
POLITICAL IMAGE OF UKRAINE

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The political image of a state is an opinion of it on the basis of an idea generated in imagination, purposely formed through professional efforts with an internal or external audience. It is absolutely obvious that any country is interested in both internal and external positive image.[1]

If you put “political image of Ukraine” into a Google search, the truth about what U.S. society and foreign mass media in general think about it immediately reveals. In the recommended searches we see “Why Ukraine is not safe?”, “Why Ukraine is a bad place to live?” and “Corruption in Ukraine”. A positive image of the state in the eyes of its citizens can be a powerful factor in consolidating the nation, strengthening the identity of the people, providing support for internal and foreign policies, as well as one of the conditions of social security. But do the government pay enough attention to this? What do Ukrainians think about it?

It is worth beginning with national consciousness as one of the components of the political image of the state. It is necessary to notice that the political consciousness of Ukrainians was formed due to such important circumstances as the fact that for a long period Ukraine had been divided and had been under the influence of other states, and Ukrainians, being a stateless nation, actually have no experience of their own state power. Besides, the government and political elite had constantly suffered from assimilation, de facto denationalization. Ukrainians still suffer from the legacy of Soviet ideology, and socio-economic instability leads to the domination of the ordinary type of consciousness over the theoretical. A great part of society has lost confidence in their own strength and in their ability to influence political processes in Ukraine, expecting to solve their own issues at the expense of state policy, thereby allowing the authorities and other factors to manipulate them easily. However, the proportion with an individualistic liberal political consciousness is also quite significant. There are people who actively participate in the political process and have an active civic position.

After the events of 2014 on the Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kyiv, the moods of part of Ukrainian society became sharply radical, and the media, political parties, and public organizations turned people against each other by imposing certain ideologies. A “nationalist” ideology was formed, that gained

a more negative meaning, because it was radical nationalists, who destroyed their own state from the inside, smashing monuments of historical figures associated with Soviet Union, demanding the renaming of streets and meddling in conflicts with Russian-speaking citizens. This may have created an image of Ukraine as “dangerous to live in”.

The image of the head of state is more positive, and it was formed mainly due to Zelensky’s acting past, especially his role in the TV series “Servant of the People”, and his “distancing” from the oligarchs, that formed the perception of the new president like “a man of the people” rather than a classic politician among the citizens. In his speeches and interviews Zelensky uses Ukrainian and Russian equally, thus preserving his positive image in the eyes of the Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine, and also keeping citizens from the final internal division of the nation. As a professional actor, Vladimir successfully represents the state on the world stage and skillfully masks the actions of the ruling elite and external forces who make momentous decisions for Ukraine. His personal moral and political purity contributes to the predominantly positive attitude towards him. [3]

The political image is certainly affected by the fact that the Ukrainian elite has not drawn any conclusions after the annexation of Crimea and the actual loss of part of the territory of Luhansk and Donetsk regions, which indicates that the ideology of building a nation state while completely ignoring the interests of individual regions still dominates the corridors of Ukrainian government. This maintains interregional contradictions and provokes political conflicts in the future. On the other hand, Russia’s actions have aroused sympathy for Ukraine abroad, but internal disputes lead to a decline in the political image on the part of internal audiences.

Taking into account such an important element of the political image as geopolitics, it is worth pointing out the predominantly pro-European and Euro-Atlantic orientation of Ukrainians. However, during the pandemic, European integration has backfired for the Ukrainian public, as visa liberalization is still impossible, and the distribution of vaccines has once again reminded us that Ukraine is not a full member of the EU and is not entitled to most of its privileges. In addition, about a quarter of citizens still have no answer about their geopolitical priorities. Thus, answering the question about the policy of different states and unions concerning Ukraine, the vast majority of respondents do not believe that it takes into account the interests of our state. It is also worth mentioning that the majority of the supporters of the rapprochement with the EU are due to their unwillingness to participate in the Russian vector.

The political image of Ukraine is certainly important. This includes positive recognition of the state, acceptance of Ukrainian goods, tourist attraction, good international relations and many other things. However, Ukraine is not such a rich state that it can promote itself with the help of influence, like the USA, or with the help of «soft power», like China does. Nor does it have powerful media resources like Russia, so the only option to improve its image is real actions. Observance of international agreements, real promotion of national values, and preservation of dignity in negotiations with Western partners are the main ways to improve Ukraine's image in the world.

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