ŁUKASZ DONAJ
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
ORCID: 0000-0002-7720-1260

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Volodymyr Zelensky: What has Been Done in the Past Year? What's Next?...[1]

Introduction

Tadeusz Iwański, an analyst from the Center for Eastern Studies, has noted that the political situation in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity and the ensuing Russian aggression created a peculiar social context, in which the perception of traditional politicians has dramatically changed for the worse. After the revolution, the society has been eagerly expecting a thorough recovery of the state, combined with a new quality of governance and public empowerment. However, the 2014 presidential and parliamentary elections changed little in terms of the political elite, as the most important state functions remained in the hands of politicians who first emerged in the 1990s, when the oligarchic system in Ukraine was being formed. The reforms introduced in the first two to three years after the revolution, mainly under pressure from Western creditors and the civil society, did not meet the society's needs. Not only did they fail to improve the quality of life, but eventually led to the emigration of some 2 million Ukrainians, which placed an additional burden on the shoulders of the old and new elites. Initiated but never completed, the painful reforms have increased political volatility and sapped public trust in the political class even further. A survey by Kyiv's Razumkov Center showed that just before the presidential elections only 23 percent of respondents trusted the president. The Verkhovna Rada enjoyed the trust of as little as 12 percent, the government – 19 percent, the courts – 12 percent and the prosecutor's office – 15 percent. Such a striking lack of confidence in state institutions and politicians sparked a search for "new faces," people who have a clean record, are from outside the establishment and could meet diverse expectations of the society. In the first stage of the electoral campaign, Ukrainians could choose between two such newcomers: Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, lead singer of Okean Elzy, a popular Ukrainian rock band, and Volodymyr Zelensky, a comedian and actor. Vakarchuk's indecision about whether to run for presidency increased support for the other candidate. After Zelensky formally announced his candidacy towards the end of 2018, the number of his supporters increased even further. This way, Zelensky became the main contender in the presidential race and eventually won the first and then the second round. In his

[1] The paper is an extended, in-depth version of *12 months of V. Zelensky's presidency – some thoughts on his foreign policy*, a lecture prepared for: XII Vseukrayins′ka Naukovo-Praktychna – Konferentsiya "*Modernizatsiya Politychnoyi Systemy Sukhasnoyi Ukrayiny: Stan ta Perspektyvy Rozvytku*" – Ministerstvo Osvity i Nauky Ukrayiny / Skhidnoukrayins′kyy Natsional′nyy Universitet Imeni Volodymyra Dalya – m. Syevyerodonets′k, Ukrayina – 15.05.2020.

campaign Zelensky advocated NATO membership as a guarantee of Ukraine’s security, although he repeatedly said that the move should be preceded by a referendum. He also argued that he wanted his country to join the EU, although in press interviews he admitted that no-one in the EU was looking forward to that. As for the Donbas conflict, he spoke in favor of a solution brokered by the West and the EU. He expressed similar expectations when asked about regaining control over Crimea, now occupied by Russia (Grochot, 2019; Ivansky, 2019a; Ivansky, 2019b; Ivansky, Zhochovsky, 2019; Donaj, 2016, pp. 227–250; Aslund, 2013; *Evro Revolyutsyya...*, 2013).

Presidency

After the first 100 days of Zelensky’s presidency, Hanna Bazhenova from the Central European Institute noted that the first moves of the Ukrainian president showed that in priority areas he was continuing the policy of Petro Poroshenko. The foreign policy remained pro-Western, although it was not yet certain whether it would be more pro-European or pro-American. Foreign visits to strategic partners demonstrated that the new president was keen on maintaining close ties with the EU. Zelensky was particularly active in cooperating with Germany and the European Commission. Quick establishment of personal relations between the new Ukrainian president and key world leaders was one of the major achievements of the first 100 days in office. At the same time, Zelensky made attempts to build good relations with Ukraine’s neighbors. A good example is his visit to Poland (August 31 to September 1, 2019). At a meeting with the Polish President Andrzej Duda, he announced some concessions to Poland in the long-standing historical dispute between the two countries, well received by Poland. He also spoke in favor of resuming the operations of a working group once created to promote a “clean slate” approach to mutual historical resentments. The Ukrainian president saw those talks as a breakthrough in the bilateral relations. Zelensky’s visit to Poland, which took place just after 100 days of his presidency, in fact marked the beginning of his independent foreign policy rather than a continuation of what his predecessor did before him (Bazhenova, 2019).

And what happened in the following months? Interesting views about the first year of Zelensky’s international policy were presented in *Dzerkalo Tyzhnya* by Alyona Het′manchuk, an analyst and head of the New Europe Centre (the main theses from her analysis were cited by Maciej Piotrowski in a paper published by the Freedom Institute). In her opinion, the strengths of Zelensky’s diplomatic policy include:

– the beginning of the normalization of relations with Warsaw (admittedly slow, mostly due to the election season in Poland) and – to some extent – with Budapest;
– continued sanctions against Russia and maintained focus on the EU and NATO, although Zelensky’s opponents had warned he would lose that focus;
– the President’s interpersonal skills, generally appreciated by his partners; he listens attentively instead of delivering monologues (as Poroshenko often did) and has established personal relations with international leaders. What endears Zelensky to them is his “sincerity, openness and naivety, so charming in the cynical world of politics.”

On the other hand, Het′manchuk lists a number of the president’s “liabilities:”

– failure of the “investors, not allies” policy (there will be no investors until the investment climate in Ukraine improves);
– difficulties in defining international policy priorities: to facilitate negotiations with Russia, Zelensky no longer paints Moscow as an aggressor. As a result, his partners get an ambiguous view of the situation and also soften their rhetoric. As Het′manchuk puts it: “it is unclear whether Zelensky will manage to stop Russia’s war against Ukraine, but he definitely manages to bring the West and Russia back together at a dizzying pace”;
– contradiction between the external priority (good relations with the US) and the internal priority (ending the war with Russia) (Het′manchuk, 2020a; Piotrowski, 2020).

Alyona Het′manchuk also describes the diplomatic style of Zelensky and his entourage. She notes that he listens to his internal advisors more closely than to the foreign ones. A good example is the dismissal of the prosecutor general despite the objections of G7 ambassadors. Het′manchuk is also concerned about the fact that Zelensky’s political team has grown increasingly critical of the country’s current economic relations with the EU, seeing them as harmful for Ukraine. Arguably, this criticism may reduce the general support for European integration. The analyst perceives Zelensky as a man who is distrustful of his partners and prefers bilateral relations over relations within international institutions. Among other things, this preference manifests itself in informal negotiations with Russia which have somewhat overshadowed the talks in the Normandy format (Het′manchuk, 2020a; Piotrowski, 2020; Petrenko, 2020; Szabaciuk, 2020).

Another important development during Zelensky’s presidency were the government reconstructions. In March 2020, Dmytro Kuleba, the former Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, took over as Head of Diplomacy. He represents the younger generation of Ukrainian diplomats and is considered to be one of the brightest. From 2016 to 2019, he served as Ukraine’s permanent representative to the Council of Europe. However, his role in the country’s foreign policy will be limited mainly to managing the day-to-day operations of the ministry, while key decisions – especially with regard to the talks with Russia and relations with the US – will still be made by Andriy Yermak, Head of the Presidential Office, to whom Kuleba will be reporting. The position of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, formerly held by Kuleba, went to Vadym Prystaiko, dismissed from the position of Foreign Minister in the wake of a conflict with Yermak (interestingly, this “staff rotation” continued: Prystaiko quit on June 4, 2020 and the following month was appointed Ambassador of Ukraine to the United Kingdom; his former position was offered to Olha V. Stefanyshyna). Despite the personal shake-up, it seems that the long-term foreign policy remains unchanged. According to Daniel Szeligowski, the current directions of Ukraine’s foreign policy will be maintained. Efforts to solve the Donbas issue and to retake control of the currently lost territories will remain a priority. To that end, bilateral talks with Russia will intensify. At the same time, efforts aimed at further integration of Ukraine with the EU and NATO will continue (public support for membership in both organizations is currently at an all-time high; any change in

the pro-European policy could cause further erosion of confidence in the government, or even trigger social unrest). On top of that, one can expect a greater emphasis on the economic dimension of foreign policy and co-operation with the Ukrainian diaspora, as well as more active public diplomacy, something the new foreign minister is very good at. Alyona Het′manchuk expresses a similar view on the personnel changes. She notes that the Head of the Presidential Office practices “back channel diplomacy,” which may “marginalize the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the decision-making process” (Het′manchuk, 2020a; Piotrowski, 2020; Szeligowski, 2020; Rokita, 2020; *Kuleba stane*..., 2019; *Rada with 255*..., 2020; *Zelens'kyy pryznachyv*..., 2020).

Mixed emotions about Zelensky’s presidency to date can also be heard in the opinions of other Ukrainian political analysts. Yevhen Mahda, head of Kyiv’s Institute of World Policy, notes that the first 12 months of Zelensky’s presidency was a time of missed opportunities: “In my opinion, it was is a year of missed opportunities, because not only did he [the president] enjoy high public support, but also had ‘his’ parliament, ‘his’ government, a perfect carte blanche. Unfortunately, no significant, actual changes have taken place.” Among Zelensky’s achievements, Mahda mentions the new law on the sale of farmland, which opens the market as from July 1, 2021, and the return of Ukrainian prisoners of war. Still, he remarks that the “terms of POW exchange were unfavorable for Ukraine.” In his turn, Volodymyr Horbach of the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation argues that in relations with Russia, Zelensky has consistently demonstrated “a policy of retreat, offering unilateral concessions.” According to Mahda, “the pro-Russian direction has been visibly reinforced in Ukrainian politics” after the appointment of Andriy Yermak as head of the presidential office. When asked about Russia’s attitude towards Zelensky, the expert notes that “Russia does not need any Ukrainian president who is capable of playing his own game. […] Zelensky’s team has been building its policy by trying to show the Russians that Zelensky is not Poroshenko [...], but without a more elaborate vision of how to protect Ukrainian interests.” According to Mahda, “the army has not become a priority” for Zelensky, and in the field of defense there are “serious problems with the state procurement, and soldiers are inadequately equipped, financed, and even fed.” The expert points out that the number of soldiers killed or wounded in the Donbas conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine is higher than in the same period last year. As for international relations, Mahda is of the opinion that the country’s relations with the US have been adversely affected by the Trump-Ukraine scandal (caused by a certain conversation between Trump and Zelensky, which prompted the Democrats in the House of Representatives to initiate an impeachment inquiry against the US President; Trump was charged of obstructing Congress and abusing the power of his office for personal political gains). Mahda adds that high-level relations with the EU are formally continued, but “are not filled with any real meaning.” Horbach, in turn, believes that the president tries to reduce his international presence and “has delegated many of his functions.” According to Horbach, Zelensky’s presidency has revolved around PR stunts, and Zelensky himself “is an actor in a TV drama, playing the role of president.” Mahda notes that during the first year there were no “breakthrough” Ukrainian initiatives in bilateral relations with Poland. However, he admits that some progress has been made on the issue of exhumations of the victims of the massacres of Poles in Volhynia. Mahda and

Horbach agree that there were many personal changes in the presidential team, including the dismissal of prime minister Oleksiy Honcharuk and head of the presidential office Andriy Bohdan. According to Mahda, the changes are attributable to the fact that “Zelensky is politically inexperienced and acts spontaneously to win more support.” However, “Zelensky’s substitutes’ bench is very short.” According to Horbach, as many as 30 people from Kvartal 95 (a TV entertainment content company co-founded by Zelensky) are now high-ranking state officials. “If before the election Zelensky was seen as a man of Kolomoisky [Ihor Kolomoisky, an oligarch], then now he can be seen as a man in whom all oligarchs are interested” – says Mahda. The experts agree that the COVID-19 pandemic actually helped Zelensky. “In the time of a pandemic, people want to feel assured by the authorities and Zelensky actively uses this” notes Mahda. Horbach adds that in emergency situations like this people “do not think rationally” about what the president does. He expects that after the end of COVID-19 restrictions, people will resume business as usual, but “in the autumn this economic crisis will catch up with us and people will start asking questions” about whether the authorities took appropriate measures during the pandemic. “The challenges faced by Ukraine will not just disappear.” Mahda adds that Kiev will soon feel the consequences of the economic crisis and it is not unlikely that later this year the government will resign and early parliamentary elections will follow (*Ekspert...*, 2020; *Yevhen Mahda...*, 2020; *Volodymyr Horbach*..., 2020).

Other experts from the Centre for Eastern Studies describe the first year of Zelensky’s presidency as “neither a miracle nor a disaster.” In their opinion, in the first 12 months of his presidency, Zelensky demonstrated that he is neither a puppet of Kolomoisky, as some of his opponents suggested from the very beginning, nor is he willing to betray national interests to Russia. He also managed to pass a number of key regulations: new electoral law, unbundling of Naftohaz, or lifting the moratorium on farmland sales. These reforms could positively and permanently change the political and economic situation in Ukraine. Although Zelensky’s governance model has failed to make the most of the opportunities offered by the vast political power he enjoys, it seems that the gradual departure from the concept of “new faces” in personnel policy will continue. While deoligarchization is unlikely, further attempts to involve the oligarchs in the State’s activities may be expected. If so, the role of some of them (first and foremost Rinat Akhmetov) will grow. The challenge faced by Zelensky’s team will be to maintain the cohesion of the ruling party (Servant of the People) in the parliament and to win the local elections planned for October. So far, the party has not made an effort to build local structures, and the regional governors appointed by the president are weak, especially in the wealthy regions of Kharkiv and Odessa, which may further exacerbate tensions between them and Kyiv. As for the institutions responsible for state security and the rule of law, their stability will depend on the president’s ability to control his personal ambitions and to put an end to endless staff turnover, used as a tool in short-term political struggle. Countering Russia’s destructive activity will remain a challenge of paramount importance. Moscow will continue its military and non-military efforts to destabilize Ukraine, aimed at forcing Ukrainian elites into acknowledging Russian political and economic interests, and ultimately at ensuring political supremacy over Ukraine. Kiev will continue to seek a breakthrough in the Donbas talks,

confirming Zelensky’s genuine intention to restore peace, although a transition to the announced (albeit enigmatic) “Plan B” is also possible. The president’s main challenge will be to face the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently it is difficult to say how deeply Ukraine will be affected. The IMF forecasts that the country’s GDP will fall by 7.7 percent this year, but experience shows that the actual impact will be greater, especially because in the first quarter, before the lockdown, the economy shrank by 1.2 percent (Iwański, Matuszak, Nieczypor, Żochowski, 2020). Obviously, such cool-headed analysis will not please those who expect statesmanlike decisions from the head of the state. Unfortunately, the times are such that heads of state are talented technocrats, at the very best. Forget about visionaries. Anyway, the fate (or we ourselves?) will usually send us someone who is just skillful (or plainly speaking: is able to take advice from his/her PR team, usually consisting of his/her own people).

Similar views have been expressed by other Polish experts. Maciej Zaniewicz from the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) notes that as promised in the electoral campaign, Zelensky’s priority has been to solve the Donbas problem. The president has intensified negotiations with Russia, also at the bilateral level. Ukraine has not changed its position on the need to regain full control over its territories at the border with Russia and clearly says that local elections in Donbas can take place only after Russian troops withdraw. As a concession, it agreed to the so-called Steinmeier formula, whereby Donbas will become a special-status territory on the day of the local elections. Although the move paved the way for the reactivation of top-level talks in the Normandy format (France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine) in Paris in December 2019, the negotiations failed to produce a breakthrough due to Russia’s reluctance. There was no permanent ceasefire or “all for all” prisoner exchange (in total, over 300 POWs were exchanged in three rounds). While most Ukrainians saw the release of prisoners as a success of the president (81 percent of positive opinions), the concessions made to Russia have been generally criticized (Zaniewicz, 2020a; Legucka, Szeligowski, 2019).

Integration with NATO and the EU remains one of the key objectives of Ukrainian foreign policy. Zelensky’s first foreign visit as President to Brussels was a symbolic confirmation of his pro-Western course. In Brussels, Zelensky met with the leaders of the two organizations. In June 2020, NATO recognized Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner (EOP), thus completing a process initiated by Petro Poroshenko. EOP membership enables Ukraine to strengthen its cooperation with NATO in such areas as planning, exercises and information exchange. However, it does not open the way to NATO membership. Like his predecessor, Zelensky has placed great emphasis on strengthening the country’s defense capabilities in the Black Sea area (e.g. through joint exercises with troops from NATO countries). NATO membership continues to be Ukraine’s ultimate goal. In keeping with the agenda announced in October 2019 by the government of former prime minister Oleksiy Honcharuk (the government of Denys Shambhala has been in office since March 2020), Ukraine intends to meet EU membership conditions by 2024, *inter alia* by implementing the Association Agreement. Until then, Ukrainian policy towards the EU is to be focused on sectoral integration, first and foremost including the power industry and the digital market. The Ukrainian

authorities see the Eastern Partnership as an initiative that facilitates integration with the EU’s internal market. In 2021, Ukraine intends to renegotiate trade terms with the EU, hoping to see an increase in import quotas and a reduction in customs duties imposed on Ukrainian goods. Ukraine also continues the efforts initiated by Petro Poroshenko to conclude an Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA) with the EU, which would allow Ukrainian industrial products to enter the EU market on intra-community terms. Oliver Várhelyi, EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement confirmed in May 2020 that the EU was ready to accelerate the talks on ACAA. Relations with the US remain essential, as Ukraine heavily relies on American diplomatic, financial and military support. During Zelensky’s presidency, bilateral relations have been dominated by Ukraine’s involvement in Donald Trump’s impeachment. As a result, Trump lost some of his enthusiasm for Ukraine, which pushed back the prospect of naming Ukraine a major non-NATO ally. Despite this, America’s bipartisan consensus on the need to support Ukraine was maintained and the Congress granted the country another tranche of US$300 million in military aid for 2020. The US also upheld sanctions against Russia (Zaniewicz, 2020a; Szeligowski, 2018; Zaniewicz, 2020b; Piotrowski, 2019; Verkhovna Rada, 2020; *NATO recognises...*, 2020; *NATO Grants...*, 2020; Het′manchuk, 2020b).

The next couple of weeks may show whether the European course, which ignited the Revolution of Dignity, will be solidified (although, in the current situation, expectations in this regard should be moderate). In his telephone conversation with the Lithuanian president Gitanas Nausėda, Zelensky spoke about the Ukraine-EU summit planned for October. As reported by Ukrinform citing the Ukrainian president’s press office, he allegedly said that Kyiv would aim to resume works on renewing the commercial part of the Association Agreement and to recognize Ukraine’s European aspirations. Zelensky also confirmed that his country was ready to maximize the summit’s efficiency and to intensify cooperation with EU structures and member states. “Among the key outcomes of the summit I’d like to see the recognition of Ukraine’s European aspirations and conclusion of agreements necessary to renew the commercial part of the Association Agreement, as it no longer reflects the economic realities of Ukraine and the EU” said the Ukrainian president in September 2020, a few weeks before the planned Ukraine-EU summit (*Zełenski powiedział...*, 2020; *Zelens'kyy ochikuye*…, 2020).

Zaniewicz notes that unlike his predecessor, Zelensky puts more emphasis on economic diplomacy, hoping to attract foreign investors to Ukraine. During his foreign visits, he regularly meets with private businesses. An investment forum organized in Mariupol in October 2019 was an initiative conceived by the President. Zelensky also continues some of the initiatives launched by Poroshenko. In August 2019, Ukraine signed a free trade agreement with Israel, and negotiations are in progress on similar agreements with Turkey and the UK. The existing free trade agreement with Canada is to be extended. Meanwhile, the new foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba, appointed to the post in March 2020, declared his intention to strengthen trade relations with Asian countries. However, the economic diplomacy offensive has not brought tangible results so far in the form of foreign investors’ greater interest in Ukraine, mainly due to the country’s internal problems, such as ubiquitous corruption. As previously an-

nounced, Zelensky has taken steps to improve relations with neighboring countries. In October 2019, Ukraine gave permission to resume the search and exhumation of Polish victims on its territory, which improved the relations with Poland. At the same time, Ukraine began the process of adjusting its laws on education and minorities to the recommendations of the Venice Commission, especially with regard to languages of instruction. This has eased the tensions with Hungary and led to the resumption of bilateral dialogue (up to the ministerial level) between the two countries. One of discussed issues is lifting Hungary’s ban on the work of the NATO-Ukraine Commission. The current Ukrainian government, just like its predecessor, has expressed interest in regional cooperation with neighboring countries, especially Poland – for instance with regard to the construction of Via Carpatia, the E40 water route (ultimately connecting the Black Sea with the Baltic Sea) or LNG imports from the US via Poland. In August 2019, Ukraine signed a trilateral memorandum on energy cooperation with Poland and the US. Conversely, the Ukrainian authorities considered the Ukraine-EU “energy bridge” (a project promoted during the presidency of Petro Poroshenko) as no longer valid (Zaniewicz, 2020a; Szeligowski, Jóźwiak, 2018).

What’s next?...

In a study called *Internal Determinants of Ukraine’s Foreign Policy under Volodymyr Zelensky*, Tomasz Stępniewski wonders whether the foreign policy of Ukraine led by Volodymyr Zelensky will be different than in the last three decades:

> In answering this question, it is important to keep in mind the rather complex situation of contemporary Ukraine. To better understand Ukraine’s internal and external considerations, let us refer to Mykola Riabchuk, who once said that a ‘war of civilizations’ is taking place in Ukraine. He notes that Ukraine must make a civilizational choice. It is not only a choice between the “Russian element” and the “Ukrainian element,” but also – between the “Central European project” and the “post-Soviet project.” Mykola Riabchuk believes that “Ukraine is historically part of Central Europe. The post-Soviet alternative, on the other hand, is tantamount to searching for some kind of separate Eastern European identity: it is a melting pot of Orthodox Church, nostalgia for the USSR and other contradictions.” Therefore, the power struggle between political parties is secondary (a tactical objective), while the true nature of the dilemma lies in the need to make a strategic choice. The following question must be asked: will the Euromaidan and the ongoing –armed conflict with Russia make European integration a permanent direction in Ukraine’s foreign policy? Or will the lack of clear declarations from the EU on the prospects for membership for Ukraine lead to the emergence of political forces that will not pursue this direction? Zelensky’s electoral victory apparently indicates that Ukraine is moving towards European integration. The coming months, or rather the coming years, will show whether or not this is a sustainable trend (Stępniewski, 2019, pp. 137–139; Riabchuk, 2004, pp. 12–13).

Once again, let us quote Maciej Zaniewicz from PISM. The expert emphasizes that despite little progress in negotiations with Russia on the Donbas conflict, its resolution

will remain a priority in the Ukrainian foreign policy. Ukraine will continue bilateral talks with Russia, as well as talks in the Normandy format and in the trilateral contact group in Minsk. If none of these platforms is effective, the country will look for new approaches, possibly including the US. Zelensky will aim at further short-term achievements (such as POW exchange), but it is unlikely that he will accept Russia’s conditions for elections in Donbas (i.e. without the withdrawal of Russian troops and full control over the Ukrainian-Russian border). This is why the Russian authorities are likely to stall negotiations by blaming Ukraine for sabotaging the Minsk agreements. Kyiv will continue its policy of integration with NATO and the EU. However, in the short to medium term, due to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the pace of implementation of the EU Association Agreement may slow down, thus halting the country’s sectoral integration with the Community. This may postpone talks on renegotiating the trade terms with the EU and concluding the ACAA, and may also adversely affect Ukraine’s ability to participate in NATO and EU initiatives (such as joint military exercises with NATO, or the EU’s European Green Deal). The economic crisis in Ukraine associated with COVID-19 may also prevent Ukraine from implementing infrastructure and energy projects with its neighbors, including Poland (Zaniewicz, 2020a; Zaniewicz, Piechowska, 2020; *Koronavirus v Ukrayini...*, 2020).

Obviously, no country exists in an international vacuum. In addition to issues such as Russian or EU politics, there are other phenomena that may radically redefine the current international order. Perhaps Bartłomiej Radziejewski rightly assumes that:

> the foundations of the world that gave us independence, security and prosperity are now shaking, so none of these three things may be taken for granted any longer. But we carry on as if nothing has happened. We are still bogged down in petty disputes, so much detached from real politics. [...] The race to defeat the virus has started: the epidemic has been politicized as yet another element of the rivalry between the superpowers. The US and China have been accusing each other of starting the epidemic. Their conflict is thawing after a period of latency. An ominous example is a certain exchange of comments, generally overlooked by Polish analysts. Xinhua, China’s state-run news agency wrote that if the Middle Kingdom were as bad as the Americans portray it, it could plunge its rival “into the mighty sea of coronavirus” by using the US’s overwhelming dependence on Chinese supplies of pharmaceuticals and medical equipment. Christian Whiton, former adviser to George W. Bush and Donald Trump, saw this as a threat. In his article published by the influential *National Interest* he called for urgent remodeling of international medical production chains, also by means of new anti-China tariffs, in order to end dependence on Beijing. I do not know much about viruses and I am unable to say what happens next. However, my political forecast is that the pandemic will further weaken the existing international institutions and reinforce nation states. There will be more border controls, protectionism at the expense of free trade, general control of movement based on national and regional criteria. Shifts in the relative power between individual states are also possible. As of today, it seems that – despite all the mistakes – Asia (and first and foremost China) has contained the epidemic and done relatively well, to say the least. Forecasts for the US and some other Western countries are increasingly pessimistic. We are already witnessing the collapse of Italy and Iran. If the pandemic leaves the West more bruised than

> Asia, the process of its decline in the global balance of power will accelerate. The most important thing here is the US-China relationship, which has a bearing on everything else. A harsh pandemic in the USA, accompanied by a mild one in China, could significantly affect their rivalry, and thus the future of the whole world [...]. The scale of the epidemic is key. In an optimistic scenario, the world will shake, but in a few weeks life will start returning to normal. There will be no deep economic crisis or profound changes in other areas. Some fine-tuning will be enough. In the worst-case scenario, where major economies remain paralyzed for months and hundreds of thousands or millions die, the global, regional and domestic political reality as we know it will be gone forever (Radziejewski, 2020a; Radziejewski, 2020b; Sroczyński, 2020).

The future will tell whether, and to what extent, this (or perhaps some other?) pandemic will affect the internal and external factors that determine Ukraine’s foreign policy.

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Summary

The paper sets out to assess the first year of Volodymyr Zelensky’s presidency. By analyzing the decision-making process followed by Zelensky (using the decision-making, institutional-legal, systems, induction and deduction methods), the author attempts to answer whether the process serves Ukraine and its long-term interests. By identifying the determinants affecting Ukraine’s foreign policy, the author tries to show the long term prospects for the country.

Key words: Ukraine, European Union, Revolution of Dignity, presidency, prospects for European integration

Wołodymyr Zelenski: Co zrobiono w minionym roku? Co dalej?...

Streszczenie

Treścią publikacji jest próba oceny pierwszego roku prezydentury W. Zełenskiego. Dokonując analizy procesu podejmowania decyzji przez W. Zełenskiego (posiłkując się metodą decyzyjną, instytucjonalno-prawną, systemową oraz indukcją i dedukcją) autor próbował odpowiedzieć, czy jest to działanie służące Ukrainie i jej dalekosiężnym interesom. Określając determinanty wpływające na politykę zagraniczną Ukrainy, autor starał się ukazać, co w dalszej perspektywie czeka kraj nad Dnieprem.

Słowa kluczowe: Ukraina, Unia Europejska, rewolucja godności, prezydentura, perspektywy integracji europejskiej

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