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CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC MANEUVERING ON UKRAINIAN- RUSSIAN WAR: FEBRUARY 2022 – FEBRUARY 2023

Key words: geopolitical position, war in Ukraine, neutrality, international relation, Chinese diplomacy.

China's geopolitical position about the war in Ukraine is one of the most discussed topics in international circles and media. It has many components that are interrelated with political, economic and geopolitical factors.

China maintains diplomatic peaceful approaches to the resolution of arms conflicts and takes, in particular, very cautious position about Russian invasion in Ukraine. The diplomatic rhetoric of China does not use the word "war", operating instead the notion of the "Ukrainian crisis". Officially the Chinese government did not express itself clearly about the confrontation between Ukraine and Russia, although some Chinese officials commented on the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict. However, the overall position of China is that it wants to maintain visible neutrality and not interfere with the conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

One of the main factors determining China's position on the war in Ukraine is China's geopolitical position. China has no close historical or cultural ties with Ukraine, and Russia's factors, which are not as important as other countries. At the same time, China has complex historical relations with Russia, but today they have a mutual economic interest in cooperation. In fact, it's an active economic cooperation. In the light of diplomatic debates China has taken a waiting position as their actions can trigger negative reactions in Western or Russian countries. Therefore, China will continue to maintain neutrality.

Russia is an important partner of China in the field of energy and infrastructure. However, China seeks to diversify its energy sources and reduce its dependence on Russia, so this factor may lose its value over time. China is also a large investor in Ukraine and has a significant economic interest in gas transit through Ukraine. Therefore, China's relations with Ukraine can be influenced by economic factors.

It is important to note that China has its own problems with regions seeking to secede, such as Taiwan and Xinjiang. So, China may fear that active support for Ukraine may push these regions to independence. In general, China's position on the war in Ukraine is complex and multifaceted.

Some official steps have been taken to illustrate China's relationship to Ukraine's war with Russia. Official statement of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 24 February 2022: "China expresses serious concern about the escalation of the situation in Ukraine calls on all parties to retreat from the use of force and to resolve the conflict through dialogue and negotiation." [1]

China's refrain from voting at the U.N. Security Council meeting on the situation in Ukraine in February 2022: China did not vote on the UN Security Council resolution on the situation in Ukraine, which demanded a cessation of violence and Russian withdrawal from Ukraine. If Beijing voted against the resolution at that time, the West would see it as a frank support

for Russia's position. But also China did not vote "pro", after tried to assess and weigh all the risks and opportunities. Maintaining such strategic ambiguity helps China better assess which approach it benefits at one point or another [2].

On the one hand, Beijing has openly called Washington responsible for this war – as if it were related to the expansion of NATO in Europe. On the other hand, it's in no hurry to provide assistance to Russia [3].

According to the U.S. Washington Post, Russia repeatedly asked China for both financial and technological support. Xi Jinping wouldn't mind finding ways of mutually beneficial cooperation with Moscow, but all the negotiations were "strengthened." It's said that China "understands Russia's precarious situation, but can't ignore its own situation." [4]

It's also interesting to analyze this problem in Chinese media. The South China Morning Post article says, that China seeks to remain neutral and not to interfere in the conflict, as it is not a direct interest in it [5]. An article in the CNBC newspaper – BBC states that China can maintain a neutrality in relations with Russia because they are afraid that conflict could adversely affect their economic relations [6].

The Nikkei Asia article states that China may fear that Ukraine's active support may push local regions that wish to separate for independence [7].

The position of Chinese social network users is the same. According to a study conducted by Chinese social platform WeChat in February 2022, 80% of Chinese support their country's neutrality in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Most of them think China should stay outside and not get involved in the conflict, but at the same time they pay attention to the importance of maintaining international stability and peace [8].

In February 2023, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs made an official statement regarding the settlement of the situation in Ukraine by publishing 12 points to help avoid the further crisis [9]. They contain calls for: respect for the sovereignty of all countries, abandoning the Cold War mentality, ending fighting, restoring peace negotiations, resolving the humanitarian crisis, protecting civilians and prisoners of war, nuclear power plant security, reducing strategic risks, facilitating grain exports, ending unilateral sanctions, maintaining the stability of industrial production and supply chains, facilitating post-conflict reconstruction.

In the official opinion of the PRC, support for Ukraine and Russia should come from all sides to restore the dialogue as quickly as possible and, as a result, de-escalate the conflict.

Chinese side believes that the sanctions that the West and Europe impose on Russia cannot solve the issues, but only create new problems: "The relevant countries must stop abuse of unilateral sanctions and "long-hand jurisdiction" against other countries, to contribute to the de-escalation of the

crisis in Ukraine and create conditions for other countries to develop their economy and improve the lives of their people"— Chinese Ministry of Health said [10].

Ukraine's Western partners are mixed reaction to this peace plan. At the same time, some of them supported China, which took the first step towards recognizing war and the importance of resolving the situation by the entire international community, not just as an exceptionally European problem.

So, on the basis of an analysis of available sources, China seeks to maintain neutrality and not interfere in conflict because it is not directly interested in it. At the same time, China is committed to maintain international stability and resolve conflicts through diplomatic efforts. In its official statements, China calls on all parties to show attention, restraint and focus efforts on a peaceful settlement of the conflict and the protection of the international stability.

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