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MUTUAL PERCEPTION OF UKRAINE AND SLOVAKIA IN THE MEDIA: ANALYSIS OF STEREOTYPES AND REALITY¹

Cirner M.

*PhD in Political Science,
Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Theory
Preshov university,
Preshov, Slovakia*

The Ukrainian media pay only a little attention to Slovakia and Slovak mass media cover Ukraine mainly through a prism of war, conflicts, corruption and so on. An analysis of Slovak media shows that even though the mainstream media present the Russian meta-narratives regarding events in Ukraine (such as, for example, “Ukraine is a failed state”, “discrimination against Russian speakers at Donbas” etc.) only marginally, they do so markedly. Russian propaganda at the same time is spread through the so called alternative conspiratorial mass media, which use sentimentality of Slovak public related to Pan-Slavic ideas, nostalgia for Communist regime, Russia and Putin’s personality.

Ukraine-Slovak relations can be explained only with difficulty in a black-and-white perception of the world. In the long run, no expert or even a common Ukrainian or Slovak citizen is able to put mutual perception of Slovakia and Ukraine into a simplistic contradictory line – friendship versus hostility. Therefore, we conclude that an information gap exists in both countries regarding the other that needs to be addressed [3, p.80].

Ukraine has a problem with shaping of its own image in the world. The primary disadvantage of the existing image of politics in Ukraine is the inadequacy of its development and implementation. The main reason for the lack of effectiveness of media campaigns is a lack of media policy strategy. There is no national media strategy to create a positive image of Ukraine abroad that would be implemented as yet; no priorities have been set for a PR campaign; no coordination centre exists and a strong ideological foundation is lacking. In other words, there is no systematic PR project focused on improving external image of Ukraine. Moreover, it is difficult to create a

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positive image of the country and its foreign policy abroad when the process of searching for a national idea still goes on. Reforms undertaken by the government of Ukraine prior to 2014 did not have for the most part of the society any specific positive results. The fact is that Ukrainians are not in the best position in the world in terms of their wages, social security or access to high quality education and medical care. Another of the problems related to building a positive image of Ukraine is corruption as well as the connection between the business sector and politicians [1, s.36].

There are elements having a potential to help in improving image of Ukraine abroad and these are its cultural and historical heritage and achievements in the field of culture and science. The coordination of an image campaign with concrete projects is an essential prerequisite for achieving the desired results. The creation of a positive image of the country – Ukraine or Slovakia – requires a structured management of their media image, which would be able to coordinate and monitor the implementation of an image policy. The media image management should be responsible for information and communication resources on the international level, should develop media projects, monitor results and be responsible for their full implementation. It should take advantage of media, business structures, scientific and educational centres, the community diaspora, cultural institutions and sport organisations as levers of influence on the opinion of the Slovak and Ukrainian societies.

States should make the effort to build their own positive images, what is a natural part of their external relations and foreign policy. It should include a complex and consolidated strategy on presenting national institutions, economy, history, culture, but also investment and tourist attractiveness. National image strategies of Ukraine and Slovakia towards external environment should be based on national interests and the foreign policy priorities of both countries. They should consider creation of a coordination centre at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs or specialised state agencies that should also conduct respective research and generate policy recommendations for other governmental institutions in the field [2, s.55].

Furthermore, politicians and state institutions should take consolidated positions regarding questions relevant for an image of Ukraine that are covered by the foreign media. Ukraine also has to have an active, even very proactive, information policy. It must actively present both successes of Ukraine and opportunities it offers, support Ukrainian information centres in capitals of foreign countries, support Ukrainian mass media in Slovakia, and ensure broadcasting in various languages.

Information specialists at Ukrainian Embassy to Bratislava should be experts who know and understand the specifics of Slovakia. It is necessary not only to reduce the practise of the “manual managing” of current questions relevant for a bilateral agenda, but also to synchronize work between agencies to prevent the duplication of functions or the lack of coordination between them. It is important to intensify the cooperation of the Slovak-Ukrainian intergovernmental commissions and to present their work to the public of both countries. A complex informational campaign presenting Ukraine in the world should be developed and should be adjusted to specific conditions of each target country, including Slovakia.

It can be conclude that stereotypes springing from a lack of information and knowledge about Ukraine still influence perceptions of Ukraine in Slovakia. Ukraine is perceived to be a poor country with many problems, including an unstable political situation and enduring corruption. The common Slovaks may be aware of the military conflict in eastern Ukraine and the outflow of Ukrainians looking for a better life, work and education in countries of the European Union. Russian propaganda, in particular, does have an impact on part of the Slovak public regarding the military conflict; therefore, people in Slovakia began to use the terms “Ukrofascist” and “Banderas” in relation to Ukrainians, but, definitely, this is not the predominant narrative in Slovakia. Certainly the image of Ukrainians as a cheap labour force or the criminal activities of Ukrainians as smugglers and the like remains the strong narrative in Slovakia. More informed part of the Slovak public certainly sees the support Slovakia provides to Ukraine in the process of reforms and getting closer to the European Union and NATO. It likewise perceives the Slovakia’s humanitarian aid and other assistance provided to Ukraine as well [4, p.152].

The same is true for image of Slovakia in Ukraine. Ukrainians do not know Slovakia and the Slovaks very well (and the same applies vice-versa regarding Slovaks) except for inhabitants of the border areas (the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine). For many Ukrainians, including part of political establishment, Slovakia is only a small country and a small neighbour about which many know only that it is part of Euro-Atlantic structures. More solvent Ukrainians know the High Tatra Mountains or other tourist resorts in Slovakia. This also comes from the fact that Ukrainians are mostly focused on domestic politics, and in terms of international relations they perceive only the big players, such as the Russian Federation, the United States or the European Union as a whole. Visibility of Slovakia in Ukraine has been improved in 2014 thanks to the launch of the reverse flow of gas

from Europe to Ukraine what has illustrated a strategic importance of Slovakia for energy security of Ukraine to wider public.

Ukrainians are not reserved towards the development of cross-border cooperation with Slovakia. They perceive Slovakia through the prism of the European Union and the opportunities that are offered by a country, which is more economically developed and integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures. Therefore, poor knowledge about Slovakia on national level in Ukraine does not prevent regional and local actors who live in the bordering regions with Slovakia and know Slovak realities much better from the cross-border cooperation with Slovak partners; on the contrary, due to the absence of national stereotypes, no psychological or social barriers on side of Ukrainian regional and local actors exist to develop cross-border cooperation with Slovak partners.

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Секція 2. Політичні інститути і процеси в умовах глобальних геополітичних змін та становлення нового світопорядку