

РОЗДІЛ I. МІЖНАРОДНІ ВІДНОСИНИ

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Kateryna Mogylnytska,

graduate student of the Chair of International Information,

Institute of International Relations

of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv,

ORCID ID 0000-0002-8290-6468

beokat@gmail.com

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POSITION OF THE KEY POLITICAL PARTIES OF THE BALTIC STATES ON THE UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN CONFLICT

The article analyses the approaches of the key political parties of the Baltic states to the Ukrainian issue: their assessment of the degree of the Russian threat to the regional space, the interpretation of the events of Russian aggression in the Crimea and the Donbass, views on the prospects for relations with Ukraine and the Russian Federation. It is confirmed that most of the Baltic political forces take a solely pro-Ukrainian stance, which makes it possible to assess the prospects for further development of stable cooperation between them and Ukraine as extremely high and practically independent from the electoral cycle. It is noted that the most consistent partners of Ukraine are the right political forces such as the Lithuanian «The Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats» and the Estonian Reform Party. By their ideology, they are natural allies of Ukrainian pro-European political parties. The radical nationalists from the Baltic states (the Estonian Conservative People's Party, the Latvian National Alliance), for whom Ukraine is a natural ally in counteracting the Russian threat, are also extremely friendly to our state. Centrist and left-wing parties from the Baltic states are also showing solidarity with Ukraine in foreign policy matters. The accusations about their possible ties to the Kremlin are usually part of the internal political struggle and have no real basis. However, there are indeed political forces in the Baltic states that hold a pro-Russian stance and, in some cases, even defend the interests of Russia in the European political space, becoming an element of the Kremlin's hybrid strategy aimed o destabilise it. The most influential of them is the Latvian party «Harmony», which retains the largest faction in the parliaments of the last convocations. But the refusal of other political forces to form coalition with it demonstrates the

toxicity of such views for the majority of the electorate – so its prospects for influencing state policy are insignificant. Overall, we suggest that there are no effective threats to the unity of the key actors of the Baltic States' political environment around Ukraine's support for its fight for independence and the European future.

Key words: *Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, political parties, Ukraine-Russia conflict.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Formulation of the Problem. The development of interstate cooperation with partners is extremely important for Ukraine today. In the regional environment where current changes in the security situation threaten the stability of the Baltic-Black Sea space, and Russia's aggressive policy directly violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our state, its intensification becomes one of the key elements of ensuring national stability and defence capability. International support is extremely important for Ukraine, which is struggling for its European future. This, in turn, determines the relevance of the study of individual factors that may affect its nature, determine the prospects and stability of relations with specific countries.

The Baltic states are known for their reputation as Ukraine's trusted partners. United by their similar geographical location, historical heritage and estimations of the threat posed by the Russian Federation, these states understand the challenges, which Ukrainian authorities are facing nowadays. However, it is impossible to assess the real status and depth of the Ukrainian-Baltic partnership solely on the basis of an analysis of its practical forms or history of relations. The policies of democratic Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are shaped and formed by the peoples of these states – through the electoral process. Therefore, in our opinion, an important component in studying the real state of bilateral cooperation is the analysis of the views of the Baltic states' political parties on the events of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict and the essence of Russian regional policy. This allows us to determine in what sense the existing level of relations really reflects the aspirations and expectations of the societies and political elites of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and to understand how appropriate our hopes are for the continuation of a mutually beneficial partnership in the future.

Previously Unresolved Parts of a Common Problem. Despite the considerable attention of researchers to the foreign policy of the Baltic states in general and Ukraine-Baltic relations in particular, the specific topic of party positions on these issues remains unexplored. Usually, scientists focus on

the practical interstate activities of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – so, at best, we can find description of the views of the ruling political forces on the problems of regional security. For this reason, this article is the first attempt to summarize information on a broader and under-explored range of issues – characterizing the positions of the various centres of the Baltic political environment.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications. Among the works that have researched this topic in one way or another, we should mention the studies made by the staff of the Institute of World Policy, which were carried out within the framework of the project «Ukraine’s Foreign Policy Audit». In the discussion notes on Ukrainian-Lithuanian and Ukrainian-Latvian relations, experts characterized the positions of leading politicians and political parties from these states regarding Ukraine. The contributions of O. Betlii, K. Zarembo, and E. Vizghunova to these studies are specially noted. Indirectly, these topics considered in publications devoted to the study of the internal political environment of the Baltic states, which are especially relevant on the eve of the next parliamentary elections. Among these materials are the analysis of the results of the 2018 parliamentary elections in Latvia by U. Bergmane and S. Osborne, O. Koval’s article on the results of the 2019 Estonian parliamentary elections. Some studies are devoted to the characterization of programs and ideologies of particular parties (f. e. the work of L. Wierenga on the Estonian Conservative People’s Party). Additional materials aimed to simplify the assessment of the views on the problem under study may be found in speeches and publications by Baltic politicians and in official documents. But it should be noted that the analysis of the official programs of the Baltic political parties in the research process proved to be not useful enough because of their concentration around domestic political problems, partly because of over-declarative nature, which hinders the real assessment of party orientation.

Purpose of the study is to characterize the positions of the leading political parties of the Baltic states regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and cooperation with Ukraine. On this basis, it is proposed to determine the prospects for the further development of relations between this states and Ukraine.

2. METHODOLOGY

The interdisciplinary nature and subject of the study led to assess the effectiveness of interstate cooperation, taking into account the limited op-

portunities and resources available to Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and the difficult geopolitical situation in which relations between them are currently developing. In general, the systemic approach allowed us to consider the issue of Ukrainian-Baltic partnership as a complex multilevel model of interstate cooperation, which at the same time is part of a broader process of transformation of the regional environment.

3. RESULTS OF RESEARCH

To date, the party environment of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia is characterized by diversity. It presents political forces of different directions. Right-wing conservatives (who usually focus on traditional values) and left-liberal movements of different kind (Social Democrats, Agrarians, Greens) remain the influential centers of power. The rise of the nationalist movement is also present – which is in line with pan-European trends. However, a key trend of recent times is the activation of populists who form situational political forces that are not based on a stable ideology. Political parties of minorities – Russian and (in the case of Lithuania) Polish – are functional as well.

In the Republic of Estonia, among the main players in the local political space, the winner of the 2019 elections – the pro-European Liberal Reform Party – is the closest to Ukraine in terms of international processes. Friendly attitude to our state is clearly demonstrated by the statements of the leading members of this political force. For example, from 2014 to 2018, its leader, Kaja Kallas, was a Member of the European Parliament, including serving as the vice-chair of the Delegation to the EU–Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. In her speeches, she repeatedly emphasized the need to develop and adhere to a common position of European states aimed at assisting Ukraine, condemning the annexation of Crimea and continuing pressure on the Russian Federation in order to achieve the implementation of the Minsk Agreement by Moscow [8]. Since September 2018, the party's staff has also been replenished by influential politician Marko Mihkelson, who chaired the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Parliament of the last convocation, also parallelly holding a position in the Estonian delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Mihkelson is known for his clear anti-Russian position. He has repeatedly expressed support for Ukraine, characterizing its fight against the aggressor as the War of Independence [5].

The Centre Party, which ranks second in the recent Estonian parliamentary elections, is known for its contacts with the Russian politician, includ-

ing its ruling «United Russia» party. Relying on the electorate of the Russian-speaking population of the republic, it advocates the liberalization of legislation on obtaining Estonian citizenship and deepening relations with the Russian Federation, supports the preservation of Russian-speaking schools. At the same time, the critical attitude of the major part of Estonian society to Kremlin substantially limit its room for maneuver in foreign policy. In such conditions Centrist leaders have been forced to talk about co-operation with NATO and support for anti-Russian sanctions – which, according to experts, has led to a decline in party popularity as it conflicts with the aspirations of its traditional voters [4].

The Conservative People's Party has gained real electoral success in the last parliamentary elections in Estonia – as it significantly increases its parliamentary presence. This confirms the pan-European trend of strengthening the right wing of the political space. Unlike many European parties of this ideological orientation, Estonian nationalists take a sharp anti-Russian stance. This, in turn, defines their views on the nature of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and intensifies efforts to form a real regional anti-Russian network of partners from the nationalist movements of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In order to achieve this, they cooperate with ideologically close foreign political forces, including Ukrainian ones. The participation of Ukrainian nationalists in the mass events of the Conservative People's Party – such as the torchlight march in honour of Estonia's Independence Day – is demonstrative for their relations [16, p. 13]. But on other important issues, the CPP's position does not correspond to Ukraine's official vision of the world order and foreign policy. Estonian nationalists hold Eurosceptic views, criticizing EU migration policy and the threat posed by the integration to traditional values and national interests of individual actors. Such a position threatens to undermine the unity of the European Union – and thus does not correspond to the Ukrainian interests directly related to the existence of a strong united Europe.

The position of the Latvian political elite regarding the assessment of events in Ukraine is sufficiently consolidated. Most political parties of the republic have supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our state.

The most pro-Ukrainian attitude is demonstrated by the right-wing populist party, the National Alliance, which is a member of the ruling coalition. From the very beginning of the Euromaidan events, its representatives expressed the need to support Ukraine's desire to defend itself against Russian influence. After the Russian aggression began, the party condemned the Kremlin's actions and demanded that the government take active action against the Russian Federation. The representative of the National Alliance –

Ināra Mūrniece – has been the speaker of the Latvian Parliament since 2014. Her rhetoric, both on national and international level, clearly demonstrates the party's position on the Ukraine-Russia conflict. For example, speaking at the Conference of Speakers of the Council of Europe Parliaments in October 2019, Ms. Mūrniece urged participants to respect international law and, therefore, to support Ukraine, which suffers from aggression and its results (the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the military conflict in the Donbass) [15].

Of course, the presence of a large Russian-speaking minority in Latvia creates some tension, as some political forces are being formed around this electorate. They may have a softer stance on Kremlin politics. The most influential of them is the «Harmony» Party. It emerged in 2010 through the unification of several centrist and leftist political forces that have traditionally stood for the rights of the Russian minority. The rhetoric of its representatives is blurred. On words this party supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine – but at the same time its members criticized the sanctions policy against the Russian Federation, emphasizing their inefficiency. Today, «Harmony» is trying to avoid a frankly pro-Russian position – such views cannot find support from the majority of Latvian citizens. To secure the support of the wider electorate, it has taken some steps aimed at disproving its ties with Russia on the eve of the 2018 parliamentary elections. For example, «Harmony» terminated the partnership agreement that had previously defined its relations with the «United Russia» party [9]. But according to the results of the Latvian elections, it did not help to improve its position in the national political arena. As during previous elections since 2011, this party has gained the first place in the electoral race. But this is primarily determined by the lack of explicit competition in its traditional electoral field. Instead, most of the Conservative political forces, which divided the respective electorate between them, joined the coalition against «Harmony» – and one more time did not allow it to power.

The Latvian Russian Union takes even more aggressive pro-Russian position. Its popularity within the state is insignificant. However, electoral support is sufficient to delegate a representative to the European Parliament. This place is occupied by Tatjana Ždanoka, whose activity is frankly anti-Ukrainian [2, p. 26–27]. This politician has repeatedly visited the occupied Crimea and welcomed the holding of an illegal referendum in its territory, considering it a manifestation of popular will. Her marginal position was used in Russian media to create a fake information picture about the lack of clear consensus on the Crimean issue among European politicians.

The October 2018 parliamentary elections in Latvia have reformatted Saeima's composition. As a result, two new political forces have joined parliament – the centrist populist party, «Who Owns the State?» and the right-wing New Conservative Party. In doing so, they demonstrated the second and third results respectively during the elections.

Experts feared that the first of them could enter a coalition with «Harmony» – and thus facilitate the acquisition of governmental authority by this party. However, this did not happen. Instead, the position of representatives of «Who Owns the State?» party regarding the prospects of such an agreement allows us to characterize their attitude to the events in Ukraine. Party leader Artuss Kaimiņš noted that he was ready to negotiate with «Harmony» only if the latter would specify its own position on the conflict in eastern Ukraine, condemning Russia for its role in it [12]. This, on the one hand, demonstrates Mr. Kaimiņš's own pro-Ukrainian attitude and, on the other, shows the importance of the Ukrainian issue to the party.

As for the New Conservative Party, its pro-Ukrainian position is undeniable. Its political platform is broadly similar to nationalists. This is not surprising given the fact that party leader Jānis Bordāns was previously a member of the National Alliance. In fact, the party used the dissatisfaction of the electorate with the actions of the previous coalition government in the domestic political arena, accusing nationalists of corruption [6]. Thus, the Conservatives sought to drag the right-wing electorate from the National Alliance – and in some ways they succeeded. But in foreign policy issues, both parties adhere to a similar anti-Russian position – and this is a positive moment for Ukraine.

According to Ukrainian analysts, Lithuania is one of those states where the attitude towards Ukraine is not dependent on electoral changes and on what political parties are in power nowadays. Its state policy always remains pro-Ukrainian [1, p. 38]. Today, the largest faction in the Lithuanian Parliament belongs to the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union. In the 2016 election, this party won the entire victory – having received 54 seats instead of 1 in the previous parliament. It should be noted that during the election process it was blamed by opponents as «pro-Russian». The object of criticism was party leader Ramūnas Karbauskis. His business ties with Russia have been the cause of it [11]. However, in our opinion, this situation should be considered as a natural element of the internal political struggle for the votes. No clear evidence of Lithuanian Farmers' and Greens' ties with the Kremlin has been provided. Strengthening of their political team by the popular politician Saulius Skvernelis, who despite his lack of membership in the party

topped its electoral list, also refutes accusations against this party – because he was well known for critical views on modern Russian politics. In general, Farmers and Greens Union can be described as a party that primarily appeals to the domestic political agenda. In practice, in foreign policy, it adheres to traditional approaches for Lithuania – pro-European policy and maintaining relations with partner countries like Ukraine, which is corresponding to the interests of Kyiv.

Unlike in other Baltic states, radical nationalist parties are much less popular in Lithuania. Therefore, more traditional conservatives are the leading partners of Ukraine here. The major Ukrainian ally is the centre-right party «The Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats», who are now in opposition. Considering Russia's aggressive policy as one of the key threats to the stability and security of the European space, they are critical to Western European hopes for a return to partnership with Russia. The May 2018 statement «We Believe in Europe» explicitly stated that the continued Russian aggression against Ukraine, occupation of Crimea and parts of eastern Ukrainian territories was a clear indication of the confrontation policy implemented by the Russian authorities against the West – and Europe must respond adequately on it [13]. Also, the representative of «The Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats» – Laurynas Kasčiūnas – initiated the creation of a Group of Friends of Ukrainian Crimea in Lithuania, which included 10 parliamentarians, journalists, historians and political scientists. Its purpose is to draw attention to the Crimean problem and to support initiatives aimed at restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity [10].

In Lithuania, the Russian Federation is relying on parties representing national minorities. The «Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance» is speaking on the behalf of the Polish diaspora, while the «Lithuanian Russian Union» is representing Russian diaspora. A stable partnership has emerged between these forces, in which the first party is playing role of some kind of «older brother» – a collaboration that allows frankly pro-Russian politicians to hope for some electoral support. Currently, it is insignificant – however, it allows the political party of the Polish diaspora to enter parliament. But strong pro-Russian orientation of its leaders do not allow it to influence Lithuania's foreign policy – as they are not supported by the vast majority of the population. Moreover, they do not coincide with the official point of view of Warsaw, which is dissatisfied with the fact that the political representatives of Lithuanian Poles actually play in favour of Kremlin. A striking manifestation of such pro-Russian position are statements of party leader Valdemar Tomaševski regarding the annexa-

tion of Crimea. The politician avoided condemning Russian actions in the peninsula. While agreeing on the doubtfulness of legality of the referendum held in the occupied territories, he at the same time did not reject the very possibility of holding the referendum and noted that he believed the results demonstrated the real position of the Crimean population [7].

The unity of the majority of Baltic political parties on the Ukrainian issue was clearly demonstrated during the PACE voting on the return of the rights of the Russian delegation in the summer of 2019. None of the representatives of these states supported this decision. It was voted against by three Estonian delegates (Indrek Saar of the Social Democratic Party, Eerik-Niiles Kross of the Reform Party and Raivo Tamm of the «Isamaa» party); three Latvian delegates (Marija Golubeva from «Development/For!» party, Linda Ozola from New Conservative Party, Boriss Cilevičs from «Harmony»); four Lithuanian delegates (Algirdas Butkevičius from Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Political Group, Egidijus Vareikis from the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, Emanuelis Zingeris from the «The Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats», Rita Tamašunienė from the «Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance») [14]. The position demonstrated by Ms. Tamašunienė drew particular attention from the media, as it did not coincide with her party's view. Thomas Yanelunas, a professor at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University, saw this as a revision of the public strategy of the party of Lithuanian Poles. In his opinion, they were trying to avoid demonstrations of open sympathies with the Kremlin, as it directly threatens their relations with Poland. However, the party stressed that in the PACE Ms. Tamašunienė acted primarily on behalf of the state, not her political force. So, her position was coordinated with the official views of the president and the Foreign Ministry of Lithuania – while clearly contradicting the views of the «Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance» [3].

It should be noted that in most Baltic states the electoral cycle has only just begun. Parliamentary elections in Latvia were held in October 2018, in Estonia – in March 2019. Therefore, the distribution of power between political parties which is formed in these states will remain unchanged over the coming years. The situation is different in Lithuania, where the next parliamentary elections are expected in October 2020. Predicting their results, it should be noted that today the chances of the Farmers and Greens Union to repeat their success are illusory. Society is disappointed with party activity. Within its ranks, there is a split – as Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis, who headed the party's list in previous elections, is openly critical of party

politics. In fact, the very principle of completing the party and its preliminary results are somewhat similar to the Ukrainian case of «Servant of the People». At the party's basis, there is a lack of clear ideology and unifying links. Therefore, opposition political forces are more likely to succeed during next elections. But in our opinion, this will in no way provoke a change in Lithuanian policy towards Ukraine for the worse.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

An analysis of the approaches of the leading political parties of the Baltic states to the assessment of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict shows that most of them take a clear pro-Ukrainian stance, primarily due to the understanding of the dangers posed by Russia's policy not only to Ukraine but also to their states. Parties of different ideologies support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine – both conservatives, nationalists, and representatives of centrist and liberal views. In our opinion, the right political parties are the key allies of Ukraine. At the same time, if conservatives ideologically share a similar platform with Ukrainian pro-European parties, then the views of the Baltic nationalists may in some cases also threaten Ukraine's interests when they undermine the unity of the European space. Centrist, liberal and leftist political forces, despite some allegations of pro-Russian support, also properly support Ukraine. The relatively less attention to the Russian threat in their rhetoric is primarily due to their orientation on internal problems of states, rather than sympathy for the Russian Federation.

The presence of hidden and frankly pro-Russian political parties in the Baltic states cannot be ignored. However, they have little or no ability to influence public policy. The example of the Latvian party «Harmony», which for several electoral cycles secures the largest faction in the parliament, demonstrates the toxicity of reconciliation policy with the Russian Federation for the political elite of the state because this party remains outside of the ruling coalition. The threat to Ukraine's position in the international arena is primarily expressed by specific politicians, including those who represent their state in European institutions. They can be used by Russian propaganda as an element of hybrid pressure, misrepresentation and the creation of a fake picture of the political split in Europe. Russia's work with the Polish diaspora in Lithuania is also of particular concern. The latter turns into an inappropriate destabilizing factor for the development of a trilateral Ukrainian-Lithuanian-Polish partnership.

Therefore, the further necessary steps could include analysing the practical aspects of regional cooperation in the context of the aggravation of the security situation in the Baltic-Black Sea area.

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ПОЗИЦІЯ КЛЮЧОВИХ ПОЛІТИЧНИХ ПАРТІЙ КРАЇН БАЛТІЇ ЩОДО УКРАЇНСЬКО-РОСІЙСЬКОГО КОНФЛІКТУ

У статті проаналізовано підходи ключових політичних партій країн Балтії до українського питання: їх оцінку ступеня російської загрози для регіонального простору, трактування подій російської агресії в Криму та на Донбасі, погляди на перспективи відносин з Україною й Російською Федерацією. Підтверджено тезу про те, що більшість балтійських політичних сил займає винятково проукраїнську позицію, що дає змогу оцінювати перспективи подальшого розвитку стабільної співпраці між ними та Україною як надзвичайно високі й практично не залежні від електорального циклу. Відзначено, що найбільш послідовними партнерами України виступають праві політичні сили литовського «Союзу Вітчизни – Литовських християнських демократів» та естонської Партії реформ. За своєю ідеологією вони є природними союзниками українських проєвропейських політичних партій. Крім того, дружню позицію щодо України займають радикальні націоналісти з країн Балтії (естонська «Консервативна народна партія», латвійський «Національний Альянс»), для яких вона є природним союзником у протидії російській загоді. Центристські та ліволіберальні партії з країн Балтії також демонструють солідарність з Україною в зовнішньополітичних питаннях. Звинування, які лунають у їхній бік щодо можливих зв'язків із Кремлем, зазвичай є елементом внутрішньополітичної боротьби та не мають під собою реальних основ. Однак у країнах Балтії дійсно є політичні сили, які займають стійку проросійську позицію та в деяких випадках навіть виступають на захист інтересів РФ у європейському політичному просторі, перетворюючись на елемент гібридної стратегії Кремля з унесення розбрату до нього. Найвпливовіша з них – латвійська партія «Злагода», яка в парламентах останніх скликань зберігає за собою найбільшу фракцію. Але відмова інших політичних сил вступати з нею в коаліцію демонструє токсичність таких поглядів для більшості електорату, тому її перспективи впливати на державну політику є незначними. Загалом це дає змогу говорити про відсутність дієвих загроз єдності ключових акторів політичного середовища країн Балтії щодо підтримки України в боротьбі за незалежність і європейське майбутнє.

Ключові слова: Україна; Латвійська Республіка; Литовська Республіка; Естонська Республіка; політичні партії; україно-російський конфлікт.

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