

CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR UKRAINE'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF FULL-SCALE WAR

СУЧАСНІ ВИКЛИКИ ДЛЯ ЄВРОІНТЕГРАЦІЙНОГО ПРОЦЕСУ УКРАЇНИ В УМОВАХ ПОВНОМАСШТАБНОЇ ВІЙНИ

Chernyshova Larysa

Candidate of Economic Sciences, Associate Professor,
V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3589-9154>

Чернишова Л.О.

Харківський національний університет імені В.Н. Каразіна

*The article discusses the current challenges and opportunities for Ukraine's European integration in the context of full-scale war. It determines the institutional capacity of public administration bodies responsible for fulfilling obligations to the EU. It highlights the process of adapting Ukrainian legislation to the *acquis communautaire*. It is noted that the economic prospects for Ukraine's integration into the EU are revealed through the stimulation of technological production, participation in the association programme and the ACAA agreement. Environmental challenges for Ukraine are analysed. Demographic risks are considered, requiring the development of a return and social repatriation strategy. European integration is also complicated by political processes in EU member states and the need to reform EU institutional mechanisms for the admission of new members. Directions for accelerating Ukraine's European integration are proposed.*

Keywords: European integration of Ukraine, European Union, challenges, reforms, European standards, investment programmes.

У статті розглядаються актуальні виклики та можливості європейської інтеграції України в умовах повномасштабної війни. Визначено інституційну спроможність органів публічного управління, відповідальних за виконання зобов'язань перед ЄС. На основі даних НАДС і DG NEAR виявлено ключові напрями реформ: уніфікація оплати праці на держслужбі відповідно до євростандартів, вдосконалення процедур вступу, проходження та звільнення з держслужби, відновлення конкурсів, запуск Єдиного порталу вакансій та HRMIS. У статті висвітлено також процес адаптації українського законодавства до *acquis communautaire*, зокрема в сфері «Верховенство права», захисту прав постраждалих від війни та цифрового правосуддя на основі Дорожньої карти, що охоплює переговорні розділи 23–24 Угоди про асоціацію. Економічна перспектива інтеграції України до ЄС розкривається через стимулювання технологічного виробництва, участь у програмі асоціації та угоді АСAA, що відкриває доступ до 27 промислових секторів. Інтеграційний процес України також забезпечить доступ до різних інвестиційних програм ЄС. Проте на сьогодні економіка України залишається дефіцитною та потребує реструктуризації боргів. Проаналізовані екологічні виклики для України: мінування, забруднення ґрунтів, руйнування інфраструктури. Розглянуті демографічні ризики: еміграція, відтік кадрів, що вимагає розробки стратегії повернення та соціальної репатріації. Відзначено, що в цілому понад 90 % населення підтримує вступ до ЄС, що створює сприятливий політичний контекст, але потребує інформаційного супроводу та прозорості реформ. Євроінтеграція також ускладнюється політичними процесами в країнах-членах ЄС, необхідністю реформування інституційних механізмів ЄС для прийому нових членів та впровадженням євроінтеграційних умов у договори про вступ. Визначено, що реалізація євроінтеграції потребує комплексного підходу – ефективної взаємодії з ЄС, реструктуризації боргів, залучення міжнародної фінансової підтримки, екологічного відновлення, оборонного співробітництва та мобілізації українського суспільства задля досягнення стійких євроінтеграційних результатів.

Ключові слова: європейська інтеграція України, Європейський Союз, виклики, реформи, європейські стандарти, інвестиційні програми.

Statement of the problem. The full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war has significantly affected Ukraine's internal and external priorities, focusing attention on accelerating integration processes with the European Union, the implementation of which will contribute to strengthening state sovereignty, political stability, economic development, security cooperation and sustainability.

However, the process of European integration in wartime is accompanied by numerous challenges that require comprehensive analysis and strategic response. On the one hand, Ukraine has demonstrated political will for deep reforms and effective adaptation to the requirements of European legislation. On the other hand, increased external aggression, destruction of infrastructure, humanitarian crisis, threats to internal stability, economic problems, as well as threats in the field of information and cyber security create multidimensional obstacles to European integration.

Ukraine has already proven its readiness to be part of the European political community, but without sustained external support, including financial, defence, advisory and diplomatic support, European integration efforts may prove insufficient to overcome the existing challenges. Therefore, the problem requires a comprehensive scientific understanding of not only internal but also external factors that determine the dynamics and effectiveness of Ukraine's European course.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The peculiarities of Ukraine's European integration process have been studied by many scholars. The work of Sobkevich O. V., Shevchenko A. V., Rusana V. M. [1] is devoted to the priorities for the development of Ukraine's real sector economy in the context of European integration. Scientists from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology and the Ukrainian Institute of the Future collected statistical data, conducted surveys among the population of Ukraine regarding support for European integration processes, and carried out analysis and forecasts regarding their implementation [2, 3]. Taran Y. I. analysed the challenges and prospects for Ukraine in the context of integration into international security structures. Sokolik L., Manuilova K., Norchuk Y., Miroshnychenko V. identified strategic vectors for the development of Ukraine's public policy in the context of European integration. Lytvyn V. focused his research on the political and institutional obstacles and risks to the completion of democratic transition and European integration in the countries of Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. The specifics of reorganising internal EU processes to ensure integration have been studied by foreign scholars such as Costa O., Schwarzer D., Berès P. [4], Gora A., Wilde P. [5] and others.

However, despite the fairly thorough research conducted by scientists, the dynamic influence of external and internal factors and the current security context give rise to new challenges for

Ukraine's European integration process, which require further research and justification.

Setting the task. The purpose of this article is to identify the key challenges in the process of European integration for Ukraine in the context of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war and to outline the main directions for accelerating integration.

Summary of the main results of the study. The process of Ukraine's European integration has reached its climax in the unprecedented circumstances of Russia's full-scale armed invasion of Ukraine and the associated damage and human losses. Ukraine's integration process into the European Union faces a number of internal and external challenges that require a comprehensive approach and coordinated efforts by state authorities, civil society and international partners. These challenges include institutional, legislative, economic, environmental, social, political and security issues, which we will examine in more detail.

One of the key tasks for Ukraine is to strengthen the institutional capacity of the state authorities responsible for implementing European integration commitments. According to the results of an analysis conducted by the National Agency of Ukraine for Civil Service (NACS) and representatives of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), there is a need to improve the efficiency of these bodies in Ukraine by implementing the following measures: reforming civil service remuneration, improving the procedure for entering, serving and leaving the civil service, resuming competitions and introducing an updated Single Portal for Civil Service Vacancies, and introducing a human resource management information system (HRMIS).

The reform of civil service remuneration will ensure changes to the fundamental Law of Ukraine "On Civil Service" and ensure the implementation of uniform approaches with the EU. The NACS, in cooperation with the EU4PAR Project, has developed a concept for updated competitive procedures for civil service positions in accordance with SIGMA principles. The resumption of competitive procedures and the operation of the updated Unified Portal for Civil Service Vacancies in Ukraine is planned only in 2026 [6].

Adapting national legislation to EU standards remains a priority. Under martial law in Ukraine, particular attention is being paid to protecting the rights of war victims and creating mechanisms for bringing those responsible for war crimes to justice. The introduction of digital tools and ensuring justice for vulnerable groups are also important areas of work. So far, in order to adapt national legislation to EU standards, Ukraine has created a Roadmap that identifies key reforms in specific areas, sets deadlines for their implementation, and serves as a basis for the European Commission to monitor Ukraine's progress [7]. In May 2025,

the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the Roadmap in the area of "Rule of Law" (negotiation chapters 23 "Judiciary and Fundamental Rights" and 24 "Justice, Freedom and Security") for the period until the end of 2027, which is an important step towards opening negotiations on the "Fundamentals of the EU Accession Process" cluster.

European integration opens up new opportunities for Ukrainian business, but at the same time creates certain challenges.

The opportunities are determined by the movement towards European integration with the consistent fulfilment by Ukraine of its commitments under the Association Agreement between Ukraine, on the one hand, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, on the other. Ukraine also has prospects for activating progress in industry, in particular by stimulating the production of more technological products, integrating Ukraine into European value chains, developing entrepreneurship, implementing reforms in industry and its development as a result of Ukraine's participation in EU funds and programmes, and implementing joint production and innovation projects in promising sectors. An important tool for promoting Ukrainian exports of more technologically advanced products is the conclusion of the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA, "Industrial Visa-Free Travel"), which provides for mutual recognition of the results of conformity assessment between the EU and Ukraine. The Association Agreement stipulates that the ACAA will cover 27 sectors, mainly mechanical engineering.

Ukraine's status as a candidate country for EU membership opens up opportunities to participate in the financing of projects and initiatives that were previously unavailable. One such project is the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), which Ukraine will be able to join. The total expenditure of the current version of this instrument, IPA III, amounts to €14.2 billion. The instrument is part of the EU Cohesion Policy, which aims to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion and reduce disparities between the levels of development of different regions. The priorities of the new EU Cohesion Policy are the green and digital transitions [8]. Therefore, by supporting reforms in candidate countries, the EU seeks, first and foremost, to achieve its own goals. At the same time, these areas are also extremely important and relevant for Ukraine.

Ukraine's export agricultural policy in the medium and long term should consolidate the position of the agricultural business and the government regarding the place and role of our state in ensuring global food security, the development of the agricultural sector, and the directions of its transformation.

The abolition of the "trade visa-free regime" and the renewal of EU trade policy instruments from 6 June 2025 will have a negative impact on the rather unstable national economy and foreign trade, given that in recent years, the share of export operations with EU countries in the overall structure of Ukraine's exports has grown and amounted to 59.5% of total annual exports in 2024, or \$24.5 billion, which is more than \$1 billion more than in 2023 [9].

At the same time, the challenges of European integration for Ukraine also lie in the fact that the domestic economy remains deficient and subsidised. According to the Ministry of Finance, as of 31 December 2024, Ukraine's state and state-guaranteed debt amounted to \$166.06 billion. According to the IMF, in 2024 it amounted to 95.6% of GDP, and in 2025 Ukraine's public debt is projected to exceed 100% of GDP [10]. Ukraine and its public and private creditors must work together to agree on debt restructuring. This will create fiscal space for investment in the restoration of Ukraine's physical infrastructure, human capital and productive capacity.

The first important result is the successful restructuring of private debt in 2024. The second step will be the restructuring of public debt by the end of the IMF programme in 2027. The possible unfreezing of frozen Russian state assets will reinforce these efforts, not replace them.

The rising costs of implementing European standards, the need to modernise production and increase competitiveness in the EU market require significant investment. Although Ukraine's investment programme for the coming year is backed by EU guarantees and grants worth €9.3 billion and is expected to mobilise up to €40 billion in public and private investment in Ukraine over the next few years [8], this will not lead to a significant improvement in macroeconomic indicators in the medium term.

In addition to economic challenges, Ukraine also faces significant environmental challenges due to military operations and landmines. In 2023, 25% of the land was unusable. The presence of harmful substances, toxic metal debris, explosive residues, etc. in the soil renders the land unsuitable for agricultural use. The destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant also caused significant losses to land resources and the agricultural sector. Most livestock sectors remain in crisis (especially the meat and dairy sectors), primarily due to a decline in production in private households [1].

In the process of European integration, it is important to take social aspects into account and ensure the protection of human rights. Mass emigration during the war and the outflow of skilled workers to EU countries have led to a labour shortage in Ukraine.

As of March 2023, the permanent population of Ukraine, according to an analysis by the Ukrainian

Institute for the Future, is 31.1 million people. There are 6.5 million Ukrainian refugees registered in countries around the world. The longer Ukrainians stay abroad, the less likely they are to return, as they become fully assimilated, find jobs, their children settle into educational institutions, etc. The proportion of people who definitely plan to return to Ukraine has almost halved since November 2022 and in January 2024 was only 26% [3, p. 45]. Therefore, it is critically important for the Ukrainian government to adopt a comprehensive return strategy, integrated planning, and strong institutional cooperation between government structures, businesses in other countries, and international organisations.

Cooperation with human rights organisations and the implementation of European standards in the field of human rights will contribute to improving social protection and ensuring citizens' rights. The protection of vulnerable groups, in particular children and war victims, should be a priority.

Public support is an important element of successful European integration. According to surveys, 92% of Ukrainians would like Ukraine to become a member of the EU. This is evidenced by the results of a survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology between 10 and 21 May 2023 throughout Ukraine, except for the temporarily occupied territories [2]. This high level of support creates favourable conditions for the implementation of necessary reforms. However, it is important to ensure adequate information support and transparency of the European integration process so that citizens understand its benefits and challenges.

In 2025, the European Union faces a number of internal and external challenges that may affect Ukraine's European integration process. The Polish and Danish presidencies of the EU Council in the first and second halves of 2025, respectively, will contribute to the intensification of security and defence issues, which is important for Ukraine in the context of countering Russian aggression. Military support from the EU for Ukraine also continues. For the period 2022–2024, Ukraine was allocated €6.1 billion from the European Peace Fund and €42.2 billion from bilateral contributions from EU member states [8]. In the future, the reduction in US military aid should be compensated by EU countries.

Ukraine needs to continue its integration into European security structures, deepen cooperation with EU member states in the field of defence and security, and strengthen its own armed forces and civil protection system.

On 8 November 2024, the Council of the European Union decided to extend the mandate of the EU Mission to provide military assistance to Ukraine for another two years. This involves funding of almost €409 million for the period from 14 November 2024 to 15 November 2026 [8]. However,

the possibility of using billions of frozen Russian assets in the West to purchase US weapons is not yet a settled issue, as the EU would derive little benefit from such an agreement. Firstly, the money will go to the US treasury, not the European one; secondly, most of these Russian funds are located in the EU, which could undermine the eurozone as a safe place for third-country businesses. The EU used these frozen assets as collateral for the G7's latest loan to Ukraine, which will cover Kyiv's needs until at least 2025.

It is also necessary to take into account internal political processes in EU countries and the relations of individual countries with Russia, which may negatively affect the dynamics of Ukraine's European integration process.

For Ukraine's successful integration, the European Union itself will also need to carry out a number of internal reforms. The institutional structure of the EU must be capable of accepting one or even several new members. There are two main options for improving the EU's ability to combat violations of the rule of law and other values. First, if it proves possible to reform the EU treaties in the medium term, the changes should include reforming Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union and extending the requirement to comply with the rule of law to the possibility of accessing all EU funds. The European Union could also create new institutions, such as a Joint Chamber of the Supreme Courts and Tribunals of EU Member States to address threats to the independence of national judicial systems, and a new institution to ensure transparency, accountability and the fight against corruption. However, amending the TEU may prove impossible in the process of agreeing it among 27 governments [4]. An alternative way to implement institutional reforms to protect the rule of law and prevent the misuse of EU funds could be to include relevant conditions in the Accession Treaty that Ukraine will sign with the EU. Accession treaties are intergovernmental agreements that have the force of primary law in the EU, so they can be used to institutionalise important changes. This would be a faster and less politically complex process than reforming the EU Treaties again. However, any accession treaty must be unanimously agreed upon by all current members and then ratified by all national parliaments as well as the European Parliament. This means that some countries that may object to the use of the rule of law conditionality mechanism until the accession negotiations are completed will also have to give their consent [5]. Thus, the political viability of this method will depend on which parties are in power in EU countries when the European Union completes accession negotiations with Ukraine, and whether their governments and parliaments can unanimously agree on such measures at that time.

Conclusions. Thus, Ukraine's European integration is accompanied by significant challenges.

Ending the war, ensuring reliable security guarantees, strengthening the military-industrial complex, institutional capacity, adapting legislation, economic reforms, protecting human rights and ensuring public support are key areas on the path to Ukraine's full membership in the European Union. To successfully overcome these challenges, it is necessary to pursue a balanced policy aimed at strengthening partnerships with all stakeholders and adapting to new global realities. This can be achieved by:

- ensuring the rule of law and fighting corruption – creating an effective, independent judicial system and a functional anti-corruption mechanism, in particular by fully supporting the activities of the NABU, SAP, NAZK and the High Anti-Corruption Court. This will provide a predictable legal environment for investors and strengthen donor confidence;
- ensuring macroeconomic stability – through transparent management of public finances and active cooperation with international financial institutions (IMF, EBRD, World Bank) to support the balance of payments and finance reforms;
- developing digital transformation and cybersecurity – further implementation of digital services (through Diya), integration into the EU Digital Single Market, and increasing resilience to cyber

threats as an important factor in national and economic security;

- modernisation of infrastructure – through investments in transport, energy and logistics infrastructure, which will improve links with EU markets, reduce transaction costs and increase the competitiveness of Ukrainian exports;
- deepening integration into the EU energy community – developing green energy, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, fulfilling commitments under the European Green Deal, which will also help attract green investments;
- accelerating integration into European security structures, deepening cooperation with EU member states in the field of defence and security projects;
- creating an attractive business climate through deregulation, ensuring the protection of property rights, promoting the development of small and medium-sized businesses, and forming effective policies to support innovation and start-ups.

The successful implementation of these measures will not only accelerate Ukraine's integration into the EU, but also lay the foundation for long-term economic growth and the strengthening of state sovereignty in the context of post-war transformation.

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