

DOI: 10.15276/EJ.04.2023.1
 DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10370860
 UDC: 330.1
 JEL: F00, E60

UKRAINE'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION – KEY OBSTACLES AND REQUIREMENTS

ЄВРОІНТЕГРАЦІЯ УКРАЇНИ – КЛЮЧОВІ ПЕРЕПОНИ ТА ВИМОГИ

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Received 11.10.2023

Балан О.С., Войтенко М.В., Пульча Д.О. Євроінтеграція України – ключові перепони та вимоги. Оглядова стаття.
 У статті розглядаються проблеми європейської інтеграції України. Автори навели короткий список угод між ЄС та Києвом. Перерахували проблеми, що стоять перед Україною на шляху до вступу. Основна – війна з Росією. Перераховані не вирішені проблеми – боротьба з корупцією та реформи судової системи та економіки. Відзначено ставлення українців та громадян ЄС до вступу Києва до Євросоюзу, досягнення, проаналізовано синхронізацію законодавства із загальноєвропейським. Наведено короткий огляд таких проблем ЄС, як проблеми через зникнення російських енергоносіїв та кризу українських біженців. Дано аналіз економічного співробітництва ЄС-Україна. Євросоюз для України – головний торговий партнер та його роль підвищується. Це – економічний базис євроінтеграції. Однак війна, що йде в Україні, – перешкода для інвестицій з ЄС і вступу до Союзу.
 Ключові слова: Євроінтеграція, Євросоюз, ЄС, Європейський Союз, план Маршалла, відбудова

Balan O.S., Voitenko M.V., Pulcha D.O. Ukraine's European Integration – Key Obstacles and Requirements. Review article.
 The article discusses the problems of Ukraine's European integration. The authors provide a short list of agreements between the EU and Kyiv. They list the problems facing Ukraine on the way to accession. The main one is the war with Russia. The unresolved problems listed include the fight against corruption and reforms of the judiciary and economy. The authors note the attitudes of Ukrainians and EU citizens towards Kyiv's accession to the European Union, its achievements, and analyses the synchronisation of legislation with the European one. A brief overview of the EU's problems, such as the problems caused by the disappearance of Russian energy supplies and the Ukrainian refugee crisis, is given. The article also analyses economic cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. The EU is Ukraine's main trading partner and its role is increasing. It is the economic basis of European integration. However, the ongoing war in Ukraine is an obstacle to investment from the EU and accession to the Union.
 Keywords: European intergation, the European Union, the EU, the Marshall plan, reconstruction

Ukraine's European integration is an important strategic path, but its success faces a number of key obstacles and requirements. The problem is to identify these obstacles and requirements that complicate the process of Ukraine's European integration. The main aspects of the problem include economic, political, socio-cultural and other aspects that limit and influence Ukraine's integration efforts in European structures.

Analysis of recent researches and publications

The issue of Ukraine's participation in integration processes and cooperation with the EU is on the agenda in the publications of such domestic scholars and experts as A. Galchynskyi, M. Yakubiak, V. Heyets, V. Movchan, P. Rudyakov, P. Haidutskyi, V. Vynnyk, O. Fedirko, O. Kovaleva, and others. They studied the problems of Ukraine's integration and cooperation with the EU, considered the problem of regional integration and the issue of Ukraine's accession to the EU.

The aim of the article is to identify and systematise the key obstacles and requirements that complicate the process of Ukraine's European integration. The results of this study can serve as a basis for developing strategies and recommendations to overcome these obstacles and ensure effective implementation of integration commitments.

The main part

The issue of Ukraine's European integration is relevant for our country for more than. Back in 1993, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law of Ukraine "On the Main Directions of Ukraine's Foreign Policy" of 2 July 1993. That was the first time Ukraine declared its European integration aspirations.

In 2014, the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union was signed.

In addition, for almost two decades now, Ukraine has shared borders with the EU countries – Hungary, Slovakia and Poland have been EU members since 2004, Romania since 2007, and Bulgaria, with which our country shares a sea border, should also be taken into account. If we talk about the land border, it is about 1,400 kilometres in total.

Moreover, it is not a border with the enemy, but with the countries of one of the most economically developed blocs in the world.

That is, integration with the EU is not only a cultural and civilisational choice [1] for Ukraine as a member of the European family of nations but also an economic choice.

In the years before the war, the issue of European integration became even more popular in the academic community, and a significant number of research papers were published.

However, the Russian aggression that began in 2022 has largely changed the "landscape" and roadmap of Ukraine's European integration and raised a number of new questions. In this paper, the authors aim to outline the achievements and new challenges on the path of Ukraine's European integration.

As early as 1991, the EU issued a declaration recognising the democratic nature of the all-Ukrainian referendum on independence. The following year, the first EU-Ukraine meeting at the highest level took place between the President of Ukraine and the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors. In 2005, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the EU-Ukraine Action Plan, and in 2014, the Verkhovna Rada and the European Parliament simultaneously ratified the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, and in 2017, the visa-free regime for Ukrainian citizens came into force.

After the start of Russia's full-scale military aggression, the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed Ukraine's application for EU membership. On 23 June 2022, the European Council granted Ukraine the status of a candidate for accession to the European Union.

In February 2023, during the 24th EU-Ukraine summit, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said [2] that Ukraine would definitely become an EU member. However, she did not specify a timeframe for accession.

At the same time, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy emphasized at the meeting with the media [3] that our country had reaffirmed its determination to start negotiations on the EU accession as soon as possible and was awaiting the relevant decisions from the European Commission and the European Council.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister of Ukraine Denys Shmyhal said: "Our task is to be ready for pre-accession negotiations by the end of 2023, and by the end of 2024 – to be ready for the EU membership".

In March 2023, the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Denys Shmyhal, stated [4] that, "Ukraine has now fulfilled all seven EU recommendations that were identified when it was granted candidate status. This demonstrates our determination to start accession negotiations this year".

But there are numerous obstacles to Ukraine's accession to the community of European nations. The most pressing issue is the war with Russia. It has not been officially declared, but the war is on, and a large part of Ukraine has been destroyed, and the Ukrainian government does not currently control some of the territories - Crimea, the territories in Donbas and others. The Lisbon Treaty of 2007, the basic agreement on the principles of the European Union, says nothing about banning countries with territorial conflicts from joining the EU. At the same time, the conflict escalation and this region's instability create difficulties for the reforms implementation and ensuring security throughout the country.

But there have been other obstacles for many years. The following have noted been (see Figure 1).

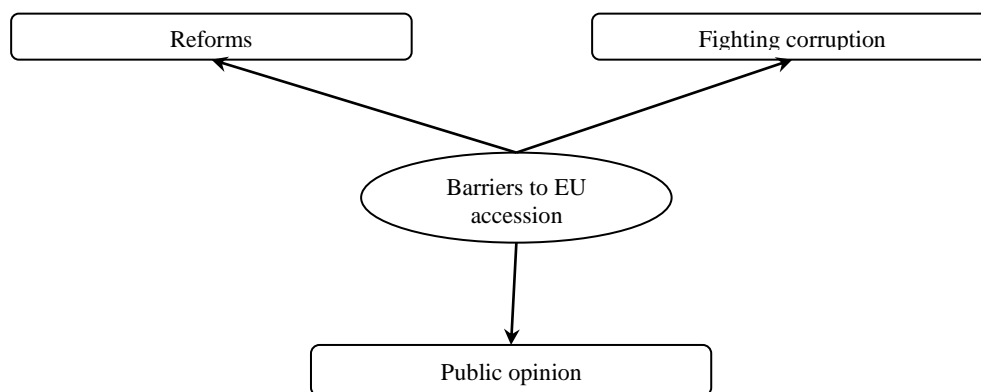


Figure 1. Obstacles to Ukraine's Accession to the EU

Source: authors' own elaboration

1) Reforms – Ukraine needs to undertake wide-ranging political and legal reforms to meet the EU standards. This covers many areas, including the fight against corruption, strengthening the rule of law, the judiciary reform, freedom of speech and human rights protection. It is also necessary to harmonise Ukrainian legislation with European standards.

2) Economic reforms, including the fight against corruption, improving the business environment and the economy stabilisation, are important factors for EU accession. Ukraine must guarantee the implementation of European standards and norms on trade, competition, public procurement, etc.

3) Public opinion: Widespread support for EU membership among the Ukrainian population and the EU countries is important for accession. Implementing reforms and changing attitudes towards European values take time and support from citizens.

For many years, there was also a geopolitical context, i.e. relations between Russia and Western countries, including the EU, had a significant impact on the political process in Ukraine. Cooperation with Russia and decisions related to the conflict in eastern Ukraine could have influenced accession negotiations with the EU. However, with the outbreak of full-scale Russian aggression and the imposition of EU sanctions on Russia, this issue is no longer relevant.

In the autumn of 2022, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, said: "Our prosperity was based on cheap energy from Russia. Russian gas was perceived as cheap and stable – but it has already been proven that it is not. Another source was access to the large Chinese market...".

That is, we can talk about at least a delay in the EU's economic development. According to experts [5] – "The deterioration of the socio-economic situation in the EU area has a cumulative effect and exacerbates other existing and latent problems. This situation, according to some Ukrainian experts, may affect the EU's common policy towards Ukraine".

In this regard, "The majority (64%) of experts suggest that the deterioration of the socio-economic situation in Europe may cause an increase in disagreements and contradictions between the EU countries regarding further actions on the Ukrainian direction. At the same time, most experts agree to varying degrees that the deterioration of the socio-economic situation in the EU in the second half of 2022 due to Russian pressure and blackmail will not generally slow down Ukraine's European integration (57%) or limit Brussels' assistance to Kyiv (57%). Still, significant shares of respondents (38% and 40%, respectively) hold the opposite opinion".

In addition to the Russian factor, the EU has a second problem: the mass migration of Ukrainian citizens. According to the UN Refugee Agency, the war in Ukraine has caused "the fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II".

In January 2023, Katharina Lump, Germany's representative to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), said that more than 7.9 million people had fled Ukraine since the beginning of the war [6].

According to her, another 5.9 million people were internally displaced, and the number of Ukrainians who had to leave the country

Regarding the reforms, Kseniia Alekankina, a representative of the voxUkraine analytical platform, provides the following statistics for part of 2022: "In total, in the last three months of 2022, we counted 51 important changes – more than in any other quarter of 2022. Among these decisions, there is only one anti-reform (the law restricting the circulation of medicines from Russia or Belarus), which means that the government was able to recover a little from the blows of the war and accelerate reforms" [7].

As for specific areas of reform, it has been noted that the most important laws were:

1) on media, which implements the requirements of the thematic European directive on achieving pluralism in the media, consumer protection, and access to information on the ownership structure of the media.

2) The Law on the Public Health System – it fulfils Ukraine's obligations under the Association Agreement with the EU and introduces the concept of "public health" at the legislative level, which describes activities aimed at promoting health, preventing diseases and increasing life expectancy.

3) The Law on Liability Insurance allowed low – and medium-hazard enterprises to replace fire inspections with civil liability insurance.

4) The Law on Chemical Safety and Management of Chemical Products, which promotes harmonisation of Ukrainian legislation with the European one in the field of registration of chemicals and labelling and packaging of chemicals.

However, it was noted that in the context of harmonisation of legislation with the EU norms, one event received a negative assessment. This is the law restricting the medicines circulation from the Russian Federation or Belarus, which was drafted in such a way as to make it possible to ban almost any medicine.

At the same time, as Oksana Sobkevych notes in her article "Overview of European Integration Reforms in the Ukrainian Industry" (referring to the situation as of mid-2022) [8], "Ukraine has harmonised horizontal legislation with the EU law and has adopted all framework laws regulating the issues of standardisation, metrology, accreditation, conformity assessment and market surveillance. Significant progress has been made in the adaptation and implementation of sectoral (vertical) legislation, including the adoption of 25 out of 27 technical regulations defined in Annex III, and the revision of approved technical regulations to bring them in line with new EU directives and regulations".

She also notes that a national quality infrastructure has been created that meets the EU requirements and even the World Trade Organisation (WTO), "the functioning of the national standardisation body, the national accreditation body, conformity assessment bodies and state market surveillance bodies have been accredited and appointed. As for the second issue, i.e. economic reforms".

We can say that this standardisation is one of the results of the abolition of the quotas on exports from Ukraine to the European Union, which was adopted by the Council of the European Union in May 2022. It adopted a decision allowing temporary trade liberalisation and other trade concessions for certain Ukrainian goods.

The reform of Ukraine's judiciary and rural branches is ongoing, but it may take many years to complete. In May 2023, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed the Comprehensive Strategic Plan for Law Enforcement Reform, which was developed in response to seven recommendations of the European Commission, as Ukraine received EU candidate status.

This plan applies to the Prosecution of Ukraine, National Police of Ukraine, State Border Service of Ukraine, State Bureau of Investigation, Economic Security Bureau of Ukraine, Security Service of Ukraine and Customs service of Ukraine. The document focuses on the following priorities and areas of law enforcement reform: efficiency and effectiveness of law enforcement and prosecution agencies as an integral part of the security and defence sector; consistent criminal policy with crime prevention as a priority; comprehensive digital transformation; openness, transparency, accountability, independence and political neutrality.

In other words, reforms of the security forces and the subsequent fight against corruption may take years to complete.

It should be noted that in 2021, the European Union was Ukraine's main trading partner. According to the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine [9], in 2021, the share of trade in goods and services with the EU was 39.0% of Ukraine's total trade, while in 2020 the share was 38.8%.

Of these, ferrous metals accounted for 20.3%, ores and slag – 11.2%, electrical machinery – 9.6%, and fats and oils – 8.8%. This means that the structure of Ukrainian exports is dominated by industrial and agricultural products. The European market capacity is so large that Ukraine could increase its exports there several times. However, the situation with the ban on grain imports from Ukraine to a number of EU countries has demonstrated that such obstacles can harm Ukrainian business.

Regarding the attitude to joining the EU.

In March 2023, the Razumkov Centre conducted a survey among Ukrainians [10] and acknowledged that, according to the survey, in March 2021, 59% of all respondents, or 80% of those who were going to take part in the referendum membership (26% and 17%, respectively, would vote against)

According to the Eurobarometer socio-environmental survey, in the spring of 2022, the majority of EU citizens saw Ukraine as a part of the European family and were ready to support our country. 66% of the EU citizens then agreed that "Ukraine should join the EU when it is ready". But it should be borne in mind that the growing problems with the economy will reduce the level of this support in society. Taking all this abovementioned into account, the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the harmonisation of Ukrainian legislation and regulations with those of the EU is an ongoing process, driven not only by Ukraine's desire to become part of the EU, but also by the fact that the EU is the number one market for Ukrainian industry and its importance will only grow.

Ukrainian citizens support the idea of Ukraine's accession to the EU, and it is also popular among the EU citizens, but with a clarification: "when it is ready".

At the same time, the EU is facing a lot of problems – the lack of cheap Russian gas, the migration crisis. But it is not ready to invest billions of euros in a country that is currently being bombed by the Russians. And it's hardly ready to accept a country in which there is a war going on.

CANDIDATE STATUS: ADVANTAGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES.

On 23 June 2022, the European Council officially granted Ukraine candidate status for EU membership. Prior to that, on 17 June, the European Commission recognised Ukraine's European perspective and recommended granting it candidate status, provided that Ukraine fulfils seven relevant recommendations. At the same time, the European Commission retained the function of monitoring the process of implementation of the relevant steps by Ukraine as a candidate state. The first reporting and evaluation of the reforms are scheduled for the end of 2022.

Acquiring candidate status is the first of three stages of the EU accession process. For Ukraine, it means an official and formal confirmation of its European integration aspirations and the reality of the prospect of one day becoming a member of the European Union. The next stage is the start of formal membership negotiations, which involves the adoption of current EU legislation; preparation for its implementation; and the implementation of judicial, administrative, economic and other reforms necessary to meet the requirements (criteria) for a candidate state's accession to the EU [11].

Ukraine's further integration into the European Union is a complex process that requires unanimous decision-making by all the member states at each stage. Membership negotiations can only begin after all 27 states jointly decide that Ukraine has fulfilled all intermediate tasks and is ready to start negotiations within a specific agreed format. That is why regular political dialogue with EU member states is critical to consolidate their support both during the process of Ukraine's acquisition of candidate status and afterwards.

Taking into account Ukraine's previous experience on the path to European integration, as well as the rhetoric of the EU member states on the eve of the decision to grant Ukraine candidate status, it was already clear from whom to expect comprehensive support and from whom to expect doubts and hesitations.

The category of lobbyists and supporters of Ukraine's European integration includes the Baltic States and Central and Eastern Europe. A significant political signal of support from these states was the conclusion of bilateral documents, i.e. declarations of support for Ukraine's European perspective. The process was initiated by the Ukrainian authorities in early 2021, and since then, declarations have been signed between the President of Ukraine and the leaders of eight EU countries. In the spring of 2021, joint declarations on Ukraine's European perspective were signed with Lithuania, Poland, Latvia and Estonia. In November, a corresponding document was signed with Slovakia, and in December – with the heads of governments of Croatia and Slovenia. Bulgaria was the last to sign a declaration with Ukraine in February 2022, on the eve of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, which interrupted the initiative (a similar document was planned to be signed with the Czech Republic). In general, the documents welcomed Ukraine's progress in implementing the Association Agreement with the EU, stressed the need for a strategic review of the Eastern Partnership initiative, and noted the intention to strengthen the support of the signatory countries for Ukraine's integration into the EU, in particular in the context of its application for membership [11].

The group of EU countries whose position on granting Ukraine candidate status was shaky and uncertain until recently included, first, the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands), which are traditionally sceptical about the EU enlargement and Ukraine's accession to the EU in particular. The main reason for this is concern about the effectiveness of Ukraine's internal reforms, including fears of a possible slowdown in reforms after the country's candidacy is granted. In the past, Ukraine had a precedent when the Netherlands blocked the Association Agreement implementation with the EU. So this time, there were also doubts about the full support of these countries.

Secondly, the states of Western and Central Europe – France, Germany, and Austria – have also always had a rather controversial position on the issue of new members joining the European Union. With the beginning of Russia's large-scale aggression, these countries began to send signals of support for Kyiv's European integration aspirations in their rhetoric. At the same time, the Ukrainian side had doubts about these countries' voting in support of Ukraine during the June meeting of the European Council (especially Germany's position). Another country that also raised questions was Hungary, a country whose leadership made sharp and controversial statements against Ukraine and the EU, opposed the provision of heavy weapons to Ukraine and their transportation through its territory, and the strengthening of the sanctions regime against Russia. At the same time, after Ukraine applied for membership, the Hungarian side made statements that the country was going to support Kyiv's movement towards the EU [12].

On 23 June 2022 (along with the European Council meeting), the European Parliament voted on a resolution to grant Ukraine the status of a candidate for the EU membership. The document was voted in favour by 529 MPs, 45 were against, and 14 abstained. Among the MPs who voted against the relevant resolution of the European Parliament are mostly representatives of far-right and populist parties from France (National Front, Reconquista), Germany (Alternative for Germany), Austria (Austrian Freedom Party), Belgium (Flemish Interest), as well as communist parties from Greece and Portugal.

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are the leaders in terms of the frequency of visits to Ukraine by heads of state and other officials. First and foremost, these are Poland and the Baltic states. The presidents of the four states made a joint visit to Kyiv on 13 April 2022. Since then, the Polish President A. Duda visited Ukraine twice more – in May and August (on the eve of Independence Day). In addition, the Polish leadership also visited Ukraine at the governmental level – the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence of Poland came to Ukraine [11].

In turn, the Baltic states' representatives – the presidents of Lithuania and Latvia, the foreign ministers of the respective countries, and Estonia also visited Ukraine. An important signal of solidarity with Ukraine was the visit to Kyiv in late May by the Slovak President Z. Chaputova. Leaders of the so-called "Old Europe" also travelled to Ukraine. One of the first to visit Kyiv after 24 February was Austrian Chancellor K. Negammer. The visit of the leaders of Germany, France, Italy, and Romania to Kyiv on 16 June 2022 was significant in demonstrating diplomatic support for Ukraine on the eve of the EU summit, as they essentially confirmed their commitment to granting Ukraine the status of an EU candidate. Since the beginning of Russia's large-scale war against Ukraine, Kyiv and the Nordic countries have maintained high-level contacts. The prime ministers of Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the Netherlands paid visits to Ukraine. In addition, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Kyiv several times - before and after Ukraine was granted the status of an EU candidate. The President of Ukraine has also met with French officials (ministers and senators) and Italian officials in Kyiv on numerous occasions. The President of the Bundestag and the President of Germany, F. Steinmeier, also paid visits to Ukraine.

In this context, it is worth noting that public opinion polls conducted among the population of EU member states over the past year have shown some changes in the perception of the enlargement policy. According to the Eurobarometer (winter 2021-2022), 47% of European citizens were in favour of the EU enlargement with the inclusion of new countries in the coming years, while 42% were against it. The most favourable attitudes towards the idea of enlargement were expressed by the population of Croatia (72%), Hungary (69%), Lithuania

(68%), Spain (68%), Poland (67%), and Slovenia (65%). The biggest opponents of enlargement were Austria (62%), Finland (62%), France (60%), Luxembourg (60%), Germany (58%) and the Netherlands (58%) (Fig. 2) [12].

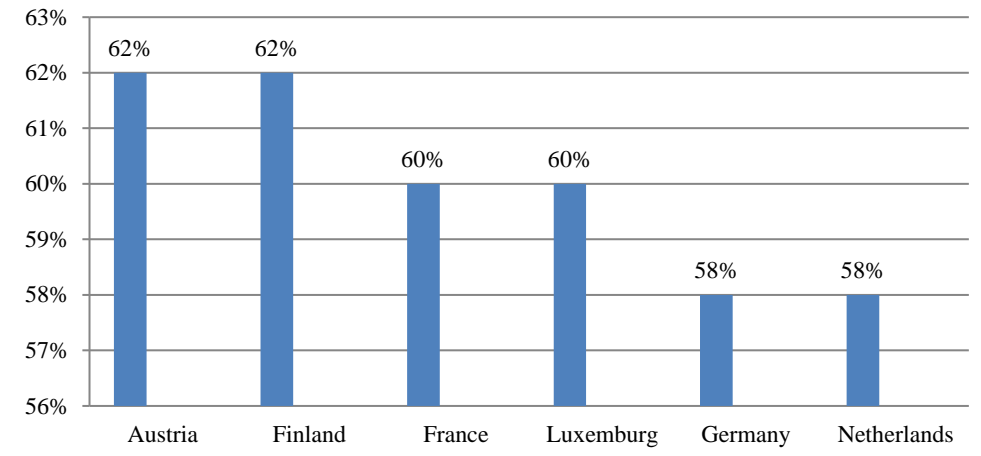


Figure 2. The Biggest Opponents of Expansion

Source: compiled by authors on materials [12]

The Russian-Ukrainian war and its aftermath have had a significant impact on public opinion in the EU. According to the results of a similar study conducted in the summer of 2022, the total number of respondents among the population of EU member states who supported the enlargement of the association increased by 10% over six months (57% of respondents were in favour of the inclusion of new members; 33% were against). The population of Lithuania (81%), Malta (80%), Poland (75%), Spain (72%), Latvia (71%), Slovenia (70%) and Hungary (70%) were most in favour of enlargement. At the same time, in almost all countries, the level of support for the idea of enlargement reaches more than 50% among respondents. The only exceptions are among the population of only two countries – Austria (33% in favour as opposed to 56% opposed to the inclusion of new members) and France (40% in favour, 44% opposed). Other countries whose societies had previously been sceptical about EU enlargement have seen an increase in support for this idea (Finland – up to 51%, Luxembourg – up to 54%, Germany – up to 52%, the Netherlands – up to 58%). Obviously, the idea of including new members is supported by the societies of those countries that joined the EU later than others. On the contrary, the most sceptical are the so-called "old members", for whom enlargement is a systemic "painful" challenge.

The reasons for the relatively high level of support for Ukraine's EU membership are directly related to the context of events that were taking place in Ukraine and Europe at the time. Due to the Russian-Ukrainian war in the spring of 2022 there were massive flows of refugees from Ukraine to the EU, as well as the publication of shocking crimes committed by the Russian army in the liberated territories, including the Kyiv region. The scale of the armed aggression and its consequences have gone beyond the purely Ukrainian context, turning into a full-fledged threat to EU security. According to a Eurobarometer survey conducted in April-May 2022, 84% of European citizens fully or partially agree with this statement. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of each EU member state believes that Russia's invasion of Ukraine poses a threat to their country (the highest rates of such belief are observed among the population of Poland (94%), Lithuania (91%) and Sweden (88%) [13].

The EU's future policy in countering Russian aggression against Ukraine is directly related to the issue of future enlargement, as opponents of the inclusion of new members, involving Ukraine, are currently concerned about the possibility of escalation of the conflict with Russia. Their position is also influenced by socio-economic issues that have become more acute with the imposition of sanctions against Russia and challenges to the EU's energy policy. Such trends may lead to an increase in asymmetry in the readiness to respond to the Russian threat between states that are more determined (in particular, those located in geographical proximity to the borders of Russia and Belarus), as well as those that have or have had a serious dependence on Russian resources – financial, energy, information, etc. This is critically important in the context of an ongoing large-scale war on the continent when it is necessary to coordinate common positions and make political decisions quickly.

At the same time, it is important to remember and convey to European partners the fact that maintaining consolidated support for Ukraine in countering Russia's armed aggression and gaining consensus on Kyiv's further European integration are interconnected and in the interests not only of Ukraine but also of all European states.

This refers to the ability of EU members to (a) make constructive decisions in the face of real security threats to the united Europe; (b) provide political impetus to democratic changes in neighbouring states, thereby establishing themselves in the EU's normative power; (c) address the systemic issue of enlargement policy, and thus the overall strategic vision of the EU's future [13].

Thus, obtaining candidate status means moving to a qualitatively new level of relations with the EU. The key change is the clarity of the goal and, accordingly, the predictability of the necessary steps. This is the basis of many opportunities and benefits that the country receives from this status.

At the same time, the main challenge associated with obtaining the status is the threat of stopping at this level, which can occur both as a result of internal factors, such as resistance to reforms or their imitation, and external factors, such as the inability to ensure consensus decisions on progress in the negotiations. Thus, the granting of candidate status to Ukraine, unfortunately, does not mean that all obstacles have been overcome and that the process will be quick and easy. The move towards membership will require political will and consolidation of efforts both in Ukraine to implement successful reforms and in the EU countries, which will decide on each further step along the way.

The good news is that the candidate status enhances the opportunities enshrined in the Association Agreement and other sectoral agreements between Ukraine and the EU. Successful economic integration prior to membership can be used as a consolidating factor to support the movement towards membership both in Ukraine and in the EU member states.

Conclusions

Ukraine's European integration is a strategic task aimed at bringing the country closer to European standards and values. However, the integration process is accompanied by numerous challenges and requirements that call into question the need to effectively overcome key obstacles to achieve a successful outcome.

Economic challenges are also an important obstacle. Ukraine needs to implement structural reforms aimed at strengthening the economy, increasing competitiveness and creating a favourable investment climate.

The political and geopolitical factors that influence European integration cannot be overlooked. It is important to develop strategies that allow to maintain stability and understand the impact of the geopolitical environment.

In view of the above challenges, the success of Ukraine's European integration requires a coordinated and targeted approach, broad public support and the determination of the authorities. Only if these obstacles are overcome can full integration into the European space be achieved, ensuring long-term development, stability and prosperity for all Ukrainian citizens.

Abstract

In this article, the author considers topical issues of European integration of Ukraine. Briefly covered the issue of interaction between the EU and Ukraine in the years preceding the start of large-scale Russian aggression, statements by the EU leadership and the leadership of Ukraine. The problems of integration and ways to solve them are also considered.

Among them – the reform of the economy and the fight against corruption. The rating of reforming the Ukrainian legislation in the context of its harmonisation with the pan-European one is given – we are talking about both the media law and the technical regulations in force in the EU countries. Ukraine has now harmonised its horizontal legislation with EU law and has adopted all the framework laws governing the issues of the standardisation system, metrology, accreditation, as well as conformity assessment and market surveillance.

Significant progress has been made in adapting and implementing sectoral legislation, in particular, 25 of the 27 technical regulations identified by Annex III have been adopted, approved technical regulations are being revised to bring them into line with new EU directives and regulations. The importance of European integration in the context of Ukraine-EU economic cooperation is also considered, since back in 2021 the EU was the main trading partner of the state of Ukraine, it accounted for almost 40 percent of Ukraine's trade. And the previously mentioned harmonisation of legislation is one of the keys to the growth of this trade, since according to EU standards, imported goods must comply with European certification standards.

The issue of public opinion regarding the possible accession of Ukraine to the EU is also being considered - the results of public opinion polls on this issue – both Ukrainians and residents of the EU countries. In Ukraine, the prospect of joining the bloc is viewed positively by the majority of the population, as in the EU countries. However, the EU states have a reservation – when Ukraine is ready.

The problems of the EU that could slow down the entry of Ukraine are considered – both economic difficulties and the migration crisis – refugees from Ukraine as a result of hostilities massively left the country and moved, including to the EU countries. According to the UN refugee agency, the war in Ukraine has caused the largest increase in the refugee crisis since the end of World War II. The conclusions of the author of the article are as follows – the harmonisation and synchronisation of Ukrainian legislation with the European one is an ongoing process, due, among other things, to the volume of trade between Ukraine and the EU. Citizens on both sides support the prospect of Ukrainian European integration. However, the EU is currently experiencing economic and migration problems. In addition, until the end of the Ukrainian-Russian war, he is not ready to invest significant funds in Ukraine.

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Посилання на статтю:

Balan O.S. *Ukraine's European Integration – Key Obstacles and Requirements* / O.S. Balan, M.V. Voitenko, D.O. Pulcha // *Економічний журнал Одеського політехнічного університету*. – 2023. – № 4(26). – С. 5-13. – Режим доступу до журн.: <https://economics.net.ua/ejopu/2023/No4/5.pdf>.
DOI: 10.15276/EJ.04.2023.1. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10370860.

Reference a Journal Article:

Balan O.S. *Ukraine's European Integration – Key Obstacles and Requirements* / O.S. Balan, M.V. Voitenko, D.O. Pulcha // *Economic journal Odessa polytechnic university*. – 2023. – № 4(26). – P. 5-13. – Retrieved from <https://economics.net.ua/ejopu/2023/No4/5.pdf>.
DOI: 10.15276/EJ.04.2023.1. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10370860.

