

INNOVATION, WORK, SOCIETY

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF UKRAINE'S FOREIGN POLICY CHOICE
AS A MARKER OF DEMOCRATIZATION**Artur Amirov**

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Summary

The purpose of the article is to conceptualize foreign policy choice as one of the markers of the democratization of political institutions in Ukraine. Special attention is focused on the connection between the democratization of political institutions and Ukraine's foreign policy choice. The choice between democracy and authoritarianism is not only a matter of internal transformation. It covers the foreign policy space as well. Ukraine has chosen the path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The implementation of this foreign policy choice requires the activation of democratization processes and the expansion of the space for individual freedom of choice. For this reason, the values of freedom of speech and individual rights are noted among the determinants of Ukraine's democratic foreign policy choice. The implementation of the democratic foreign policy choice made by the Ukrainian political class is impossible without effective institutions: free mass media, electoral contests, and parliamentarism. All of them should contribute to political and economic competition and the creation and strengthening of the middle class, which, in fact, should make a democratic political choice. The research used an interdisciplinary approach, which made it possible to determine the differences between existential and marketing choices, between everyday and political choices and substantiate the presence of political, legal, economic, and communicative dimensions of foreign policy choice. The importance of historical prerequisites for foreign policy choice is substantiated.

Key words: political choice, foreign policy, political institutions, European integration, political freedoms.

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1. Introduction

Determining the essence of foreign policy choice and creating its concept in the discourse of political science is a necessary prerequisite for the study of the democratization of the political institutions of Ukraine. Conceptualization, as part of the research process, involves defining the concept of foreign policy choice and determining the need to distinguish it from other phenomena. Ukraine's foreign policy choice in the direction of European and Euro-Atlantic integration is a clear marker of the democratization of political institutions in Ukraine. Opting for a foreign policy choice as a unit of analysis involves determining the institutional actors of

its justification and implementation, and interpreting the interaction between institutions as a systemic phenomenon (*Yakovleva, & Yakovlev, 2020*).

This research task has acquired special importance in the context of the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine since 2014, which in 2022 turned from a "hybrid" into a large-scale armed aggression and took the form of a confrontation between the democratic world and authoritarian countries. In this sense, the connection between foreign policy choice and the democratization of political institutions, which is developed in this article, is obvious.

Defining a choice as an element of social interaction, one should agree that the foreign policy choice is determined according to the system of social coordinates, "...a choice cannot go beyond the alternatives proposed by the grand narrative and embedded in the picture of the world. That is, the choice is a part of social interaction, its integral component" (*Yakovlev, 2015*).

Among the signs of free political choice under democracy, the following ones should be noted: 1) citizens' awareness of their own interest, the ratio of individual and public interest; 2) high level of political participation and political activity of citizens, developed civil society; 3) political pluralism; 4) free competition among political parties, leaders, ideas, and ideologies; 5) the presence of political freedoms, awareness of their value and readiness to protect them from autocracies and populists; 5) formation of institutions that guarantee freedom of choice – law, free media, the institution of elections and representative democracy, etc.

Conceptualization of foreign policy choices requires an interdisciplinary approach. Its application allows determining the unity of certain elements of internal and external policy and involves a system analysis. Determining the essence of foreign policy choice, its stages, and components, as well as delineating the place of choice in the process of making political decisions is an important task of modern democratic theory and practice in Ukraine. Its solution requires the justification of the foreign policy choice as a political choice, not an everyday one, as well as an existential one, not a marketing one. One should especially emphasize a rational choice, as a result of awareness of the limits of an individual's freedom and her/his responsibility.

The attention to the individual choice of a citizen, rights, choice and freedom of choice are the foundation of a democratic political system. Freedom of choice of the individual plays an important role in the process of democratization of political institutions.

2. Theoretical framework of the research

In modern interpretations, the theory of choice is presented in the theory of public choice. If the theory of rational choice focuses on economic choice, then the theory of public choice examines mainly the conditions of political choice. Economics and political science intersect in public choice theory, as "...the wasteful offspring of political economy", it arises at the border of these two orthodoxies (*Buchanan & Tullock, 1965*).

The focus of the theory of public choice is the transition from individual choice to collective one or from individual rational behaviour to the study of the logic of collective action (it is worth mentioning M. Olson, who formulates a question critically important for democracy: why do rational actions of individuals lead to irrational collective behaviour? (*Olson, 1993*)). The founder of public choice theory is the Nobel laureate in economics J. Buchanan (prize 1986). He emphasizes the complexity of public choice (as well as responsibility for the management of public finances) compared to economic choice and transactions with private finances. In the work "The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy", written by J. Buchanan in co-authorship with H. Tullock (2011 Nobel laureate), it

is stated that public choice theory examines the political organization of a society of free people (*Buchanan & Tullock, 1965*). A free political choice of an individual or group is considered rational. The tradition of public choice, the genesis of which takes place in the domain of liberal political thought, emphasizes individual choice in the process of forming the political market (democracy) and the economic market (capitalist system). Representatives of the theory of public choice emphasize a unified approach to the analysis of the activities of both economic and political actors through the prism of selfishness, individual choice, maximization of benefits, opportunistic behaviour, etc. The differences lie in the need to ensure the constitutional level during political choices

In general, the theory of choice is based on assumptions about individualism, the model of behaviour of the "economic man" (*Homo economicus*), and the interpretation of politics as exchange. It is the theory of choice between several alternatives that is the basis of the theory of decision-making in domestic and foreign policy. Foreign policy choice involves the adoption and implementation of a number of important decisions, in particular regarding the formation and development of political institutions, their democratization, etc.

In the process of making an important ("big", "existential", etc.) political choice, a series of decisions are made, each of which consists, in turn, of a choice between specific alternatives. Such a cycle is called a choice situation. This can be presented in the form of the following series: 1) alternatives – 2) choice – 3) decision – 4) Choice. The alternative between democracy and authoritarianism is decided by the choice in favour of democracy, which involves the decision to democratize political institutions. This decision determines the foreign policy choice – integration with democratic countries and disintegration with authoritarian ones. The choice is made with the participation of various social groups and communities; foreign policy choice is a matter of the whole society. But the decision is the prerogative of public power.

3. Freedom of choice as a marker of democracy

Justification of the essence of foreign policy choice and democratization of political institutions requires special attention to the phenomena that distinguish democratic countries from authoritarian ones. It is about such phenomena as freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and freedom of choice. The latter becomes especially relevant in the conditions of the transition from the authoritarian Soviet regime to the model of modern democracies; it involves free, competitive, and regular elections of representatives of public power, but is not limited to electoral campaigns. Freedom of choice in everyday life (goods and services, style and way of life, cultures and identities) and in politics (ideology, party, or candidate) is one of the main characteristics of democracies that distinguishes them from autocracies. The state cannot limit the choice of individuals if it is within the realm of law. This maxim of the liberal political doctrine has become the foundation for determining the essence of individual rational choice, and freedoms (especially political) can be considered as a prerequisite for political choice. This fully applies to foreign policy choices in the conditions of the formation of a democratic political system, the democratization of political institutions, etc. Freedom of individual choice has become the condition for the formation of two most important processes – democratization and modernization on a global scale. A researcher of two types of freedom – positive and negative – I. Berlin cites the opinion of one of the founders of the liberal tradition, J.S. Mill, regarding the role of freedom: "Mill believed that neither rational thinking nor mastery over nature, but only the freedom to choose and experiment, differentiates people from the rest of nature; of all his ideas, it was this view that provided his lasting fame. Under

freedom, he understood a state in which people are not prevented from choosing the object and method of their worship. For him, only such a society, in which this condition is realized, can be called completely human" (*Berlin, 1994:265*). The inner freedom of the individual, I. Berlin continues, can be destroyed by the oppressor or "repressive institutionalized practice"; in this sense, he, following R. Velder, makes a distinction "between authoritarianism, when a person obeys the government without approving of its orders or demands, and totalitarianism when the system is imposed by a dictator and supplemented by internal conformism. Hence the totalitarian insistence on teaching and instilling ideas as opposed to a simple outward display of submission..." (*Berlin, 1994:34*). I. Hioane notes: "Building a democratic society and integration into the progressive international community is seen as a strategic direction of Ukraine's development. An integral component of these processes is the active participation of the population in the formation of representative authorities and making political decisions that determine the development of society. The leading role in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of political choice is played by the interaction of its characteristics such as freedom and responsibility, the inseparable unity of which is not always realized in society" (*Hioane, 2020*). In the process of democratic political choice, there is a connection between freedom and responsibility because an individual in a democratic society always seeks to go beyond social and political restrictions, resist manipulation and pressure from the state. The citizen's intention to freely choose is a prerequisite for democratization, the basis of his/her foreign policy choice. In turn, democratic political institutions should promote free choice, and not artificially create conditions for its limitation.

4. Alternatives and determinants of foreign policy choice

The choice, both everyday (marketing) and political (existential), necessarily implies the presence of alternatives. In the modern world, the conceptualization of choice is definitely conditioned by the existence of such alternative political regimes as democracy and authoritarianism. Despite all the socio-cultural, historical, institutional, economic, and governmental differences between, for instance, the Republic of Poland and the Australian Union, they are united by a respect for the choice of individuals, as the basis of a democratic political system. This fully applies to the authoritarian and totalitarian alternative – the differences between Iran and the Russian Federation recede into the background when it comes to restricting the rights and freedoms of citizens, replacing individual choice with collective (state) interests. For post-Soviet countries, a democratic political choice necessarily implies a rejection of the Soviet past in order to intensify the process of consolidation with democratic countries. This alternative looks like the "Soviet past" v. "democratic future".

The impact of information manipulation in the process of justifying and implementing a choice cannot be underestimated. For this reason, the need for rationalization in the process of making a choice, both individual and collective, should be noted. A rational choice is especially important for the political space, both domestic and foreign.

One of the main factors of individual choice (both political and everyday) is the activity of the mass media. The institute of mass media, in turn, is undergoing significant transformations due to the emergence and development of Internet communication, social networks, and online media. At the same time, traditional mass media (television, radio, press) are losing influence on citizens' choices. Therefore, the information sphere (including media, political advertising, and PR) is an important determinant of political choice. The informational determinant (or the influence of the mass media institute) on foreign policy

choice deserves special attention. Mass media can create a picture of the world that determines the system of political coordinates and contributes to one or another choice (*Yakovlev, Amirov & Stoliarova, 2021*). The ability of the media to influence choices by setting priorities and determining the main topics for the public agenda is emphasized by agenda-setting theorists (*McCombs, 2005*). At the same time, it is not only about the national mass media system, but also the powerful and growing influence of global media holdings, which have made the way from global satellite news networks (CNN owner Ted Turner is considered the founder of this trend) to global social networks. Their influence on foreign policy choice increases with the development of Internet communications, which provide access to information resources of global media anywhere in the world. Such global media include not only North American (CNN, Fox News, CNBC, etc.) and British (BBC World) media. The global movement of information occurs not only from the North to the South, but also in the reverse direction. Such media as Al Jazeera and Al Arabia have recently been actively positioning themselves on the global media market.

Other determinants of political choice include political values, economic factors (including class struggle (*Yakovlev, Borovyk & Diachenko, 2022*), political situation (configuration and balance of political forces), ideology, the activity of civil society institutions, etc.

It is also worth mentioning that Ukrainian citizens are learning to make rational individual choices, gradually moving away from the traditions of Soviet collectivism, when the choice was the result of the authoritarian dictates of the government. A choice without a choice.

Adherence to the values of a democratic society is an important determinant of not only domestic political, but also foreign policy choices. The basic element for a rational political choice of an individual is an electoral choice. It should be especially noted that the struggle for the possibility of democratic choice of citizens during election campaigns is an important component of rational choice. Transparent, competitive, and fair elections allow citizens to make a rational political choice and learn to counter information manipulation and falsification during electoral contests. This is a two-way influence: election campaigns influence values, and values, in turn, determine the democratic choices of citizens during election campaigns.

Values are an important component of foreign policy choice. They determine not only individual, but also a collective choice. The correlation of values at the individual level occurs with a specific political choice, and at the collective level, values determine the social tendency to choose between democracy and authoritarianism, the European and Euro-Atlantic choice or "Eurasianism". Values, collective and individual, are manifested during electoral choice, they are manifested in the choice of society in favour of representatives of democratic political forces and, as a result, democratic political institutions.

It should be noted that according to I. Hioane, "the influence of values on the choice of an individual is correlated with the effect of stimuli that a person encounters in everyday life and on which he consciously or unconsciously focuses his attention" (*Hioane, 2018*).

Regarding the connection between rational choice and information, it is much more difficult for political choice to fulfil the condition of comprehensive and objective (verified) information, as a prerequisite for rational choice, than for economic choice.

A fundamental concept for the theory of choice (theory of rational choice, theory of public choice) is the "situation" of choice. In everyday life, the situation of choice arises quite often when it comes to marketing choice, i.e. the choice of goods and services. But foreign policy choice belongs to a different category. The situation of choice does not arise here every day and not every year. This is a window of opportunity that opens for some countries once a decade or even a century. For instance, gaining independence creates a situation of foreign

policy choice for the country, and the waves of expansion of the European Union and NATO should also be mentioned.

Sociocultural and political traditions of society and the elite become another important factor in foreign policy choices. The influence of traditions, which are formed under the influence of past experience, both individual and collective, is extremely powerful. On the one hand, this influence can be contrasted with rational decision-making; traditions should be taken into account in the "situation" of choice as an irrational factor. On the other hand, we are talking about the inertia of previous election situations, past elections, particularly foreign political ones. In the tradition of historical institutionalism, the dependence of political decisions on the "travelled path" is emphasized.

On the example of the post-Soviet countries, such inertia should be noted, which for a long time marked the path of preserving integration ties with the Eurasian geopolitical space and the efforts of the elites to reproduce the Soviet (and if we look at history, actually the imperial) model of interaction.

It is based on, inertia and the dependence of the activities of "new" institutions on "old" experience traditions (Pierson & Skocpol, 2002).

Therefore, foreign policy choice needs rationalization, such as abandoning Soviet (imperial) traditions in the interaction of public power and citizens, democratizing the activities of political institutions, overcoming inertia (dependence on the "travelled path") in politics and everyday life.

5. Conclusions

Thus, the conceptualization of foreign policy choice in scientific discourse allows determining the role of political institutions in the process of transition from individual to collective choice. If the collective choice is based on democratic mechanisms and takes into account public opinion, which is formed under the influence of the activities of civil society institutions, then we are talking about a democratic political choice. On the contrary, the institutions of an authoritarian political regime (the institution of personal power, institutions that use violence or its threat to citizens) form a space of authoritarian collective choice, effectively making an individual choice, freedom of thought, speech, and choice impossible for citizens. The ability to understand the situation of choice, make rational political decisions and form appropriate political institutions characterizes the place of the state in international relations (it acts as a subject or an object). At the same time, it should be taken into account that the political institutions of authoritarian states are aimed at narrowing the space of choice both inside the country and abroad, making it impossible to form one's own strategy for the protection of national interests, without leaving the status of subjectivity for its satellites.

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