UKRAINE IN DEFENSE OF EUROPEAN VALUES

Collective Monograph

Edited by
Yuriy Kotlyar, Alina Iovcheva

Mykolaiv-2025

Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine
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This collective monograph offers a multi-layered analysis of the European Union as a value-based and institutionalized model of regional integration, positioning Ukraine's European trajectory within this conceptual framework. It investigates the historical-philosophical origins of European unity, the dynamics of supranational governance, and the normative architecture underpinning the EU's global role. The volume provides an in-depth examination of Ukraine's transformation from a European choice to a strategic defender of democratic values in the context of hybrid and full-scale warfare, addressing the implications for post-Soviet political space and global security. Drawing on interdisciplinary approaches from comparative politics, legal theory, and international relations, the study contributes to scholarly debates on normative power, democratic resilience, and the reconfiguration of regional orders under systemic crisis. The monograph prepared and funded Erasmus+JM Module «Implementation of European Values as a basis of Democracy in Ukraine» 101085843 – EVADEM – ERASMUS-JMO-2022-HEI-TCH-RSCH. Intended for scholars, university lecturers, students, and all those interested in the issues under discussion.

The authors of the sections are responsible for the reliability of the results.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Association Agreement
CETA	Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EEA	European Economic Area
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EU	European Union
FSB	Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation / Financial Stability Board *(context-dependent)*
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MERCOSUR	Southern Common Market
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument
ODA	Official Development Assistance
QMV	Qualified Majority Voting
RF	Russian Federation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SBU	Security Service of Ukraine
TCA	Trade and Cooperation Agreement
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
WTO	World Trade Organization

FOREWORD

The collective monograph *"Ukraine in Defence of European Values"* is part of the implementation of the European Union (EU) Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Module project *"Implementation of European Values as a Basis of Democracy in Ukraine"* No. 101085843 – EVADEM (Grant Agreement No. 101085843 – EVADEM – ERASMUS-JMO-2022-HEI-TCH-RSCH), carried out at Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University.

The module *"Implementation of European Values as a Basis of Democracy in Ukraine"* is related to the intensification of Ukraine's European integration strategy and the involvement of educational institutions in its implementation; it contributes to the development of an educational system aimed at promoting the idea of a united Europe, enhancing knowledge about the EU within Ukrainian society, and bringing the EU closer to the public; it also fosters cooperation between higher education institutions and other organizations actively supporting Ukraine's European integration, as well as the civil society sector; and it promotes the democratization of Ukrainian society as a whole.

The process of self-identification of the Ukrainian people as Europeans is complex and protracted for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it should be noted that Ukrainians were separated from the European community for a long time, isolated from the cultural, political, and spiritual life of Europe. The legacy of the Soviet Union, particularly among the older generation, has also had a significant impact. In addition, the anti-European ideology of the "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*) exerted a strong influence on the population of certain regions (oblasts) of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Revolution of 2013–2014, known as the "Euromaidan", was a unique political phenomenon expressed in the form of a peaceful popular resistance. Ukraine preserved its independence from imperial Russia by removing Viktor Yanukovych and his entourage, who had consistently sacrificed the national interests of the country and were ready to surrender them entirely, and confirmed its course toward European development. Russia did not cease its attempts to return Ukraine to its sphere of influence, seizing Crimea shortly after the events on the Maidan and occupying part of the Donbas. However, the soldiers who defended the principles for which the Maidan had stood remain on the front lines and continue to fight against the enemy for Ukrainian and European values.

The international community recognized and supported the Ukrainian people's aspiration for European integration following the events of the

Revolution of Dignity. This encouraged the country to intensify its efforts toward accession to the European Union and NATO.

The Russian military invasion of Ukraine – initially in Crimea, and later in the Donbas – which began on 20 February 2014 in a covert (hybrid) form and continues to this day in violation of international law, has become a negative historical precedent in the modern world. On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation (RF) treacherously launched a full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, shifting from a covert hybrid war to an open, conventional, total war. Ukraine has thus found itself "at the epicenter of one – and possibly the largest and most extreme – sociocultural rupture of the contemporary global world"[1].

The Russia–Ukraine war of 2014–2024 has global consequences. Even today, through its heroic resistance to brutal Russian aggression, Ukraine has influenced both regional and global processes. It is the driving force shaping the geopolitical foundations of a new world order in the first half of the 21st century. In particular, since the Second World War, Europe has never been as united as it is now – united, for the time being, by a country that is still only a candidate for European Union membership: the Ukrainian people, who have taken upon themselves the blow of the barbaric Russian onslaught to once again serve as a historic shield, defending themselves and all of Europe, and, in essence, the entire European and Euro-Atlantic civilization.

The collective monograph has a clear and logically consistent structure, comprising three substantive chapters, each preceded by an introduction and followed by conclusions, a list of sources and references, and information about the authors.

The first chapter, *The European Union as a Model of Regional Integration: Institutional and Value Dimension* (Alina Iovcheva), explores the historical and philosophical origins of the European idea, the post-war development of economic and political integration, the role of European values in shaping a normative foundation for unity, and the Eastern Partnership as a testing ground for the EU's value-based model, with particular reference to Ukraine.

The second chapter, *The Current Stage and Prospects of the EU Functioning: Ukraine and the Processes of European Integration* (Anna Soloviova), analyses the current state of the European Union, its external relations and global role, the dynamics of Ukraine's integration trajectory, and potential future developments.

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[1] Смолій В. А. Історик і війна. *НАН України. Інститут історії України*. 2022. 23 березня. http://resource.history.org.ua/item/0016388

The third chapter, *Ukraine: From European Choice to the Defence of Democratic Values* (Yuriy Kotlyar, Yevgen Kobets, Anastasiia Chokova, Oleksandr Mosin, Alina Tikhonova, Marharyta Lymar), traces the history of Ukraine–EU relations, examines the Revolution of Dignity as a decisive moment in Ukraine's European course, analyses the threats to democracy in the context of hybrid warfare, and conceptualises Ukraine as a strategic and normative shield for the European community in the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian war.

Together, these chapters offer a multi-dimensional examination of the EU as both a normative and institutional model of integration and of Ukraine's place within this framework, situating the country's European choice in the broader geopolitical, historical, and value-driven context.

CHAPTER 1
THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A MODEL OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION: INSTITUTIONAL AND VALUE DIMENSION

Introduction

In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, the European Union (EU) is widely regarded as the most advanced model of regional integration, capable of reconciling institutional functionality with a coherent set of shared values. Its experience offers essential insights into the ongoing redefinition of sovereignty, the foundations of political legitimacy, and the development of inclusive governance mechanisms. From the perspective of democratic theory, especially models seeking to reconcile stability with universality, the EU emerges as more than a political actor: it embodies a new paradigm of coexistence between states and citizens, anchored in legal and normative order.

For Ukraine, a country simultaneously engaged in full-scale war and pursuing a fundamental transformation of its political institutions, the relevance of the EU's integration experience is especially pressing. This process entails aligning national legislation with the acquis communautaire and at the same time engaging in a deeper political and philosophical rethinking of democracy, shaped by the principles embedded in the Union's legal and institutional architecture. In this context, the adoption of core European values – respect for human dignity, legal certainty, accountability, and inclusion – takes on strategic importance in shaping a durable democratic model for a society seeking meaningful integration into the European political space.

Studying the EU as a value-driven model of integration enables a critical assessment of its capacity for transformation in changing historical contexts. Especially significant is the exploration of how the organizational framework of governance interacts with a system of shared principles that remains responsive and at the same time preserves the heritage of European humanism and political modernity. Consequently, the analysis of the EU extends beyond the narrow scope of European studies. It becomes a domain in which answers to the fundamental questions of contemporary democracy are being developed.

Defining the *research question* within this analytical framework calls not only for a reconstruction of the EU's developmental path as a political project, but also for a critical reflection on its core value principles.

Considering that the EU's integration model emerged as a polyarchic form of governance grounded in voluntary commitment and value-based coordination, the central research question is articulated as follows: *how has European integration, founded upon a common normative basis, evolved from an initial idea into institutionalized practice, and to what extent can this model assert its normative relevance in external contexts, particularly for states with unstable or transitional democratic regimes?*

This formulation requires analytical engagement across multiple levels: *the conceptual-historical* (the evolution of the European idea as a paradigm of shared order), *the institutional-political* (the structural architecture and legitimating mechanisms of the EU), *and the strategic* (the external promotion of the EU's core values). Accordingly, the **central hypothesis** of the study posits that the European Union represents an institutional model of a new type of regional integration, which combines a multi-level decision-making system with standards oriented by normative principles. Such a model can function as a referential framework for countries with transitional democracies, provided that:

− the EU's internal framework is expected to uphold procedural legitimacy while maintaining coherence in its guiding principles;

− the mechanisms of external influence (such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, association conditions, and the Copenhagen criteria) demonstrate the capacity to effectively implement normative standards within recipient countries;

− there is a recognised view of the EU as a credible source of guiding values within the political discourse of these countries.

In this theoretical and political context, the **aim** of the chapter is *to provide an analytical investigation of the European Union as both a conceptual and practical model of regional integration, one grounded in a value-based foundation and a historically shaped normative identity.* At its core lies an examination of the internal logic underpinning the construction and functioning of the EU, from the emergence of the European idea to its current institutionalised form of interstate coexistence based on the principles of legal order, democracy, and solidarity.

Accordingly, the **objectives** of the chapter delineate the analytical trajectory of the study, ensuring its conceptual coherence and structural completeness. First, it is essential to undertake a philosophical and historical reconstruction of the origins of the idea of a "United Europe" as a vision of civilisational unity emerging from the legacy of classical antiquity, Christian unification, and post-Renaissance humanism. Second, it is necessary to trace the transition from moral-philosophical projects to political-institutional forms of integration, shaped by the experience of total wars, the crisis of state

authority, and the quest for stable order. Third, attention must be given to the role of the normative foundation as a factor in establishing the political credibility of the integration project, manifested in the gradual entrenchment of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law as structural pillars of the EU. Fourth, it becomes necessary to analyse how the European Union is currently conceptualised – particularly as a promoter of shared values, a post-national governance space, and a soft power instrument in global politics.

These objectives go beyond a purely descriptive treatment of historical material. They aim to determine the extent to which the EU model, as a political community grounded in value-based integration, is capable of generating normative universalism relevant to countries undergoing democratic transition and seeking an alternative to a fragmented, state-centric order. Within this analytical framework, the chapter examines integration as a dynamic process that requires ongoing adjustment of value frameworks, the fostering of political solidarity, and the preservation of procedural legitimacy.

This approach helps to avoid reductive interpretations (whether utopian or purely pragmatic) and supports a well-rounded understanding of the EU as a complex entity shaped by value-driven reasoning, negotiated structures, and strategic responsiveness to today's global challenges.

The *methodological rationale* of this study rests on the imperative to integrate an interpretive reconstruction of the European integration experience with a rigorous analytical investigation of its theoretical foundations and political implications. To achieve this, the research employs an interdisciplinary toolkit encompassing *political philosophy* (notably the concepts of universalism, post-national democracy, and normative power), *comparative politics* (with particular regard to institutional model analysis), *legal theory* (with a focus on normative legitimacy), as well as *theories of regionalism* and *global governance*. This configuration allows the European Union to be understood as a structured normative space shaped by political meaning-making and institutionalised norms, instead of being viewed merely as a collection of policy instruments.

The chapter is grounded in an analytical reconstruction of the ideational and institutional evolution of integration, employing a qualitative methodology informed by close engagement with primary sources, contextualised interpretation of foundational texts and concepts, and a comparative evaluation of divergent scholarly interpretations of the EU's nature within contemporary academic discourse. Special attention is given to the mechanisms by which integration has been translated into formal value systems, from the moral and philosophical roots of the Enlightenment to the modern forms of procedural authority embedded in the EU's multi-level governance structure. The methodology also incorporates a case-oriented

approach aimed at examining key episodes in the historical development of European political unity, including the Schuman Declaration, the Copenhagen Criteria, and the external projection of normative values through EU foreign policy instruments. This analytical approach allows us to examine both the historical evolution of the EU's structural transformations and the continuity or change in its core value system. The comparative dimension is equally important, as it allows for evaluating how the EU's value-based model resonates with other regional structures and with countries navigating the challenges of democratic transformation.

In sum, the analytical apparatus deployed in this study is not intended to provide a descriptive or chronological account of integration stages. Its aim is to uncover the structural and semantic foundations that support the European Union's resilience, normative coherence, and ability to operate as a rule-based political order within a rapidly evolving global environment. The *theoretical basis* of this study determines its analytical trajectory and ensures conceptual rigour throughout the exposition. Among the principal approaches that shape the interpretive framework, particular prominence is given to neofunctionalism, which, in contrast to classical functionalism, accounts for the political will of actors and the dynamics of spillover, whereby integration extends spontaneously into adjacent policy domains. From this perspective, the European Union is understood as the product of a gradual evolution from economic cooperation to a political community. Neofunctionalism enables the conceptualisation of the European experience as a process in which technical decisions acquire political salience and institutions develop their own autonomous logic of growth.

Complementing this is the intergovernmentalist approach, which represents an alternative logic of integration, one in which national states remain the principal actors and integration mechanisms emerge as the outcome of strategic inter-state negotiations. This approach is particularly important for a critical reassessment of the limits of supranationalism within the EU, as it highlights the continued exercise of political control over integration processes by the member states. Its inclusion within the theoretical framework makes it possible to avoid a one-dimensional interpretation of integration as a linear progression and to attend more closely to the ambivalence between national autonomy and shared European authority.

A third conceptual pillar is the notion of *"normative power"* which plays a central role in understanding the EU's global significance. Developed by Ian Manners, this approach presents the EU as an actor that exercises influence on the international stage through the diffusion of norms, standards, and values, rather than by relying on military power or economic coercion.

Incorporating this concept into the theoretical architecture of the study allows for an examination of how the European idea of a shared political space has evolved into the external projection of normative orientations through instruments such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, accession conditions, and human rights diplomacy.

The chapter is **structured** around a logic of analytical development, beginning with the philosophical roots of the European idea and tracing its evolution into a modern framework of regional integration shaped by shared values. The opening section examines the cultural and civilisational foundations of the idea of Europe, tracing its development from the legacy of classical antiquity through the Christian conception of unity and the humanist tradition, which together shaped the understanding of Europe as a community grounded in order and shared meaning.

The following section examines the shift from moral-philosophical visions of coexistence to functionalist ideas of political integration, which set the stage for the development of Europe's modern system of governance. The third section examines how ideas of integration evolved in response to the key challenges of the twentieth century, including the redefinition of statehood, the need for effective intergovernmental cooperation, and the emergence of legal order as a core principle of unity. The fourth section offers a critical survey of contemporary academic debates on the nature of the European Union, contrasting interpretations of the EU as a community of values with those that view it as a political instrument for strategic coordination. Finally, the concluding section examines the Eastern Partnership as a platform for promoting shared values, using the case of Ukraine to explore the complex interplay between normative aspirations and political realities.

Taken together, the chapter constitutes a multi-layered analytical reconstruction that integrates philosophical inquiry, political theory, historical analysis, and legal interpretation in order to conceptualise the European Union as a political model that synthesises ideological continuity, institutional rationalism, and global normative agency. Ultimately, this perspective presents the EU as more than a regional coordination project and positions it as a dynamic reference point for societies pursuing democratic renewal and value-driven transformation. In this light, the case of Ukraine serves as a pivotal test of the European idea's relevance, resilience and adaptability under conditions of profound political and civilizational upheaval.

1.1. The Idea of a United Europe: Historical, Philosophical, and Conceptual Dimensions of Integration
(Alina Iovcheva)

The notion of Europe as a distinct civilizational entity began to take shape long before the emergence of the idea of political unity. At first, the term *"Europe"* was used solely in a geographical sense, as evidenced by ancient cartographic sources, particularly the writings of Herodotus, in which the continent was set in contrast to Asia and Libya within a tripartite framework of the known world[2]. It was in ancient Greece, however, that the European space first acquired a normative dimension, envisioned as the territory of the *polis* – a social order grounded in civic participation, rational legal structure, and the concept of the common good. The philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle, in which politics is conceived as an ethical activity, laid the intellectual foundations for the future idea of Europe as a space of rational governance and institutional recognition.

The Roman tradition contributed a framework of legal universalism. The concept of citizenship, the imperial unity established through *jus gentium* (the law of nations), and the idea of the public good as the basis of governance created a legal architecture that would become a normative model for the development of European legal systems. After the fall of Rome, these principles took on a new form within an ecclesiastical-legal framework, sustained by the Latin educational tradition and canon law, which helped maintain cultural continuity[3].

In the medieval period, the idea of Europe became firmly rooted as a cultural and spiritual unity under the auspices of the Catholic Church. The concept of *Res Publica Christiana* referred to an imagined community of Christian states bound together by a shared faith, ecclesiastical hierarchy, and a universalist moral doctrine. The papal curia functioned as a kind of transnational authority, maintaining the legitimacy of political power through moral authority. In this way, the notion of Europe evolved into a normative space, understood as a spiritual community grounded in ideas of salvation, sin, eternal order, and divine hierarchy, rather than being seen only as a geographical territory[4].

The transition to a new historical epoch in the late Middle Ages gave rise to the first proposals for the political configuration of Europe as a united community of states. Although these initiatives did not represent integration

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[2] Delanty G. *Inventing Europe: Idea, identity, reality*. Macmillan, 1995.
[3] Davies N. *Europe: A history*. Oxford University Press, 1996.
[4] Pagden A. *The idea of Europe: From antiquity to the European Union*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

in the modern sense, they contained conceptual foundations for a supranational European order. Notably, in the fourteenth century, Pierre Dubois proposed forming a League of Christian monarchs to resolve internal conflicts and maintain common order through legal arbitration, avoiding the use of armed confrontation. In 1464, George of Poděbrady, King of Bohemia, put forward a plan to create a federation of Christian states featuring an intergovernmental council, permanent representatives, and a shared foreign policy[5]. These initiatives emerged as attempts to institutionalize the *Res Publica Christiana* in the context of a crisis of ecclesiastical authority and the growing influence of dynastic nationalism.

Europe's self-conception was also shaped through a mechanism of identification grounded in cultural opposition. The process of European self-definition presupposed the existence of an "other" as a contrasting backdrop. During the medieval and early modern periods, this role was primarily fulfilled by the Ottoman Empire and Islam, viewed as a civilizational antagonist. Europe was increasingly envisioned as the embodiment of true faith, enlightened knowledge, and institutional order, in contrast to the perceived despotism, fanaticism, or irrationality of the *"other"*. This dichotomy functioned as more than a rhetorical construct; it played a key role in shaping European cultural cohesion[6]. In modern history, a similar logic continued to inform attitudes toward Slavic, colonial, and totalitarian political formations.

In the absence of stable political institutions, the idea of Europe persisted until the early modern period as a metaphysical construct, understood as a cultural community founded upon imagined principles of unity. The Enlightenment carried this tradition forward, though it shifted the foundation from a religious to a rationalist basis. Eighteenth-century thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau articulated the vision of a universal legal order in which peace and coexistence would be achieved through juridical integration and the voluntary coordination of interests. Kant's concept of *"perpetual peace"* (*Zum ewigen Frieden*) laid the philosophical groundwork for the idea of an inter-state federation, thereby shaping the political logic of future European integration[7].

The idea of a united Europe acquired new substantive meaning during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, when the human being emerged at the

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[5] Heymann F. G. George of Poděbrady's plan for an international peace league. *The Czechoslovak contribution to world culture* / (Ed.) M. Rechcigl. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 1964, P. 224–244.

[6] Zielonka J. *Europe as empire: the nature of the enlarged European Union*. Oxford University Press, 2006. https://doi.org/10.1093/0199292213.001.0001

[7] Pagden A. *The idea of Europe: From antiquity to the European Union*.

center of intellectual inquiry as an autonomous subject of morality, law, and politics. European humanism affirmed the dignity of the individual, the notion of rational order, and the concept of a universal moral law. This shift in philosophical thinking laid the groundwork for a new logic of political unity, grounded in ethical and legal foundations and moving away from reliance on imperial or sacred authority.

Immanuel Kant played a pivotal role in this transformation. In his work *"Perpetual Peace" (1795)*, he proposed a model of inter-state federation as the only viable means of overcoming conflict in international relations. The idea of "perpetual peace" marked the first effort to articulate a political project of integration whose foundation was freedom, as opposed to territorial expansion[8].

Another strand of the humanist vision of integration can be found in the ideas of Jeremy Bentham, who, as early as the late eighteenth century, proposed the creation of a permanent inter-state consultative body to regulate international affairs by peaceful means. Unlike Kant, whose political philosophy was grounded in the categorical imperative and universal moral principles, Bentham's utilitarianism was oriented toward pragmatic outcomes. He regarded international law as a tool for the rational organization of relations among states, aimed at securing *"the greatest happiness for the greatest number"*. This included the prevention of war, which he viewed as a source of human suffering and a senseless waste of resources[9]. In his proposals for international reform, Bentham emphasized the necessity of an organized framework for cooperation among states to prevent conflicts – an idea that effectively anticipated the concepts of multilateral diplomacy and institutional integration. In a broader sense, both Bentham and Kant, despite their methodological differences, laid down two intellectual foundations that would later converge in theories of functionalism: the normative universalization of political order and the rationalization of cooperation based on mutually beneficial interests. These approaches offered a theoretical foundation for models of integration where the state retains core governing authority while transferring specific competences to supranational bodies to promote stability, security, and lower the transaction costs linked to conflict. Beginning in the nineteenth century, the concept of European unity began to assume a more practical character. Whereas earlier discourse centered primarily on moral and philosophical models of coexistence, this period saw the emergence of institutional design proposals. Among the most well-known

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[8] Cavallar G. *Kant and the theory and practice of international right*. 2nd ed. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020.

[9] Janis M. W. Jeremy Bentham and the fashioning of "international law". *The American Journal of International Law*. 1984. Vol. 78(2). P. 405–418.

were the projects of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, who envisioned a peaceful union of European monarchies supported by regular conferences, a common army, and a shared court. His vision emphasized the permanence of diplomatic engagement as a safeguard against war[10]. Similar ideas were later expressed by William Penn, who, as early as the seventeenth century, proposed the creation of an inter-state council to resolve disputes. These intellectual initiatives reflected the gradual rationalization of the idea of integration, marked by a shift from moral imperative to political and legal mechanisms.

Nevertheless, the true transition from a humanist ideal to functional integration occurred only in the twentieth century. The tragedy of the two world wars confronted Europe with a dual imperative: to engage in moral self-justification and to pursue institutional transformation. The humanist ideas of Kant and Bentham gained renewed significance as the pursuit of lasting peace was increasingly seen as a historical necessity rooted in political reality and no longer dismissed as a utopian aspiration. In this context, the concept of functionalism, developed by David Mitrany in the 1930s, offered a pragmatic model of integration based on the transfer of competences to supranational institutions in technical and economic domains[11].

In its subsequent development, functionalism rejected the idea of a single, immediate federal unification of states and instead advanced a model of gradual integration based on common interests. This logic profoundly influenced the architects of post-war European unification, most notably Jean Monnet. Although the model of the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) did not conform to traditional notions of political integration, it nonetheless established supranational regulation over key industrial sectors central to the machinery of war. At this juncture, the idea of unity was institutionally realized for the first time through a legal framework designed to transform a history of conflict into a space of cooperation, moving beyond a mere declaration of goodwill[12]. The principle of supranationality, which underpinned the European Coal and Steel Community, was not political in its formal structure, yet it entailed significant political consequences: the gradual formation of a common market, the harmonization of legal norms, and the emergence of joint regulatory bodies. In this way, functionalism demonstrated its capacity both to prevent conflict and to generate new forms

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[10] Lehning P. B. European citizenship: Towards a European identity? *Law and Philosophy*. 2001. Vol. 20(3). P. 239–282.

[11] Mitrany D. *A Working peace system*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966.

[12] Dinan D. *Europe recast: A history of European Union* (2nd ed.). London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

of political interaction, wherein compromise became technologically embedded within the structure of decision-making processes.

This shift toward a functional logic of integration laid the groundwork for the further expansion of the European project. Post-war Europe became a unique case of a region that transformed its traumatic historical experience into a stimulus for shared institutionalization. In contrast to earlier forms of inter-state coordination, which were primarily instrumental or defensive in nature, such as military alliances or imperial coalitions, this new phase was defined by the creation of enduring supranational structures that facilitated both coordination and the integration of certain aspects of member states' governing authority. This marked a qualitatively new stage, in which traditional conceptions of the state as a monopoly of authority began to coexist with the notion of "functional sovereignty," understood as the capacity to delegate powers without forfeiting political identity.

Against this backdrop, the formation of a political logic of European integration acquires a strategic dimension. The unification of the continent is increasingly seen as a practical response to the crisis of state authority, the threat of war, ideological fragmentation, and economic instability, with less emphasis on abstract moral duty or Enlightenment ideals. At this stage, the idea of Europe gradually loses its metaphysical dimension and assumes the form of a political project supported by a concrete infrastructure consisting of treaties, institutions, and procedures. It is on this foundation that the European project emerged in the second half of the twentieth century as a response to strategic challenges, as it simultaneously sought to overcome the profound crisis of European civilization caused by the catastrophes of the two world wars and the division of the continent during the Cold War.

European integration arises as a response to the radical delegitimation of the traditional political form of the nation-state. The two world wars exposed the inability of traditional state authority to guarantee peace and security. The nation-state emerged as a victim of conflict while simultaneously serving as a primary source of it. This realization led to a profound intellectual shift: whereas national autonomy had previously been regarded as a guarantor of stability, after 1945 it increasingly came to be seen as a potential threat. Within this framework, integration was conceived as a mechanism for managing sovereign power through gradual transformation, achieved by means of inter-state trust and procedural arrangements for coexistence[13].

The task of the new Europe focused on developing a procedural model for legitimizing authority at the supranational level instead of unifying

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[13] Pinder J. *The building of the European Union*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

cultures or ethnic groups. This was reflected in the practice of delegating limited competences to common institutions. The establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 aimed to achieve a clearly defined political objective by making future war impossible through the supranational management of coal and steel, which were essential resources for military production. This marked the first concrete realization of the idea that security is attainable only where interdependence exists, institutional arbitration is established, and legal predictability is ensured[14].

The key architects of this new approach were Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide De Gasperi. Their political responsibility was defined by the capacity to transform the structures of interaction between nations, instead of defending state prerogatives. The roles of France and the Federal Republic of Germany were particularly significant, as both states made a symbolic gesture: instead of pursuing historical revanche, they adopted a model of shared responsibility, notably through the institutional integration of formerly conflict-prone sectors of the economy. This initiative marked the start of a deeper process of building mutual trust, guided by binding legal norms alongside diplomatic declarations[15].

A significant analytical shift within the European project involved a rethinking of the very nature of power. Unlike the classical state's exclusive sovereignty, the European Community's model featured power that was distributed and networked, accountable at multiple levels including institutions beyond national oversight. This development stopped short of full federalization and involved the delegation of specific functions to supranational bodies. As a result, the principle of a "union through law" (*Union par le droit*) emerged, becoming foundational to the legal culture of the European Union[16].

This concept highlights the importance of adherence to shared norms alongside the democratic procedures that shape these norms, as well as the mechanisms of oversight, avenues for appeal, and equal access to legal institutions. This indicates that the European Community operates beyond a simple coordination platform, constituting a political order where authority is founded on competence and legitimacy rather than historical origin. In this manner, the European Union takes on characteristics of a post-sovereign

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[14] Milward A. S. *The European rescue of the nation-state*. London: Routledge, 1992; Monnet J. *Memoirs*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976.

[15] Dinan D. *Europe recast: a history of European Union*.

[16] Weiler J. H. H. The transformation of Europe. *Yale Law Journal*. 1991. Vol. 100(8). P. 2403–2483.

entity, governed by principles of mutual constraint through legal norms instead of traditional power balancing.

The further development of the integration project did not unfold in isolation. Its political evolution occurred within a broader geopolitical context, shaped above all by the bipolar world order that emerged after 1945. The Cold War established the spatial boundaries of European cooperation and played a decisive role in shaping its normative orientation. Throughout this period, integration functioned as a strategic asset for the Western bloc in its confrontation with the Soviet-style totalitarian model.

The European integration project evolved into both a means of preventing internal conflict and an external symbol of a civilizational alternative. The process of economic reconstruction, supported in part by the Marshall Plan, functioned as a means of legitimizing liberal democracy as an effective and morally superior form of political organization. The institutional innovation initiated by the Treaties of Rome in 1957 was complemented by the establishment of a common market, the harmonization of public policies, and the development of a shared legal system Together, these developments firmly established integration as a strategy for consolidating the West in economic as well as ideological terms[17].

During this period, the formation of European identity was shaped through normative instruments. In contrast to traditional national projects grounded in shared history, language, or culture, the European Community began to articulate a concept of political identity based on values such as the rule of law, social partnership, freedom of expression, and a market economy. This model was distinctive in its inclusivity and lack of sentimentalism. Its foundation was not a national myth or ethnic homogeneity; instead, it rested on procedural loyalty and legal frameworks[18].

Alongside the development of its economic and legal core, European integration was marked by political caution in matters of security. A strategic decision was made to embed Europe within the transatlantic framework through NATO, foregoing the pursuit of an independent European defence union. This choice had far-reaching implications: on the one hand, it limited Europe's autonomy in the field of defence; on the other, it enabled a focused consolidation of political, legal, and economic structures. It confirmed that the primary goal of European integration in the twentieth century was to

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[17] Moravcsik A. *The choice for Europe: Social purpose and state power from Messina to Maastricht*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998; Gilbert M. *European integration: A concise history*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012.
[18] Shore C. *Building Europe: The cultural politics of European integration*. London: Routledge, 2000.

construct an alternative model of governance and coexistence within a divided world, with no intention to replace individual nation-states.

However, even in its most successful manifestations, the political architecture of integration proved insufficient in the absence of a shared normative foundation. The gradual expansion of competences, the development of legal institutions, and the emergence of features characteristic of a political system brought a deeper question to the forefront: what ensures cohesion within such a multinational, multiethnic, and linguistically diverse community? The search for an answer inevitably led to the need to conceptualize European values as informal yet essential conditions for normative authority, solidarity, and internal coherence within the integration framework.

Beginning in the late 1980s, the emphasis in the development of the European project increasingly shifted toward its ethical and cultural dimensions. Integration ceased to be understood solely as an institutional technique and began to be positioned as the embodiment of a specific normative model. At this point, the idea of Europe returned to its deeper roots as a civilizational paradigm grounded in universalism, human rights, the rule of law, and democracy as foundational principles of political order.

Against this backdrop, one of the key analytical frameworks of modernity has taken shape within European intellectual discourse – namely, the concept of the European Union as a normative power, introduced by Manners in 2002. This concept opened a new horizon for understanding the nature of the EU in international relations. In contrast to the traditional notion of "soft power", which emphasizes cultural appeal, the EU's normative power lies in its capacity to establish, institutionalize, and diffuse universal norms beyond its own borders through diplomacy, association agreements, economic integration, and the promotion of democratic reforms[19]. This approach draws on the humanist tradition of Immanuel Kant and Jürgen Habermas's conceptions of post-national citizenship, in which political community is grounded in participation in a procedurally legitimized system of norms and practices, as opposed to being based on ethnic or historical affiliation[20]. In this context, the EU exhibits characteristics beyond a simple union of states, embodying a form of *"post-sovereign democracy"* grounded in procedural rationality, reflexive legitimacy, and ethical universalism. The concept of normative power also implies that political authority within the EU is transformative in nature, reshaping normative frameworks through

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[19] Manners I. Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms? *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 2002. Vol. 40(2). P. 235–258. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353

[20] Habermas J. *The postnational constellation: political essays*. MIT Press, 2001.

standardized regulation, moral argumentation, judicial mechanisms, and institutional diffusion of norms. For instance, the implementation of the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership candidates and the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) serve as practical manifestations of this approach. They illustrate how, by exporting its values, the EU promotes a form of political modernization beyond its own borders and at the same time extends its legal framework[21]. Thus, within the paradigm of normative power, the EU is conceived as a new kind of actor, defined by a commitment to values rather than by military force or imperial ambition. Its capacity for global influence rests on normative appeal. This foundation has rendered the Union both strong and vulnerable: while it relies on the voluntary acceptance of norms, it is also dependent on external perceptions of the EU's political credibility and on the consistency of its internal policies with its proclaimed values.

Under these conditions, academic debates concerning the depth and durability of the EU's normative dimension have intensified. Much of the critical discourse focuses on the claim that the EU's external actions are, in many instances, driven by the imperative to reconcile the interests of its member states. Andrew Moravcsik elaborates this argument by asserting that EU institutions primarily function as channels for coordinating intergovernmental interests, not pursuing an autonomous normative agenda[22]. Within this logic, values function more as instruments of diplomatic influence than as a coherent ethical strategy.

Further criticism concerns the internal consistency of the EU's normative order. During periods marked by threats to democracy within member states, the EU has shown limitations in its response, particularly in its failure to systematically apply sanction mechanisms in cases involving breaches of the rule of law or judicial independence. This reveals the extent to which normative rhetoric is contingent on political circumstances, resulting in a decline in legitimacy both externally and internally[23]. From a strategic perspective, this situation exposes the vulnerability of the normative model within a multilevel system, where institutional unity is not always accompanied by normative coherence. Decision-making processes are constantly shaped by a dilemma between upholding values and achieving

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[21] Diez T. Constructing the self and changing others: reconsidering "Normative power Europe". *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. 2005. Vol. 33(3). P. 613–636.
[22] Moravcsik A. *The choice for Europe: social purpose and state power from Messina to Maastricht*. Cornell University Press, 1998.
[23] Kochenov D. The EU and the rule of law – naïveté or a grand design? *Constitutionalism and the rule of law* / (Eds.) M. Adams, A. Meuwese, E. Hirsch Ballin. Cambridge University Press, 2017. P. 419–445.

consensus, compelling the EU to operate within a fragmented normative architecture. This ambivalence reflects a fundamental characteristic of the European Union as a politico-institutional entity that combines mutually exclusive logics: normative self-positioning and strategic responsiveness to a changing external environment. The EU functions as a dynamic configuration of institutions, member states, and political forces embodying divergent approaches to external action, instead of as a unitary actor. Under such conditions, unified normative behaviour develops as a result of the situational alignment of competing interests, shaped more by context than by any consistent political will. Accordingly, Europe's *"value-based power"* emerges from the dynamic interaction of political contingency, institutional design, and cultural legitimacy, and does not represent a fixed or inherent attribute[24]. In theoretical terms, this gives rise to the need to reconsider the very concept of normative power. While it was previously associated with moral superiority, it is now increasingly interpreted through the lenses of constrained universalism, procedural selectivity, and selective inclusion. Principles proclaimed as universal are often applied according to the logic of political expediency, which undermines trust in the EU among its neighbours, partners, and its own citizens. This phenomenon is frequently described as a shift from normative power to normative ambition, understood as a recognition of the EU's potential to shape global standards without assuming consistent moral conduct or intrinsic normative superiority[25]. In light of these challenges, there is a growing interest in the structural analysis of European values. They are no longer viewed merely as a background element or a declarative component of identity. Instead, their functional significance is increasingly evident along three dimensions: first, as an ethical compass for the EU's internal consolidation; second, as a condition for access to the benefits of membership or cooperation with the EU; and third, as a category through which influence over the global order is exercised.

Under these conditions, values acquire the status of a political resource around which both foreign policy debates and intra-institutional competition are centered. The shift toward understanding values as a strategic instrument does not imply their devaluation. On the contrary, it creates an opportunity for deeper reflection on values as elements that demand both rhetorical affirmation and political embeddedness, transparent mechanisms of implementation, and accountability.

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[24] Whitman R. G. Norms, power and Europe: A new agenda for study of the EU and international relations. *Normative power Europe: Empirical and theoretical perspectives* / (Ed.) R.G Whitman. 2011. P. 1–22.
[25] Sjursen H. The EU as a 'normative' power: How can this be? *Journal of European Public Policy*. 2006. Vol. 13(2). P. 235–251.

At this juncture, it becomes necessary to undertake a focused analysis of European values as the normative foundation underpinning both internal cohesion and external influence. This inquiry forms the basis of the subsequent analysis.

1.2. The EU after WWII: Economic Integrationas a Peace Project
(Alina Iovcheva)

A key aspect in shaping the values-oriented integration model was the experience of post-war Europe, where ensuring sustainable peace was closely intertwined with the necessity of establishing new foundations for political trust. The devastating consequences of the Second World War (WWII) left no room for returning to the interstate balance-of-power system, which had already proven incapable of containing escalation twice during the first half of the twentieth century. Under these circumstances, constructing a new system of interdependence, designed to mitigate the risk of conflict by limiting sovereignty in certain critical areas, became a strategic imperative.

It is noteworthy that in the immediate post-war years, the United States played a significant role in advancing the logic of integration in Western Europe. The Marshall Plan helped revive the region's economic potential, simultaneously fostering conditions that enabled the coordination of policies among the recipient countries. This process revealed an objective need for interstate mechanisms of coordination that would ensure the efficient utilization of resources and promote economic stability[26].

The initial institutional embodiment of the functional logic of integration was the establishment of ***the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)****,* founded by the Treaty of Paris in 1951. For the first time, sovereign states agreed to transfer control over critical sectors, specifically coal and steel, which were fundamental resources necessary for warfare, to a special supranational organization whose highest governing body was ***the High Authority*** (a prototype of the European Commission). According to the vision of Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, the ECSC was intended as a political-economic project designed to transform the confrontational relationship between France and Germany into effective cooperation, fostering solidarity through economic interdependence. The supranational High Authority of the ECSC was composed of nine members appointed by the governments of the participating countries and functioned independently from national control. It was granted powers to supervise production, pricing, and competition within the common market. Its decisions had direct legal effect within national jurisdictions, marking one of the first precedents of supranational law in Europe[27].

Thus, the fundamental principle of functionalism, which consisted in delegating limited technical functions to a supranational body with

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[26] Milward A. S. *The reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945–1951*. University of California Press, 1984.

[27] Dinan D. *Origins and evolution of the European Union*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 2014.

subsequent *spillover effects* (*Figure 1*), was institutionally implemented for the first time. According to this approach, integration in one sector inevitably generated a necessity to coordinate related fields, which, in turn, led to further convergence – initially institutional and legal, and ultimately political. This spillover effect was perceived as a mechanism for the organic expansion of the integration project, requiring neither strict external decisions nor the complete abandonment of national autonomy[28]. This approach proved effective: during the first years of the ECSC's operation, a system of Franco-German cooperation was established, creating a precedent for efficient joint governance.

Functional integration in a strategic sector
(e.g., coal and steel under ECSC)

Creation of supranational decision-making structures
(e.g., High Authority, Council of Ministers)

Operational success + sectoral interdependence
(e.g., need for cross-sector regulation)

Pressure for harmonization in adjacent policy areas
(e.g., transport, labor mobility, competition rules)

Legal and institutional expansion
(e.g., establishment of EEC, Euratom)

Gradual political convergence and normative alignment
(e.g., common market logic → shared values)

Transformation of sovereignty through embedded cooperation
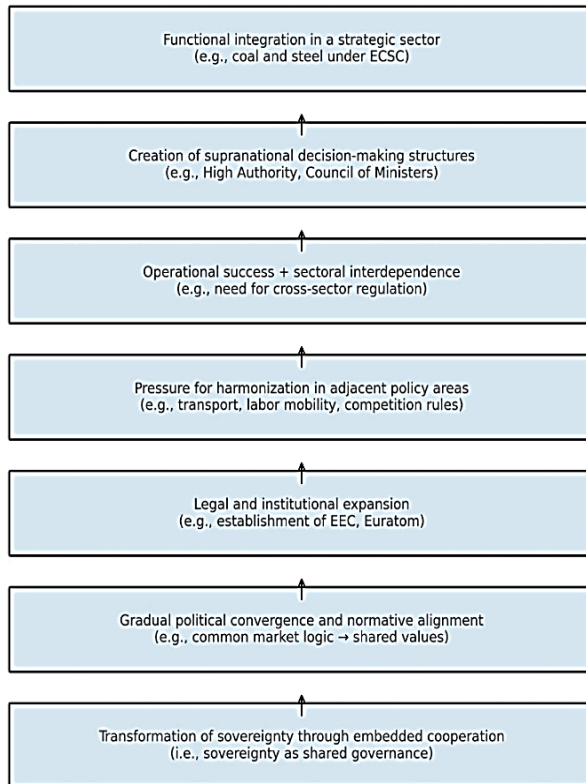(i.e., sovereignty as shared governance)

Figure 1. Spillover Mechanism in Functionalist Integration (author's elaboration)

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[28] Haas E. B. *The uniting of Europe: political, social, and economic forces, 1950–1957.* Stanford University Press, 1958.

In parallel, a new security architecture was taking shape: the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) project in 1954 effectively redirected European integration efforts from a purely military focus toward a politico-economic dimension. This shift, in turn, brought broader integration initiatives to the forefront[29].

Accordingly, the ECSC model, which represented a form of sectoral integration with a limited functional scope, no longer met the emerging political expectations. As a result, the next phase of the integration process aimed at thematic and institutional expansion, primarily through deeper cooperation in the areas of trade, infrastructure coordination, and labour mobility.

The transition from sectoral coordination to multi-level integration demanded administrative decisions alongside the development of a conceptual framework for a new model of cooperation that could align economic efficiency with political stability. In this context, functionalism became the theoretical framework that defined the mechanism of gradual, institutionally driven convergence among states through the delegation of sovereign powers in technocratically neutral domains. The institutional form it took in the ECSC and EEC projects reflected the ambition of European states to move beyond historical conflict by constructing a bottom-up system of interdependence grounded in the rational management of shared resources, rather than relying on top-down federalization. In this sense, *functionalism* was deeply political, even though it was implemented through technical, administrative, and economic channels. In practical terms, it served as a tool for the convergence of political trajectories among states with historically antagonistic interests. By establishing joint institutions to regulate technical issues of production, competition, or tariff policy, member states overcame barriers of mistrust and formed a common legal environment. As Ben Rosamond[30] notes, it was precisely the functionalist mechanism that made it possible to avoid direct confrontation over the issue of sovereignty, as the delegation of authority in "neutral" domains did not provoke resistance from national governments and, alongside this, had profound transformative consequences.

Functionalism proved effective by engaging with political differences and channeling them through cooperative mechanisms. It offered a method of convergence that respected the distinctiveness of national identities, even as it laid the groundwork for shared governance. Trust, in this model, did not require ideological alignment; it was built procedurally – through repeated

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[29] Dedman M. *The origins and development of the European Union 1945–2008: A history of European integration.* 2nd ed. Routledge, 2010.

[30] Rosamond B. *Theories of European integration*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

cooperation, common institutions, and predictable rules. This quiet logic of integration allowed the European Union to take shape as something rare: a supranational order that neither demands uniformity nor dissolves difference. The motto "United in Diversity" is not rhetorical ornamentation – it captures the paradox that functionalism turned into institutional fact[31].

At the same time, it is important to note that the implementation of the functionalist logic was neither linear nor unequivocal. As early as the establishment of the EEC, tensions began to emerge between the pursuit of deeper integration and the member states' desire to retain control in key areas, particularly fiscal policy, social policy, and foreign affairs. These tensions between advancing integration and preserving political authority at the national level drove the development of the institutional framework of the European Communities. *The Treaties of Rome*, signed in 1957 and establishing *the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)*, also laid the foundations for a political and legal structure intended to maintain a dynamic balance between intergovernmental and supranational modes of governance. The institutional model, which distributed powers among the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Assembly (later the European Parliament), and the Court of Justice of the European Communities, was designed to reconcile the logic of integration based on shared interests with the political necessity of preserving state autonomy. This effort to strike a balance constituted one of the fundamental dilemmas of the integration process[32].

The European Commission, as a supranational executive body, embodied the functional logic of cooperation. Its primary role was to ensure the implementation of common interests, even when these conflicted with the short-term priorities of individual member states. It was granted a monopoly on legislative initiative, and its members, though appointed by national governments, were required to act independently, renouncing the role of national representatives. This arrangement set a precedent for granting a supranational mandate within a defined and effective area of executive authority.

In contrast, *the Council of Ministers* represented the aggregate interests of the member states and reflected the logic of intergovernmental control. At the early stages, all key acts of the EEC required its approval, and the decision-making procedures were based on the principle of unanimity, which functioned as an instrumental mechanism for safeguarding national

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Craig P., de Búrca G. *EU law: text, cases, and materials*. 7th ed. Oxford University Press, 2020.

prerogatives. Over time, however, the gradual expansion of competences and the introduction of qualified majority voting in certain areas marked the beginning of a limited yet irreversible shift toward more efficient decision-making[33].

The role of *the European Parliamentary Assembly*, which later evolved into the *European Parliament*, also underwent development. Although its powers were initially limited, the very notion of a representative body within the structure of the European Communities carried the potential for transformation from an advisory institution into a genuine legislative actor. The 1979 reform, which introduced direct elections to the European Parliament, marked the first step toward the political legitimization of supranational integration through citizen participation rather than exclusive reliance on governments. This development reflected a broader trend toward democratizing the supranational dimension of governance[34].

A distinctive role within the system was played by the *Court of Justice* of the European Communities, which became the primary instrument for the gradual transformation of integration law from a branch of international law into an autonomous legal order. Through landmark rulings in *Van Gend en Loos* (1963) and *Costa v. ENEL* (1964), the Court articulated the principles of direct effect and the supremacy of EU law, establishing the legal primacy of EU norms over national legislation within areas of shared competence[35].

The ruling in *Van Gend en Loos* established the principle of direct effect, according to which provisions of EU law could be applied directly within national legal systems and conferred rights on individuals without the need for further implementation. In *Costa v. ENEL*, the Court articulated the principle of supremacy, holding that in the event of a conflict between EU law and national legislation, EU law must prevail. These precedents transformed Community law into an autonomous legal order superior to national law, forming the foundation of its supranational character.

The entire institutional structure of the European Community was not free from internal contradictions. On the one hand, member states sought to retain control over key political decisions, particularly in domains traditionally considered the core of national authority, such as security, fiscal policy, and social standards. On the other hand, supranational institutions – most notably the European Commission and the Court of Justice – gradually acquired

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[33] Nugent N. *The government and politics of the European Union.* 8th ed. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

[34] Hix S., Høyland B. *The political system of the European Union*. 3rd ed. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

[35] Weiler J. H. H. The transformation of Europe. *The Yale Law Journal*. 1991. Vol. 100(8). P. 2403–2483.

expanding powers, especially in the areas of legal interpretation, regulation of the common market, and oversight of compliance with the *acquis communautaire*. This produced tensions that could not be reduced to a simple dichotomy between the "national" and the "European". It reflected the complex process of institutionalizing a political compromise between the need to ensure the effectiveness of joint action through centralized governance mechanisms and the simultaneous need to preserve political credibility grounded in national democracies.

In this context, the concept of *"institutional symmetry"* gains particular analytical significance. It refers to the balancing of power among institutions that represent different sources of political legitimacy: the Commission as the embodiment of the Union's collective interest; the Council as the forum of member state governments; the European Parliament as the voice of civil society; and the Court of Justice as the guarantor of legal coherence within the system[36].

This structure formalized the distribution of competences while also acting as a mechanism of integrative moderation, enabling the coordination of multi-level interests within a constantly evolving political system. At the same time, this model differed fundamentally from classical federal systems such as that of the United States. The allocation of authority within the EU followed a dynamic, polycentric balance, with power distributed across national and supranational levels instead of being arranged in a rigid hierarchical structure. This arrangement has come to be known as *"diffuse sovereignty"* referring to a pluralistic configuration of power centers in which control is not merely divided, but circulates depending on the policy domain, political context, and the degree of political alignment achieved[37]. In this sense, the European Union functions as a constitutionally indeterminate space characterized by overlapping jurisdictions.

This phenomenon has brought both institutional resilience and the flexibility needed to address political crises, accommodate the Union's enlargement, and adapt to changes in the global environment. Diffuse sovereignty, supported by mechanisms of institutional symmetry, has prevented centralization from becoming the dominant paradigm and has sustained the process of integration without requiring a definitive resolution of the Union's final political form. This framework has enabled the EU to evolve as an open political system grounded in procedural legitimacy and flexible coordination.

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[36] Curtin D., Egeberg M. Tradition and innovation: Europe's accumulated executive order. *West European Politics*. 2008. Vol. 31(4). P. 639–661.
[37] Piattoni S. *The theory of multi-level governance: conceptual, empirical, and normative challenges*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

The gradual reconfiguration of power within the EEC in favor of supranational institutions, accompanied by the development of instruments such as legal primacy, parliamentary oversight, and the Commission's executive competence, gave rise to a unique form of political order that transcended classical typologies of federations or confederations. The European project increasingly demonstrated the capacity to reconcile heterogeneous interests through institutionally structured interaction based on mutual agreement and the distribution of responsibility. This capacity for adaptation, political flexibility, and incremental evolution became a critical condition for the legal and political viability of the integration mechanism and its continued development.

Meanwhile, the deepening of supranational governance mechanisms occurred alongside the structural economic transformation of Western Europe. The common market, established within the framework of the EEC, gradually evolved into a systemic infrastructure in which national economies lost much of their autonomous character and became increasingly embedded in a mode of mutual adjustment. This transformation carried economic as well as political implications, reshaping the conditions under which states engaged in the development of collective policies. In the 1960s, as trade barriers were lifted and regulatory standards harmonized, the Community fostered an environment of high economic intensity, supported both by technical instruments and by evolving institutional logics. The expansion of intra-Community trade, industrial cooperation, and capital mobility prompted a reexamination of the principles of economic governance. The unification of rules in the areas of competition policy, state aid, and public procurement gradually introduced new frameworks for political accountability. As this was occurring, decision-making mechanisms increasingly moved beyond intergovernmental negotiations and were conducted through procedures involving supranational institutions and European law. The growing executive and legal competences of the European Commission and the Court of Justice signaled the emergence of a new level of public authority structured around procedural governance, transcending traditional state-based frameworks. Researchers emphasize that during the 1960s and 1970s, trust in the supranational level was grounded primarily in regulatory effectiveness, with political representation playing a secondary role[38]. However, this technocratic legitimacy did not eliminate the political dimension. Through the implementation of common policies in areas such as competition, transport, and consumer rights, supranational institutions began to establish

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[38] Majone G. *Dilemmas of European integration*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

new frameworks for interaction among government, business, and civil society.

Another important instrument of economic policy that contributed to political convergence was the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It functioned as a mechanism for economic stabilization while also providing a means of institutional balancing between older and newer member states, core and peripheral regions, and wealthier and less developed areas. Wyn Grant[39] observes that the CAP functioned less as a market instrument and more as a politico-administrative architecture of solidarity, enabling the maintenance of cohesion within an ethnically diverse and economically uneven environment.

Alongside the expansion of supranational competences, new forms of multi-level participation also emerged. Throughout the 1970s, municipalities, business associations, and trade unions increasingly engaged in cross-border networks operating according to European rules. As Christopher J. Bickerton, Dermot Hodson and Uwe Puetter[40] note, this evolution signaled the rise of an *"embedded politics",* where national policymakers adjusted to supranational regimes through processes of institutional re-learning rather than through coercion. Consequently, a distinct European political space began to take shape, characterized by its own norms, expectations, and practices of loyalty.

The development of the European legal system also became increasingly significant, as it progressively acquired a more autonomous character. The principles of direct effect and the supremacy of EU law were gradually implemented in new domains, particularly within the field of economic regulation.

As Joseph Weiler[41] emphasizes, legal integration became the mechanism through which compliance with common commitments was ensured without the need for centralized authority. Together with the institutional autonomy of the Commission, this created a system where political coordination was achieved through legal consistency and procedural predictability, avoiding confrontation or the imposition of will.

Over time, economic growth, institutional complexity, and legal integration did more than simply reinforce cooperation. Together, they redefined the very conditions in which states operate. No longer confined to intergovernmental diplomacy, integration acquired a multi-level character –

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[39] Grant W. Policy instruments in the Common Agricultural Policy. *West European Politics*. 2010. Vol. 33(1). P. 22–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380903354049

[40] Bickerton C. J., Hodson D., Puetter U. *The new intergovernmentalism*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

[41] Weiler J.H.H. The transformation of Europe revisited. *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 2012. Vol. 50(s1). P. 23–28.

layered, adaptable, and increasingly self-sustaining. Within this evolving structure, the economy ceased to be a technical background. It became the foundation for a new political order, where procedures and norms gradually emerged through practice instead of being externally imposed. The result was a distinctly European form of coexistence that avoided both federal consolidation and political fragmentation, offering instead a historically new model.

In analyzing the European model of economic integration, the experience of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) offers a revealing contrast. This comparison helps to conceptualize the structural features of the EU's integration order in relation to other regional arrangements. MERCOSUR, established in 1991 by several Latin American countries with the goal of forming a customs union and common market, was from the outset defined by intergovernmental coordination without delegating executive authority to supranational institutions.

The absence of an autonomous and coordinated supranational institutional system significantly limited MERCOSUR's capacity to implement unified policies or ensure normative consistency. Common decisions within the bloc were largely declaratory and lacked binding enforcement or sanctioning mechanisms. As a result, integration remained highly dependent on the political climate in individual member states, undermining the long-term institutional stability of the project[42].

In contrast to the normatively embedded European model, where economic interdependence is reinforced through legal norms and procedural autonomy, MERCOSUR operates under conditions of normative indeterminacy. The absence of a regulatory apparatus and an independent judiciary prevents the establishment of a binding legal order. As a consequence, private actors such as businesses, associations, and citizens lack direct access to mechanisms for defending their interests within the integration framework. This absence of access contrasts sharply with the procedural guarantees established within the EU system[43].

Beyond institutional differences, the presence of internal redistribution mechanisms is a critical factor. In the EU, financial support for agricultural sectors, regional policy instruments, and cohesion funds serve as tools for integrative equalization. In contrast, the lack of an effective budgetary

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[42] Malamud A. Presidential diplomacy and the institutional underpinnings of the Mercosur. *Latin American Research Review*. 2005. Vol. 40(1). P. 138–164.

[43] Ribeiro Hoffmann A. Politicization and legitimacy in MERCOSUR. *The legitimacy of regional integration in Europe and the Americas* / (Eds.) A. Hurrelmann, S. Schneider. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. P. 179–198. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137461423_10

framework in MERCOSUR has played a role in maintaining structural asymmetries among member states. As José Briceño-Ruiz[44] notes, the dominance of the largest economies (particularly Brazil) in the absence of compensatory mechanisms has led to the institutionalization of imbalance, which significantly undermines trust in the common market among less influential participants.

Thus, in the post-war period, the EU model was defined by a constitutionally structured form of political coexistence, where the economy supported the development of new forms of collective action instead of operating as an independent objective. Through the combination of legal autonomy, political adaptability, and structural solidarity, the European Union established a unique paradigm of integration that remains relevant in the context of global instability and competition among regional development models.

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[44] Briceño-Ruiz J. *The politics of regional integration in Latin America*. Routledge, 2021.

1.3. EU Political Integration: Between National Interests and Supranational Governance
(Alina Iovcheva)

European experience has shown that economic interdependence often lays the foundation for more complex political transformations. In the case of the EU, political integration did not emerge from a single reform initiative, but rather evolved in response to the growing need for collective decision-making. It is precisely in the domain of common policy development that a fundamental tension becomes evident – between the sovereign interests of member states and the demand for effective governance at the Union level. Even though political authority is often associated with centralized control, this tension has instead given rise to a distinctive institutional system grounded in interaction across multiple levels. Within this framework, the EU political system is marked by the absence of a single locus of sovereignty, and policy decisions result from the interplay of institutions based on different forms of legitimacy. This system, as described by Vivien A. Schmidt[45], exemplifies a form of "institutional pluralism with limited executive cohesion", in which no single body possesses complete political agency. The European Commission, acting as a technocratic agent of shared interests, operates within a mandate defined by its responsibilities for initiating and overseeing policy. The Council of the EU and the European Council aggregate national priorities and function as political gatekeepers, while the European Parliament represents the civic dimension of the Union. Despite the fact that the arrangement lacks a hierarchical structure, it fosters a polycentric dynamic where each actor operates within limits yet remains essential[46].

This institutional setup places primary emphasis on the capacity to reach alignment across actors instead of concentrating authority. It is this ability to coordinate across diverse interests and bodies that becomes the system's most vital asset in the absence of a central decision-making core. However, this approach generates a functional paradox: as the number of issues requiring joint resolution increases, the policy process itself becomes more fragmented and contentious. Consensus, in this context, turns into both a political imperative and a structural impediment. The need for alignment across levels

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[45] Schmidt V. A. Democracy and legitimacy in the European Union revisited: input, output and 'throughput'. *Political Studies*. 2013. Vol. 61(1). P. 2–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00962.x

[46] Curtin D., Egeberg M. Tradition and innovation: Europe's accumulated executive order. *West European Politics*. 2008. Vol. 31(4). P. 639–661. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380801905868

of governance often stalls strategic action, particularly in fields such as security, energy, and tax coordination. When consensus becomes simultaneously essential and obstructive, there arises a need for a temporary political focal point capable of facilitating compromise. In such circumstances, the European Council has come to play a heightened role as an arbiter, particularly under conditions of crisis. During the Eurozone crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, it was the European Council that assumed the role of strategic responder. The driving force behind this development was the political authority of national leaders, not the institution's formal role. This shift has reinforced the intergovernmental dimension of political planning without altering the formal distribution of powers, establishing a new norm: supranational implementation in the absence of supranational leadership.

In the field of foreign policy, the logic of multilevel governance leads to systemic disunity, both in terms of procedures and content. The European External Action Service (EEAS) has been established, and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy holds a permanent position. Nonetheless, the Union's external policy remains dispersed. Its main characteristics include inconsistency, a reactive approach, and limited institutional leverage. The CFSP and CSDP establish a formal framework for the EU to operate as a single actor, although in practice its foreign policy still depends on agreement among member states, who continue to lead in key areas such as defence, diplomacy, sanctions, and strategic forecasting.

The existence of common institutions and the appearance of unity do not resolve the underlying divergence of actions and positions. Disunity is further exacerbated by the absence of binding coordination mechanisms, particularly in times of crisis. From Libya to Syria, from the Western Balkans to the Sahel, the EU has often either delayed its responses or faced parallel national initiatives, undermining the coherence of its external engagement. This lack of coordination reveals a fundamental contradiction between the EU's institutional structure and the political autonomy of its members. Furthermore, the requirement for unanimous agreement in foreign policy decision-making creates a built-in vulnerability, where a single state can block a common position, even if it enjoys broad support among others.

Attempts to overcome this structural incoherence through the promotion of strategic autonomy, including instruments such as the *Strategic Compass*, aim to foster a stronger collective identity in the areas of security and defence. At the same time, these initiatives remain largely declarative and have not been accompanied by a revision of the decision-making framework. EU foreign policy incoherence reflects an enduring pattern within the Union's institutional structure, instead of a momentary disruption. This situation is

reinforced by the lack of shared defence planning, differences in strategic cultures among member states, and the politicisation of foreign policy within national contexts. These conditions indicate that incoherence in external action stems from a systemic issue, pointing to a broader structural challenge that extends to the internal dimension of EU integration.

The internal political dimension of EU integration also reveals a persistent tension between the normative expectation of solidarity and the empirical divergence of member states' political positions. This tension is particularly evident in the area of migration policy, where efforts to introduce mandatory mechanisms for refugee redistribution have faced institutional resistance from several governments. These governments invoke arguments related to national sovereignty, cultural identity, and domestic security. Divergences also arise in relation to climate targets, the level of ambition under the European Green Deal, and the stalled reform of voting procedures in the Council of the EU, especially in areas such as taxation and foreign policy. These disagreements reflect a deep asymmetry in political priorities within the Union. However, such tensions do not represent an anomaly. They illustrate the multidimensional nature of the EU system, where common agreement emerges through the possibility of adaptive participation. Common policies in this framework evolve through continuous institutional coordination instead of being imposed through coercion or top-down authority.

To support this dynamic, mechanisms have been established that allow for variation without undermining the overall cohesion of the Union. Instruments such as *enhanced cooperation*, *flexible integration*, and *coalitions of the willing* enable groups of member states to pursue joint initiatives even in the absence of Union-wide agreement, while preserving the integrity of the broader institutional structure[47]. The formalisation of these tools, notably in the Lisbon Treaty, was a response to the systemic difficulty of achieving unified policy outcomes. For instance, enhanced cooperation made it possible to implement the EU Unitary Patent and to introduce a financial transaction tax, despite the lack of unanimous support. These practices demonstrate the potential for institutional innovation and establish precedents for asymmetric integration, where core and peripheral actors coexist without pressure toward uniformity. In this context, differentiated

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[47] Bickerton C. J., Hodson D., Puetter U. *The new intergovernmentalism: States and supranational actors in the post-Maastricht era*. Oxford University Press, 2015. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198703617.001.0001;
Tekin F. *Differentiated integration at work: The institutionalisation and implementation of opt-outs from European Union law*. Nomos, 2012. https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/10.5771/9783845242915.pdf

integration does not threaten unity. Instead, it functions as a tool for maintaining balance between shared objectives and divergent political tempos.

Despite the clear risks associated with institutional disunity, the mechanisms of differentiated integration serve a stabilising function in the context of growing political diversity within the EU. They provide institutional options for states that are not prepared to engage in deeper cooperation, allowing them to avoid political isolation, simultaneously remaining within the framework of the Union. This enhances the Union's capacity to adapt, helps preserve internal legitimacy in a pluralistic environment, and relieves pressure to impose uniform centralisation. As noted by Schmidt[48], flexible integration can be understood as a functional norm that sustains the EU's political viability amid growing internal diversity, instead of representing a departure from the broader integration path.

A useful conceptual tool for understanding the effectiveness of this model is the tripartite approach to legitimacy. According to this model, *input legitimacy* derives from the participation of citizens and national governments in shaping policy; *output legitimacy* is defined by the effectiveness and outcomes of decisions; *throughput legitimacy* concerns the quality, openness, and inclusiveness of decision-making processes[49]. The interplay of these three dimensions enables a structurally diverse system to maintain both coherence and resilience. However, the resilience of this model cannot be assumed, particularly under conditions of heightened political and social pressure. The crises of the past decade have exposed its vulnerabilities. In situations of emergency governance, where *output* tends to take precedence, attention to democratic participation *(input)* and inclusive decision-making is often diminished *(throughput)*. This dynamic erodes trust in long-term participatory mechanisms and raises doubts about the Union's capacity to combine effectiveness with democratic legitimacy. Consequently, the EU's flexibility becomes both a source of institutional strength and a potential challenge to its normative coherence. This tension reveals a deeper paradox. The consolidation of integration signals a growing demand for solidarity, while the political cultures of member states often remain deeply divided and, in many cases, incompatible on matters of identity, legitimacy, and justice. This suggests that the problem of normative authority within the

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[48] Schmidt V. A. The future of differentiated integration: A 'soft-core,' multi-clustered Europe of overlapping policy communities. *Comparative European Politics*. 2019. Vol. 17(2). P. 212–230. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-019-00164-7

[49] Schmidt V. A. Democracy and legitimacy in the European Union revisited: Input, output and 'throughput'.

EU goes beyond institutional procedures and reaches into the foundations of political identity and the community's symbolic self-understanding.

Unlike nation-states, which are shaped by historically embedded cultural frameworks of political belonging, the European Union operates within a post-national political environment. This context creates what John Erik Fossum and Hans-Jörg Trenz[50] describe as a *"structural deficit of symbolic integration",* referring to the absence of a shared collective identity that transcends instrumental reasoning and rests on emotional allegiance. Public support for the EU often appears conditional and context-dependent, shaped primarily by perceptions of policy performance (output legitimacy) and only loosely tied to the idea of a European demos as a political community. As a result, the Union remains vulnerable during times of crisis, when challenges to individual policy decisions frequently evolve into questions about the institutional trustworthiness of the supranational model itself. These dynamics bring into focus the issue of normative disjunction, which extends beyond institutional interaction and reaches into the realm of political and cultural imaginaries that underpin societal legitimacy.

The plurality of values, especially regarding migration, gender policy, public health responses, and the stance toward Russia as an aggressor, reflects diverging political priorities alongside deep differences in political cultures. Richard Bellamy and Albert Weale[51] argue that political legitimacy in the EU does not rest on a shared conception of the common good, but instead reflects a negotiated balance among distinct national value systems. This makes consolidation, in the classical sense understood as the formation of a unified democratic public sphere, unattainable. Moreover, efforts to promote convergence through normative instruments, such as the Rule of Law Mechanism or the Gender Equality Strategy, often encounter resistance and are perceived as infringements on domestic sovereignty. This points to a deeper problem: the absence of a shared cognitive framework in which such principles might be jointly recognised and interpreted.

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[50] Fossum J. E., Trenz H. J. When the people come in: Constitution-making and the belated politicisation of the European Union (EUROGOV No. C-06-03). *European Governance Papers (EUROGOV)*, 2006. https://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2011/2462/pdf/egp_connex_C_06_03.pdf

[51] Bellamy R., Weale A. Political legitimacy and European monetary union: Contracts, constitutionalism and the normative logic of two-level games. *Journal of European Public Policy*. 2015. Vol. 22(2). P. 257–274. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2014.995118

In this regard, the issue of cognitive legitimacy becomes particularly relevant. Kathleen R. McNamara[52] defines this as the capacity of institutions to shape broadly accepted ways of interpreting political reality. Unlike national governments, the EU lacks exclusive access to the symbolic domain. It does not possess a *pan-European media landscape*, a unified educational narrative, or shared practices of everyday political socialisation. As a consequence, integration-supportive narratives remain fragmented, limiting the EU's ability to cultivate sustained allegiance through identity-based attachment. In this environment, political culture tends to play a disintegrative role, amplifying differences in expectations and deepening the perceived distance between citizens and Union institutions. The resulting deficit of cognitive credibility complicates communication between political authority and society, while also raising doubts about the possibility of establishing a common symbolic foundation for political identification.

Pluralism within political cultures creates conditions for internal tensions within the very concept of European identity. In the absence of a minimal symbolic convergence on political memory, notions of justice, and the EU's role in the world, it becomes impossible to establish a legitimate foundation for collective action. This challenge places significant constraints on the Union's aspirations for strategic autonomy. Even when institutional mechanisms are available, the necessary political momentum to activate them remains lacking. It becomes evident that the integration process cannot be reduced to cultural homogeneity or symbolic unity. Its driving force lies in the complex interplay of institutional mechanisms, normative orientations, and political practices operating within a structurally diverse landscape.

From this perspective, political integration in the EU cannot be understood solely through the lens of identity-based agreement or constitutional unification. At its core is a delicate equilibrium among institutional adaptability, normative plurality, and evolving political expectations. Over the decades, multiple theoretical frameworks have emerged to interpret this dynamic, each capturing distinct dimensions of a process that unfolds across multiple levels:

1. *Neofunctionalism,* originally formulated by Ernst Haas and later developed by Philippe Schmitter, interprets European integration as a gradual transfer of competences to the supranational level. This process unfolds through the dynamics of institutional interdependence. Its core premise is that cooperation within a specific domain, particularly in the technical or economic sphere, often creates a subsequent need for coordination in related

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[52] McNamara K. R. Imagining Europe: The cultural foundations of EU governance. *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 2015. Vol. 53(S1). P. 22–39. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12276

areas of policymaking. However, the focus of this paradigm lies less in the so-called spillover effect itself and more in the role of institutions in transforming functional impulses into political outcomes. Schmitter[53] emphasises that supranational bodies, especially the European Commission, serve as strategic drivers of integration. These institutions are capable of aggregating, formalising, and projecting interests that extend beyond the individual preferences of member states. Within this framework, bureaucratic autonomy is seen as a necessary condition for effective governance in an environment where decision-making unfolds across multiple levels. This setting also draws attention to the role of organised interests, such as business associations, trade unions, and professional networks, which contribute to the legitimacy of emerging regulatory structures by introducing new actors into the political process. At the same time, this approach does not overlook the political dimension of integration. In his later work, Schmitter[54] acknowledges that the initial model was based on an overly linear understanding of institutional development. In this revised view, integration is a contingent process shaped by technical coordination as well as by the capacity of institutions to sustain trust, mediate interests, and offer symbolic representation. As issues like migration, social policy, and energy autonomy have become more politically charged, member states increasingly resort to veto power or request exemptions, even when collective solutions are functionally required. These developments have reshaped neofunctionalism into what may be described as a mode of reflexive modernisation, one that recognises the importance of the institutional environment, public legitimacy, and symbolic resources in the evolution of integration. Institutional progress is now seen as depending on the capacity to mediate strategically in a context marked by growing political contestation. From this perspective, neofunctionalism offers an analytical framework for understanding how supranational institutions manage to channel intergovernmental tensions toward structured cooperation and the gradual consolidation of shared commitments.

2. Unlike neofunctionalism, the ***intergovernmental approach*** views European integration not as the outcome of internal institutional logic or the autonomous development of supranational structures, but as a sequence of strategic agreements negotiated among national governments pursuing their own interests. In the formulation of liberal intergovernmentalism proposed

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[53] Schmitter P. C. Neo-neofunctionalism. *European integration theory* / (Eds.) A. Wiener, T. Diez. Oxford University Press, 2004. P. 45–74.

[54] Schmitter P. C. Ernst B. Haas and the legacy of neofunctionalism. *Journal of European Public Policy*. 2005. Vol. 12(2). P. 255–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500043951

by Moravcsik, the primary drivers of integration are found within domestic political dynamics of the member states. These include coalitions of influential actors, business interests, party alignments, and public expectations[55].

Within this perspective, the European level serves as an institutional extension of intergovernmental compromises that reflect preferences defined at the national level. Supranational institutions are thus conceived as instruments designed to reduce transaction costs, enhance the transparency of agreements, and ensure the stability of repeated interactions. The EU, in this model, operates as a political forum based on the delegation of executive authority from member states, which continue to play the leading role in setting the direction of integration. This approach is particularly effective in explaining those areas where state interests remain strategically sensitive, such as foreign policy, security coordination, tax harmonisation, or the allocation of budgetary resources. Its analytical strength lies in its ability to explain why major breakthroughs in integration, such as the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, were achieved through intensive intergovernmental negotiations instead of gradual institutional evolution. For this reason, Moravcsik[56] emphasises that the EU's durability rests on the pragmatic recognition of mutual dependence among states, which outweighs the pursuit of ideological unity or a common identity. Liberal intergovernmentalism interprets integration as a political strategy shaped by domestic calculations and the shifting priorities of national governments.

Nonetheless, this perspective tends to underestimate the role of institutions as autonomous sites of policymaking and as arenas for symbolic legitimation. It also offers a limited explanation for why states accept instruments such as the primacy of EU law or juridical arbitration procedures that constrain national autonomy without providing an immediate strategic benefit. In this regard, the distinctiveness of the European experience lies in the emergence of durable frameworks of multilevel governance even within predominantly intergovernmental structures. These arrangements gradually alter prevailing understandings of the acceptable limits of state authority. The EU thus demonstrates that political coexistence can emerge through institutionalised interdependence, without relying on the consolidation of centralised authority.

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[55] Moravcsik A. *The choice for Europe: Social purpose and state power from Messina to Maastricht*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998.

[56] Moravcsik A. The European constitutional compromise and the neofunctionalist legacy. *Journal of European Public Policy*. 2005. Vol. 12(2). P. 349–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500044215

3. The third approach, *postfunctionalism*, emerged as a theoretical response to the limitations encountered by both neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism in accounting for the later phases of European integration, particularly following the Maastricht Treaty. Developed primarily by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, this framework shifts analytical focus toward political mobilisation, public legitimation, and collective identity. It emphasizes what states are willing to accept within societies that are increasingly sensitive to sovereignty, cultural belonging, and national identity, rather than focusing on their institutional capacities[57]. Postfunctionalism interprets integration as a political conflict that unfolds in public arenas where identities, interests, and shared understandings of political credibility are formed and expressed. Topics once treated as technocratic, such as fiscal discipline, migration governance, and climate commitments, have become central to political polarisation. In turn, even decisions adopted within formally intergovernmental frameworks have become more exposed to domestic electoral pressures, media dynamics, and party-based contestation. This approach offers a compelling framework for analysing the fragmentation of the EU's political space. The concept of a *"transnational cleavage"* introduced by Hooghe and Marks captures an emerging line of conflict between cosmopolitan, pro-European actors and those who advocate for national autonomy and traditional identity. It is important to note, however, that postfunctionalism does not simply identify constraints. It also points to new modes of adaptation. Integration under conditions of heightened politicisation gives rise to evolving forms of cooperation, including coalitions of willing states, enhanced collaboration, and institutional asymmetry. These configurations allow for action even in the absence of complete consensus. The EU has demonstrated an ability to develop mechanisms for managing such arrangements within a shared normative setting. This is where the distinctiveness of the European integration process becomes apparent: instead of avoiding political conflict, the Union incorporates it into its institutional design. It fosters coexistence within a structurally plural environment by avoiding the imposition of artificial unanimity. In this sense, postfunctionalism reshapes the understanding of integration by portraying it as a constellation of pathways responsive to evolving political conditions, instead of reducing it to a single linear trajectory. This perspective opens new directions for exploring the potential of democratic innovation within multilevel governance systems.

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[57] Hooghe L., Marks G. A postfunctionalist theory of European integration: From permissive consensus to constraining dissensus. *British Journal of Political Science*. 2009. Vol. 39(1). P. 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000409

A comparison of the three theoretical approaches to integration highlights the complexity of the European Union as a sui generis political formation. Its distinctiveness lies in combining core elements from multiple conceptual models without conforming to any single one. Neofunctionalist dynamics are evident in the evolution of supranational institutions. Intergovernmental features appear in the prominence of state-led arrangements in strategically sensitive areas. Postfunctionalism helps explain the political responsiveness to debates around migration, sovereignty, and identity. The Union demonstrates that effective governance does not require strict centralisation or uniformity. As Schmitter[58] observes, the integration process maintains a degree of adaptive flexibility while gradually expanding the frameworks that enable collective action. This produces a distinctive form of political order in which theoretical approaches intersect and coexist, creating a structure that remains stable despite its multidimensional character.

In this light, the political integration of the European Union shapes a new model of supranational coexistence that combines the preservation of national autonomy with a structured capacity for joint decision-making. The Union's complex institutional setup reflects its ability to uphold political unity within diversity by employing multilevel governance, varied forms of participation, and asymmetrical modes of cooperation. The integration dynamic of the European Community reveals a pragmatic alignment of interdependence, sensitive to the diversity of political cultures and strategic interests. This ability to coordinate action without requiring complete homogeneity is a defining feature of the EU's institutional innovation and underpins its resilience in a rapidly changing global environment.

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[58] Schmitter P.C. Ernst B. Haas and the legacy of neofunctionalism.

1.4. European Values: A Normative Foundation of Unity and an Instrument of Global Influence
(Alina Iovcheva)

Since its inception, European integration has been guided by more than economic ties or political arrangements – it has also drawn momentum from a deeper commitment to shared values. The commitment to peace, freedom, democratic participation, and respect for human rights formed the moral and legal basis of the European project. These principles laid the groundwork for rethinking state sovereignty and encouraged the emergence of a European identity that transcended national boundaries. As the institutional framework of the European Community evolved, values acquired formal normative status and became central to the development of its political and legal structure. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union frames respect for human dignity, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights as fundamental requirements for membership and engagement in the European community, elevating them beyond the level of mere aspirations.

Today, these values are embedded in the operational logic of the Union. Amid the Union's complex landscape of cultural plurality, political contention, and uneven democratic development, shared values provide a common point of orientation, all the while respecting the sovereignty of individual member states. Disputes over value-related norms, such as media freedom or judicial independence, put the Union's ability to preserve normative coherence during periods of political divergence to the test.

Beyond their internal function, values serve a strategic role in the European Union's external engagement. In a global environment increasingly shaped by contestation over norms rather than mere resource competition, the EU positions itself as a normative power focused on setting standards and promoting a particular model of legitimacy, distancing itself from the logic of military-political alliances. In this way, values become instruments of its global influence.

In examining the role of value norms in the formation and functioning of the European Union, it is important to recognize that these principles did not emerge arbitrarily or without historical grounding. Their content and legitimacy draw upon a longstanding intellectual tradition that shaped foundational views on the human being, society, and the nature of political order. Already in Antiquity, essential orientations were established that centered on the ideas of the common good and justice as the basis of political legitimacy. Plato's philosophical vision emphasizes a normative order that links the structure of the soul to the structure of the state, where harmony depends on aligning personal well-being with the collective good. Aristotle, in turn, regards the political community as the setting for the realization of an ethical life, in which personal and civic flourishing are closely intertwined. These thinkers helped shape an understanding of politics as more than

administrative control – as a moral framework for collective life, which later became a cornerstone of the humanist tradition in European thought.

Though these ideas belong to a distant past, their influence remains persistent in the evolving understanding of the ethical dimension of power, the limitation of political authority by moral considerations, and the primacy of reasoned law over arbitrary rule. This humanist strand gained further articulation in the legal heritage of Rome, particularly through Stoic philosophy. Within this intellectual tradition, the concept of natural law takes shape as a form of universal moral reason that exists independently of political authority. This notion laid the groundwork for the idea of dignity as an ontological equality shared by all individuals, which would later become a cornerstone of the European legal tradition. In contemporary EU law, dignity is understood as the primary source of all other rights, grounded in the inherent worth of the individual and independent of any state-bestowed status[59].

This idea was further developed within the framework of Christian anthropology, which deepened the ethical significance of the human person. In medieval theology, particularly in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, the concept of natural law is articulated as a higher source of moral judgment that should serve as a constraint on positive law. This line of thought did not disappear with the advent of secular modernity. On the contrary, it was reinterpreted during the Enlightenment through the lens of autonomy, universality, and rational law. In the writings of Kant, Rousseau, and Locke, the notion of the individual as an autonomous subject endowed with rights by virtue of human nature itself finds clear expression, with these rights understood as independent of state authority[60].

This philosophical foundation contributed to the emergence of a legal conception in which dignity came to function as a practical criterion of legitimacy. In Europe's more recent history, this idea would be given formal expression in Article 1 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which declares dignity as the highest principle, taking precedence over freedom, equality, or solidarity[61]. In the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union, this principle plays a direct regulatory role and serves as a

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[59] Nussbaum M. C. *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Harvard University Press, 2011; Tuck R. *Natural rights theories: Their origin and development*. Cambridge University Press, 1979.

[60] Habermas J. The concept of human dignity and the realistic utopia of human rights. *Metaphilosophy*. 2010. Vol. 41(4). P. 464–480. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9973.2010.01648.x; Bohman J., Lutz-Bachmann M. (eds.). *Perpetual peace: Essays on Kant's cosmopolitan ideal*. MIT Press, 1997.

[61] European Union. Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. *Official Journal of the European Union*. 2012. C 326. P. 391–407. https://surl.li/mctmef

basis for legal reasoning in cases concerning social protection, discrimination, data privacy, and medical ethics[62].

The transition from philosophical ideas to legally binding norms unfolded gradually and unevenly. Only as the European Union's political institutions gained strength did the need arise to formalize the normative foundation of integration. The Maastricht Treaty brought the question of political identity to the forefront, reflecting the Union's maturity as an economic entity. The Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 introduced, for the first time, a logic of accountability in response to violations of common principles. The Lisbon Treaty of 2007 marked the culmination of this evolution by granting values the status of foundational legal norms with direct effect[63]. This development significantly reshaped the structure of the Union. Values are no longer confined to preambles or political declarations. They are now integrated into the mechanisms of enlargement, access to funding, rule of law assessment, and democratic governance within member states. This has given rise to a normative framework in which law and values interact as a single reasoning structure, shaping institutional decisions and grounding the legitimacy of a shared European identity[64].

A key question remains: can the values set out in the Union's founding documents serve simultaneously as enforceable legal norms and as a symbolic bridge across diverse national identities? Unlike norms, identity cannot be standardized through legislation. It is rooted in historical experience, cultural memory, and deeply held conceptions of legitimate authority. This enduring paradox lies at the heart of integration: the Union seeks cohesion through shared principles while simultaneously accommodating divergent national conceptions of legitimacy and justice. As Thomas Risse[65] notes, European integration engages national identities through a nuanced and ongoing process of negotiation, without aiming to eliminate them.

Far from dissolving distinct identities, the process fosters a layered sense of belonging, where national and European loyalties intersect and coexist. In such conditions, identity becomes a dynamic construction that links the national and supranational levels. This dynamic is most visible when

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[62] Fink M. *Frontex and human rights: Responsibility in "multi-actor situations" under the ECHR and EU public liability law*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

[63] Craig P., De Búrca G. *EU law: Text, cases, and materials*. 7th ed. Oxford University Press, 2020.

[64] Kochenov D. The acquis and its principles: The enforcement of the "law" versus the enforcement of "values" in the European Union. *The enforcement of EU law and values: Ensuring member states' compliance* / (Eds.). A. Jakab, D. Kochenov. Oxford University Press, 2017. P. 9–27.

[65] Risse T. *A community of Europeans? Transnational identities and public spheres*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010. https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801459184

interpretations of European values come into conflict with political practices that enjoy local legitimacy. In Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland and Hungary, the rise of sovereignist rhetoric has coincided with institutional resistance to EU standards on judicial independence, media freedom, and minority rights. National governments frequently present such resistance as an assertion of sovereign prerogative *vis-à-vis EU legal oversight*, invoking democratic pluralism to legitimize divergence.

Here, European values are less often seen as a universal moral code and more frequently interpreted as a political tool that, in the eyes of local elites, threatens the principle of national self-determination. As Ulrich Sedelmeier[66] observes, these states do not necessarily reject the values themselves. Instead, they question Brussels' authority to serve as the final interpreter. The core difficulty stems less from questioning the legitimacy of the norms themselves than from concerns about how they are implemented and enforced in practice.

However, such tensions are not confined to the post-socialist region. In Western Europe as well, different forms of value demarcation emerge in political debates on migration policy, secularism, and multiculturalism. Neil Fligstein, Alina Polyakova and Wayne Sandholtz[67] show that in many countries deeply embedded in the European project, national identity still serves as the main anchor for political loyalty, whereas European identity is often perceived more abstractly as a functional tie to institutions. The challenge in such cases lies in divergent understandings of how to apply and prioritize the Union's core values, not in their outright denial. In France, for example, political controversy around secularism (*laïcité*) intersects with European conceptions of religious freedom. In the Netherlands and Germany, the integration of Muslim communities becomes a point of friction between commitments to openness and concerns over cultural cohesion. Far from undermining the Union's normative coherence, such debates highlight the political complexity of translating shared principles into practice and the need for interpretative flexibility. The European integration model allows for multiple modes of expressing common values, provided that fundamental principles are respected. This capacity for interpretive adaptability has become an important asset for the Union's resilience.

Even so, flexibility of this kind does not fully eliminate the risk of superficial alignment. The formal adoption of common norms does not guarantee meaningful internalization unless they are embedded in the cultural

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[66] Sedelmeier U. Anchoring democracy from above? The European Union and democratic backsliding in Hungary and Romania after accession. *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 2014. Vol. 52(1). P. 105–121. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12082
[67] Fligstein N., Polyakova A., Sandholtz W. European integration, nationalism and European identity. *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 2012. Vol. 50(S1). P. 106–122. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2011.02230.x

imagination and everyday practices of European citizens. As Jan Zielonka[68] notes, The Union's success as a community of values hinges on more than legal commitments – it requires a compelling narrative that enables citizens from diverse backgrounds to see themselves as participants in a common political endeavour. At the same time, the Union has begun to demonstrate a growing capacity to bridge this gap through the gradual internalization of values in practical settings. A range of educational, professional, and civic initiatives (from Erasmus+ to the European Citizens' Initiative) create spaces of intercultural exchange in which values are enacted in everyday contexts and cease to function as distant abstractions.

In this perspective, the idea of *"experiential identity"*[69] becomes especially relevant. Attachment to Europe emerges through lived participation in shared initiatives that cultivate solidarity, a sense of common purpose and mutual responsibility, extending beyond mere intellectual alignment with political objectives. A sense of attachment to Europe develops through direct involvement in collective experiences that foster solidarity, shared purpose and mutual responsibility, alongside intellectual agreement with political aims.

Thus, the relationship between European values and national identities should not be framed as a conflict or a binary opposition. It represents a space of sustained political and cultural dialogue, where institutional cohesion requires reinforcement through symbolic meaning. When values operate as the language of institutional legitimacy, and identities serve as the structure of emotional engagement, successful integration depends on the ongoing alignment between the two.

It is also essential to clarify that values play a central role in shaping a shared European identity. This identity fosters a transnational sense of belonging, allowing individuals from diverse national backgrounds to perceive themselves as part of a political project that transcends state boundaries. In doing so, these values acquire a universalized content that helps structure interaction within the Union and provides a reference point for the European Union's external positioning.

Against this backdrop, values shift from serving as internal organizing principles to functioning as a strategic asset in the realm of international affairs. The European Community emerges as a geopolitical actor that contributes to the global order by promoting democratic norms, protecting human rights, and affirming the rule of law as standards of legitimacy.

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[68] Zielonka J. *Is the EU doomed?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014.

[69] Royuela V., López-Bazo E. Understanding the process of creation of European identity – The role of Cohesion Policy. *Investigaciones Regionales – Journal of Regional Research*. 2020. Vol. 46. P. 51–70. https://doi.org/10.38191/iirr-jorr.20.003

To gain a more nuanced understanding of this process, it is useful to refer to the concept of *"normative power Europe"* introduced by Manners[70]. In this study, the concept is approached from a critical-normative perspective that highlights the political nature of norm creation and the internal tensions of the European project. Normative power is interpreted as a dynamic process shaped by interaction and marked by ongoing dilemmas of legitimacy and effectiveness. This theoretical lens invites comparison with other approaches to the EU's external action. For instance, Joseph Nye's concept of *"soft power"*[71] emphasizes the appeal of culture and institutions, while normative power focuses on ideas of moral legitimacy and ethical correctness. From a social constructivist viewpoint, normative power emerges through the co-construction of identities and norms. Zielonka[72] cautions that when values are universalized, they may risk becoming instruments of structural dominance, especially in asymmetrical power relations.

Institutionally, this orientation is embedded in Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union, where democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are identified as key principles guiding external action. These normative principles act as reference points guiding the Union's external engagements and structuring its expectations *vis-à-vis* partner states. This is reflected in association agreements, political dialogues, market access conditions, and funding mechanisms that impose legal obligations on partner states[73].

At the same time, this normative framework reveals its fragility at the level of implementation. Despite the formal mechanisms in place, the EU's foreign policy often faces limitations due to a lack of consensus among member states. This becomes particularly evident when geopolitical interests diverge from declared normative commitments. In the case of relations with China or Saudi Arabia, for example, human rights considerations are frequently subordinated, leading to accusations of double standards.

Such contradictions are further intensified by internal challenges. When some member states violate legal norms within the EU, it disrupts the functioning of monitoring mechanisms and simultaneously weakens the Union's credibility in promoting its normative narrative internationally. Promoting the rule of law globally becomes increasingly difficult when its

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[70] Manners I. Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms? https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353

[71] Nye J. S. *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs, 2004.

[72] Zielonka J. Europe's new civilizing missions: the EU's normative power discourse. *Journal of Political Ideologies*. 2013. Vol. 18(1). P. 35–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2013.750172

[73] Balfour R., Carta C. (eds.). *The European External Action Service and national foreign ministries: convergence or divergence?* Routledge, 2016.

application cannot be consistently upheld within the Union itself[74]. Nevertheless, these challenges do not diminish the normative potential of the EU. On the contrary, they generate pressure for the refinement of instruments and the improvement of legal and political mechanisms.

Against this backdrop, alternative channels for transmitting norms are gaining importance, especially those that operate independently of governmental initiatives. The involvement of civil society, support for international monitoring bodies, implementation of election missions, educational programmes, and human rights advocacy together contribute to a multifaceted framework of external engagement. The EU's normative influence unfolds through a decentralized, network-based system where standards are transmitted via institutional cooperation and continuous interaction. The EU's enlargement policy represents another crucial avenue through which its values are put into practice. The Copenhagen criteria clearly stipulate that only countries capable of ensuring stable democratic institutions, an independent judiciary, and respect for human rights may be considered for membership in this sense, the assessment of candidate states is guided by shared values, which also play a role in shaping the Union's self-understanding.

At the same time, criticism is mounting that the global relevance of the EU's normative agenda is constrained by its universalist orientation, which does not always take into account the historical and cultural specificities of partner states. Zielonka[75] points out that without a flexible interpretive framework, the EU's normative ambition may lose its legitimacy. Foundational principles should remain intact, yet their application demands political sensitivity, contextual adaptability and responsiveness to diverse social realities.

As a result, the European Union does not impose a rigid model backed by political dominance. Instead, it offers a normative platform that remains open to adaptation. Its soft power operates through mechanisms, institutions, symbols, and incentives for transformation. The distinctiveness of the European approach lies in its ability to foster a legal and political environment where participation is voluntary and shared norms are embraced without relying on instruments of control.

However, such openness does not guarantee the ascendancy of the European normative model at the global level. Increasingly, it must contend with competing value frameworks that offer alternative visions of societal organization, political legitimacy, and the role of human rights. In this environment, a form of global legal and normative pluralism is taking shape. The European Union, the United States, and China each act as influential

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[74] Closa C., Kochenov D. (eds.). *Reinforcing rule of law oversight in the European Union*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

[75] Zielonka J. Europe's new civilizing missions: the EU's normative power discourse.

norm entrepreneurs, articulating their own priorities, principles, and expectations in shaping the international order[76].

The American approach, shaped by the tradition of liberal individualism, combines normative rhetoric about the defence of democracy with the pragmatic objectives of foreign policy. At its core lies a strong emphasis on the idea of freedom as a universal imperative, pursued through a combination of diplomatic engagement, economic leverage, and political pressure. As G. John Ikenberry notes, the United States presents itself as the guarantor of a liberal international order, yet the sustainability of this role depends heavily on Washington's ability to uphold institutional stability and global credibility[77]. Against this background, the European model reflects a more integrative approach, in which values are embedded in political dialogue and institutional adaptation.

By contrast, the normative framework advanced by China centers on collective stability, political cohesion, and social order. These principles are often presented as an alternative route to modernization that does not rely on liberal democratization. The concept of *"democracy with Chinese characteristics"* is positioned within a strategic framework in which political participation is formalized, while the leading role is assigned to the ruling party as the guarantor of harmonious development[78]. This model is actively promoted through diplomatic and economic instruments, including *the Belt and Road Initiative*, which has come to represent a new source of normative appeal for countries across the Global South[79].

What distinguishes the European approach is its systematic integration of norms and values into international cooperation. The European Union's distinctiveness lies in the way it combines normative commitment with legally codified arrangements, where democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law function both as ethical ideals and as legal tools. Through this structure, normative commitments are translated into practice by means of codified benchmarks (most notably the Copenhagen criteria) and by attaching compliance obligations to financial instruments and oversight procedures[80].

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[76] Manners I. Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms? https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353

[77] Ikenberry G.J. *Liberal Leviathan: The origins, crisis, and transformation of the American world order*. Princeton University Press, 2011.

[78] Zhao S. The China model: can it replace the Western model of modernization? *Journal of Contemporary China*. 2010. Vol. 19(65). P. 419–436; Pan C. *Knowledge, desire and power in global politics: Western representations of China's rise*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2012.

[79] Breslin S. *China and the global political economy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

[80] Kochenov D. Reinforcing rule of law oversight in the European Union. *Reinforcing rule of law oversight in the European Union* / (Eds.). C. Closa, D. Kochenov.

In contrast to the more operational focus of the United States or the technocratic emphasis of China, the European Union's normative model demonstrates an ability to promote cultural and legal alignment through dialogue, multi-stage integration processes, and the active participation of civil society. Values are not imposed from above; they emerge through sustained institutional interaction. This approach has earned recognition for its capacity to support long-term transformation in public governance, civic engagement, and the legal environment[81].

Competition among the EU, the United States, and China is particularly evident in regions where normative influences intersect, such as the Eastern Partnership, the Western Balkans, Central Asia, and parts of Africa. In these settings, the European Union offers more than economic cooperation; it presents a consistent normative framework, linking access to resources with commitments in areas such as human rights, judicial independence, and transparent governance. The attractiveness of this model stems both from the material support it offers and from its capacity to cultivate an atmosphere of trust, inclusive participation and a sense of self-determination[82].

One of the EU's distinctive strengths lies in its capacity to create conditions in which states and societies voluntarily adopt European values as part of their own path toward modernization. Through academic exchange programmes (such as Erasmus+), institutional partnerships (*Twinning, SIGMA*), and civil society initiatives (*the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights*), the EU has developed a multi-level framework where normative engagement becomes embedded in everyday cooperation.

Amid global competition for normative influence, the European Union distinguishes itself by its ability to merge legal norms with ethical principles. It combines a commitment to universal standards with attentiveness to political context, aligning strategic orientation with openness to dialogue. The EU's approach functions as a space of interaction, where shared norms take shape through partnership, legitimate compromise, and institutional inclusion.

The Union's normative influence is expressed through the creation of standards that earn recognition on the basis of their effectiveness, legal durability, and ethical credibility. Despite the rise of authoritarian or transactional models, the European approach remains strategically relevant as an alternative to antagonistic global dynamics. Its strength lies in the combination of universal values and institutional articulation, which enables

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Cambridge University Press, 2016. P. 311–338. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316258774

[81] Youngs R. *The European Union's strategic autonomy and normative power*. Carnegie Europe, 2021.

[82] Zielonka J. *Europe as empire: The nature of the enlarged European Union*.

its norms to operate beyond the borders of the Union while remaining responsive to local conditions without compromising core principles. Through its support for inclusive processes and mutual recognition, the European Union contributes to the collective development of legitimate rules and positions itself as a shaping force within the emerging system of global governance.

1.5. The Eastern Partnership as a Testing Ground for the European Value Model (the Case of Ukraine)
(Alina Iovcheva)

In light of the political and institutional transformation of the European Union as a normative integration model, it becomes essential to examine its influence on transitional democracies, which act both as recipients and interpreters of the European experience. Ukraine, currently navigating a profound socio-political crisis while conducting a full-scale defensive war, stands out as one of the most complex and vivid illustrations of this dynamic. Its path toward European integration demands a focused inquiry that goes beyond the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, encompassing the lived experience of institutional renewal, value alignment, and the exercise of geopolitical agency.

Ukraine's progress toward EU membership cannot be understood as a straightforward integration into a pre-existing framework. Rather, it reveals a diversity of directions, competing expectations, and, at the same time, an extraordinary consolidation of political will in response to both external and internal pressures. This trajectory should therefore be explored through three interlinked dimensions: *the stages of political and institutional adaptation; the strategic challenges encountered during the process of transformation; and the tangible outcomes that reflect Ukraine's capacity to implement European standards under conditions of severe political turbulence.*

1. Stages of Ukraine's European Integration: From Declarations to Candidacy. Ukraine's initial engagement with the idea of European integration was more symbolic than strategically grounded. As early as the 1990 Declaration of State Sovereignty, the aspiration to participate in the broader European process was articulated, yet this commitment lacked both the institutional capacity to be enacted and a unified vision among political elites regarding the country's foreign policy orientation. The post-Soviet transformation, the multi-directional stance of early governments, and the severe economic crisis of the 1990s all hindered the establishment of a consistent pro-European course.

Formal relations with the European Union began with the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1994, which laid the foundation for political dialogue. Nevertheless, it made no provision for gradual legal alignment with EU norms or for the possibility of future membership[83]. Although the PCA contained references to democratic principles and market economy, in practice, it reflected what has been termed

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[83] Petrov R. *Legal and political expectations of the neighbour countries from the European Neighbourhood Policy.* European University Institute, 2006. https://surl.li/ugkhms

a model of "limited Europeanisation," within which Eastern European states were seen primarily as partners with minimal institutional convergence[84]. The EU soon redirected its focus toward the integration of Central European countries, leaving Ukraine outside the scope of its enlargement strategy. Internal instability and a lack of political determination within Ukraine contributed to a dynamic of asymmetric indifference: the EU refrained from encouraging deeper engagement, and Ukraine showed little readiness to advance integration on its own initiative.

A pivotal shift occurred in 2003 with the adoption of Ukraine's national Strategy for Integration into the EU. Despite its declarative tone, the strategy established a normative basis for defining European integration as a strategic goal. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the document functioned more as a reflection of foreign policy positioning than as a roadmap for reform. By 2004, most political initiatives were not matched by significant legislative or administrative changes. This phase may be described as one of nominal Europeanisation, marked by the prevalence of European rhetoric without corresponding structural transformation[85].

A decisive transformation in Ukraine's European trajectory unfolded during the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–2014. The government's refusal, under President Viktor Yanukovych, to sign the Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013 ignited a sweeping wave of protest that elevated the idea of integration from a foreign policy preference to a matter of democratic legitimacy. These events revealed that, for a significant part of Ukrainian society, the European Union is perceived as a normative order in which the rule of law, transparency, and dignity are experienced as concrete realities grounded in everyday life, not merely abstract declarations[86].

The signing of the Association Agreement in 2014, and its full ratification by 2017, marked a shift in relations from partnership to structured alignment. The agreement introduced binding obligations to incorporate elements of the acquis communautaire and launched mechanisms for legal adaptation, sectoral cooperation, and oversight of reform implementation. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) fostered alignment in areas such as competition policy, public procurement, technical standards, and sanitary regulations. For the first time, integration began to influence the internal logic of governance, beyond the scope of external relations.

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[84] Wolczuk K. *Integration without Europeanisation? Ukraine and its policy towards the European Union (EUI Working Paper RSCAS No. 2004/15)*. European University Institute, 2004. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2344806

[85] Wolczuk K. Ukraine's policy towards the European Union: A strategic partnership? *Ukraine: Quo vadis?* / (Ed.). S. Fischer. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2004. P. 17–30.

[86] Kuzio T. *Ukraine: Democratization, corruption, and the new Russian imperialism*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015.

In 2017, Ukraine was granted visa-free travel to the European Union. This achievement had both practical and symbolic dimensions, reflecting the outcome of sustained institutional adaptation. To meet the benchmarks of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, the country adopted over 140 measures, including reforms in anti-corruption policy, data protection, migration management, and the issuance of biometric documents[87]. This phase signified a move from symbolic engagement to technical alignment, where progress was increasingly assessed through legal and administrative performance.

The culmination of Ukraine's integration effort emerged in 2022 against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion. On 28 February, Ukraine submitted its formal application for EU membership. The European Council's decision of 23 June 2022 to grant candidate status served as both a political expression of solidarity and a legal endorsement of Ukraine's European future. In its opinion, the European Commission commended Ukraine's "remarkable resilience" and highlighted its progress in digital governance, macro-financial management, and public sector transparency, achieved under wartime conditions[88]. This step marked a fundamental shift from a framework of measured compliance to one shaped by shared identity. Political will, in this context, emerged as no less significant than technical preparedness. Ukraine's path to candidacy should thus be understood as a profound political transformation in which European integration has evolved into a framework for redefining the very character of the state. Under conditions of existential threat, integration has become a mode of political being, a means of affirming sovereignty and direction in a radically altered geopolitical environment.

2. Strategic Challenges to Ukraine's European Integration Agenda. Despite notable progress, Ukraine's pursuit of European integration cannot be described as a consistent trajectory toward legal and institutional alignment. Its development has been shaped by a set of persistent challenges that are structural in nature and extend beyond questions of administrative capacity. These difficulties also affect the resilience of Ukraine's democratic transformation amid a multilayered crisis. Rather than viewing them as temporary or technical, they should be understood as reflecting deeper gaps between European normative expectations and domestic political, administrative, and socio-cultural realities. Their complexity demands analysis across multiple disciplines.

One of the central challenges remains *the disparity in institutional capacity*. Having established dedicated bodies to advance the adoption of the acquis communautaire, including the Government Office for European and

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[87] European Commission. *Ukraine 2023 report – Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood*. Brussels, 2022.

[88] European Commission. *Fifth progress report on the implementation by Ukraine of the Action Plan on Visa Liberalisation*. Brussels, 2015.

Euro-Atlantic Integration, Ukraine still faces key weaknesses. These include the lack of effective coordination across levels of government, fragmented interagency cooperation, and the generally low quality of regulatory drafting. The adoption of European standards often takes place in a declarative mode, resulting in legal acts that lack proper implementation mechanisms. This dynamic, widely described in the academic literature as "façade Europeanisation", illustrates the disconnect between political commitment and the inertia of public administration[89].

Another major obstacle is *the structural instability of the political system*. Beyond complicating the delivery of medium-term strategies, this instability ties the integration process to changes in government, electoral cycles, and shifting parliamentary coalitions. Frequent turnover in the executive branch erodes institutional memory and undermines continuity, with strategic planning often replaced by short-term political maneuvering. Analysis of the implementation of the Association Agreement shows that even key reform laws are frequently passed under external pressure or in pursuit of tactical advantage, weakening the long-term coherence of Ukraine's legal and institutional development[90].

Within this broader landscape, the entrenched role of *oligarchic influence* remains a central obstacle. It functions as an active political and economic force shaped by the past, continuously distorting the trajectory of integration. Oligarchic networks, control over key media outlets, and privileged access to administrative resources can obstruct the adoption of EU standards in pivotal domains, including judicial reform and the establishment of anti-corruption mechanisms.

Another persistent challenge is *the widespread distrust in public institutions*, which undermines public engagement with reform. Although European integration continues to enjoy broad support at the level of official discourse, it is often perceived as an externally driven agenda, disconnected from domestic priorities. This disconnect is compounded by the absence of a consistent communication strategy capable of conveying the complexity and long-term nature of the process. Accordingly, a paradox emerges as society supports the idea of integration but remains uncertain about the state's ability to achieve it. A similar pattern has been observed in relation to public attitudes toward Euro-Atlantic integration[91].

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[89] Sedelmeier U. Anchoring democracy from above? The European Union and democratic backsliding in Hungary and Romania after accession. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12082

[90] Wolczuk K. et al. *The struggle for Ukraine*. Chatham House, 2017.

[91] *Суспільна підтримка євроатлантичного курсу України: Оцінки та рекомендації: Соціологічне дослідження Центру Разумкова*. Razumkov Centre, Київ, 2021. 55 с. https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021-nato-ukr.pdf

The impact of *Russia's military aggression* requires particular attention. Beyond the physical destruction of infrastructure, loss of life, and economic disruption, the invasion directly targets the very concept of European integration as an alternative model for Ukraine's development. The war has placed extraordinary strain on the state, which operates under constant mobilization. This inevitably slows the implementation of complex reforms, especially in the areas of justice, governance, and anti-corruption. At the same time, the aggression has brought new meaning to the integration process, transforming it into a form of civilizational self-defence.

Attention must also be paid to *the ambivalence within the European Union itself*. Despite strategic support for Ukraine, the bloc lacks a unified position on the future of enlargement. Many member states remain cautious when it comes to practical steps toward Ukraine's accession, often citing limited institutional capacity and the need for internal consolidation. This caution is reflected in carefully worded decisions that avoid firm timelines or binding commitments. Therefore, Ukraine faces a dual burden: it is expected to carry out demanding reforms without a clear understanding of the timeframe or structure of its potential membership.

The challenges of Ukraine's European integration extend beyond matters of implementation and reach into the *realm of ontology*. They call into question the deeper foundations of political agency and institutional adaptability. At stake is the state's ability to sustain reform from within, resist internal and external pressures, cultivate public trust, and respond to shifting geopolitical conditions. In Ukraine's case, integration is not a process of model transfer. It is a test of whether such models can remain meaningful under conditions of historical rupture.

3. Achievements of the Ukrainian State in the Process of European Integration. Ukraine faces multidimensional challenges. Nonetheless, its European integration has been marked by a series of accomplishments indicating a gradual capacity to adapt to EU standards. These achievements should not be assessed exclusively through quantitative indicators or procedural benchmarks. It concerns a *qualitative transformation* in the logic of governance, an increase in transparency, accountability, and regulatory alignment with the EU, which is reflected both in political discourse and in institutional practices.

Thus, one of the most visible successes has been the *systemic reform of the anti-corruption infrastructure* launched after 2014. Ukraine established a range of independent bodies: the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU), the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), the National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NAPC), and the High Anti-Corruption Court (HACC), with the mandate to combat corruption across all levels of the public administration. According to assessments by GRECO and Transparency International, while the effectiveness of these *institutions remains inconsistent*, the anti-corruption system has achieved institutional

consolidation and demonstrates a relative independence of its core agencies from political interference[92].

A second critically important achievement lies in the *reform of the civil service and public administration*, which draws on the principles of the European administrative tradition: political impartiality, transparency, and meritocracy. The Law on Civil Service adopted in 2015 and the activities of the National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service (NAUCS) laid the groundwork for implementing a competitive recruitment system, building a professional senior civil service, and transitioning toward competence-based management. Although the war has introduced disruptions, the institutional framework of public administration has demonstrated resilience by maintaining the continuity of government operations during the invasion.

Particular attention should also be given to *progress in the field of digitalisation*, which the European Commission has repeatedly recognised as exemplary within the Eastern Partnership region[93]. The Diia programme has evolved into a new form of state presence, transforming the relationship between citizens and public institutions beyond its technical function. The introduction of digital services, electronic documents, and automated registers has reduced corruption risks, improved access to administrative services, and laid the foundation for further fiscal, educational, and healthcare reforms. Ukraine became the first country to officially integrate into the EU internal market in the area of digital trust services under the eIDAS framework and, in 2023, began technical accession to the EU's Single Digital Market[94].

Particularly illustrative is the progress made in the reform of *public procurement*. The Prozorro system, operating on the principle of "everyone sees everything," has been recognised by the World Bank, the EBRD, and the EU as one of the most transparent in Eastern Europe[95]. Its introduction helped reduce budgetary losses and at the same time laid the groundwork for public trust in the management of state finances. According to Open Contracting Partnership, the implementation of Prozorro has enabled Ukraine to save over €1 billion annually[96].

Another strategic achievement was *the granting of visa-free travel with the EU in 2017*, which served as a verification of the state's implementation

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[92] *Annual report 2023*. Transparency International Ukraine, 2023.

[93] *General report on the activities of the European Union 2022*. European Commission, 2022.

[94] Approximation of Ukraine's eID infrastructure to the EU standards. *EU4DigitalUA*. 2023. https://surl.li/svalaq

[95] *Fighting bid rigging in public procurement in the energy sector in Ukraine*. OECD Publishing, 2021. https://surl.li/txxlku

[96] Open Contracting Partnership. *Armed with open data: How Ukraine saved billions on defence procurement*. 8 December 2021. https://surl.li/deamua

capacity. Between 2009 and 2017, Ukraine fulfilled the four thematic blocks of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan: document security, border management, combating irregular migration, and protection of human rights. The visa-free regime became a symbolic shift from "neighbourhood" to a limited form of "European citizenship," with the recognition of Ukraine as a state capable of ensuring basic standards of security, rights protection, and administrative effectiveness.

Lastly, *the normative impact of candidate status*, granted to Ukraine in June 2022, deserves special attention. In response to this status, a number of reforms were promptly introduced, including the re-establishment of the High Council of Justice and the High Qualification Commission of Judges, along with legislative changes in media regulation, minority rights protection, and anti-corruption policy[97]. These reforms are still underway. Nonetheless, the emergence of mechanisms for monitoring, reporting, and reciprocal accountability between Ukraine and the EU signals a qualitative shift in their political partnership, moving from an association framework toward a pre-accession logic.

Taken together, these achievements point to a shift in the underlying framework: from imitative adoption of European norms to an emerging attempt at genuine institutional embedding, even under conditions of systemic turbulence and external threat. This makes it possible to speak of the gradual formation of an internal normative culture which, despite its fragmentation, carries the potential to shape a new logic of governance and provide a foundation for a sustainable European trajectory. At the same time, it is important to stress that the introduction of formal structures and legal norms does not, in itself, ensure the irreversibility of change. At this stage, the core challenge lies in **institutional adaptation,** which involves integrating EU models into Ukraine's political environment shaped by deep transition, polarization, and the realities of war, rather than simply reproducing them. The key question is whether newly established institutions serve as carriers of transformed governance practices or whether they merely preserve the logic of administrative mimicry. This issue is particularly visible in the restructuring of public authority initiated after the signing of the Association Agreement. The creation of new regulatory agencies, oversight instruments, and coordination mechanisms may, at first glance, signal deep alignment with European standards. Nonetheless, institutional expansion in quantitative terms does not necessarily imply a qualitative shift in governance logic. The critical question remains whether these structures are truly reshaping the rules of the game or simply simulating formal compliance with EU expectations.

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[97] European Commission. *Ukraine 2023 report*. Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 8 November 2023. https://surli.cc/qvzroa

This dynamic, marked by the simultaneous display of reformist alignment and latent anti-European resistance driven by entrenched informal interests, has been described in the literature as "hybrid Europeanisation". Comparative analysis of other enlargement contexts shows that EU norms tend to produce lasting effects only when internalised as operative rules, instead of being applied through mechanical replication. In Ukraine's case, this transformation has been uneven. In several key areas such as the judiciary, civil service, and competition regulation, formal adaptation has occurred without a corresponding transformation in institutional practice. This results in a kind of "dual institutionalism", where modern regulatory frameworks are superimposed upon outdated behavioural patterns without displacing them[98]. Among all domains of adaptation, the justice system stands out as the clearest indicator of institutional tension. The establishment of the High Council of Justice, the Qualification Commission, and the involvement of international monitors in judicial appointments reflect an effort to align the judiciary with European expectations. Yet, the system continues to suffer from political pressure, lack of independence, and a self-contained corporate culture, all of which call into question the depth of institutional change. A similarly difficult situation exists in the anti-corruption domain. Although the creation of NABU, SAPO, and HACC is seen as a regional benchmark, these institutions continue to face political resistance, resource constraints, and repeated interference from parliament and government actors. This highlights the fragility of the reforms, as institutional consolidation depends both on legal infrastructure and on the presence of stable political consensus. Without integration into a broader political order, even the strongest institutions remain vulnerable to dismantling.

Institutional adaptation should not be viewed as a purely technical process, since it unfolds within a politically charged environment. For this reason, attention must be paid to the political narratives that accompany Ukraine's European course. These narratives shape public understanding of the legitimacy of integration, its scope, and its perceived viability. Amid the post-Soviet transformation, political rhetoric does more than communicate; it contributes to the formation of national identity, shapes collective values, and defines foreign policy direction. In the early years of independence, Ukrainian political discourse developed between two poles: the legacy of the Soviet past and the aspiration toward a European future. During this period, elite rhetoric played a crucial role in presenting European belonging as part

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[98] Kornivska V. Institutional efficiency in the context of Ukraine's eurointegration prospects. *Ekonomìčna Teorìâ.* 2024. Vol. 2. P. 67–80. https://doi.org/10.15407/etet2024.02.067

of state legitimacy[99]. This ambivalence of political meanings has since evolved and continues to be reflected in current narrative frameworks.

At present, several key narratives of European integration coexist in Ukraine's public space. The first, *"Europe as a civilisational choice"* presents integration as a form of historical recovery and a step away from the imperial past. The second, *"Europe as a contract"* interprets the relationship in transactional terms, linking reforms to access to resources and compliance with standards to prospects of membership. The third perspective, *"Europe as an internal norm",* centers on shaping political life according to domestic ideals of justice, dignity, and legal order, without relying on external pressure as the main driver[100]. These narratives can strengthen support for integration; however, their coexistence often produces a fragmented semantic landscape, especially during periods of political crisis. Studies conducted after the Revolution of Dignity indicate that support for the European trajectory rises significantly during periods of external shock and declines as political conditions return to normal. This fluctuation is largely due to the absence of a consistent narrative and a long-term vision of the "final destination" of integration[101].

After the outbreak of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, these narratives intensified and acquired new symbolic significance. The European Union increasingly came to be seen as a geopolitical space in which survival, democracy, and security are deeply interconnected, transcending its role as a mere normative reference point. Public opinion, according to sociological data, increasingly sees European integration as an existential necessity in the struggle for national sovereignty. In this heightened historical moment, a fundamental question arises: can Ukraine's institutional system convert public mobilisation around the idea of integration into durable mechanisms of policy formation, legitimate implementation, and effective enforcement? Without such a transformation, there is a risk that the momentum behind the integration narrative – shaped under existential threat – will remain disconnected from the practical dynamics of governance. Losing this momentum could lead to institutional rollback, a return to practices of

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[99] Iovcheva A. Between Soviet heritage and the European vector: the role of political rhetoric in shaping national identity in Ukraine (1991–2004). *Acta De Historia & Politica: Saeculum XXI.* 2025. Vol. 10. P. 49–64. https://doi.org/10.26693/ahpsxxi2025.10.049

[100] Zarembo K. Still normative power Europe? The perception of the EU in Ukraine amidst the Russian war of aggression. *The war against Ukraine and the EU: Facing new realities* / (Eds.) C. Wiesner, M. Knodt. Springer, 2024. P. 189–206.

[101] Razumkov Centre. *Support among citizens for Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO. Attitude to foreign countries. Attitude to peace talks (September 2024).* 31 October 2024. https://surl.li/ytwrpv

imitative compliance, erosion of public trust, and the eventual weakening of reform-oriented political discourse.

This risk draws attention to another critical dimension of the European integration process: the issue of ***normative internalisation***, which extends beyond procedural or technocratic compliance with EU standards. Institutional adaptation, even when formally aligned with European models, does not ensure the durability of democratic practices in the absence of a genuinely internalised and collectively shared normative foundation. This redirects analytical attention to a central question concerning the extent to which the principles that define the European community, especially the principle of human dignity, have been assimilated within Ukrainian society. This question arises in a context where public support for EU membership remains unequivocal, despite the country's post-Soviet legacy, historical fragmentation, and experience of political trauma.

As previously discussed, European integration in its current form implies entry into a normative space where ethical commitment holds precedence over regulatory formality. In this respect, it is the value core of the EU that becomes the true object of integration. It is therefore necessary to explore how these values are internalised within Ukrainian society, the political class, and the system of public administration. This level of integration is the least institutionalised, yet arguably the most decisive in the long term. In this sense, integration goes beyond policy and takes shape as a normative project, involving a process of ethical alignment between the candidate state and the EU's foundational principles. It is precisely at the level of values that the deepest tensions emerge in the post-Soviet context. In countries emerging from the Soviet system, the entrenchment of European norms is often hindered by inherited discursive legacies, weak institutionalisation of political culture, low public trust in state institutions, and the persistence of paternalistic expectations[102]. These factors generate an environment in which external normative impulses do not always translate into internalised motivation to adhere to rules. In such settings, values are at risk of being reduced to instruments of political convenience or superficial rhetoric, lacking genuine integration into institutional or societal practice.

The Ukrainian experience presents a distinct case in the broader discourse on European integration. Following the events of 2014, there was a marked transformation in the societal perception of European values. Over time, these were reinterpreted not just as external standards, but as expressions of resistance to authoritarianism, markers of dignity, and affirmations of civic empowerment. This shift is evident in the language of protest as well as in

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[102] Howard M. M. *The weakness of civil society in post-communist Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2003; Greskovits B. Rival views of postcommunist market society: Introduction to democracy and privatization in post-communist Europe. *East European Politics and Societies*. 2007. Vol. 21(1). P. 1–10.

the transformation of public attitudes. Indicators such as support for democracy, transparency, judicial independence, and equal rights show a consistent upward trend[103]. At the same time, a persistent divergence remains between declared adherence to EU values in legal frameworks and official discourse, and their practical implementation. This discrepancy becomes particularly visible in matters such as equal access to justice, the protection of minority rights, gender equality, and freedom of expression. In these areas, legal reforms such as those concerning media regulation or anti-discrimination measures are frequently adopted in response to demands from external stakeholders, among them the European Union, the Venice Commission, and international funding institutions. Despite the existence of these laws, their implementation is frequently limited or inconsistent. This reveals that internalisation of values cannot be reduced to formal legal enactments. It requires their integration into professional ethics, administrative practices, and everyday civic conduct.

The post-Soviet context itself poses inherent challenges to normative Europeanisation. The legacy of postcolonial governance, characterised by paternalistic relations between state and citizen, selective enforcement of law, and tolerance for informal arrangements, stands in fundamental opposition to the normative logic of the European Union[104]. Consequently, EU values often become a focal point of internal societal and institutional tension, requiring both external incentives and sustained domestic dialogue and re-evaluation. This tension is especially acute in domains where the normative model of the EU directly confronts entrenched social norms and cultural perceptions. Issues such as LGBT+ rights, secularism, gender equality, and media independence often trigger resistance, with European principles perceived as intrusive or incompatible with local traditions and identities. Within this environment, European norms are often portrayed as external pressures, with limited resonance as collectively embraced commitments. This raises a fundamental dilemma, well known from the Western Balkan enlargement experience: should the EU adjust its standards to fit the cultural specificities of candidate countries, or should those countries reconfigure themselves to align with the Union's normative paradigm?[105]

At the same time, it is the external threat from Russia and the open, full-scale invasion that has created a window of opportunity for a deeper

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[103] Центр Разумкова. Україна на шляху до ЄС: Реалії і перспективи. *Національна безпека і оборона*. 2022. № 1–2 (187–188). https://razumkov.org.ua/images/journal/NSD187-188_2022_ukr_full.pdf

[104] Grzymala-Busse A. *Rebuilding Leviathan: Party competition and state exploitation in post-communist democracies.* Cambridge University Press, 2007.

[105] Mendelski M. *The EU's rule of law promotion in Central and Eastern Europe: Where and why does it fail, and what can be done about it?* Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law, 2016.

internalization of values. Under the pressure of existential danger, fundamental European principles – equality, non-discrimination, freedom, and dignity – cease to be abstract political rhetoric and acquire a profoundly existential significance. Dignity emerges as the foundation of citizenship, equality becomes essential to collective resistance, and freedom defines the limits of violence. Following the traumatic experience, these principles came to be seen as a lived philosophy deeply rooted in Ukrainian society, moving beyond the realm of abstract declarations[106].

Against the backdrop of this intensified engagement with values brought about by war, a strategic question gains renewed urgency: *is Ukraine seen as an integral part of the European space, or rather as a geopolitical buffer zone – functioning primarily as a corridor between the West and Russia?* The dilemma itself is longstanding, yet the events of 2022 placed questions of security and values at the center of European discourse and added a new layer of complexity to it. Since the 1990s, the European Union's political discourse has often framed Ukraine as a "grey zone," a "neighbouring country," or part of the "periphery of enlargement"[107]. Although the Eastern Partnership proclaimed a vision of an "extended Europe," in practice it offered Ukraine no clearly defined path to membership. This approach reinforced the perception of Ukraine as a transit territory – both geographically and in terms of institutional positioning[108]. Despite earlier assumptions, Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 marked a turning point that challenged this paradigm. Recognizing the resilience of Ukrainian institutions even under wartime conditions, the European Commission recommended granting Ukraine candidate status for EU membership. This decision signaled a shift in perception: from viewing Ukraine as peripheral to acknowledging it as a potential full-fledged participant in the European political and normative community. Nevertheless, ambiguity persists. Some EU member states, particularly given ongoing energy and security instability, continue to regard Ukraine primarily as a strategic transit zone, functioning as an eastern outpost, a logistical conduit, or a reserve asset for sustaining internal equilibrium within Europe. In such perspectives, Ukraine's agency is reduced to an instrumental function. Combined with the domestic challenges previously outlined, this sustains a persistent skepticism within parts of the European political establishment and reinforces the perception of Ukraine as peripheral, not fully recognised as an integral part of the European project.

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Ultimately, Ukraine's place in the European project depends both on the direction of EU policy and on the country's capacity to maintain internal modernization. The choice between serving as a transit space and becoming an equal member of the European community represents a defining civilizational crossroads. Against this backdrop, the principles of dignity, freedom, and solidarity should be recognised as intentional foundations for shaping the future, emerging independently of any immediate external threat.

In conclusion, Ukraine's integration into the European Union within the framework of the Eastern Partnership emerges as a complex, multidimensional process involving normative alignment, institutional reconfiguration, and value transformation. The historical trajectory from symbolic declarations to the attainment of candidate status demonstrates the gradual strengthening of the state's implementation capacity, despite persistent structural challenges. Progress in areas such as anti-corruption policy, digitalization, public governance, and procurement points to the potential for deeper institutional adaptation. Still, this progress requires sustained political consensus and the consolidation of normative commitments at the domestic level. Of particular importance is the domain of value internalization, within which European integration evolves from a technical procedure into a civilizational decision. The durability of this decision will depend on whether Ukrainian society and political elites can translate European standards into internal rules of conduct across institutional, cultural, and political spheres. For this reason, EU integration should be understood as a far-reaching process of internal modernization, one that calls for a redefinition of the very nature of statehood at a historical turning point.

Conclusions

Summarising the findings of this study, several analytical conclusions can be drawn, shedding light on both the internal logic of European integration and its relevance for countries undergoing democratic transition.

The model of the European Union constitutes a distinctive form of politico-institutional order, characterised by a high level of organisational complexity in combination with normative clarity, which together enable the maintenance of internal stability as well as the projection of external attractiveness. Its integration paradigm represents a conceptually novel form of political coexistence, grounded in the interplay of institutional diffusion, multi-level governance, and value-based legitimation. The EU has evolved from an intergovernmental framework for coordinating economic policy into a post-national normative community, in which authority derives not from coercion or hegemony, but from the voluntary acceptance of shared norms and principles.

Accordingly, the European Union embodies a new configuration of legitimacy based on the symbiosis of institutional rationality, democratic accountability, and ethical universalism. This configuration appeals to universally recognised foundations such as human dignity, fundamental rights, equality, and legal certainty. A triangular nexus involving institutional complexity, democratic inclusiveness, and normative integration constitutes the core of the EU's capacity for sustainable political development within an environment marked by pluralism, asymmetrical interests, and cultural diversity.

As a consequence, the European Union does not operate as a classical federation or confederation; instead, it operates as a sui generis political system with no historical precedent within the realm of regional integration. It is precisely the Union's capacity to reconcile legal autonomy with procedural flexibility, and strategic coordination with normative consistency, that renders the European model normatively attractive beyond its own borders, particularly for states navigating the challenges of democratic transition.

In parallel, it is the core values, namely the rule of law, human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and respect for human rights, that function as the normative foundation securing both the internal coherence and the external recognisability of the European Union as a polity grounded in shared principles. Despite the heterogeneity of political traditions, economic capacities, and strategic interests among the member states, it is this foundational system of shared values that functions as an integrative

framework, preventing disintegration and enabling the reproducibility of the Union's political order.

On the internal level, these values perform the role of ethical foundation, underpinning a form of political solidarity based on the willingness of states and societies to recognise mutual responsibility within a common political project. On the global level, the EU's values constitute the foundation of its external political credibility as an international actor capable of shaping global order through the dissemination of norms, standards, and expectations rooted in universal humanistic principles. This is the essence of the EU's normative power: a form of influence exercised not through coercion, but through persuasion, by cultivating a space of normative attractiveness.

However, this value-based model is not without vulnerabilities. The weakening or selective interpretation of its foundational values, whether driven by political opportunism or by the absence of internal agreement within the Union, presents a substantial threat to its normative authority at both the domestic and international levels. A decline in value consistency transforms the EU from a moral leader into a situational broker, operating on the basis of tactical compromise rather than normative steadfastness. Consequently, the resilience of the EU as a political community depends on its capacity to sustain and reproduce value integrity as the basis for political legitimacy, internal cohesion, and international recognisability.

In this context, the Eastern Partnership, particularly when examined through the lens of the Ukrainian experience, assumes the role of a testing ground for assessing the practical applicability of the European Union's normative model beyond the boundaries of its legal jurisdiction. In this setting, the Union's values encounter not conditions of normative compatibility, but political disunity, historical trauma, hybrid statehood, and a contested geopolitical environment. As such, the Ukrainian case serves as both a recipient of normative projection and a strategic mirror reflecting the potential and limitations of the EU's transformative capacity.

On the one hand, progress in areas such as procedural adaptation, including the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*, the consolidation of institutional independence, anti-corruption reforms, and advancements in digital modernisation, demonstrates the attractiveness and operational effectiveness of the European institutional model. On the other hand, the persistence of paternalistic practices, selective application of the law, and limited internalisation of core values in certain sectors indicate the constraints of European influence in the absence of a profound socio-cultural transformation.

Significantly, the full-scale war has reaffirmed the relevance of European values for Ukraine as a framework for political survival and ethical self-

determination, strengthening their significance instead of undermining it. This suggests that the process of European integration is gradually shedding its character as a formal external trajectory and is being reconfigured as an internal matrix of identity. Ukraine is increasingly manifesting itself as a political community striving to embody the European normative order in one of the most challenging historical contexts imaginable.

It is this challenge – *the rooting of European normative principles in a moment of profound historical rupture* – that renders the Ukrainian case a crucial test of the viability and resilience of the European Union's model as a normative power.

Accordingly, the results of the conducted analysis provide grounds to assert that the **research hypothesis is, in general, substantiated**, though with important qualifications that refine the scope of its applicability. The European Union indeed emerges as an institutional model of a new type of regional integration, combining a multi-level decision-making architecture with value-oriented standards capable of structuring both internal order and external projection of influence.

The analysis of the EU's internal organization reveals a sufficient degree of procedural legitimacy, stability of legal mechanisms, institutional coherence, and democratic accountability. These elements form the basis of the Union's normative coherence and commitment to ethical universalism. In parallel, its external instruments, particularly the European Neighbourhood Policy, conditionality frameworks, and the Copenhagen criteria, also exhibit a demonstrable capacity to facilitate the implementation of normative standards in candidate countries. The case of Ukraine illustrates that, when accompanied by political will and existential mobilisation, these instruments can contribute to profound structural transformations even under conditions of military instability. Simultaneously, the Ukrainian experience reveals the limiting conditions of this model's effectiveness: the EU's normative influence is constrained in the absence of internal institutional resilience and when the internalisation of values is fragmented. Moreover, even the formal adoption of the acquis does not guarantee the substantive embedding of new governance practices if not accompanied by a deeper ethical and political reconfiguration.

With regard to the third component of the hypothesis, namely the perception of the European Union as a source of normative authority, the Ukrainian case produces ambivalent findings. On the one hand, the European vector enjoys high levels of support in the public sphere, and the EU is frequently portrayed as a symbol of democratic order and a guarantor of sovereignty. On the other hand, Ukrainian political discourse occasionally exhibits the instrumentalisation of European rhetoric without corresponding

substantive commitments, suggesting the presence of latent tensions between the external normative imperative and internal legitimation.

Therefore, the hypothesis holds true when the EU model is seen as a context-dependent framework rather than a universally applicable template, with its effectiveness determined by both the quality of external influence and the capacity of recipient states to undergo profound transformations in political culture, governance structures, and societal understandings of legitimate authority. It is precisely this capacity for internal alignment with the EU's normative core that determines the success of the integration model in the context of democratic transition.

In light of the findings obtained, several significant avenues for ***further research*** emerge. Foremost among these is the need for a more profound understanding of the flexibility and adaptability of the European integration model, particularly its capacity to respond institutionally under conditions of external pressure, internal crisis, or asymmetry among political systems. The central question concerns how the European Union can adjust its normative framework to a rapidly evolving global environment without compromising its value-based coherence. Accordingly, the issue of new regional challenges associated with the intensifying global competition of values has gained increasing relevance. Against the backdrop of geopolitical rivalry, especially from authoritarian regimes, the EU model must be continually re-evaluated in terms of its identity as a political space that combines normative appeal with institutional effectiveness.

It is essential to explore the extent to which the Union is capable of projecting its values beyond its territorial boundaries without diminishing their universalist claims, and how the nature of those values is itself transformed in the process of intercultural interpretation.

Another distinct area of analytical interest lies in the future of the EU's enlargement policy. In the context of a shifting geopolitical configuration, enlargement has ceased to be merely a technical-legal process and is increasingly becoming a strategic response to demands for security, stability, and democratisation in bordering regions. This development necessitates a reconsideration of membership criteria, pre-accession integration instruments, and the tools available to support candidate countries. The Ukrainian case, in this light, provides a basis for rethinking the very logic of association and institutional interaction prior to the attainment of full membership.

Ultimately, the research findings point to the necessity of revisiting existing theoretical frameworks for analysing integration models. While existing paradigms such as neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, and normative power remain analytically productive, they are no longer entirely

sufficient to capture the full complexity and dynamism of contemporary integration processes. There is a growing need for an interdisciplinary approach that brings together institutional analysis, political philosophy, cultural anthropology, and narrative theory, not only to explain how integration functions but also to interpret what it means in terms of identity, political credibility, and political self-determination in the twenty-first century.

Thus, the prospects for further inquiry extend well beyond the descriptive analysis of institutional mechanisms. They call for deeper reflection on the nature of the European integration project as a political form that aspires to universalism, even as it operates within an increasingly fragmented global order.

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CHAPTER 2
THE CURRENT STAGE AND PROSPECTS OF THE EU FUNCTIONING: UKRAINE AND THE PROCESSES OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Introduction

The European Union (EU) finds itself at a critical juncture, navigating a complex landscape marked by significant political, economic, and social challenges. Politically, the EU has been shaped by the repercussions of Brexit, which has necessitated a reevaluation of its cohesion and unity. The rise of populism and Euroscepticism within several member states has further complicated the political climate, prompting debates over sovereignty and the balance of power between national governments and EU institutions. Economically, the EU continues to recover from the financial crises of the past decade while striving to implement ambitious initiatives such as the European Green Deal and the digital transformation agenda. These efforts aim to promote sustainable growth and competitiveness in a rapidly changing global economy. Socially, the EU is grappling with demographic shifts, including aging populations and migration flows, which impact social cohesion and integration policies. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for robust public health strategies and resilient economic frameworks. As the EU looks to the future, it must address these multifaceted challenges to strengthen its role as a global actor and ensure the stability and prosperity of its member states.

The European Union's origins trace back to the post-World War II era, when the devastation of the conflict prompted European leaders to seek lasting peace and stability through economic and political cooperation. The foundation of what would become the EU was laid in 1951 with the Treaty of Paris[109], establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) among six founding countries: Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany. This initiative aimed to pool coal and steel production, crucial industries for military power, thus making war between these nations not only undesirable but also materially difficult.

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[109] Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (Paris, 18 April 1951). https://cutt.ly/GrGRP4X3

Building on the success of the ECSC, the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957, creating the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)[110]. The EEC sought to establish a common market, gradually eliminating tariffs and establishing common policies on agriculture, transport, and competition. This integration fostered economic interdependence and growth, which in turn supported political stability. Over the next few decades, the EEC expanded both its membership and its scope, evolving into a more comprehensive economic union.

The 1970s and 1980s saw significant developments, including the first enlargement in 1973, which brought in Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. This period also witnessed the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the Community's institutions. The Single European Act of 1986 marked a pivotal moment by committing member states to creating a single internal market by 1992, removing remaining barriers to the free movement of goods, services, people, and capital[111].

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent reunification of Germany provided further impetus for European integration. The Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992 and entering into force in 1993, formally established the European Union and introduced a three-pillar structure: the European Communities, a common foreign and security policy, and cooperation in justice and home affairs[112]. The Maastricht Treaty also laid the groundwork for the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the eventual introduction of the euro, which became a reality in 1999 with the launch of the Eurozone.

The early 2000s were characterized by the EU's largest enlargement rounds. In 2004, ten countries, including eight from Central and Eastern Europe, joined the EU, followed by Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 and Croatia in 2013. These enlargements were historic, extending the EU's influence and promoting stability and economic development in former communist states. Concurrently, the Treaty of Lisbon, which came into force in 2009, reformed the EU's institutional framework to enhance efficiency, coherence, and democratic legitimacy[113]. The Lisbon Treaty introduced the position of a permanent President of the European Council, strengthened the

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[110] The Treaty of Rome. https://ec.europa.eu/archives/emu_history/documents/treaties/rometreaty2.pdf

[111] Single European Act. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/in-the-past/the-parliament-and-the-treaties/single-european-act

[112] Treaty on European Union (TEU) / Maastricht Treaty. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/in-the-past/the-parliament-and-the-treaties/maastricht-treaty

[113] The Treaty of Lisbon. *European Parliament.* https://cutt.ly/urGCI36t

role of the European Parliament, and expanded the use of qualified majority voting in the Council, making decision-making more streamlined.

Throughout its evolution, the EU has faced numerous challenges, including economic crises, political fragmentation, and external pressures. The 2008 global financial crisis and the subsequent eurozone debt crisis tested the EU's economic governance and solidarity mechanisms. More recently, the Brexit referendum in 2016 and the United Kingdom's subsequent departure from the EU in 2020 marked an unprecedented moment in European integration, challenging the EU to redefine its future trajectory.

Despite these hurdles, the EU has continued to pursue deeper integration and greater global engagement. Initiatives such as the European Green Deal, which aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, and the Digital Strategy, which seeks to position the EU as a leader in digital innovation, reflect its ambition to address contemporary global challenges. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of solidarity and cooperation, prompting the EU to adopt substantial recovery measures, including the landmark NextGenerationEU recovery fund.

So, the historical evolution of the EU from a coal and steel community to a comprehensive political and economic union illustrates its adaptability and resilience. Through continuous enlargement, institutional reforms, and policy innovations, the EU has sought to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in Europe. As it navigates current and future challenges, the EU's commitment to integration and cooperation remains a cornerstone of its identity and mission.

The historical relationship between Ukraine and the European Union (is deeply rooted in the broader context of European history, marked by cultural, political, and economic exchanges. Ukraine's geographic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia has historically positioned it as a significant player in regional dynamics. The historical ties between Ukraine and the EU are not only recent phenomena but are embedded in centuries of interaction, influenced by periods of both cooperation and conflict.

The European integration of Ukraine holds profound significance across political, economic, social, and strategic dimensions. For Ukraine, a country at the crossroads of Eastern and Western Europe, the pursuit of closer ties with the European Union represents not only a strategic choice but also a transformative journey towards modernization, stability, and prosperity. This integration is seen as a pathway to reinforce sovereignty, achieve sustainable economic growth, enhance governance, and secure a place within a stable and prosperous European community.

Politically, European integration is pivotal for Ukraine's democratic development and institutional reform. Following the dissolution of the Soviet

Union in 1991, Ukraine embarked on a tumultuous journey of nation-building, characterized by varying degrees of political instability, corruption, and governance challenges. The EU, through its extensive framework of treaties, agreements, and cooperation mechanisms, provides a robust template for political and institutional reforms. The Association Agreement (AA) signed in 2014, along with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), commits Ukraine to align its legislative, regulatory, and institutional frameworks with EU standards. This alignment fosters the rule of law, judicial independence, and transparency, essential for the consolidation of democratic governance. Moreover, the EU's political and technical support has been crucial in driving anti-corruption measures, decentralization reforms, and the strengthening of civil society, all of which are key components of Ukraine's democratic transformation.

Economically, European integration offers Ukraine substantial opportunities for growth, modernization, and diversification. The DCFTA, as part of the AA, grants Ukrainian businesses access to the vast EU single market, encouraging trade, investment, and economic cooperation[114]. By aligning with EU standards, Ukrainian products and services gain greater competitiveness on the global stage, fostering export growth and economic diversification. Additionally, EU technical assistance and financial support facilitate critical reforms in sectors such as agriculture, energy, and infrastructure, which are vital for Ukraine's economic resilience. The harmonization with EU standards also attracts foreign direct investment (FDI), enhancing productivity and technological advancement. The economic modernization driven by European integration helps Ukraine reduce its dependency on traditional industries and external powers, particularly Russia, thereby strengthening its economic sovereignty.

Socially, European integration has profound implications for the quality of life and the well-being of Ukrainian citizens. The adoption of EU social and environmental standards promotes higher quality healthcare, education, and social protection systems. Enhanced environmental regulations contribute to sustainable development and improved public health. Furthermore, the visa-free regime for short-term travel to the Schengen Area, granted in 2017, facilitates greater people-to-people contacts, educational exchanges, and cultural ties. This mobility enhances mutual understanding and integration at the grassroots level, fostering a European identity among Ukrainian citizens. The social dimension of European integration also includes the promotion of human rights, gender equality, and inclusive

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[114] EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/eu-ukraine-deep-and-comprehensive-free-trade-area

policies, which are core values of the EU and contribute to a more cohesive and equitable society in Ukraine.

Strategically, European integration is critical for Ukraine's security and geopolitical positioning. Since the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the full-scale war, the EU has been a vital partner in supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The EU's diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian assistance, alongside its sanctions against Russia, underscores a strong commitment to Ukraine's stability and security. Enhanced cooperation with the EU in defence, cybersecurity, and border management also bolsters Ukraine's capabilities to address external threats and internal security challenges. Additionally, integration with the EU aligns Ukraine more closely with the broader Euro-Atlantic security architecture, contributing to regional stability and peace.

The significance of European integration for Ukraine extends beyond immediate political, economic, and social benefits; it embodies a strategic orientation towards a future of stability, prosperity, and democratic values. European integration provides a clear roadmap for comprehensive reforms that can transform Ukraine's political and economic landscape, improve the quality of life for its citizens, and enhance its strategic resilience in a complex geopolitical environment. The process of integrating with the EU, though challenging, offers a vision of a modern, democratic, and prosperous Ukraine that is fully anchored in the European family of nations.

In conclusion, the European integration of Ukraine is of paramount significance for its development and future trajectory. It provides a framework for democratic governance, economic modernization, social development, and strategic security. The process of aligning with EU standards and practices drives transformative reforms that can unlock Ukraine's potential and enhance its resilience against external and internal challenges. As Ukraine continues to navigate its path towards European integration, the commitment to this process represents a clear and strategic choice for a better future, which is deeply intertwined with the aspirations and values of the Ukrainian people. The journey towards full integration with the EU, while demanding, promises a future where Ukraine is a stable, prosperous, and integral part of a united Europe.

2.1. Current Stage of the EU
(Anna Soloviova)

Political Landscape

The European Union finds itself at a critical juncture, navigating a complex political landscape shaped by recent changes and elections. Over the past few years, the EU has witnessed significant political shifts, reflecting a broader trend of populism, Euroscepticism, and nationalist sentiments across member states. These developments have challenged traditional political establishments and tested the cohesion of the EU project.

One of the most significant political changes in recent years has been the departure of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union, following the Brexit referendum in 2016. Brexit marked a historic moment in European integration, posing unprecedented challenges for both the EU and the UK. The negotiations surrounding the terms of the UK's withdrawal and the future relationship between the EU and the UK have dominated the EU's agenda, shaping its priorities and strategic direction.

In addition to Brexit, the EU has grappled with internal political dynamics, including the rise of populist and Eurosceptic parties in several member states. These parties have capitalized on concerns over immigration, globalization, and perceived loss of national sovereignty, gaining traction among disillusioned voters. The electoral success of populist movements has led to fragmented political landscapes in some countries, making coalition-building and policymaking more challenging at the EU level.

Furthermore, the EU has faced pressure from external actors, including Russia, China, and the United States, which have sought to exploit divisions within the EU and undermine its unity. Disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, and geopolitical tensions have heightened security concerns and raised questions about the EU's ability to defend its interests and values in an increasingly volatile global environment.

The European Parliament elections in 2019 saw gains for both pro-European and Eurosceptic parties, reflecting a polarized political landscape[115]. Pro-European parties retained a majority but lost ground to Eurosceptic and nationalist forces, highlighting divisions within the EU over issues such as migration, economic governance, and climate change. Against this backdrop, recent elections have been closely watched as indicators of the EU's political direction and future trajectory.

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[115] European Parliament 2019–2024. *European Union*. https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/european-results/2019-2024/outgoing-parliament/

Moreover, national elections in key member states, such as Germany, France, and Italy, have shaped the EU's political dynamics and leadership. These elections have seen the emergence of new political movements and leaders, as well as shifts in power within traditional political parties. In Germany, the departure of Chancellor Angela Merkel after 16 years in power has raised questions about the future direction of German and EU politics. Similarly, in France, President Emmanuel Macron faces challenges from both the left and the right as he seeks re-election, while in Italy, the rise of populist parties has led to political instability and uncertainty.

Overall, the current stage of the EU is characterized by political turbulence and uncertainty, as the bloc grapples with internal divisions, external pressures, and shifting geopolitical dynamics. The outcome of recent elections and the formation of new governments will have significant implications for the EU's ability to address pressing challenges, such as climate change, economic recovery, and digital transformation. Moreover, the EU's response to these challenges will shape its role as a global actor and determine its ability to defend its values and interests in an increasingly complex and competitive world. As the EU navigates this uncertain political landscape, it faces a crucial test of its resilience, cohesion, and capacity for leadership in the 21st century.

The departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union, commonly known as Brexit, represents a defining moment in the current stage of the EU, with far-reaching implications across political, economic, and strategic dimensions. Brexit, triggered by the UK's referendum in 2016 and officially completed on January 31, 2020[116], after a prolonged negotiation period, has fundamentally altered the dynamics of European integration and reshaped the EU's future trajectory.

Politically, Brexit has challenged the cohesion and unity of the EU, casting a shadow of uncertainty over its institutional framework and decision-making processes. The loss of one of the EU's largest and most influential member states has weakened the bloc's political weight and altered its internal dynamics. The UK's departure has disrupted the balance of power within EU institutions, particularly the European Parliament and the European Council, where British MEPs and leaders once played significant roles. Moreover, Brexit has fueled debates over the future direction of European integration, with some member states advocating for deeper integration, while others question the benefits of further centralization of powers.

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[116] Brexit. *European Commission*. https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-topic/data-protection/international-dimension-data-protection/brexit_en

Economically, Brexit has had profound implications for the EU's single market and its trading relationship with the UK. The UK's withdrawal from the single market and customs union has disrupted established supply chains, increased trade barriers, and led to economic uncertainty for businesses on both sides of the English Channel. The EU has sought to mitigate the economic impact of Brexit through the negotiation of a comprehensive Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), which governs trade, security, and other aspects of the future EU–UK relationship. However, the TCA represents a compromise between the EU and the UK, with limitations and uncertainties remaining, particularly in areas such as financial services and regulatory alignment.

Strategically, Brexit has raised questions about the EU's geopolitical role and its ability to project influence on the global stage. The UK, as a nuclear-armed permanent member of the UN Security Council and a major player in NATO, has been a key partner for the EU in addressing security challenges, including terrorism, organized crime, and cyber threats. The loss of the UK's defence capabilities and intelligence-sharing arrangements has forced the EU to rethink its security and defence policies and seek closer cooperation with other international partners, such as the United States and NATO. Moreover, Brexit has reshaped the EU's approach to external relations, trade negotiations, and multilateral cooperation, as the bloc seeks to assert its interests and values in an increasingly uncertain and competitive international environment.

Socially, Brexit has heightened divisions within the UK and raised questions about the future of European identity and citizenship. The referendum campaign exposed deep-seated divisions within British society, including concerns over immigration, sovereignty, and national identity. The decision to leave the EU has triggered debates over the rights of EU citizens living in the UK and British citizens living in the EU, as well as the future of cross-border cooperation in areas such as education, research, and cultural exchange. Moreover, Brexit has sparked discussions about the impact of populism, nationalism, and xenophobia on European societies, as well as the need for greater social cohesion and solidarity within the EU.

In conclusion, the impact of Brexit on the current stage of the EU cannot be overstated, as it has reshaped the political, economic, strategic, and social landscape of European integration. The departure of the UK has tested the resilience and unity of the EU, challenged its institutional framework, and forced member states to rethink their relationships and priorities. As the EU navigates the consequences of Brexit, it faces a crucial test of its ability to adapt, innovate, and assert its values and interests in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. The legacy of Brexit will shape the future

trajectory of European integration and define the EU's role as a global actor in the 21st century.

The current stage of the European Union is marked by the rise of populism and Euroscepticism, posing significant challenges to the cohesion and effectiveness of the EU project. Populist and Eurosceptic movements, fuelled by discontent with established political elites, globalization, immigration, and economic inequality, have gained traction across many member states, reshaping the political landscape and challenging the principles of European integration.

Populist leaders and parties, often characterized by nationalist rhetoric, anti-establishment sentiment, and promises of radical change, have capitalized on public disillusionment with traditional political institutions and EU policies. They portray the EU as a distant, bureaucratic, and undemocratic entity, disconnected from the needs and aspirations of ordinary citizens. Eurosceptic narratives emphasize sovereignty, national identity, and the preservation of cultural heritage, framing EU membership as a threat to national sovereignty and autonomy.

The rise of populism and Euroscepticism has manifested in electoral victories, political alliances, and policy debates, shaping national governments and influencing EU decision-making processes. In countries such as Hungary, Poland, Italy, and Austria, populist leaders have secured power and implemented policies that challenge EU norms and values, including attacks on the independence of the judiciary, media freedom, and the rule of law. Eurosceptic parties have also gained influence in the European Parliament, forming alliances and coalitions that challenge the mainstream consensus on issues such as migration, economic governance, and environmental protection[117].

The impact of rising populism and Euroscepticism extends beyond electoral politics, affecting public opinion, social cohesion, and the functioning of democratic institutions. Surveys indicate a growing skepticism towards the EU among citizens, with concerns over immigration, economic inequality, and perceived loss of national identity driving Eurosceptic sentiment. The polarization of public discourse, fuelled by disinformation, conspiracy theories, and social media manipulation, further exacerbates divisions within society and undermines trust in democratic institutions.

The European Parliament election of 2024 took place across the European Union from June 6 to 9. It marked the tenth parliamentary election since direct voting began in 1979, and was the first European Parliament election

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[117] EU election results: The main takeaways. *Le Monde*. 9 June 2024. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/06/09/eu-election-results-the-main-takeaways_6674302_4.html

after Brexit. A total of 720 Members of the European Parliament were elected, representing over 450 million people from 27 EU member states. This election coincided with various other national elections in some EU countries. Over 360 million individuals were eligible to vote across the 27 countries, though turnout for EU elections has traditionally been low. According to initial results, far-right parties secured first place in France, Italy, and Austria, while finishing second in Germany and the Netherlands. The election occurred amid several global challenges, including Russia's war in Ukraine, heightened trade tensions between the United States and China, the ongoing climate crisis, and the potential for a second Donald Trump presidency[118].

The EU's response to the challenges posed by populism and Euroscepticism has been multifaceted, encompassing political, economic, and social measures aimed at addressing underlying grievances and strengthening democratic resilience. Efforts to promote transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement, including initiatives such as the Conference on the Future of Europe, seek to bridge the gap between EU institutions and citizens and restore trust in the European project. Moreover, the EU has taken steps to address the root causes of populism and Euroscepticism, including addressing socio-economic inequalities, promoting inclusive growth, and strengthening social cohesion.

At the same time, the EU has sought to uphold its core values and principles in the face of populist challenges, defending the rule of law, fundamental rights, and democratic norms. Mechanisms such as the Rule of Law Framework[119], the European Semester, and infringement procedures provide tools to monitor and address threats to democracy and the rule of law within member states. Additionally, the EU has increased efforts to counter disinformation and strengthen resilience against foreign interference, recognizing the importance of safeguarding democratic processes and public debate.

In conclusion, the rise of populism and Euroscepticism represents a significant challenge to the current stage of the EU, threatening the principles of democracy, solidarity, and integration that underpin the European project. As the EU navigates these challenges, it must remain vigilant in upholding its values and principles, fostering inclusive dialogue, and addressing the underlying grievances that fuel populist movements. By strengthening

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[118] 2024 European election results. *European Parliament*. 23 July 2024. https://www.results.elections.europa.eu/en/
[119] Rule of law framework. *European Commission*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/rule-law-framework_en

democratic resilience, promoting social cohesion, and reaffirming its commitment to democratic values, the EU can counter the forces of populism and Euroscepticism and build a more resilient, cohesive, and inclusive European Union for the future.

Economic Status

The European Union has experienced significant economic growth over the past few years, emerging as a powerhouse on the global stage. The union, comprising 27 member states and over 447 million inhabitants, has shown robust economic performance in various sectors. One of the key indicators of the EU's economic success is its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which has been steadily increasing. The EU has been successful in creating a single market, ensuring the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, which has led to increased trade and investment within the region.

Moreover, the EU has been focusing on innovation and technological advancements, investing heavily in research and development. This has helped the EU stay competitive in the global market and fostered the growth of high-tech industries. The EU's commitment to sustainability and clean energy has also been a driving force behind its economic growth. Initiatives such as the European Green Deal aim to make the EU carbon-neutral by 2050[120], creating new opportunities for green investment and sustainable development.

However, despite these successes, the EU also faces several economic challenges. One of the primary concerns is the economic disparities among member states. The wealth gap between different regions within the EU has widened, leading to issues of social inequality and economic imbalances. The recent economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these disparities, with certain countries facing greater economic hardship than others.

Another challenge that the EU is grappling with is Brexit. The United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU has created uncertainties and disruptions in trade and economic relations. The EU is now navigating the complexities of redefining its economic partnerships and ensuring smooth transitions post-Brexit.

In addition, the EU is facing pressure to adapt to rapid technological changes and digital transformations. The rise of artificial intelligence, automation, and digitalization poses both opportunities and challenges for the EU economy. Ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the necessary skills for the digital age and addressing concerns about data privacy and

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[120] The European Green Deal. *European Commission*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

security are critical issues that the EU must address to sustain its economic growth.

Overall, the EU is currently at a crucial stage in its economic development. While it has made significant progress in fostering economic growth and prosperity, it must also address the challenges posed by economic disparities, Brexit, and technological advancements to ensure a sustainable and inclusive future for all its member states.

The European Union is at a pivotal stage in terms of fiscal policies and economic integration, as it navigates a complex landscape of economic challenges and opportunities. Fiscal policies within the EU play a crucial role in maintaining stability and promoting economic growth across member states. The EU operates under a framework of rules and regulations designed to ensure sound fiscal discipline and coordination among its members. The Stability and Growth Pact, for example, sets limits on budget deficits and public debt levels to prevent macroeconomic imbalances within the EU.

Moreover, the EU has taken steps towards greater economic integration through initiatives such as the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the Eurozone. The adoption of the euro as a common currency among 19 EU member states has deepened economic ties and streamlined trade and financial transactions within the Eurozone. The European Central Bank (ECB) plays a key role in setting monetary policy for the Eurozone, aiming to maintain price stability and support economic growth[121].

However, the EU faces challenges in maintaining fiscal stability and economic integration. One of the primary concerns is the disparities in fiscal positions among member states. While some countries have strong fiscal positions and low debt levels, others struggle with high deficits and debt burdens. This divergence in fiscal policies can strain the cohesion of the EU and create economic imbalances that jeopardize the stability of the Eurozone.

The aftermath of the global financial crisis and the recent COVID-19 pandemic have also tested the resilience of the EU's fiscal policies. Member states have faced mounting fiscal pressures as they implement stimulus measures to support their economies during times of crisis. The EU's response through programs like the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) and the Next Generation EU recovery fund demonstrates a collective effort to address economic challenges and promote recovery and growth.

Furthermore, the EU is working towards enhancing economic integration through initiatives such as the Capital Markets Union (CMU) and the European banking union. These efforts aim to deepen financial integration,

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[121] What the European Central Bank does and what it means for you. 2021. *European Central Bank*. 2021. January 30. https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb-and-you/explainers/tell-me-more/html/anniversary.en.html

improve access to capital, and strengthen the resilience of the EU financial system. By fostering closer economic ties and harmonizing financial regulations, the EU seeks to create a more robust and competitive economic environment for all member states.

In conclusion, the EU is at a critical juncture in its journey towards fiscal stability and economic integration. While significant progress has been made in fostering economic cooperation and convergence, challenges persist in ensuring fiscal discipline, promoting sustainable growth, and addressing economic disparities. The EU's commitment to strengthening fiscal frameworks, enhancing economic governance, and advancing financial integration will be essential in shaping the future of the EU's economic landscape.

The European Union is currently at a dynamic stage with several key economic initiatives shaping its future trajectory. Among the most prominent initiatives is the European Green Deal, a comprehensive plan to transform the EU into a climate-neutral economy by 2050. The Green Deal encompasses a wide range of policies and measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy sources, enhancing energy efficiency, and fostering sustainable growth. Through the Green Deal, the EU seeks to lead the global fight against climate change while creating new opportunities for green investments and job creation.

Another significant economic initiative within the EU is digital transformation. The EU has been actively promoting the digitalization of its economy to drive innovation, increase competitiveness, and adapt to the evolving technological landscape. Initiatives such as the Digital Single Market strategy and the European Digital Strategy aim to create a cohesive digital ecosystem within the EU, ensuring that all citizens and businesses can benefit from the opportunities offered by digital technologies. The EU also places a strong emphasis on data protection and privacy through regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)[122], setting a global standard for safeguarding personal data.

In addition to the Green Deal and digital transformation, the EU has been prioritizing initiatives to enhance research and innovation. Programs like Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship research and innovation initiative, provide funding and support for cutting-edge projects across various sectors, driving scientific advancement and technological breakthroughs. The EU's commitment to research and innovation is key to maintaining its competitive edge in the global economy and fostering sustainable growth in the long term.

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[122] General Data Protection Regulation GDPR. *Intersoft Consulting.* https://gdpr-info.eu/

Moreover, the EU is actively working towards building a more resilient and competitive economy through initiatives focused on industrial strategy, trade policy, and investment. The EU's industrial strategy aims to boost the competitiveness of European industries, support innovation, and ensure strategic autonomy in key sectors. Trade policies focus on promoting fair and sustainable trade practices, while investment initiatives seek to drive economic growth and job creation across the EU.

Overall, the EU's current stage is characterized by a bold vision for a sustainable, digital, and innovative economy. By spearheading initiatives such as the European Green Deal, digital transformation, and research and innovation programs, the EU is laying the groundwork for a prosperous and resilient economic future. It is through these key economic initiatives that the EU aims to tackle global challenges, drive economic growth, and ensure the well-being of its citizens in the years to come.

Social and Cultural Dimensions

The European Union is a unique political and economic union of 27 member states that have agreed to work together for mutual benefits, balancing national sovereignty with regional integration. A critical aspect of this integration process is the social and cultural dimensions, which are significantly influenced by migration and demographic changes. Migration, both intra-EU and from outside the Union, along with demographic shifts such as aging populations, play pivotal roles in shaping the socio-cultural landscape of the EU.

Migration has long been a driving force in the EU, contributing to its diversity and economic dynamism. Historically, migration patterns within Europe have been fluid, with citizens moving across borders for work, education, and family reunification. This internal mobility is facilitated by the EU's commitment to the free movement of people, one of the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Treaty of Rome. It allows EU citizens to live, work, and study in any member state, fostering a more integrated and culturally diverse society. For example, the influx of Eastern Europeans into Western European countries following the EU's eastern enlargement in 2004 and 2007 brought about significant cultural exchanges and economic contributions, enriching the host countries with new skills, perspectives, and cultural practices.

External migration into the EU has also been significant, especially in the context of global crises. The 2015 refugee crisis, where millions fled war-torn regions such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan[123], tested the EU's solidarity

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[123] Spindler W. 2015: The year of Europe's refugee crisis. *UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency.* 8 December 2015. https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis

and integration capacity. The influx of refugees posed challenges but also highlighted the EU's role as a haven for those seeking safety and a better life. The diverse backgrounds of migrants have brought a mosaic of cultures, languages, and religions into the EU, which necessitates effective integration policies to foster social cohesion. Successful integration involves ensuring migrants' access to education, healthcare, and employment, and promoting intercultural dialogue to mitigate xenophobia and social exclusion.

Demographic changes within the EU further compound the challenges and opportunities brought by migration. One of the most pressing demographic issues is the aging population. With a declining birth rate and increasing life expectancy, the EU faces the prospect of a shrinking workforce and greater pressure on social welfare systems. Migration, particularly of younger and economically active individuals, can mitigate some of these demographic challenges. For instance, migrant workers often fill labour shortages in sectors such as healthcare, construction, and agriculture, which are vital for the EU's economic stability and growth.

However, demographic changes and migration also pose cultural challenges. The integration of diverse cultural identities into the social fabric of the EU requires a balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing multiculturalism. The rise of nationalist and populist movements in some EU countries reflects the tensions and anxieties surrounding migration and demographic changes. These movements often exploit fears of cultural dilution and economic competition, advocating for stricter immigration controls and nationalistic policies. Addressing these concerns requires a nuanced approach that respects national identities while promoting the EU's values of unity in diversity, solidarity, and human rights.

The EU's response to migration and demographic changes involves comprehensive policy frameworks and initiatives aimed at fostering social inclusion and cultural integration. Programs such as the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) support member states in managing migration and integration challenges. These funds are used for various projects, including language and vocational training for migrants, community-building activities, and support services for vulnerable groups. Additionally, the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum, introduced in 2020[124], seeks to create a more balanced and fair migration system, emphasizing solidarity among member states and shared responsibility.

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[124] Pact on Migration and Asylum: A common EU system to manage migration. *European Commission*. 21 May 2024. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en

In conclusion, migration and demographic changes are integral to the social and cultural dimensions of the EU, shaping its identity and future trajectory. While these processes present challenges, they also offer opportunities for growth, innovation, and cultural enrichment. The EU's ability to navigate these dynamics effectively will determine its success in fostering a cohesive, inclusive, and resilient society that values diversity and upholds its foundational principles of unity and solidarity. By embracing the complexities of migration and demographic shifts, the EU can continue to build a vibrant, multicultural community that benefits all its citizens.

The European Union is not just an economic and political entity but also a social project aimed at promoting cohesion, solidarity, and quality of life among its member states. Social policies and cohesion efforts form the bedrock of this endeavor, addressing disparities and fostering inclusive growth. The EU's commitment to social cohesion is evident in its strategies, funding mechanisms, and legislative frameworks designed to support equitable development and social integration across its diverse regions.

At the heart of the EU's social policy framework is the European Social Model, which seeks to balance economic competitiveness with social justice. This model emphasizes the importance of social protection systems, employment rights, and social inclusion policies. One of the critical instruments in this regard is the European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed in 2017[125]. This Pillar outlines 20 key principles and rights essential for fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems in the 21st century. It focuses on equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. The implementation of these principles aims to ensure that economic growth translates into tangible social progress, reducing inequalities and promoting well-being.

The EU's cohesion policy is another pivotal element, designed to reduce economic, social, and territorial disparities between regions. The policy is primarily funded through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)[126], which include the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund, and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). These funds support a wide range of initiatives, from infrastructure projects and job creation to education, training, and social inclusion programs. For instance, the ERDF focuses on reducing disparities by investing in innovation, the digital agenda, support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and

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[125] European pillar of social rights. *European Commission.* https://cutt.ly/urGRVvAP
[126] EU cohesion policy: European structural and investment funds supported SMEs, employment of millions of people and clean energy production. *European Commission*. 31 January 2023. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_389

the transition to a low-carbon economy. The Cohesion Fund targets member states with a Gross National Income (GNI) per inhabitant less than 90% of the EU average, financing environmental and transport infrastructure projects to promote sustainable development[127].

Social policies within the EU also prioritize employment and labour market inclusiveness. The EU's Employment Strategy aims to create more and better jobs, ensuring a high level of employment and social protection. This strategy is aligned with the Europe 2020 strategy and its successor, the European Green Deal, which emphasizes sustainable and inclusive growth. Programs such as the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) provide targeted support to young people and workers affected by large-scale redundancies, respectively. These initiatives help mitigate the impacts of economic transitions and global competition, fostering resilience in the labour market.

Education and training are crucial components of the EU's social policies, recognized as key drivers for personal development, social inclusion, and economic growth. The Erasmus+ program is one of the most prominent examples, promoting mobility and cooperation in education, training, youth, and sport. This program not only enhances the skills and employability of participants but also fosters a sense of European identity and solidarity. Additionally, the EU invests in lifelong learning initiatives to ensure that individuals can continuously upgrade their skills and adapt to changing labour market demands.

The EU's social policies also encompass health and well-being, recognizing the importance of accessible, high-quality healthcare for all citizens. The EU Health Strategy aims to improve public health, prevent diseases, and address health inequalities across member states[128]. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of robust health systems and prompted the EU to enhance its health policy framework, leading to the establishment of the European Health Union. This initiative seeks to strengthen the resilience of Europe's health systems through better preparedness and response mechanisms for future health crises.

Cultural cohesion is another vital aspect of the EU's efforts to build a united and inclusive community. The Creative Europe program supports the cultural and creative sectors, fostering cultural diversity and heritage while enhancing the competitiveness of these industries. By promoting cross-border cooperation, cultural exchange, and the mobility of artists and cultural

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[127] Cohesion fund. *European Commission*. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/cohesion-fund_en
[128] Health strategy. *European Commission*. https://cutt.ly/grGRBLra

professionals, the EU aims to strengthen the European cultural identity and contribute to social cohesion.

The EU's approach to social policies and cohesion efforts is inherently multifaceted, addressing a broad spectrum of issues from economic disparities and employment to education, health, and cultural integration. These efforts are underpinned by a commitment to solidarity, ensuring that no region or community is left behind. As the EU navigates challenges such as migration, demographic shifts, and economic transitions, its social policies and cohesion initiatives will continue to play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive, resilient, and cohesive European society. By upholding its values and adapting to emerging needs, the EU can sustain its vision of unity in diversity, enhancing the quality of life for all its citizens.

Cultural Integration and Identity Issues

The European Union is a combination of diverse cultures, languages, and traditions, woven together through centuries of history, trade, migration, and conflict. As a political and economic union, the EU has endeavored to foster a sense of European identity while respecting and celebrating the unique cultural identities of its member states. This balancing act presents both opportunities and challenges in the realms of cultural integration and identity. Navigating these complexities requires a nuanced approach to policy-making and societal engagement, ensuring that cultural diversity becomes a source of strength rather than division.

Cultural integration within the EU is influenced by the movement of people, both within and beyond its borders. Intra-EU mobility, enabled by the principle of free movement, has facilitated the mingling of different cultures, fostering multiculturalism and cross-cultural exchange. For instance, students participating in the Erasmus+ program often return with a broadened perspective and a sense of European solidarity, contributing to the creation of a shared European identity. However, the free movement of people also brings challenges, as host communities sometimes struggle with integrating newcomers, and migrants face barriers to social and cultural inclusion.

External migration has added another layer of complexity to cultural integration in the EU. The influx of migrants and refugees from various parts of the world, particularly during the 2015 refugee crisis, has significantly altered the cultural landscape of many EU countries. These newcomers bring with them diverse traditions, languages, and religious practices, enriching the cultural fabric of host societies. However, this diversity can also lead to social tensions, xenophobia, and cultural clashes if not managed effectively. Integration policies that promote inclusivity and mutual understanding are essential to address these challenges. Initiatives such as language courses,

intercultural dialogue programs, and community-building activities help bridge cultural divides and foster social cohesion.

The issue of identity is central to the EU's cultural integration efforts. The concept of a European identity is often seen as complementary to national identities, rather than a replacement. This duality allows individuals to identify both with their nation-state and with Europe as a whole. The EU promotes this multifaceted identity through various cultural and educational programs that highlight shared values, history, and heritage. For example, the European Capitals of Culture initiative[129] celebrates the cultural richness of different cities, fostering a sense of European unity while showcasing local traditions.

Despite these efforts, the rise of nationalist and populist movements across Europe poses a significant challenge to cultural integration and the development of a European identity. These movements often exploit fears of cultural dilution and economic insecurity, advocating for stricter immigration controls and a return to traditional national values. This trend highlights the tension between globalization and localism, and the struggle to maintain cultural heritage in an increasingly interconnected world. Addressing these concerns requires a careful balance between respecting national identities and promoting the benefits of cultural diversity and integration.

The EU's legal and policy frameworks play a crucial role in promoting cultural integration and addressing identity issues. The Treaty of Lisbon, for example, enshrines the respect for cultural diversity as a core value of the EU. The EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights further guarantees the right to cultural expression and the protection of cultural heritage. These legal instruments provide a foundation for policies and programs aimed at fostering cultural inclusion and protecting the rights of minorities[130].

Education is a powerful tool for cultural integration and the formation of a European identity. The EU's educational policies emphasize the importance of intercultural learning and the development of critical thinking skills. Schools and universities play a key role in promoting values such as tolerance, respect for diversity, and active citizenship. By educating young people about the shared history and values of Europe, and by encouraging them to engage with different cultures, the EU aims to build a more cohesive and inclusive society.

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[129] European capitals of Culture. *European Commission*. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture

[130] Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. *European Commission* https://commission.europa.eu/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-fundamental-rights-eu_en

Media and the arts also have a significant impact on cultural integration and identity formation. The Creative Europe program supports the audiovisual, cultural, and creative sectors, fostering cross-border cooperation and the mobility of artists and cultural professionals. By promoting European cinema, literature, and arts, the program helps to create a shared cultural space that transcends national boundaries. Additionally, the media can play a vital role in shaping perceptions and narratives about cultural diversity and integration. Positive portrayals of multiculturalism and successful integration stories can counteract negative stereotypes and xenophobia.

In conclusion, the social and cultural dimensions of the EU, particularly regarding cultural integration and identity issues, are complex and multifaceted. The EU's efforts to foster a sense of European identity while respecting and celebrating national and regional diversities are ongoing and require a delicate balance. Effective integration policies, inclusive educational programs, and supportive cultural initiatives are essential to address the challenges and harness the opportunities presented by cultural diversity. By promoting mutual understanding, respect, and solidarity, the EU can continue to build a cohesive and inclusive society that values and benefits from its rich cultural diversity.

2.2. External Relations and Global Role
(Anna Soloviova)

Foreign Policy and Security

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union represents a pivotal aspect of the Union's external relations, aimed at promoting peace, security, and international cooperation. Established by the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, the CFSP seeks to project the EU's values and interests on the global stage, harmonizing the foreign policies of its member states to present a united front in international affairs.

The CFSP was born out of the EU's aspiration to play a more assertive role in global politics, driven by the need to respond collectively to international crises and the changing dynamics of the post-Cold War era. The Maastricht Treaty formalized the CFSP, introducing a structured approach to foreign policy and security matters. This policy framework was further refined by subsequent treaties, notably the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), the Nice Treaty (2001), and the Lisbon Treaty (2007), which enhanced the coherence, effectiveness, and visibility of the EU's external actions.

One of the fundamental objectives of the CFSP is to safeguard the EU's values, fundamental interests, security, independence, and integrity. It aims to promote international cooperation, respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The CFSP also seeks to prevent conflicts and strengthen international security by addressing global challenges such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and regional instability. These objectives are pursued through various diplomatic, economic, and, occasionally, military means.

The institutional framework of the CFSP is designed to facilitate coordination and decision-making among the EU's member states. The European Council provides strategic direction and sets the overall guidelines for the CFSP. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, a position created by the Lisbon Treaty, plays a crucial role in representing the EU externally and coordinating the CFSP. The High Representative is also supported by the European External Action Service, which acts as the EU's diplomatic corps and assists in the implementation of the CFSP[131].

Decision-making within the CFSP is primarily intergovernmental, requiring unanimity among member states in the Council of the European Union. This requirement ensures that all member states are committed to the decisions taken, but it also poses challenges in achieving swift and decisive

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[131] High Representative / Vice President. *Diplomatic Service of the European Union*. 1 December 2024. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/high-representative-vice-president_en

action, particularly in times of crisis. To address this, the Lisbon Treaty introduced the possibility of using Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) in certain CFSP areas, although this has been applied sparingly due to the sensitive nature of foreign and security policy[132].

The EU employs a range of instruments and mechanisms under the CFSP to achieve its objectives. Diplomatic measures, such as political dialogues, partnerships, and agreements with third countries, are central to the CFSP. The EU also uses sanctions and restrictive measures to respond to violations of international law or human rights abuses, as seen in its actions against countries like Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Additionally, the CFSP encompasses the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which includes civilian and military missions aimed at conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict stabilization. These missions are deployed in various regions, including the Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East, demonstrating the EU's commitment to global security[133].

Despite its achievements, the CFSP faces several challenges. One of the most significant is the tension between national sovereignty and the need for a cohesive EU foreign policy. Member states often have divergent interests and priorities, making it difficult to reach consensus on critical issues. The requirement for unanimity in decision-making can lead to paralysis or diluted responses to international crises. Moreover, the CFSP's effectiveness is sometimes hampered by limited resources and capabilities, particularly in the area of defence, where the EU relies heavily on the military assets of individual member states and NATO.

Brexit has also had a profound impact on the CFSP. The departure of the United Kingdom, one of the EU's major military powers, has necessitated a re-evaluation of the Union's security and defence strategies. However, Brexit has also presented an opportunity for the remaining member states to forge a more integrated and cohesive foreign policy, as evidenced by recent initiatives to enhance defence cooperation and strategic autonomy.

The EU's relationship with other major global actors, such as the United States, Russia, and China, further influences the CFSP. Transatlantic relations, particularly with the United States, have traditionally been a cornerstone of the EU's foreign policy[134]. However, shifting geopolitical

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[132] Qualified majority. *European Council, Council of the European Union* https://cutt.ly/ErGR0iBX
[133] The Common Security and Defence Policy. *EU Security, Defence and Crisis Response*. 12 August 2021. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/common-security-and-defence-policy_en
[134] European Parliament resolution of 28 February 2024 on the implementation of the common foreign and security policy – annual report 2023. *European Parliament.* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0104_EN.html

dynamics and differing approaches to international issues have prompted the EU to seek greater strategic autonomy. Relations with Russia are strained due to conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, cyber-attacks, and interference in democratic processes, leading the EU to adopt a dual strategy of deterrence and engagement. With China, the EU pursues a complex relationship balancing cooperation on global challenges like climate change and trade with concerns over human rights and strategic competition.

Thus, the Common Foreign and Security Policy is a cornerstone of the EU's efforts to promote peace, security, and international cooperation. While it has achieved significant milestones, the CFSP must navigate complex challenges, including member state divergences, resource limitations, and evolving global dynamics. The continuous evolution and adaptation of the CFSP are crucial for the EU to maintain its role as a global actor capable of responding effectively to international challenges and promoting a stable and just world order. As the EU faces an increasingly uncertain global environment, the CFSP will remain an essential tool for safeguarding the Union's interests and values on the international stage.

The European Union has progressively established itself as a formidable actor in global politics, leveraging its strategic partnerships and expansive influence to address international challenges, promote stability, and advance its values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The EU's foreign policy framework, underpinned by the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), is designed to enhance its global reach through cooperative engagements with key international players and multilateral organizations.

Strategic partnerships are integral to the EU's foreign policy architecture. These partnerships are formed with countries and regions that are pivotal to the EU's geopolitical interests and global stability. Among the most significant of these relationships is the transatlantic partnership with the United States. Historically, the US and the EU have shared a robust bond grounded in common democratic values, economic interdependence, and security alliances such as NATO. Despite occasional divergences in policy approaches, this partnership remains a cornerstone of the EU's foreign policy, particularly in areas like counter-terrorism, global trade, and addressing climate change. The EU–US collaboration underscores a mutual commitment to sustaining a rules-based international order and addressing global challenges collaboratively.

In Asia, the EU has cultivated strategic partnerships with key players like China, Japan, and India. The relationship with China is multifaceted, balancing cooperation and competition. The EU engages China on global issues such as climate change, trade, and investment, while also addressing concerns related to human rights, intellectual property, and market access. The EU–China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, for example, aims to create a more balanced economic relationship, though it faces scrutiny and

debate within the EU regarding its implications for strategic autonomy and values. Meanwhile, Japan and the EU share a strong partnership underscored by the EU–Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, which enhances economic ties and promotes common values in international affairs. Similarly, the EU's relationship with India is evolving, with both parties seeking to bolster cooperation in areas such as digital transformation, sustainable development, and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region.

In the context of its neighborhood policy, the EU places significant emphasis on fostering stability and prosperity in its immediate periphery. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) encompasses relationships with Eastern European countries, the Middle East, and North Africa. Through the ENP, the EU aims to promote democratic reforms, economic development, and conflict resolution in neighboring countries, thereby contributing to regional stability[135]. The Eastern Partnership, involving countries like Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, exemplifies the EU's efforts to support political and economic reforms, enhance connectivity, and foster security cooperation. In the Southern Neighborhood, the EU engages with countries like Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt to address shared challenges such as migration, counter-terrorism, and energy security.

The EU's strategic partnerships extend to multilateral organizations, reflecting its commitment to a multilateral approach to global governance. The EU is an active participant in the United Nations, where it champions international law, sustainable development, and human rights. Through its participation in the G20, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and other international forums, the EU advocates for global economic stability, free and fair trade, and cooperative solutions to global crises[136]. The EU's partnership with the African Union (AU) highlights its role in promoting peace, security, and sustainable development in Africa, addressing issues like conflict prevention, economic integration, and climate resilience.

The influence of the EU on the global stage is also reflected in its normative power – the ability to shape international norms and standards. The EU's normative influence is evident in its promotion of human rights, environmental sustainability, and regulatory standards in international trade. The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), for instance, has set a global benchmark for data privacy and protection, influencing legislation beyond its borders[137]. Similarly, the EU's leadership in climate policy,

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[135] European Neighbourhood Policy. *Diplomatic Service of the European Union*. https://cutt.ly/QrGR2Wym

[136] The World Trade Organization. *Official website*. https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/thewto_e.htm

[137] General Data Protection Regulation GDPR. https://gdpr-info.eu/

epitomized by the European Green Deal, positions it as a global leader in the transition to a sustainable and carbon-neutral economy.

However, the EU's global influence and strategic partnerships are not without challenges. Internal divisions among member states can sometimes hinder a cohesive and effective foreign policy. Differing national interests and perspectives on global issues can lead to fragmented responses, affecting the EU's ability to act decisively on the international stage. Moreover, the rise of geopolitical competition, exemplified by the strategic rivalry between the US and China, presents the EU with complex choices in aligning its policies and partnerships. Additionally, the EU must navigate the implications of Brexit, which has necessitated recalibrating its foreign and security policy framework without the UK.

Despite these challenges, the EU continues to enhance its strategic autonomy and global influence through innovative initiatives and adaptive strategies. The Strategic Compass, currently under development, aims to provide a coherent and unified direction for the EU's security and defence policy, addressing emerging threats and enhancing operational capabilities. The EU's pursuit of digital sovereignty, through initiatives aimed at technological innovation and resilience, reflects its strategic ambition to remain a key player in the digital economy and cybersecurity.

In conclusion, the EU's foreign policy and security framework, characterized by strategic partnerships and global influence, underscores its role as a key actor in international relations. Through its partnerships with major global powers, regional neighbors, and multilateral organizations, the EU promotes stability, cooperation, and the advancement of its values. While internal and external challenges persist, the EU's commitment to multilateralism, normative power, and strategic autonomy ensures that it remains a significant force in shaping the global order. As the EU navigates an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape, its strategic partnerships and global influence will continue to be essential in addressing global challenges and promoting a more stable and prosperous world.

Trade and Economic Relations in the EU

Trade and economic relations are fundamental pillars of the European Union, playing a crucial role in its economic stability and global influence. The EU is one of the world's largest trading entities, with a highly integrated internal market and an extensive network of trade agreements that facilitate economic interaction with global partners. These trade agreements are designed to promote growth, create jobs, and ensure a competitive market environment for European businesses.

One of the cornerstone trade agreements of the EU is the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, which extends the EU's internal market to three of the four European Free Trade Association (EFTA) states: Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein. The EEA agreement allows these countries to

participate in the EU's single market without being EU members, ensuring the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. This agreement has significantly boosted economic ties and integration, benefiting both the EU and the EFTA states through increased trade flows and economic cooperation[138].

The EU's trade relationship with Switzerland, another EFTA member, is governed by a series of bilateral agreements rather than the EEA. These agreements cover a wide range of sectors, including trade, agriculture, public procurement, and transport. Switzerland is one of the EU's most important trading partners, with substantial cross-border trade and investment[139]. Despite the complexity of these bilateral arrangements, they underscore the EU's ability to maintain robust trade relationships even outside its formal frameworks.

On the global stage, the EU has forged significant trade agreements with key economic partners. The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada is one of the EU's most comprehensive trade deals. Signed in 2016, CETA eliminates nearly all tariffs on goods between the EU and Canada and opens up markets for services and investment[140]. This agreement has enhanced economic cooperation, increased bilateral trade, and provided new opportunities for businesses in both regions.

Another landmark agreement is the EU–Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), which entered into force in 2019. This agreement represents one of the world's largest free trade areas, covering almost a third of global GDP. The EU–Japan EPA removes tariffs, improves regulatory cooperation, and promotes sustainable development, significantly boosting trade in goods and services[141]. It also enhances bilateral investment flows and strengthens economic ties between two of the world's largest economies.

The EU–South Korea Free Trade Agreement, in effect since 2011, is another critical trade pact. As the first trade deal between the EU and an Asian country, it has significantly increased bilateral trade and investment. The agreement covers not only the elimination of tariffs but also non-tariff barriers, intellectual property rights, and sustainable development

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[138] European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement. *European Commission*. https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/european-economic-area-eea-agreement

[139] Ibid.

[140] The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. *European Commission*. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/canada/eu-canada-agreement_en

[141] The EU–Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. *European Commission*. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/japan/eu-japan-agreement_en

provisions[142]. This comprehensive approach has deepened economic integration and cooperation between the EU and South Korea, benefiting a wide range of industries.

In addition to these bilateral agreements, the EU is actively engaged in multilateral trade negotiations. The EU is a key player in the World Trade Organization (WTO), advocating for a rules-based international trading system. The EU's commitment to multilateralism is evident in its efforts to advance global trade liberalization and address challenges such as trade protectionism and unfair trade practices. The EU's involvement in the WTO underscores its role as a champion of open and fair trade on the global stage.

The EU's trade relations with the United States are particularly significant, given the size and importance of transatlantic trade. Despite challenges and periodic disputes, such as those related to tariffs and regulatory standards, the EU and the US remain each other's largest trading partners. Efforts to negotiate comprehensive trade agreements, like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), have faced hurdles, but ongoing dialogue and cooperation continue to shape this vital economic relationship[143].

The EU's trade strategy also prioritizes emerging markets and regional partnerships. The EU–Mercosur Agreement, finalized in 2019, aims to create a comprehensive trade framework with South American countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. This agreement, once fully ratified, will create one of the world's largest free trade areas, facilitating increased trade and investment flows and promoting sustainable development. Similarly, the EU has signed trade agreements with Mexico, Vietnam, and Singapore, among others, reflecting its strategy to diversify trade relations and tap into the growth potential of emerging economies[144].

Brexit has necessitated a reevaluation of the EU's trade relations, particularly with the United Kingdom, which was one of its largest trading partners. The EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which came into effect in 2021, establishes the framework for post-Brexit trade[145]. While it maintains zero tariffs and quotas on goods, it introduces new regulatory and customs checks, impacting trade flows. This agreement marks a new chapter

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[142] EU–South Korea Free Trade Agreement and Digital Trade Agreement. *European Commission*. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/south-korea/eu-south-korea-agreements_en

[143] The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. *European Commission*. https://surl.lt/jdxcxu

[144] The EU–Mercosur Agreement. *European Commission*. https://surl.li/kcmcml

[145] The EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement. *European Commission*. 30 April 2021. https://surl.lu/qgfpoc

in EU–UK economic relations, requiring ongoing adjustments and cooperation to manage the complexities of their interconnected markets.

Trade agreements are not only about economic gains but also reflect the EU's commitment to promoting its values globally. Many of the EU's trade agreements include provisions on human rights, environmental protection, and labour standards. These clauses ensure that trade promotes sustainable development and respect for fundamental rights, aligning economic activities with broader social and ethical standards. The EU's emphasis on these values in its trade policy highlights its role as a normative power in global trade.

So, the EU's major trade agreements and partnerships are foundational to its economic strategy, enhancing its global influence and economic resilience. Through a diverse network of bilateral and multilateral agreements, the EU promotes open and fair trade, drives economic growth, and upholds its values on the global stage. While challenges such as geopolitical tensions, protectionism, and Brexit pose ongoing risks, the EU's adaptive and proactive trade policy ensures that it remains a central player in the global economy. By continuing to forge strategic partnerships and advocate for a rules-based trading system, the EU not only secures its economic interests but also contributes to global stability and prosperity.

The European Union plays a pivotal role in global economic governance, actively participating in and shaping the rules and norms that govern international trade and finance. Through its engagement with key institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the EU influences global economic policies, promotes stability, and advocates for a multilateral, rules-based international economic order. This monograph explores the EU's contributions to global economic governance, examining its roles, strategies, and impacts within these vital organizations.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is a central platform for the EU's trade policy and economic diplomacy. As one of the WTO's founding members, the EU has been a staunch advocate for a multilateral trading system that ensures fair competition, reduces trade barriers, and fosters economic growth. The EU's active participation in the WTO includes shaping trade rules, resolving disputes, and negotiating trade agreements[146]. The EU has been instrumental in promoting trade liberalization through successive rounds of negotiations, such as the Doha Development Agenda, which aims to address the needs of developing countries within the global trading system. Despite the challenges and slow progress in some areas, the EU continues to push for reforms that enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of the WTO, advocating for measures that modernize trade rules

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[146] The World Trade Organization. *Official website*. https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/thewto_e.htm

to address contemporary issues like digital trade, environmental sustainability, and the role of state-owned enterprises.

The EU's influence in the WTO extends to its role in dispute settlement. The EU is one of the most active users of the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism, both as a complainant and respondent. This mechanism is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the global trading system, providing a structured process for resolving trade disputes. The EU's involvement in high-profile cases, such as those concerning subsidies and trade remedies, underscores its commitment to upholding international trade rules and protecting the interests of its member states. Furthermore, the EU has been a vocal supporter of efforts to resolve the current impasse in the WTO's Appellate Body, emphasizing the need for a fully functional dispute resolution system to ensure legal certainty and predictability in international trade.

Beyond the WTO, the EU plays a significant role in the International Monetary Fund (IMF), where it contributes to global financial stability and economic governance. The EU member states collectively hold a substantial share of voting power in the IMF, reflecting their economic weight and political influence. Through this platform, the EU engages in policy dialogue and coordination on global economic issues, providing input on macroeconomic policies, financial regulation, and crisis management. The EU's involvement in the IMF is particularly evident in its support for financial assistance programs aimed at stabilizing economies in distress[147]. For instance, during the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, the EU collaborated closely with the IMF to design and implement bailout packages for member states like Greece, Ireland, and Portugal, combining financial support with structural reforms to restore economic stability and growth.

The EU's commitment to global economic governance also manifests in its efforts to promote international financial regulation and supervision. The EU has been a proactive participant in the Financial Stability Board (FSB) and the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, contributing to the development and implementation of global financial standards[148]. These efforts are aimed at enhancing the resilience of the financial system, preventing future crises, and ensuring a level playing field in global finance. The EU's adoption of comprehensive regulatory frameworks, such as the Basel III standards, demonstrates its leadership in implementing robust financial regulations that enhance transparency, reduce systemic risks, and protect consumers.

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[147] The International Monetary Fund. *Official website*. https://www.imf.org/en/About
[148] FSB Work Programme for 2024. *Financial Stability Board*. 24 January 2024. https://www.fsb.org/2024/01/fsb-work-programme-for-2024/

The EU's influence in global economic governance extends to its engagement with the Group of Twenty (G20), where it plays a crucial role in shaping global economic policies and responses to international challenges[149]. The EU's participation in the G20, alongside its major member states, allows it to advocate for policies that promote sustainable and inclusive growth, address global imbalances, and enhance international cooperation. The EU's contributions to G20 initiatives, such as those on climate change, tax transparency, and digital economy, highlight its commitment to addressing global public goods and fostering a more equitable and sustainable global economy.

Moreover, the EU's role in global economic governance is characterized by its promotion of development cooperation and support for low-income countries. The EU is one of the largest providers of official development assistance (ODA), channeling significant resources to support economic development, poverty reduction, and capacity building in developing countries. Through its partnerships with international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and regional development banks, the EU contributes to global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and address pressing challenges like climate change, health crises, and infrastructure deficits[150]. The EU's development policies are guided by principles of partnership, ownership, and alignment with the priorities of recipient countries, ensuring that aid is effective and responsive to local needs.

The EU's leadership in promoting global economic governance is also evident in its efforts to address climate change and promote sustainable development. The EU has been at the forefront of international climate negotiations, playing a key role in the adoption and implementation of the Paris Agreement. The EU's ambitious climate policies, such as the European Green Deal, aim to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and serve as a model for other regions. By integrating climate considerations into its trade and investment policies, the EU promotes a green transition that aligns economic growth with environmental sustainability.

Despite its significant contributions, the EU faces challenges in its role in global economic governance. Internal divisions among member states can sometimes complicate the formulation of a unified stance on international issues. Additionally, geopolitical tensions and the rise of protectionist sentiments globally pose risks to the multilateral trading system that the EU

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[149] G20 Summit 2024: 18–19 November 2024, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *IISD SDG Knowledge Hub*. https://cutt.ly/wrGR4cKu

[150] The *s*ustainable development *g*oals: What are the *s*ustainable *d*evelopment *g*oals? *United Nations Development Programme* https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals

champions. To navigate these challenges, the EU must continue to enhance its internal cohesion, strengthen alliances with like-minded partners, and advocate for reforms that reinforce the resilience and inclusivity of global economic institutions.

In conclusion, the EU's role in global economic governance is multifaceted and impactful, reflecting its commitment to promoting a stable, fair, and rules-based international economic order. Through its active participation in the WTO, IMF, G20, and other multilateral forums, the EU shapes global economic policies, addresses systemic challenges, and advocates for sustainable development. While challenges persist, the EU's proactive engagement and leadership in global economic governance remain crucial for advancing its values, protecting its interests, and contributing to a more stable and prosperous world.

Neighborhood Policy in the EU

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a key framework of the European Union designed to foster stability, security, and prosperity in the countries directly surrounding the EU. Established in 2004, the ENP aims to strengthen relationships with 16 neighboring countries to the east and south of the EU's borders through political association, economic integration, and cooperation on issues of mutual interest[151].

The origins of the ENP can be traced to the EU's enlargement process in the early 2000s, which brought several Central and Eastern European countries into the Union. This expansion heightened the need for a coherent strategy to manage the EU's new external borders and to address the potential spillover effects of instability from neighboring regions. The ENP was conceived as a way to create a "ring of friends" around the EU, promoting shared values and fostering deeper political and economic ties with neighboring countries.

The primary objectives of the ENP are to promote democracy, rule of law, human rights, and economic development in the EU's neighboring countries. The policy seeks to support political reforms, enhance economic integration, and facilitate mobility and people-to-people contacts. The ENP is grounded in the principles of conditionality and differentiation, meaning that the level of EU support and cooperation is contingent upon the commitment of partner countries to implement reforms and uphold shared values. This approach allows for tailored partnerships that reflect the varying needs, capacities, and aspirations of individual countries.

The ENP is implemented through bilateral Action Plans or Association Agendas agreed upon between the EU and each partner country. These documents outline specific priorities and benchmarks for political, economic,

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[151] European Neighbourhood Policy. *Diplomatic Service of the European Union*. 29 July 2021. https://cutt.ly/QrGR2Wym.

and sectoral cooperation over a set period, typically three to five years. Financial and technical assistance from the EU supports the implementation of these plans, facilitated through instruments like the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and, more recently, the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)[152]. These funds are used to support projects ranging from governance reforms and infrastructure development to educational exchanges and civil society initiatives.

In the eastern dimension, the ENP encompasses the Eastern Partnership (EaP), which includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The EaP aims to deepen political association and economic integration between the EU and these countries, with a particular focus on comprehensive reforms and alignment with EU standards[153]. The signing of Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine represents significant milestones in this context, fostering closer economic ties and integration into the EU market[154]. These agreements have facilitated increased trade, investment, and economic growth in the partner countries, while also promoting democratic governance and the rule of law.

In the southern dimension, the ENP covers the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) framework, which includes countries from North Africa and the Middle East. The UfM focuses on fostering regional cooperation and addressing common challenges such as economic development, migration, energy security, and environmental sustainability. Initiatives under the UfM aim to enhance connectivity, promote sustainable development, and support socioeconomic reforms. Projects such as the Mediterranean Solar Plan and the Horizon 2020 initiative for a cleaner Mediterranean highlight the EU's commitment to addressing environmental and energy challenges in the region[155].

One of the notable achievements of the ENP has been its role in promoting stability and economic development in the EU's neighboring countries. Through targeted assistance and policy dialogue, the ENP has supported democratic transitions, governance reforms, and economic modernization. For example, in Ukraine, the EU's support has been instrumental in

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[152] Neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe). *European Commission*. https://cutt.ly/2rGR5E2F

[153] Eastern Partnership. *Mission of Ukraine to the European Union*. 15 April 2021. https://cutt.ly/HrGR6JBk

[154] Deep and comprehensive free trade agreements. *European Commission*. https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/deep-and-comprehensive-free-trade-agreements

[155] The Union for the Mediterranean. *Diplomatic Service of the European Union*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/union-mediterranean-ufm-and-eu_en

advancing judicial reforms, combating corruption, and improving public administration. Similarly, in Tunisia, the ENP has facilitated democratic consolidation and socioeconomic development following the 2011 revolution.

The ENP has also played a critical role in managing migration flows and enhancing border security. Through partnerships with countries like Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan, the EU has developed comprehensive approaches to address the root causes of irregular migration and enhance border management. These efforts have included capacity-building initiatives, support for asylum and refugee systems, and the development of legal migration pathways. The ENP's emphasis on migration cooperation underscores the interconnectedness of security, development, and humanitarian considerations in the EU's neighborhood policy.

However, the ENP faces significant challenges. The diverse political, economic, and security contexts of neighboring countries require flexible and adaptive approaches, which can be difficult to implement uniformly. Political instability, conflicts, and authoritarian regimes in some partner countries pose significant obstacles to the ENP's objectives. For instance, the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Libya have severely limited the EU's ability to engage effectively in these regions. Additionally, the varying levels of commitment to reforms among partner countries can hinder progress and limit the impact of EU assistance.

The EU's internal dynamics also influence the effectiveness of the ENP. Member states' differing foreign policy priorities and interests can lead to inconsistencies in the EU's approach to its neighbors. The need for unanimity in foreign policy decisions can sometimes result in watered-down measures that lack the necessary force to effect meaningful change. Moreover, the EU's capacity to respond to crises and support long-term development in its neighborhood is constrained by limited financial and human resources.

To address these challenges, the EU has undertaken several reforms to enhance the effectiveness of the ENP. The 2015 ENP review introduced a more flexible and tailored approach, allowing for differentiated partnerships based on the specific needs and ambitions of each partner country. The review also emphasized the importance of security cooperation, economic resilience, and migration management, reflecting the evolving geopolitical landscape and the EU's strategic interests. The recent adoption of the NDICI, which combines various external action instruments, aims to streamline EU funding and increase the coherence and impact of its external policies.

Thus, the European Neighbourhood Policy is a cornerstone of the EU's foreign relations, aiming to promote stability, security, and prosperity in its surrounding regions. Through a combination of political dialogue, economic integration, and development assistance, the ENP seeks to foster closer ties with neighboring countries and support their transition towards democracy

and sustainable development. Despite the challenges and complexities inherent in its implementation, the ENP remains a vital tool for the EU to manage its external borders, address shared challenges, and promote its values and interests in an increasingly interconnected world. As the EU continues to navigate a dynamic geopolitical environment, the ENP will be crucial in shaping the future of the EU's relations with its neighbors and contributing to a more stable and prosperous European region.

In Eastern Europe, the ENP has had a significant impact on political, economic, and social developments, influencing the trajectories of countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus. This monograph explores the multifaceted effects of the ENP in Eastern Europe, examining the successes, challenges, and ongoing efforts to deepen integration and cooperation with these neighboring countries.

The ENP's influence in Eastern Europe is particularly evident in its support for political reforms and democratic governance. One of the most prominent examples is Ukraine, where the EU has played a crucial role in the post-2014 political landscape. Following the Euromaidan protests and the subsequent ousting of President Yanukovych, the EU provided substantial political and financial support to Ukraine. The Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area signed in 2014 have been pivotal in fostering closer political association and economic integration between the EU and Ukraine[156]. These agreements have facilitated extensive reforms in governance, judiciary, anti-corruption measures, and public administration, aligning Ukraine's legal and institutional frameworks more closely with EU standards.

In Moldova, the ENP has similarly supported significant democratic reforms and governance improvements. The EU–Moldova Association Agreement, including the DCFTA, has been instrumental in driving legislative and institutional changes aimed at strengthening the rule of law, combating corruption, and enhancing economic governance[157]. EU assistance has helped Moldova to improve its regulatory environment, making it more conducive to business and investment. The EU's support has also extended to civil society organizations, empowering them to play a more active role in promoting transparency and accountability.

Georgia has also benefited from the ENP, particularly through its Association Agreement and DCFTA with the EU. These agreements have catalyzed comprehensive reforms in various sectors, including public

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[156] EU–Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. *European Commission*. https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/eu-ukraine-deep-and-comprehensive-free-trade-area

[157] The EU–Moldova, Republic of Association Agreement. *EDIT*. 2014. https://edit.wti.org/document/show/53463c73-5ac4-4a31-917f-a8025bce0bf2

administration, justice, and trade. The EU has provided technical and financial assistance to support these reforms, helping Georgia to modernize its institutions and align its policies with European standards [158]. The ENP has also facilitated increased trade between Georgia and the EU, boosting economic growth and creating new opportunities for Georgian businesses. Furthermore, the EU's visa liberalization with Georgia has enhanced people-to-people contacts, fostering greater mobility and cultural exchange.

The impact of the ENP in Eastern Europe is not limited to political and economic reforms; it also extends to social and human development. The EU has supported numerous initiatives aimed at improving education, healthcare, and social protection in neighboring countries. In Ukraine, for example, the EU has funded projects to enhance vocational education and training, aligning it with labour market needs and improving the employability of young people. In Moldova, EU assistance has helped to modernize the healthcare system, improving access to quality medical services and strengthening public health capacities. These efforts contribute to the overall well-being of the populations in Eastern European countries, promoting inclusive and sustainable development.

Energy security is another critical area where the ENP has made a significant impact. Eastern European countries, many of which are heavily dependent on energy imports, have benefited from EU support in diversifying their energy sources and enhancing energy efficiency. The EU has promoted regional energy cooperation and infrastructure projects aimed at reducing reliance on single suppliers and improving energy resilience. For instance, the EU has supported the Southern Gas Corridor, which aims to transport Caspian gas to Europe, thereby diversifying energy supply routes and enhancing energy security in the region. Additionally, the EU has provided technical assistance and funding to support renewable energy projects and energy efficiency measures in countries like Ukraine and Georgia, contributing to their energy transition and environmental sustainability.

Despite these achievements, the ENP in Eastern Europe faces significant challenges. Political instability, conflicts, and governance issues in some countries hinder the full realization of the ENP's objectives. Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war provoked by Russia's aggression against Ukraine have created complex security and political dynamics that complicate EU engagement and support efforts. Similarly, unresolved conflicts in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan pose substantial obstacles to stability and development in the region.

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[158] The EU–Georgia Association Agreement. *Official Journal of the European Union.* 2014. Vol. 54. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/association_agreement.pdf

Moreover, the varying levels of commitment to reforms among Eastern European countries can limit the effectiveness of the ENP. While countries like Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia have made significant strides in implementing EU-supported reforms, others, such as Belarus and Azerbaijan, have been less receptive to EU engagement due to their authoritarian governance structures and limited political freedoms. In Belarus, the EU's ability to influence political reforms and democratization has been constrained by the regime's repressive policies and resistance to external pressure. In Azerbaijan, the government's focus on maintaining control and limiting political pluralism has hindered progress in democratic governance and human rights.

The EU's internal challenges also impact the ENP's effectiveness in Eastern Europe. The need for unanimity among EU member states in foreign policy decisions can lead to compromises and delays, affecting the consistency and coherence of the ENP's implementation. Additionally, the EU's limited financial and human resources constrain its ability to provide sustained and comprehensive support to neighboring countries. Addressing these internal challenges is crucial for enhancing the EU's capacity to effectively engage with and support its Eastern European neighbors.

To strengthen the ENP's impact in Eastern Europe, the EU has undertaken several reforms and initiatives. The 2015 ENP review introduced a more flexible and tailored approach, allowing for differentiated partnerships based on the specific needs and aspirations of each partner country. This approach enables the EU to focus its efforts where they are most needed and where there is the greatest potential for positive change. The EU has also emphasized the importance of security cooperation, economic resilience, and migration management, reflecting the evolving geopolitical landscape and the strategic interests of the EU and its neighbors.

Furthermore, the EU has sought to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of its support through better coordination and coherence between different policy instruments and funding mechanisms. The adoption of the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) aims to streamline EU funding and increase the impact of its external actions. By combining various external action instruments, the NDICI facilitates more strategic and integrated support for the EU's neighborhood, addressing both immediate needs and long-term development goals[159].

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[159] Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument. *European Commission*. European Commission. https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/global-europe-neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument_en

In conclusion, the European Neighbourhood Policy has had a profound impact on Eastern Europe, promoting political reforms, economic integration, and social development in the region. The ENP has supported democratic transitions, governance improvements, and economic modernization in countries like Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, fostering closer ties with the EU and enhancing regional stability. However, significant challenges remain, including political instability, conflicts, and varying levels of commitment to reforms among partner countries. To address these challenges, the EU must continue to adapt and refine its approach, ensuring that the ENP remains a flexible and effective tool for promoting stability, security, and prosperity in Eastern Europe. Through sustained engagement, tailored support, and strategic cooperation, the EU can help its Eastern European neighbors navigate their paths toward sustainable development and closer integration with the European community.

2.3. Ukraine and European Integration
(Anna Soloviova)

Historical Context

Ukraine's relationship with Europe has been deeply intertwined and complex, influenced by a myriad of historical, cultural, and political factors. This intricate relationship dates back centuries, reflecting Ukraine's strategic geographical position as a bridge between Eastern and Western Europe. From its early medieval origins through periods of domination by powerful empires, to its contemporary aspirations for European integration, Ukraine's historical journey highlights a persistent and evolving connection with Europe.

The historical context of Ukraine's relationship with Europe can be traced back to the Kyivan Rus', a powerful medieval state that emerged in the 9th century. The Kyivan Rus', centered in present-day Kyiv, was a major political and cultural entity in Eastern Europe, establishing extensive trade networks and diplomatic relations with various European states. The adoption of Christianity in 988 under Prince Volodymyr the Great marked a significant cultural and religious alignment with Byzantium and, by extension, with Europe. This period laid the foundations for Ukraine's cultural and spiritual connections with the broader European Christian world.

Following the decline of the Kyivan Rus' in the 13th century, Ukraine fell under the influence and control of various foreign powers, which significantly shaped its relationship with Europe. The Mongol invasions led to the fragmentation of the region, and by the 14th century, western Ukrainian territories came under the rule of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and later the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. During this era, Ukrainian lands were exposed to Western European political, social, and cultural influences. The Union of Lublin in 1569, which created the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, integrated much of Ukrainian territory into this European polity, further fostering cultural and religious exchanges.

The 17th century marked another turning point in Ukraine's European engagement with the rise of the Cossack Hetmanate. Led by Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the Cossack state sought alliances with European powers to resist Polish domination. The Treaty of Pereyaslav in 1654, which aligned the Cossack Hetmanate with the Tsardom of Russia, significantly altered Ukraine's trajectory, shifting its focus eastward. Nevertheless, the Hetmanate maintained a degree of autonomy and continued to engage with European states, reflecting a persistent orientation towards Europe despite growing Russian influence.

The 18th and 19th centuries saw Ukraine's incorporation into the Russian Empire, which imposed significant cultural and political restrictions aimed at Russification. Despite these constraints, Ukrainian intellectuals and nationalists drew inspiration from European ideas of nationalism, liberalism, and self-determination. The 19th century Ukrainian national revival, spearheaded by figures like Taras Shevchenko, underscored a cultural and intellectual alignment with European movements advocating for national identity and autonomy.

The collapse of the Russian Empire and the subsequent establishment of the Ukrainian People's Republic in 1917 briefly revived hopes for Ukrainian sovereignty and closer ties with Europe. However, the Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War and the incorporation of Ukraine into the Soviet Union in 1922 curtailed these aspirations. Throughout the Soviet era, Ukraine remained largely isolated from direct European influence, though it retained deep cultural and historical ties with Europe.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Ukraine's subsequent declaration of independence marked a new chapter in its relationship with Europe. The newly independent Ukraine sought to reorient itself towards Europe, pursuing membership in European institutions and aligning its policies with European norms and standards. The early years of independence were marked by economic struggles and political instability, which complicated Ukraine's European aspirations. Nevertheless, the desire for integration with Europe persisted as a central theme in Ukraine's post-Soviet identity and foreign policy.

The Orange Revolution of 2004–2005 represented a significant moment in Ukraine's European integration efforts. Triggered by widespread public dissatisfaction with electoral fraud and government corruption, the revolution underscored a strong popular desire for democratic governance and alignment with European values. The subsequent government pursued closer ties with the EU, though progress was slow and fraught with internal and external challenges.

Ukraine's European aspirations faced a critical juncture with the Euromaidan protests of 2013–2014. Sparked by then-President Viktor Yanukovych's decision to suspend the signing of an Association Agreement with the EU in favour of closer ties with Russia, the protests quickly evolved into a broader movement advocating for democracy, rule of law, and European integration. The ousting of Yanukovych and the establishment of a pro-European government marked a decisive shift in Ukraine's foreign policy, culminating in the signing of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU in 2014.

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, initiated in February 2022 have further solidified Ukraine's commitment to European integration as a means of securing its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The EU has played a crucial role in supporting Ukraine through financial assistance, technical expertise, and political backing. The implementation of the Association Agreement and the DCFTA has facilitated significant political and economic reforms in Ukraine, aligning its legal and regulatory frameworks more closely with EU standards.

Despite the progress made, Ukraine's path towards European integration remains complex and challenging. Corruption, political instability, and resistance from vested interests continue to pose significant obstacles. Additionally, Russia's aggression creates a volatile environment that complicates Ukraine's efforts to integrate more deeply with Europe. Nevertheless, the historical context of Ukraine's relationship with Europe underscores a long-standing aspiration for closer ties and alignment with European norms and values.

In conclusion, Ukraine's relationship with Europe has been shaped by centuries of cultural, political, and historical interactions. From the medieval era of the Kyivan Rus' to the modern aspirations for EU membership, Ukraine has consistently sought to position itself within the European sphere. The ENP and the Association Agreement with the EU represent significant milestones in this historical journey, fostering political, economic, and social reforms that bring Ukraine closer to Europe. Despite ongoing challenges, Ukraine's commitment to European integration reflects a deep-rooted historical connection and a persistent desire to align with European values and standards. As Ukraine continues to navigate its path towards integration, the historical context provides valuable insights into the enduring and evolving nature of its relationship with Europe.

Major Agreements and Milestones (Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, Association Agreement). Ukraine's journey towards European integration is marked by a series of significant agreements and milestones that have progressively aligned the country with the European Union. Among these, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) and the Association Agreement stand out as pivotal moments, each representing critical steps in Ukraine's evolving relationship with Europe.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), signed in 1994 and entering into force in 1998, was the first substantial treaty between Ukraine and the EU. The PCA aimed to establish a framework for political dialogue,

economic cooperation, and legislative alignment[160]. It was designed to facilitate Ukraine's transition to a market economy and to promote democratic reforms, human rights, and the rule of law. The agreement covered a wide range of areas, including trade, investment, energy, transport, and environmental protection. By promoting legislative and regulatory convergence with EU standards, the PCA laid the groundwork for deeper integration and set the stage for future agreements.

The PCA's implementation marked a significant shift in Ukraine's foreign policy, reflecting its aspirations to move closer to Europe following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The agreement fostered increased political dialogue and cooperation, leading to the establishment of regular meetings between Ukrainian and EU officials. These interactions facilitated the exchange of best practices and expertise, supporting Ukraine's reform efforts. Economically, the PCA contributed to the liberalization of trade between Ukraine and the EU, promoting increased bilateral trade and investment flows. Despite its limitations, the PCA represented a crucial step in institutionalizing Ukraine's relationship with the EU and reinforcing its European trajectory.

Building on the foundation laid by the PCA, the next major milestone in Ukraine's European integration was the signing of the Association Agreement and its accompanying the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area in 2014. The AA, which had been under negotiation since 2007, was a more ambitious and comprehensive agreement aimed at significantly deepening political, economic, and sectoral cooperation between Ukraine and the EU[161]. The signing of the AA was a direct response to the Euromaidan protests of 2013–2014, which were sparked by then-President Yanukovych's decision to suspend the agreement in favor of closer ties with Russia. The subsequent ousting of Yanukovych and the establishment of a pro-European government paved the way for the AA's signing and ratification.

The Association Agreement represents a landmark in Ukraine's European integration process. It is divided into several key components: political dialogue and reform, justice and security cooperation, economic and sectoral policies, and the DCFTA. The political section of the AA focuses on promoting democratic principles, human rights, and good governance, while also enhancing cooperation on foreign and security policy. This component

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[160] EC–Ukraine Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. *Electronic Database of Investment Treaties.* https://edit.wti.org/document/show/ffc14f8f-aeee-4700-ae09-9c114328a99c

[161] Ukraine–EU relations. *(2021, August 5). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.* https://mfa.gov.ua/en/about-ukraine/european-integration/eu-ukraine-relations

underscores the EU's commitment to supporting Ukraine's political transformation and alignment with European values.

The economic provisions of the AA, particularly the DCFTA, aim to integrate Ukraine's economy more closely with the EU single market. The DCFTA involves the gradual elimination of tariffs, quotas, and non-tariff barriers, facilitating increased trade and investment. It also requires Ukraine to adopt significant portions of the EU acquis communautaire, covering areas such as competition policy, intellectual property rights, and sanitary and phytosanitary standards[162]. By aligning its regulatory environment with that of the EU, Ukraine aims to enhance its competitiveness and attract more European investment. The implementation of the DCFTA has already led to a significant increase in trade between Ukraine and the EU, with the EU becoming Ukraine's largest trading partner.

The Association Agreement also includes provisions for enhanced cooperation in key sectors such as energy, transport, environment, and education. In the energy sector, the AA promotes energy security, market integration, and the diversification of energy sources, reflecting the strategic importance of energy cooperation between Ukraine and the EU. The agreement supports the modernization of Ukraine's energy infrastructure, the adoption of EU energy regulations, and the development of renewable energy sources. These efforts are crucial for reducing Ukraine's dependence on Russian energy supplies and enhancing its energy resilience.

In the transport sector, the AA aims to integrate Ukraine's transport networks with the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), facilitating improved connectivity and mobility. The agreement supports infrastructure development, regulatory harmonization, and the adoption of EU safety and environmental standards[163]. These measures are expected to enhance Ukraine's transport efficiency, reduce logistical costs, and promote sustainable transport solutions.

Environmental cooperation is another critical component of the AA. The agreement promotes the adoption of EU environmental standards and practices, supporting Ukraine's efforts to address environmental challenges and promote sustainable development. The AA encourages cooperation on issues such as climate change, air and water quality, waste management, and biodiversity conservation. By aligning its environmental policies with those

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[162] EU/Ukraine Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. *European Commission*. https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/2672-euukraine-partnership-and-cooperation-agreement

[163] Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). *European Commission*. https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/infrastructure-and-investment/trans-european-transport-network-ten-t_en

of the EU, Ukraine aims to improve its environmental performance and contribute to global sustainability goals.

The Association Agreement also emphasizes the importance of people-to-people contacts and cooperation in education, research, and culture. The agreement facilitates academic exchanges, joint research projects, and cultural initiatives, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. Programs such as Erasmus+ have enabled Ukrainian students and academics to study and conduct research in EU countries, enhancing educational opportunities and promoting cross-cultural exchange.

The implementation of the Association Agreement and the DCFTA has been accompanied by significant challenges and opportunities for Ukraine. On the one hand, the agreement has driven extensive reforms and modernization efforts, enhancing Ukraine's political, economic, and social development. The alignment with EU standards has improved the regulatory environment, increased transparency, and promoted economic growth. On the other hand, the reform process has faced resistance from vested interests, political instability, and external pressures, particularly from Russia. Russia's aggression has created a complex and difficult environment for the implementation of the Association Agreement.

Despite these challenges, the Association Agreement remains a cornerstone of Ukraine's European integration strategy. The agreement reflects a shared commitment to deepening political and economic ties, promoting democratic values, and fostering sustainable development. It serves as a roadmap for Ukraine's transformation and integration into the European community, reinforcing its sovereignty and resilience in the face of external threats.

In conclusion, the major agreements and milestones in Ukraine's relationship with the EU, particularly the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the Association Agreement, have played a crucial role in shaping its path towards European integration. These agreements have established frameworks for political dialogue, economic cooperation, and legislative alignment, supporting Ukraine's efforts to align with European norms and standards. The historical context of these agreements highlights the evolving and deepening nature of Ukraine's relationship with Europe, reflecting a persistent and determined aspiration to integrate more closely with the European Union. As Ukraine continues to navigate its integration journey, the PCA and the AA will remain instrumental in guiding its reforms, fostering cooperation, and reinforcing its place within the European community.

Current State of Relations. Challenges and Obstacles

Ukraine's relationship with the European Union has undergone significant evolution in recent years, marked by a series of critical developments that underscore deepening ties and robust cooperation.

Since the signing of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area in 2014, Ukraine has embarked on an ambitious path of political, economic, and institutional reforms aimed at aligning itself more closely with EU standards and practices. The AA and DCFTA have provided a comprehensive framework for cooperation, encompassing areas such as trade, energy, governance, and the rule of law. These agreements have been instrumental in driving Ukraine's reform agenda and fostering closer integration with the EU.

One of the most significant recent developments in Ukraine–EU relations is the progress made in the implementation of the DCFTA. The agreement, which came into full effect on 1 September 2017, has facilitated substantial increases in bilateral trade and investment. The EU has become Ukraine's largest trading partner, accounting for over 40% of its trade[164]. Ukrainian exports to the EU have diversified and grown, particularly in the agricultural, machinery, and metallurgical sectors. The reduction of tariffs and non-tariff barriers, along with the alignment of regulatory standards, has enhanced the competitiveness of Ukrainian products in the European market.

Additionally, the DCFTA has catalyzed significant reforms in Ukraine's economic governance. The country has made strides in improving its business climate, enhancing transparency, and reducing corruption. Regulatory harmonization with EU standards has contributed to greater predictability and stability for investors. These reforms have been supported by substantial financial and technical assistance from the EU, including macro-financial assistance programs aimed at stabilizing Ukraine's economy and supporting structural reforms.

The political dimension of Ukraine–EU relations has also seen noteworthy developments. The EU has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly in the context of the ongoing war. The EU has imposed and maintained sanctions against Russia in response to the aggression against Ukraine. These sanctions have underscored the EU's commitment to upholding international law and supporting Ukraine's sovereignty.

In parallel, the EU has provided significant support for Ukraine's defence and security sectors. The European Peace Facility, established in 2021, has

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[164] EU trade relations with Ukraine: Facts, figures and latest developments. *European Commission*. https://cutt.ly/YrGIPs2X

facilitated the provision of military assistance to Ukraine, including non-lethal equipment and capacity-building measures[165]. This support aims to enhance Ukraine's resilience and defence capabilities in the face of external aggression. The EU has also been actively involved in diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict in Ukraine, supporting the Normandy format and the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Another critical area of cooperation is energy security. Ukraine and the EU have worked closely to enhance Ukraine's energy independence and integration into the European energy market. The EU has supported Ukraine's efforts to diversify its energy sources, modernize its energy infrastructure, and improve energy efficiency. The integration of Ukraine's electricity grid with the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E) in 2022 marked a significant milestone in this regard[166]. This integration has strengthened Ukraine's energy security and resilience, reducing its dependence on Russian energy supplies.

Visa liberalization has been a tangible and highly impactful development in Ukraine–EU relations. Since the introduction of visa-free travel for Ukrainian citizens to the Schengen Area in 2017, there has been a marked increase in people-to-people contacts, fostering greater cultural exchange and mutual understanding. The visa-free regime has facilitated travel for tourism, business, and educational purposes, strengthening the ties between Ukrainian and European societies.

Despite these positive developments, Ukraine–EU relations face ongoing challenges. Corruption remains a significant issue in Ukraine, hindering the full realization of the potential benefits of European integration. While progress has been made in recent years, particularly with the establishment of anti-corruption institutions such as the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the High Anti-Corruption Court, sustained efforts are needed to ensure the effectiveness and independence of these bodies.

Political instability and governance issues also pose challenges to Ukraine's reform agenda. Frequent changes in government and political infighting can slow down the implementation of critical reforms. Ensuring political stability and maintaining a strong commitment to the European integration path are essential for sustaining progress.

Moreover, the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine continues to strain Ukraine–EU relations. The humanitarian, economic, and security impacts of the conflict are significant, and achieving a lasting resolution remains a

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[165] European Peace Facility. *European Council, Council of the European Union*. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/

[166] ENTSO-E Member Companies. *ENTSO*. https://www.entsoe.eu/about/inside-entsoe/members/

complex and challenging task. The EU's continued support for Ukraine in addressing the consequences of the conflict and advancing diplomatic efforts is crucial for regional stability and Ukraine's European aspirations.

In response to these challenges, the EU has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Ukraine's reform and integration efforts. The EU–Ukraine Association Council, which oversees the implementation of the AA and DCFTA, has been a key platform for dialogue and cooperation. The Council's meetings provide opportunities to assess progress, address challenges, and set priorities for future cooperation. The EU has also continued to provide substantial financial assistance to Ukraine, including support for the implementation of reforms in areas such as decentralization, public administration, and judicial reform.

Looking ahead, the future of Ukraine–EU relations will depend on the continued successful implementation of the AA and DCFTA. This requires sustained commitment from both sides to the principles of democracy, rule of law, and market economy. Key priorities for the future include further integration into the EU single market, enhanced sectoral cooperation, and continued support for Ukraine's reform agenda. Ukraine's aspirations for EU membership represent a long-term goal that will require significant progress in political, economic, and institutional reforms. While the EU has not committed to a specific timeline for Ukraine's accession, the European perspective provided by the AA serves as a guiding framework for Ukraine's integration efforts.

Ukraine's aspirations for EU membership represent a long-term goal that will require significant progress in political, economic, and institutional reforms. While the EU has not committed to a specific timeline for Ukraine's accession, the European perspective provided by the AA serves as a guiding framework for Ukraine's integration efforts. The EU's support for Ukraine's European aspirations, coupled with Ukraine's continued commitment to reform and modernization, will be essential for realizing this goal.

In conclusion, recent developments in Ukraine–EU relations reflect a deepening partnership characterized by robust political, economic, and security cooperation. The implementation of the Association Agreement and the DCFTA has driven significant reforms and increased economic integration, while political and security cooperation has strengthened Ukraine's resilience in the face of external threats. Despite ongoing challenges, the trajectory of Ukraine–EU relations is one of steady progress and growing alignment. The continued commitment of both Ukraine and the EU to the principles of democracy, rule of law, and market economy will be crucial for furthering Ukraine's European integration and ensuring a stable and prosperous future for the region.

Ukraine's journey towards European integration has been fraught with challenges and obstacles, particularly in the realms of political and economic reforms. The ambitious reform agenda set forth by the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the European Union requires profound transformations in Ukraine's political and economic structures. While significant progress has been made, the implementation of these reforms has been impeded by a complex interplay of internal and external factors.

One of the most pressing challenges in Ukraine's political reform landscape is the pervasive issue of corruption. Corruption has long been entrenched in Ukraine's political system, undermining governance, eroding public trust, and hindering economic development. Efforts to combat corruption have seen some progress, notably with the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU), the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), and the High Anti-Corruption Court (HACC)[167]. These institutions represent significant steps forward, yet their effectiveness has been hampered by political interference, inadequate resources, and resistance from entrenched interests. Ensuring the independence and functionality of these anti-corruption bodies remains a critical challenge for Ukraine.

Political instability further complicates the reform process. Frequent changes in government, political infighting, and a fragmented political landscape create an environment of uncertainty that undermines sustained reform efforts. Coalition governments and shifting political alliances often lead to inconsistent policy implementation and delays in critical reforms. This instability not only affects domestic governance but also complicates Ukraine's relations with the EU, as the unpredictability hinders long-term planning and cooperation.

Judicial reform is another significant area where progress has been slow and contentious. An independent and efficient judiciary is essential for upholding the rule of law, protecting human rights, and fostering a favorable business climate. Despite numerous reform initiatives, Ukraine's judicial system remains plagued by corruption, lack of transparency, and inefficiency. Efforts to overhaul the judiciary have faced strong resistance from within the system, with many judges and officials obstructing changes that would diminish their power and influence. The EU has emphasized the importance of judicial reform as a cornerstone for Ukraine's European integration, but

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[167] For the first time in the history of Ukraine, a corruption whistleblower received a reward. *National Agency on Corruption Prevention*. 4 October 2024. https://nazk.gov.ua/en/news/for-the-first-time-in-the-history-of-ukraine-a-corruption-whistleblower-received-a-reward/

achieving meaningful progress in this area continues to be a formidable challenge.

Economic reforms present another set of obstacles. The transition to a market economy and the alignment of Ukraine's economic policies with EU standards require comprehensive and often painful adjustments. One of the key challenges is the reform of state-owned enterprises (SOEs). SOEs in Ukraine are frequently inefficient, loss-making, and serve as sources of corruption and political patronage. Privatization and restructuring of these enterprises are essential for improving economic efficiency and competitiveness[168]. However, the process has been slow and marred by vested interests and lack of political will. Resistance from oligarchs and entrenched elites, who benefit from the status quo, has impeded efforts to privatize or reform these enterprises effectively.

The agricultural sector, a vital component of Ukraine's economy, also faces significant reform challenges. Agriculture holds great potential for growth and increased exports to the EU under the DCFTA. However, issues such as land reform, modernization of agricultural practices, and compliance with EU sanitary and phytosanitary standards need to be addressed. Land reform, in particular, has been a contentious issue. The moratorium on the sale of agricultural land, which lasted for nearly two decades, was only lifted in 2020[169]. Implementing effective land reform that ensures transparent and fair land transactions while protecting the rights of small farmers remains a critical challenge.

Energy sector reform is another crucial area for Ukraine's economic development and security. Reducing dependence on Russian energy supplies, improving energy efficiency, and integrating with the European energy market are key objectives. Progress has been made, notably with the synchronization of Ukraine's electricity grid with the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E) and efforts to diversify energy sources[170]. However, the sector still faces significant challenges, including the need to reform the gas and electricity markets, reduce energy subsidies, attract investment for modernizing infrastructure, and problems due to Russian attacks on critical infrastructure.

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[168] Who buys Ukrainian state-owned enterprises? *Liga.net*. 7 May 2024. https://projects.liga.net/who-buys-ukrainian-state-owned-enterprises-eng/

[169] Matuszak S. The moratorium on the sale of agricultural land is lifted in Ukraine. *Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW)*. 1 April 2020. https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2020-04-01/moratorium-sale-agricultural-land-lifted-ukraine

[170] ENTSO-E Member Companies. https://www.entsoe.eu/about/inside-entsoe/members/

External factors also play a significant role in shaping the challenges and obstacles to Ukraine's reform efforts. The ongoing war with Russia has profound political, economic, and security implications. The conflict diverts resources and attention from the reform agenda, exacerbates political instability, and creates an environment of uncertainty. The EU's support in the form of sanctions against Russia and financial assistance to Ukraine has been crucial, but the war remains a significant impediment to comprehensive reform and integration.

Economic instability and vulnerability to external shocks further complicate Ukraine's reform efforts. The country's economy has been significantly affected by the conflict, global economic downturns, and internal challenges such as corruption and inefficiency. Achieving macroeconomic stability, improving fiscal discipline, and fostering sustainable economic growth are essential for the success of Ukraine's European integration. The EU's macro-financial assistance programs have provided vital support, but long-term economic stability requires structural reforms and effective governance.

Despite these formidable challenges, there have been notable achievements in Ukraine's reform efforts. The implementation of the DCFTA has led to increased trade and investment flows between Ukraine and the EU. Ukrainian exports to the EU have grown and diversified, particularly in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. Regulatory harmonization with EU standards has improved the business climate, attracting foreign investment and fostering economic development. The visa-free regime introduced in 2017 has facilitated people-to-people contacts, enhancing cultural and social ties between Ukraine and the EU.

Looking ahead, the future of Ukraine's European integration hinges on the sustained implementation of political and economic reforms. Achieving this requires strong political will, effective governance, and continued support from the EU. The EU's role in providing financial assistance, technical expertise, and political backing is crucial for overcoming the challenges and obstacles that Ukraine faces. Strengthening the rule of law, combating corruption, ensuring judicial independence, and fostering economic modernization are essential for Ukraine's integration into the European community.

In conclusion, the challenges and obstacles to political and economic reforms in Ukraine are significant but not insurmountable. The implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area has driven substantial progress, but much work remains to be done. Corruption, political instability, judicial inefficiency, and economic vulnerabilities are major impediments that need

to be addressed. Aggression of Russia further complicates the reform process. However, with strong political will, effective governance, and continued support from the EU, Ukraine can overcome these challenges and achieve its European integration aspirations. The success of Ukraine's reform efforts will not only determine its future trajectory but also have broader implications for regional stability and European security.

Corruption and governance issues remain some of the most significant challenges impeding Ukraine's path toward European integration. Despite concerted efforts and numerous reforms, these problems persist, undermining both the trust of the public and the confidence of international partners, including the European Union. The prevalence of corruption in various sectors and the inefficiencies within Ukraine's governance structures create substantial barriers to achieving the comprehensive political and economic transformation envisioned in the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreements.

Corruption in Ukraine is deeply entrenched and manifests in multiple forms, from petty corruption affecting everyday interactions between citizens and public officials to grand corruption involving high-level officials and substantial sums of money. The latter is particularly damaging as it diverts public resources, undermines economic development, and erodes the rule of law. The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index consistently ranks Ukraine poorly but with positive dynamics, reflecting the widespread nature of corruption and the ongoing struggle to address it effectively[171]. This endemic corruption has serious repercussions for Ukraine's integration into the European community, as it hampers the implementation of reforms required under the AA and DCFTA and undermines the credibility of the Ukrainian government.

One of the most critical areas affected by corruption is the judicial system. A fair, transparent, and independent judiciary is essential for upholding the rule of law, protecting human rights, and ensuring that businesses and citizens can operate in a predictable legal environment. However, Ukraine's judiciary has long been plagued by corruption, nepotism, and political interference. Judges and court officials often engage in corrupt practices, including bribery and favoritism, which erode public trust and confidence in the legal system. Efforts to reform the judiciary have included the establishment of the High Anti-Corruption Court (HACC) and the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of

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[171] Corruption Perceptions Index – 2023. *Transparency International*. https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023/index/ukr

Ukraine (NABU), both aimed at tackling high-level corruption[172]. While these institutions have made some progress, their effectiveness has been limited by political resistance, insufficient resources, and ongoing attempts to undermine their independence.

Political corruption also poses a significant challenge to governance in Ukraine. Political elites and oligarchs wield considerable influence over state institutions, using their power to maintain control and protect their interests. This has led to a lack of transparency in government decision-making and widespread patronage networks that undermine democratic processes and accountability. The concentration of power among a few individuals and groups not only stifles political competition but also obstructs meaningful reforms. Anti-corruption reforms often face strong resistance from these vested interests, making it difficult to implement changes that would reduce their influence and increase government accountability.

The business environment in Ukraine is similarly affected by corruption and governance issues. Corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies create significant obstacles for both domestic and foreign businesses, deterring investment and stifling economic growth. Businesses often encounter demands for bribes, lengthy approval processes, and arbitrary regulatory changes, which increase the cost and risk of doing business in Ukraine. These challenges undermine the potential benefits of the DCFTA, which aims to create a more open and competitive economic environment. Despite some improvements in regulatory transparency and ease of doing business, much work remains to be done to create a business climate that aligns with European standards.

Governance issues in Ukraine are further compounded by weak institutions and a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. The implementation of reforms is often inconsistent, and there is a significant gap between legislation and actual practice. This is partly due to the limited capacity of state institutions, which are often under-resourced and lack the necessary expertise to enforce reforms effectively. Additionally, the decentralization process, while aimed at improving local governance, has sometimes led to increased opportunities for corruption at the regional and local levels, as oversight mechanisms are not always adequately developed.

International partners, including the EU, have played a crucial role in supporting Ukraine's anti-corruption efforts and governance reforms. The EU has provided substantial financial and technical assistance aimed at strengthening institutions, enhancing transparency, and building capacity for

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[172] For the first time in the history of Ukraine, a corruption whistleblower received a reward. https://nazk.gov.ua/en/news/for-the-first-time-in-the-history-of-ukraine-a-corruption-whistleblower-received-a-reward/

effective governance. Programs such as the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform and various macro-financial assistance packages have been instrumental in supporting Ukraine's reform agenda. However, the impact of these efforts is often limited by the lack of political will and the entrenched nature of corruption within Ukraine.

One notable area of progress has been in the realm of public procurement, which has historically been a major source of corruption. The introduction of the ProZorro electronic procurement system has increased transparency and competition in public tenders, resulting in significant cost savings and reduced opportunities for corrupt practices[173]. This reform has been widely praised and serves as a model for other areas of governance. However, sustaining and expanding such reforms requires ongoing commitment and vigilance to prevent backsliding and ensure that gains are consolidated.

Civil society in Ukraine has been a vital force in pushing for anti-corruption reforms and greater government accountability. Activists, journalists, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a critical role in exposing corruption, advocating for policy changes, and monitoring the implementation of reforms. Their efforts have been supported by international partners, including the EU, which has provided funding and technical assistance to strengthen civil society. Despite facing significant risks, including threats and attacks, these actors continue to be a driving force for change. Ensuring their protection and enabling their work is essential for sustaining the momentum of reforms.

Looking ahead, addressing corruption and governance issues in Ukraine requires a multifaceted and sustained approach. Strengthening the independence and capacity of anti-corruption institutions, ensuring judicial reforms are fully implemented, and enhancing the transparency of political processes are critical steps. Additionally, fostering a culture of accountability and integrity within public administration and ensuring that anti-corruption measures are enforced consistently across all levels of government are essential. Continued support from international partners, coupled with strong domestic political will, is crucial for overcoming these challenges.

In conclusion, corruption and governance issues remain significant obstacles to Ukraine's European integration. While there have been notable achievements and progress in certain areas, much work remains to be done to eradicate corruption and build effective, transparent governance structures. The persistence of these challenges undermines public trust, deters

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[173] The Prozorro Impact: What real savings an electronic system delivers. Policy Brief. *KSE: Kyiv School of Economics*. 30 December 2022. https://kse.ua/about-the-school/news/the-prozorro-impact-what-real-savings-an-electronic-system-delivers-policy-brief/

investment, and hampers the implementation of reforms required under the AA and DCFTA. Addressing these issues is essential for Ukraine to fully realize its European integration aspirations and achieve sustainable political and economic development. The continued commitment of both Ukraine and its international partners to the principles of democracy, rule of law, and good governance will be crucial for overcoming these obstacles and ensuring a prosperous future for Ukraine within the European community.

Security Concerns and the Impact of the War with Russia. The Impact of Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine on Ukraine's European Integration Prospects. Ukraine's path towards European integration has been severely hampered by persistent security concerns and the ongoing war with Russia. These issues present formidable challenges that affect nearly every aspect of Ukraine's political, economic, and social landscape. Since the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the subsequent outbreak of conflict in eastern Ukraine, the security situation has remained volatile, undermining stability and development efforts.

Russia's aggression has resulted in significant territorial, human, and economic losses for Ukraine. The humanitarian crisis created by the conflict has strained Ukraine's social services and infrastructure, diverting resources that could have been used for development and reform initiatives critical to European integration.

Economically, the conflict has inflicted severe damage on Ukraine's industrial base. The loss of control over some territories has significantly reduced Ukraine's industrial output and export capacity, contributing to economic instability. The cost of the war, including military expenditures and reconstruction needs, has placed an enormous burden on Ukraine's already strained budget, limiting the government's ability to invest in necessary reforms and development projects. This economic strain complicates efforts to align Ukraine's economy with EU standards as envisioned in the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.

The security situation also complicates Ukraine's political landscape. The ongoing war fosters political instability and uncertainty, which are detrimental to the reform process. Frequent changes in government, shifting political alliances, and the influence of oligarchic interests further exacerbate governance challenges. The conflict has also been exploited by populist and nationalist forces within Ukraine, sometimes leading to political polarization and impeding consensus on necessary reforms. This political instability undermines Ukraine's ability to implement the comprehensive reforms required for deeper integration with the EU.

Internationally, the full-scale invasion of Russia has significant geopolitical implications, affecting not only Ukraine but also broader

European and global security dynamics. The EU and the United States have responded with a series of sanctions against Russia, which, while intended to pressure Moscow to change its policies, have also contributed to economic and political tensions. These sanctions, coupled with military and diplomatic support for Ukraine, underscore the West's commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity but also highlight the geopolitical stakes involved.

The war has also highlighted the need for Ukraine to enhance its defence capabilities and security sector reform. Ukraine's military was ill-prepared for the scale and nature of the conflict in 2014, exposing significant weaknesses in its defence structures. Since then, Ukraine has undertaken substantial efforts to modernize its military, increase defence spending, and enhance cooperation with NATO and other Western partners. These efforts have included reforms aimed at improving command and control structures, increasing transparency and accountability in the defence sector, and enhancing the capabilities of the armed forces. However, achieving a robust and sustainable defence posture that can effectively deter further aggression remains an ongoing challenge.

NATO's support has been crucial for Ukraine's defence reforms. While Ukraine is not a NATO member, it has significantly deepened its cooperation with the alliance through initiatives such as the NATO–Ukraine Annual National Programme, which aims to implement reforms in the defence and security sectors. NATO has provided training, advisory support, and non-lethal military assistance to Ukraine, helping to build capacity and improve the professionalism of the Ukrainian armed forces[174]. However, the prospect of NATO membership for Ukraine remains contentious, with concerns about provoking further Russian aggression and the alliance's own hesitations about expanding its membership to include a country currently embroiled in conflict.

The war has also underscored the importance of cybersecurity and information warfare. Russia's hybrid warfare tactics, which include cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and political interference, have posed significant challenges to Ukraine's national security. Ukraine has faced numerous cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure, government institutions, and the financial sector, highlighting the need for robust cybersecurity measures. In response, Ukraine has strengthened its cybersecurity capabilities, with support from the EU and other international partners, to protect against cyber threats and build resilience.

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[174] Relations with Ukraine. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)* https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_37750.htm

Diplomatically, resolving the conflict with Russia remains a complex and elusive goal. Various efforts, including the Minsk agreements brokered by the OSCE, have sought to establish a ceasefire and outline steps towards a political settlement. However, these agreements have largely failed to bring about lasting peace, with frequent violations and a lack of political will from both sides to fully implement the terms. The EU has played a significant role in supporting diplomatic efforts and imposing sanctions on Russia, but achieving a comprehensive and durable resolution to the conflict remains a formidable challenge.

The conflict has also affected Ukraine's energy security, as Russia has historically been a major supplier of natural gas to Ukraine. Disputes over gas supplies and transit fees have led to interruptions in energy supply, prompting Ukraine to seek diversification of its energy sources. The EU has supported Ukraine's efforts to enhance energy security through initiatives such as reverse gas flows from European countries and the integration of Ukraine's energy market with the European Energy Community. These efforts aim to reduce Ukraine's dependency on Russian energy supplies and increase its energy independence, which is critical for national security and economic stability.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, initiated in February 2022, has dramatically reshaped Ukraine's path toward European integration. This significant geopolitical event has had profound implications not only for Ukraine's immediate security and political landscape but also for its long-term prospects of joining the European Union.

Political Dynamics and Support

1. Strengthened Political Will. The invasion has galvanized a robust political will within Ukraine and among EU member states to accelerate Ukraine's integration process.

Ukrainian Resolve. The existential threat posed by the invasion has solidified a national consensus in Ukraine regarding the strategic imperative of EU membership. This resolve is evident in the swift legislative and reform efforts undertaken by the Ukrainian government to align with EU standards.

EU Solidarity. The EU has responded with unprecedented unity and support for Ukraine. The rapid granting of candidate status to Ukraine in June 2022 exemplifies this solidarity[175]. EU institutions and member states have expressed strong political backing, recognizing Ukraine's aspirations as integral to the broader European project.

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[175] Ukraine: Membership status – candidate country. *European Commission.* https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/ukraine_en

2. Accelerated Reforms. In response to the invasion, Ukraine has expedited key reforms necessary for EU integration, despite the challenging wartime context.

Governance and Anti-Corruption. Ukraine has intensified efforts to combat corruption, enhance judicial independence, and strengthen democratic institutions. These reforms are crucial for meeting the EU's accession criteria and building a resilient governance framework.

Legislative Alignment. The Ukrainian parliament has passed numerous laws to harmonize with EU standards, covering areas such as economic policy, environmental protection, and human rights. These legislative changes reflect Ukraine's commitment to the EU integration process.

Economic Considerations

1. Economic Resilience and Reconstruction. The invasion has underscored the importance of economic resilience and the role of the EU in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction.

Economic Support. The EU has provided substantial financial aid to support Ukraine's economy amidst the conflict. This assistance includes macro-financial aid, humanitarian relief, and support for infrastructure repair, helping stabilize Ukraine's economy during wartime.

Reconstruction Plans. The EU is poised to play a pivotal role in Ukraine's reconstruction efforts. Plans for post-war recovery, such as the European Commission's proposal for a 'Rebuild Ukraine' facility, envisage significant investment in rebuilding infrastructure, revitalizing industries, and fostering sustainable development.

2. Trade and Integration. The war has accelerated efforts to deepen economic integration between Ukraine and the EU, mitigating the economic impact of the conflict.

Trade Agreements. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area has become a cornerstone of Ukraine's economic strategy. Despite the invasion, trade between Ukraine and the EU has intensified, with the EU becoming Ukraine's primary trading partner.

Energy Independence. The conflict has highlighted the need for energy independence and diversification. Ukraine's integration into the EU's energy market, including synchronization with the European electricity grid, represents a strategic move to reduce dependency on Russian energy supplies.

Social Transformations

1. Societal Resilience and European Identity. The invasion has fostered a strong sense of European identity and resilience within Ukrainian society.

Civic Mobilization. The war has seen unprecedented levels of civic mobilization and volunteerism in Ukraine. This societal resilience is

underpinned by a collective commitment to European values of democracy, freedom, and human rights.

Cultural Integration. The influx of Ukrainian refugees into EU countries has enhanced cultural ties and mutual understanding. Host communities in the EU have demonstrated solidarity and support, reinforcing the shared cultural and social bonds between Ukrainians and Europeans.

2. Humanitarian Impact. The humanitarian crisis resulting from the invasion has further intertwined Ukraine's fate with the EU.

Refugee Support. The EU has welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees, providing them with protection, social services, and integration opportunities. This humanitarian response has strengthened the social fabric linking Ukraine with the EU.

Reintegration Challenges. The eventual reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) into Ukrainian society will require sustained support from the EU, emphasizing the importance of social cohesion and inclusive policies.

Geopolitical Consequences

1. Redefining European Security. Russia's invasion has redefined the EU's approach to security and defence, with Ukraine playing a central role.

Strategic Autonomy. The conflict has prompted the EU to pursue greater strategic autonomy, enhancing its defence capabilities and reducing reliance on external powers. Ukraine's integration into European security structures is a critical component of this strategy.

Security Partnerships. Ukraine's collaboration with the EU in security and defence matters has intensified. Initiatives such as the European Peace Facility, which provides military aid to Ukraine, illustrate the deepening security partnership.

2. Global Alliances and Influence. Ukraine's EU integration has broader implications for global alliances and the international order.

Transatlantic Relations. The invasion has reinforced the transatlantic alliance, with the EU and NATO working closely to support Ukraine. This collaboration underscores the strategic importance of Ukraine in transatlantic security and the shared commitment to countering authoritarian threats.

Global Democracy Support. Ukraine's integration journey serves as a testament to the EU's role in supporting democracies worldwide. The EU's backing of Ukraine sends a strong message of solidarity to other nations facing similar threats, promoting the values of democracy and rule of law globally.

Despite the significant challenges posed by the Russia's aggression, Ukraine has made notable progress in its European integration efforts. The implementation of the AA and DCFTA has driven important political,

economic, and legal reforms, aligning Ukraine's policies and standards more closely with those of the EU. Increased trade and investment flows, regulatory harmonization, and enhanced cooperation in various sectors are tangible benefits of these agreements. However, the full potential of these agreements can only be realized in a stable and secure environment, free from the ongoing conflict and external aggression.

Looking ahead, the future of Ukraine's European integration depends on its ability to navigate the complex security environment and achieve a resolution to the conflict with Russia. This requires sustained international support, both diplomatically and militarily, as well as a continued commitment to reform and modernization. Strengthening Ukraine's defence capabilities, enhancing cybersecurity, and addressing the humanitarian and economic impacts of the conflict are essential for building a resilient and prosperous Ukraine that can fully integrate with the European community.

Security concerns and the ongoing war with Russia present significant obstacles to Ukraine's European integration. The conflict has profound implications for Ukraine's political stability, economic development, and national security, complicating the implementation of reforms required under the AA and DCFTA. Despite these challenges, Ukraine has made important strides in aligning with European standards and deepening its cooperation with the EU. Achieving a stable and secure environment, resolving the conflict, and sustaining reform efforts are critical for Ukraine to fully realize its European integration aspirations and contribute to regional and global security. The continued support and solidarity of the international community, particularly the EU and NATO, are crucial for overcoming these obstacles and ensuring a secure and prosperous future for Ukraine within the European family.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia has profoundly impacted Ukraine's European integration prospects, accelerating political, economic, and social transformations within the country and strengthening its ties with the EU. The invasion has galvanized unprecedented support and solidarity from the EU, resulting in accelerated reforms, enhanced economic integration, and deeper security cooperation. These developments have not only fortified Ukraine's resolve to join the EU but have also redefined the broader geopolitical landscape, underscoring the strategic importance of Ukraine's integration for European and global stability. As Ukraine continues its path toward EU membership amidst ongoing challenges, the shared commitment to democracy, security, and prosperity will be pivotal in shaping a more resilient and united Europe. The journey ahead promises to be transformative, with Ukraine's integration heralding a new era of stability and cooperation for the region and beyond.

2.4. Prospects for the Future
(Anna Soloviova)

EU's Strategic Vision

The European Union stands at a crossroads, faced with the dual imperatives of deepening integration among its existing members and expanding its membership to include aspiring nations. The strategic vision for the EU's future is underpinned by a commitment to maintaining stability, promoting prosperity, and reinforcing its values of democracy, rule of law, and human rights across the continent.

Deepening Integration

At the heart of the EU's strategic vision is the goal of deepening integration among its current member states. This involves enhancing economic, political, and social cohesion through various mechanisms and policies. The economic integration process aims to complete the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) by addressing remaining vulnerabilities and ensuring the stability of the Eurozone. Efforts are underway to establish a more robust banking union, including a common deposit insurance scheme and a strengthened European Stability Mechanism (ESM) to provide financial assistance to member states in distress[176]. Additionally, the Capital Markets Union (CMU) seeks to mobilize capital across Europe, fostering investment and growth.

Political integration is equally critical, with the EU focusing on strengthening its governance structures and decision-making processes. Reforms aimed at increasing the efficiency and democratic legitimacy of EU institutions are essential for addressing the growing skepticism and Euroscepticism within member states. Enhancing the role of the European Parliament, improving the transparency of the European Council's decision-making, and ensuring greater involvement of national parliaments in EU affairs are pivotal steps towards a more democratic Union. Moreover, fostering a European identity and solidarity among citizens through education, cultural exchange, and civic engagement is a key component of the integration process.

Expanding Membership

The EU's strategic vision also includes plans for further enlargement, particularly towards the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries. The accession of these countries is seen as a means to promote stability, democracy, and economic development in the region, as well as to

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[176] European Stability Mechanism (ESM). *European Commission*. https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/eu-financial-assistance/euro-area-countries/european-stability-mechanism-esm_en

strengthen the EU's geopolitical influence. The Western Balkans, comprising countries like Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, are at various stages of the accession process. The EU has reiterated its commitment to the Western Balkans' integration, recognizing that their future lies within the Union. This is reflected in the 2018 EU–Western Balkans Strategy[177], which outlines concrete steps and support for reforms in these countries.

The Eastern Partnership, which includes countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, represents another significant dimension of the EU's expansion strategy. These countries have made substantial progress in aligning their policies and standards with the EU through Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs). The EU's engagement with these countries aims to promote political stability, economic development, and resilience against external pressures, particularly from Russia. The EU's Eastern Partnership policy emphasizes support for governance reforms, economic modernization, and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

Addressing Challenges

However, the path towards deeper integration and expansion is fraught with challenges. The EU must navigate complex political dynamics both within and beyond its borders. Internally, the rise of populist and nationalist movements poses a significant challenge to the integration agenda. These movements often exploit economic disparities, migration issues, and sovereignty concerns to garner support, thereby undermining the unity and coherence of the EU. To counter this, the EU needs to address the root causes of discontent by promoting inclusive growth, social cohesion, and effective governance.

Externally, geopolitical tensions and security threats, particularly from Russia, present significant obstacles to the EU's expansion plans. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the assertive foreign policy of Russia in Eastern Europe necessitate a robust and coherent EU foreign policy. Strengthening the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and enhancing cooperation with NATO are critical for addressing these security challenges. The EU's strategic autonomy, which aims to bolster the Union's ability to act independently in defence and security matters, is a key aspect of this effort.

Moreover, the economic disparities between current and prospective member states pose significant integration challenges. Ensuring that new

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[177] Strategy for the Western Balkans: EU sets out new flagship initiatives and support for the reform-driven region. *European Commission*. 6 February 2018. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_18_561

member states can meet the economic criteria for accession and effectively integrate into the single market requires substantial support from the EU. The cohesion policy, which aims to reduce regional disparities and promote balanced development across the Union, will play a crucial role in this regard. Investment in infrastructure, education, and innovation in both current and prospective member states is essential for fostering convergence and ensuring that the benefits of integration are widely shared.

Broader Implications

The EU's strategic vision for expansion and integration has broader implications for global governance and international relations. A more integrated and expanded EU can serve as a powerful advocate for multilateralism, free trade, and global cooperation. The EU's commitment to tackling global challenges such as climate change, digital transformation, and migration can be reinforced through a more cohesive and influential Union. Furthermore, the EU's model of regional integration and cooperation can serve as an inspiration for other regions seeking to enhance their stability and prosperity through collective action.

The EU's strategic vision also highlights the importance of maintaining strong transatlantic relations. The partnership with the United States remains a cornerstone of the EU's foreign and security policy. Continued cooperation on issues such as security, trade, and climate change is essential for addressing global challenges. Additionally, strengthening ties with other global partners, including China, India, and Japan, is crucial for promoting a rules-based international order.

In conclusion, the EU's strategic vision for the future involves a dual focus on deepening integration among its current members and expanding its membership to include aspiring nations. This vision is driven by the goals of enhancing stability, promoting prosperity, and reinforcing democratic values across the continent. The process of deeper integration entails completing the Economic and Monetary Union, strengthening political governance, and fostering a European identity. Expanding membership involves supporting the accession of the Western Balkans and engaging with the Eastern Partnership countries to promote stability and development. However, the path towards integration and expansion is fraught with challenges, including political dynamics, geopolitical tensions, and economic disparities. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and sustained effort, both within the EU and through cooperation with international partners. The broader implications of the EU's strategic vision highlight its potential role as a global leader in promoting multilateralism and addressing global challenges. Through a more integrated and expanded Union, the EU can enhance its influence and contribute to a more stable and prosperous world.

Potential Reforms and Their Implications. The European Union stands at a critical juncture, requiring strategic reforms to address contemporary challenges and ensure its long-term relevance and stability. As it navigates the complexities of globalization, economic disparities, political fragmentation, and external threats, the EU's strategic vision includes a suite of potential reforms aimed at strengthening its institutions, deepening integration, and enhancing its global influence.

Governance Reforms. At the heart of the EU's strategic vision is the need for robust governance reforms to enhance democratic legitimacy and decision-making efficiency. Key proposals include:

1. *Strengthening the European Parliament.* Increasing the legislative powers of the European Parliament (EP) is essential to enhance its role in EU decision-making. This could involve giving the EP greater say in budgetary matters and expanding its powers in policy areas currently dominated by the European Council and the European Commission. Such reforms would enhance the democratic accountability of the EU, giving citizens a more direct voice in European affairs.

2. *Reforming the European Commission.* Proposals to streamline the European Commission include reducing the number of Commissioners to make the body more efficient and representative. Additionally, enhancing the transparency of the Commission's decision-making processes can help build public trust and reduce perceptions of bureaucratic opacity.

3. *Revamping the Council of the European Union.* Introducing more majority voting in the Council of the European Union, as opposed to the current requirement for unanimity in key policy areas, could accelerate decision-making and prevent a single member state from blocking critical initiatives. This reform could be contentious but is necessary for a more agile and responsive Union.

Economic Reforms. Economic resilience and convergence remain top priorities for the EU, necessitating reforms that can bolster growth, stability, and cohesion across the bloc:

1. *Completing the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)*[178]. The EMU's future stability requires a fully-fledged banking union, including a European Deposit Insurance Scheme to protect savers across the euro area. Additionally, establishing a common fiscal capacity, such as a Eurozone budget, could provide a buffer against asymmetric economic shocks and support member states in economic distress.

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[178] What is the Economic and Monetary Union? (EMU). *European Commission.* https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-and-monetary-union/what-economic-and-monetary-union-emu_en

2. *Capital Markets Union (CMU)*[179]. Completing the CMU is crucial for mobilizing capital across the EU, fostering investment, and promoting economic growth. This involves harmonizing financial regulations, removing barriers to cross-border investment, and ensuring efficient capital allocation throughout the Union.

3. *Green and Digital Transitions.* Implementing the European Green Deal and advancing the digital transformation are central to the EU's economic strategy. These reforms aim to make the EU the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050 and a global leader in digital innovation. This requires substantial investment in renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, and digital technologies, supported by a robust regulatory framework.

Social Reforms. To ensure social cohesion and address disparities, the EU must implement reforms that promote inclusivity and equal opportunities:

1. *Social Pillar Implementation.* The European Pillar of Social Rights, adopted in 2017[180], outlines principles and rights essential for fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. Implementing these principles requires coordinated actions to improve working conditions, social protection, and access to education and training.

2. *Addressing Inequality.* Reforms aimed at reducing economic and social disparities between and within member states are critical. This includes targeted investments in regions lagging behind, support for marginalized communities, and measures to combat discrimination and promote social inclusion.

3. *Health Union.* The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for a stronger European Health Union. Proposals include establishing a more coordinated EU approach to health crises, enhancing the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), and creating a European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA)[181].

Foreign Policy and Security Reforms. In an increasingly volatile global environment, the EU's strategic autonomy and global influence require significant enhancements to its foreign policy and security frameworks:

1. *Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).* Strengthening the CFSP involves increasing the EU's capacity to act cohesively on the global stage. This could include streamlining decision-making processes, enhancing

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[179] Capital markets union and financial markets. *European Commission.* https://finance.ec.europa.eu/capital-markets-union-and-financial-markets_en

[180] European pillar of social rights. *European Commission.* https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1226&langId=en

[181] Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority. *European Commission.* https://surl.li/dwrlkn

the role of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy[182], and improving coordination between the EU and national foreign services.

2. *Defence Integration.* Furthering defence integration through initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)[183] and the European Defence Fund (EDF) can enhance the EU's military capabilities and reduce dependency on external actors[184]. Developing a common strategic culture and conducting joint military operations are vital steps towards a more unified and capable European defence policy.

3. *Strategic Partnerships.* Building and strengthening strategic partnerships with key global players, such as the United States, China, and India, is crucial. This involves balancing relationships to protect the EU's interests, promoting multilateralism, and addressing global challenges like climate change and cybersecurity.

The implications of these potential reforms are multifaceted and profound:

1. *Enhanced Cohesion and Stability.* Governance and economic reforms can foster greater cohesion and stability within the EU. By addressing economic disparities, improving democratic accountability, and streamlining decision-making, the Union can become more resilient and better equipped to handle internal and external challenges.

2. *Global Influence and Strategic Autonomy.* Strengthening the CFSP and advancing defence integration can enhance the EU's strategic autonomy and global influence. A more cohesive and capable EU can play a more significant role in international diplomacy, security, and defence, contributing to global stability and multilateral governance.

3. *Social Inclusivity and Resilience.* Social reforms aimed at reducing inequality and promoting inclusivity can ensure that all EU citizens benefit from economic growth and integration. By addressing social disparities and enhancing social protection, the EU can build a more inclusive and resilient society.

4. *Sustainable and Innovative Growth.* Implementing the Green Deal and advancing digital transformation can position the EU as a leader in sustainable and innovative growth. These reforms can drive economic

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[182] *Common Foreign and Security Policy. European Commission: Official website.* Retrieved from https://cutt.ly/frGINmCI

[183] Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). *PESCO.* https://www.pesco.europa.eu/about/

[184] EDF – Developing tomorrow's defence capabilities. *European Commission.* https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-fund-edf-official-webpage-european-commission_en

development, create new jobs, and set global standards for environmental and technological innovation.

5. *Public Trust and Legitimacy.* Transparency and accountability in governance, combined with effective implementation of social and economic reforms, can build public trust and legitimacy. Engaging citizens in the decision-making process and demonstrating tangible benefits of EU membership are essential for countering Euroscepticism and fostering a sense of European identity.

The EU's strategic vision for the future involves a comprehensive set of reforms aimed at deepening integration, enhancing economic resilience, promoting social cohesion, and strengthening foreign policy and security frameworks. These reforms are essential for addressing contemporary challenges, ensuring the Union's stability and prosperity, and enhancing its global influence. The successful implementation of these reforms requires a concerted effort from EU institutions, member states, and citizens, guided by the principles of democracy, solidarity, and mutual respect. By embracing these reforms, the EU can secure its position as a leading global actor, capable of addressing both internal and external challenges and contributing to a more stable and prosperous world.

Ukraine's Path to Membership

The prospect of Ukraine joining the European Union is both a significant opportunity and a complex challenge, requiring a multifaceted approach that encompasses political, economic, legal, and social reforms. Ukraine's path to full EU membership involves meeting a comprehensive set of criteria established by the EU, commonly referred to as the Copenhagen Criteria, which include stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities, a functioning market economy, and the ability to take on the obligations of EU membership.

Political and Institutional Reforms. One of the foundational steps for Ukraine's EU membership is the establishment and maintenance of stable democratic institutions. This involves comprehensive reforms to ensure the independence, efficiency, and integrity of the judiciary, the eradication of corruption, and the enhancement of public administration.

1. *Judicial Reforms.* Ukraine must continue to strengthen its judicial system by ensuring the independence of the judiciary, enhancing the transparency of judicial appointments, and improving the efficiency and accountability of the courts. Judicial reforms should also include measures to combat corruption within the judiciary, providing for fair and impartial legal processes.

2. *Anti-Corruption Measures.* Combatting corruption remains a critical challenge for Ukraine. Effective anti-corruption measures include the establishment of independent anti-corruption agencies, robust legislation, and the rigorous enforcement of laws. Ukraine must also enhance the transparency of public procurement and financial transactions, and implement measures to prevent and punish corrupt practices at all levels of government.

3. *Public Administration Reform.* Strengthening public administration involves creating a professional, transparent, and accountable civil service. This includes implementing merit-based recruitment and promotion processes, improving the management of public resources, and enhancing the capacity of public institutions to design and implement effective policies.

4. *Human Rights and Minority Protections.* Ensuring the protection of human rights and the rights of minorities is essential. Ukraine must adopt and implement legislation that protects the rights of all citizens, including ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, and ensure that these laws are enforced effectively.

Economic Reforms. Economic reforms are crucial for Ukraine to meet the EU's requirements and to ensure that its economy can integrate smoothly into the EU's single market.

1. *Market Economy.* Ukraine must establish a functioning market economy capable of coping with competitive pressures within the EU. This involves liberalizing key sectors of the economy, reducing state intervention, and promoting competition. Structural reforms should focus on improving the business environment, protecting property rights, and fostering entrepreneurship and innovation.

2. *Trade and Investment.* Implementing the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU is a significant step towards economic integration. Ukraine needs to align its trade regulations and standards with those of the EU, eliminate trade barriers, and enhance the attractiveness of its investment climate. This includes reforms to improve infrastructure, reduce bureaucracy, and protect investors' rights.

3. *Fiscal and Monetary Policies.* Sound fiscal and monetary policies are essential for economic stability. Ukraine must ensure sustainable public finances, reduce its budget deficit, and manage public debt effectively. Additionally, maintaining a stable monetary policy that controls inflation and supports economic growth is critical.

Legal and Regulatory Alignment. Alignment with EU laws and regulations, known as the acquis communautaire, is a fundamental requirement for EU membership. This involves adopting and implementing EU legislation across various sectors.

1. *Adoption of the Acquis.* Ukraine must adopt and effectively implement the EU acquis, which covers a wide range of areas including competition policy, consumer protection, environmental standards, and labour laws. This requires a thorough review and overhaul of national legislation to ensure full compliance with EU standards.

2. *Institutional Capacity.* Building the institutional capacity to enforce EU laws and regulations is crucial. This involves training public officials, enhancing regulatory bodies, and establishing mechanisms for monitoring and compliance. Effective institutions are essential for ensuring that EU standards are maintained and that reforms are implemented consistently.

3. *Sectoral Integration.* Sector-specific reforms are necessary to integrate key sectors of the Ukrainian economy into the EU single market. This includes aligning agricultural policies with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), adopting EU environmental standards, and harmonizing transport and energy regulations[185].

Social Reforms and Human Capital Development. Social reforms are essential to ensure that the benefits of EU membership are widely shared and that Ukraine's society is prepared for integration.

1. *Education and Training.* Investing in education and training is critical for developing a skilled workforce capable of meeting the demands of a modern economy. Reforms should focus on improving the quality of education, aligning curricula with EU standards, and promoting lifelong learning and vocational training.

2. *Healthcare.* Reforming the healthcare system to provide accessible, high-quality medical services is essential for social well-being. This includes aligning health standards with the EU, improving healthcare infrastructure, and ensuring adequate funding for public health.

3. *Social Protection.* Strengthening social protection systems to reduce poverty and inequality is important for social cohesion. This includes enhancing social safety nets, improving pension systems, and ensuring adequate support for vulnerable groups.

Security and Foreign Policy Alignment. Aligning Ukraine's security and foreign policy with that of the EU is crucial for regional stability and integration.

1. *Security Sector Reform.* Strengthening Ukraine's security sector involves modernizing the military, improving cybersecurity, and enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies. This is essential for maintaining national security and contributing to regional stability.

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[185] The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). *European Commission: Official website.* https://cutt.ly/nrGI1HYR

2. *Foreign Policy Coordination.* Aligning Ukraine's foreign policy with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is important for fostering cooperation and addressing common security challenges. This includes participating in EU foreign policy initiatives, contributing to EU missions, and coordinating responses to international crises.

3. *Conflict Resolution.* Resolving ongoing conflicts and the war, is essential for stability and integration. This requires sustained diplomatic efforts, support for peacebuilding initiatives, and engagement with international partners to achieve a durable resolution.

Implications for the EU and the Region. Ukraine's path to EU membership has significant implications for both the EU and the broader region.

1. *Geopolitical Stability.* Ukraine's integration into the EU can enhance geopolitical stability in Eastern Europe, serving as a counterbalance to Russian influence. A stable and democratic Ukraine within the EU can contribute to regional security and cooperation.

2. *Economic Growth.* Integrating Ukraine into the EU single market can boost economic growth and investment in both Ukraine and the EU. This can create new opportunities for trade, innovation, and development, benefiting the entire region.

3. *EU Cohesion.* Ukraine's membership can strengthen the EU's cohesion by promoting unity and solidarity among member states. The successful integration of a large and diverse country like Ukraine can demonstrate the EU's capacity to accommodate and support new members, reinforcing the principles of enlargement and solidarity.

4. *Cultural Enrichment.* Ukraine's rich cultural heritage can contribute to the EU's diversity and cultural exchange. Integration can promote mutual understanding, cultural cooperation, and the sharing of values, enriching the EU's cultural landscape.

Ukraine's path to full EU membership involves a comprehensive and sustained effort to implement political, economic, legal, and social reforms. Meeting the EU's criteria requires commitment and cooperation from the Ukrainian government, civil society, and international partners. The successful integration of Ukraine into the EU can enhance regional stability, promote economic growth, and strengthen the EU's cohesion and global influence. Through these efforts, Ukraine can achieve its aspirations for a European future, contributing to a more stable, prosperous, and united Europe.

Ukraine's aspiration to join the European Union represents a strategic vision for its future, symbolizing a commitment to democratic values, economic development, and integration into the European community.

However, the path to EU membership is complex and requires meeting a series of stringent benchmarks across political, economic, legal, and social dimensions.

Immediate to Short-Term (1–3 Years)

1. Submission and Approval of Membership Application:

− Application Submission. Ukraine has formally submitted its application for EU membership. The initial phase involves the European Council and the European Commission assessing Ukraine's readiness and the potential impact on the EU.

− Candidate Status. Upon positive assessment, the European Council may grant Ukraine candidate status, marking the official start of the accession process. This status acknowledges Ukraine's eligibility and commitment to reforms.

2. Political and Institutional Reforms:

− Judicial Independence. Strengthening the independence and efficiency of the judiciary, including transparent judicial appointments and anti-corruption measures.

− Anti-Corruption Framework. Establishing robust anti-corruption institutions and laws, ensuring enforcement and reducing bureaucratic corruption.

− Public Administration Reforms. Implementing merit-based recruitment and training programs for civil servants to enhance public service delivery and governance[186].

3. Alignment with EU Acquis:

− Initial Screening. The European Commission conducts a comprehensive screening process to identify areas where Ukraine's laws and regulations need alignment with the EU acquis.

− Adoption of Legislative Roadmaps. Developing detailed roadmaps for adopting and implementing EU laws across various sectors.

Medium-Term (3–7 Years)

4. Economic Reforms and Market Integration:

− Functioning Market Economy. Ensuring that Ukraine's economy can cope with competitive pressures within the EU. This involves liberalizing markets, reducing state intervention, and enhancing competition.

− DCFTA Implementation. Fully implementing the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreement with the EU, harmonizing trade regulations, and removing barriers to investment.

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[186] Soloviova A., Fomin A. Ukraine and the EU: Prospects and Challenges on the Road to Integration. *Acta de Historia &Politica: Saeculum XXI*. 2025. Vol. IX. 65.

− Fiscal and Monetary Stability. Maintaining sound fiscal policies, reducing budget deficits, and ensuring stable monetary policy to control inflation and support economic growth.

5. Legal and Regulatory Alignment:

− Sectoral Reforms. Aligning specific sectors such as agriculture, energy, transport, and environment with EU standards. This involves adopting and enforcing EU regulations and policies in these areas.

− Building Institutional Capacity. Enhancing the capacity of regulatory bodies and public institutions to implement and enforce EU laws effectively.

6. Social and Human Rights Reforms:

− Human Rights Protections. Ensuring robust legal frameworks to protect human rights, including the rights of minorities, and implementing these protections effectively.

− Education and Healthcare Reforms. Improving education and healthcare systems to meet EU standards, including investment in infrastructure and training.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation:

− Regular Progress Reports. The European Commission provides regular progress reports assessing Ukraine's adherence to benchmarks and the implementation of required reforms.

− Peer Reviews and Assistance. Member states and EU institutions may provide technical assistance and conduct peer reviews to support Ukraine's reform process[187].

Long-Term (7–10+ Years)

8. Advanced Economic and Social Convergence:

− Economic Convergence. Achieving economic indicators comparable to those of existing EU member states, including GDP per capita, employment rates, and productivity levels.

− Social Cohesion. Reducing disparities in income, social services, and quality of life between Ukraine and EU countries.

9. Full Legal and Institutional Integration:

− Complete Acquis Adoption. Ukraine must fully adopt and implement the entire body of EU law (acquis communautaire), demonstrating the capability to function within the EU framework.

− Institutional Readiness. Ensuring all national institutions are capable of operating seamlessly within EU structures, including the ability to contribute to and participate in EU decision-making processes.

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[187] Ibid. P. 66.

10. Pre-Accession Negotiations:

− Accession Negotiations. Detailed negotiations on specific chapters of the acquis, addressing any remaining issues and finalizing the terms of membership.

− Accession Treaty. Drafting and ratifying the Accession Treaty, which formally outlines Ukraine's obligations and rights as an EU member state. This treaty must be ratified by all EU member states and Ukraine.

Final Phase

11. Membership Approval and Transition:

− Final Assessments. The European Commission and European Council conduct final assessments to ensure all criteria and benchmarks have been met.

− Transition Period. Implementing transitional arrangements to facilitate smooth integration, which may include temporary measures in areas like migration and labour markets.

12. Full Membership:

− Formal Accession. Upon successful completion of all requirements, Ukraine formally joins the EU as a full member state, participating fully in the EU's political, economic, and social systems.

− Integration and Adjustment. Continued efforts to integrate into EU structures and policies, with ongoing support and collaboration from other member states and EU institutions[188].

Ukraine's path to EU membership involves a rigorous and multifaceted process requiring substantial political, economic, legal, and social reforms. By adhering to a clear timeline and meeting specific benchmarks, Ukraine can achieve its aspirations of joining the EU, contributing to a more stable, prosperous, and integrated Europe. The journey is challenging but offers significant opportunities for growth, stability, and regional influence, ultimately benefiting both Ukraine and the broader European community.

The aspiration of Ukraine to join the European Union is a significant geopolitical development with profound implications for both Ukraine and the EU. As Ukraine embarks on this ambitious journey towards full membership, the support from existing member states and the public opinion within these states are crucial determinants of its success.

Political Support from Existing Member States. Political support from the EU member states is essential for Ukraine's accession process. The unanimous approval of all member states is required for granting candidate status, negotiating the terms of accession, and ultimately accepting Ukraine as a full member.

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[188] Ibid. P. 66.

1. Historical Context and Recent Developments:

− Eastern Partnership Initiative. The EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, launched in 2009[189], aims to strengthen relations with Eastern European countries, including Ukraine. This initiative has provided a framework for political and economic cooperation, laying the groundwork for Ukraine's EU aspirations.

− Association Agreement and DCFTA. The signing of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between the EU and Ukraine in 2014 marked a significant milestone, reflecting strong political support from the EU for Ukraine's European integration.

2. Varying Levels of Support Among Member States:

− Supportive States. Countries like Poland and the Baltic states have consistently championed Ukraine's EU membership, viewing it as a strategic priority for enhancing regional stability and countering Russian influence.

− Cautious States. Some Western European countries, including France and the Netherlands, have adopted a more cautious stance, emphasizing the need for Ukraine to implement comprehensive reforms and meet EU standards before advancing its membership bid.

− Economic Considerations. Germany, as the EU's largest economy, has shown conditional support, balancing economic interests with political and security concerns. Germany's position often reflects a pragmatic approach, emphasizing the importance of economic reforms and anti-corruption measures in Ukraine.

3. Institutional Support:

− European Commission. The European Commission plays a pivotal role in assessing Ukraine's progress and providing technical assistance. The Commission's regular progress reports and recommendations are critical in guiding Ukraine's reform efforts.

− European Parliament. The European Parliament has been a vocal advocate for Ukraine's EU membership, passing numerous resolutions supporting Ukraine's European integration and condemning external aggression.

Economic and Financial Support. Economic and financial assistance from existing member states and EU institutions is vital for Ukraine's reform process and economic stabilization.

1. EU Financial Aid and Investment:

− Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA). The EU has provided substantial macro-financial assistance to Ukraine to support economic stabilization and

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[189] Eastern Partnership. *Mission of Ukraine to the European Union.* 15 April 2021. https://cutt.ly/2rGZNdz5

structural reforms. These funds are crucial for maintaining fiscal stability and advancing key reforms[190].

− European Investment Bank (EIB). The EIB has financed numerous projects in Ukraine, focusing on infrastructure, energy efficiency, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)[191]. These investments are essential for boosting economic growth and aligning Ukraine's economy with EU standards.

2. Support from Individual Member States:

− Bilateral Aid. Several member states, including Poland, Sweden, and Germany, have provided bilateral aid to support Ukraine's reform efforts. This aid includes financial assistance, technical expertise, and capacity-building initiatives.

− Trade and Investment Partnerships. Enhanced trade and investment partnerships between Ukraine and individual EU member states contribute to economic integration and development. These partnerships facilitate market access, technology transfer, and the creation of jobs.

Social and Humanitarian Support. Social and humanitarian support from the EU and its member states is crucial for addressing the immediate needs of the Ukrainian population and fostering long-term social development.

1. Humanitarian Assistance:

− Crisis Response. In response to the ongoing war and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, the EU and its member states have provided significant humanitarian aid, including food, medical supplies, and shelter. This assistance is vital for alleviating the suffering of affected populations.

− Refugee Support. EU member states have also supported Ukrainian refugees, providing asylum, integration programs, and social services. This support reflects the EU's commitment to solidarity and human rights.

2. Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs:

− Erasmus+ Program. The Erasmus+ program facilitates educational exchanges between Ukraine and EU member states, promoting academic cooperation, cultural understanding, and capacity building[192]. These exchanges help Ukrainian students and professionals gain valuable experience and skills.

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[190] Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA). *European Commission*. https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/eu-financial-assistance/macro-financial-assistance-mfa_en
[191] The EIB stands with Ukraine. *European Investment Bank (EIB)*. https://cutt.ly/trGOiaEA
[192] Erasmus+: EU programme for education, training, youth and sport. *European Commission*. https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/

‒ Civil Society Support. The EU and its member states have supported Ukrainian civil society organizations, promoting democratic governance, human rights, and community development. Strengthening civil society is essential for fostering a vibrant and inclusive democratic culture.

Public Opinion in EU Member States. Public opinion within existing EU member states plays a significant role in shaping the political landscape and influencing decision-makers regarding Ukraine's EU membership.

1. Public Perception of Ukraine:

‒ Sympathy and Solidarity. In many EU countries, there is a strong sense of sympathy and solidarity with Ukraine, especially in the wake of the 2014 Euromaidan protests and the ongoing war with Russia. Public support for Ukraine's European aspirations is often driven by shared democratic values and a desire to support a nation striving for freedom and self-determination.

‒ Concerns and Skepticism. Conversely, there are also concerns and skepticism among some EU citizens regarding Ukraine's readiness for membership. Issues such as corruption, economic instability, and the potential financial burden on the EU are common concerns that influence public opinion.

2. Influence on Political Decisions:

‒ Electoral Impact. Public opinion can significantly impact national elections and the positions of political parties regarding EU enlargement. Political leaders are often responsive to the views of their constituents, which can affect their stance on Ukraine's EU membership.

‒ Referendums and Ratification. In some member states, public opinion is directly influential through referendums or parliamentary ratification processes required for approving new EU members. Ensuring broad public support is thus crucial for a successful accession process.

3. Media and Public Discourse:

‒ Role of Media. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of Ukraine. Balanced and accurate reporting can help build public understanding and support, while negative or biased coverage can fuel skepticism and opposition.

‒ Public Campaigns and Advocacy. Pro-European advocacy groups and civil society organizations in EU member states often engage in public campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of Ukraine's EU membership and counter misinformation. These efforts are essential for building a positive narrative and mobilizing support.

The support from existing EU member states and public opinion is pivotal for Ukraine's path to EU membership. Political, economic, and social support from member states, coupled with positive public opinion, can facilitate

Ukraine's reform process and integration into the EU. However, challenges such as political resistance, economic concerns, and public skepticism must be addressed through comprehensive reforms, effective communication, and sustained international cooperation. By garnering broad-based support and demonstrating commitment to EU values and standards, Ukraine can navigate its path towards full membership, contributing to a more stable, prosperous, and united Europe.

The integration of Ukraine into the European Union represents a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires a nuanced approach to policy formulation and implementation. As Ukraine navigates its path towards EU membership, it must address a myriad of economic, political, and social issues. To enhance Ukraine's integration process, a series of strategic policy recommendations can be formulated to ensure a smooth and effective transition. These recommendations focus on strengthening governance, promoting economic development, enhancing social cohesion, and ensuring security and stability.

1. Strengthening Governance and Rule of Law

1.1. Institutional Reforms:

− Capacity Building. Strengthen the capacity of Ukrainian institutions through technical assistance and capacity-building programs. This involves training government officials, improving administrative processes, and enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms.

− Judicial Reform. Prioritize comprehensive judicial reforms to ensure an independent, efficient, and transparent judiciary. This includes measures to combat corruption, improve legal frameworks, and enhance the rule of law, which are essential for building investor confidence and public trust.

1.2. Anti-Corruption Measures:

− Anti-Corruption Agencies. Support the establishment and empowerment of independent anti-corruption agencies. Provide technical and financial assistance to these agencies to enhance their effectiveness in investigating and prosecuting corruption cases.

− Public Sector Transparency. Implement robust public sector transparency measures, including mandatory asset declarations for public officials, open government initiatives, and public access to government information.

2. Promoting Economic Development and Convergence

2.1. Economic Reforms:

− Market Reforms. Accelerate market-oriented economic reforms to create a competitive and dynamic economy. This includes deregulation, privatization of state-owned enterprises, and the creation of a business-friendly environment to attract foreign investment.

− SME Support. Develop targeted support programs for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are crucial for job creation and economic growth. This includes access to finance, business development services, and integration into EU value chains.

2.2. Infrastructure Development:

− Transport and Connectivity. Invest in critical infrastructure projects, particularly in transport and connectivity, to facilitate trade and integration with the EU. This includes upgrading road, rail, and port infrastructure, and enhancing digital connectivity.

− Energy Sector. Promote energy sector reforms to enhance energy efficiency, diversify energy sources, and integrate Ukraine's energy market with the EU. Support the development of renewable energy projects and the modernization of the energy grid.

3. Enhancing Social Cohesion and Human Capital

3.1. Education and Workforce Development:

− Education Reform. Support comprehensive education reforms to align Ukraine's education system with EU standards. This includes curriculum modernization, teacher training, and the promotion of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education.

− Vocational Training. Develop vocational training and apprenticeship programs to address skill mismatches in the labour market. Collaborate with the private sector to ensure that training programs meet industry needs and enhance employability.

3.2. Social Inclusion:

− Social Protection Systems. Strengthen social protection systems to reduce poverty and inequality. Implement targeted social assistance programs and improve the efficiency and coverage of social services.

− Community Development. Promote community development initiatives to enhance social cohesion and integration at the local level. Support civil society organizations and grassroots initiatives that foster social inclusion and community resilience.

4. Ensuring Security and Stability

4.1. Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding:

− Intensify diplomatic efforts to resolve the war in Ukraine. Support initiatives for ceasefire agreements, peace negotiations.

− Humanitarian Assistance. Provide humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected areas, ensuring access to basic services and supporting the reintegration of displaced persons.

4.2. Border Security and Migration Management:

− Border Management. Enhance border management and security to prevent illegal activities and manage migration flows. Collaborate with EU agencies such as FRONTEX to strengthen border control capabilities.

− Migration Policy. Develop a comprehensive migration policy that balances security concerns with humanitarian considerations. Implement integration programs for migrants and refugees to promote social cohesion.

5. Strengthening EU–Ukraine Relations

5.1. Political and Diplomatic Engagement:

− EU Accession Pathway. Provide a clear and credible EU accession pathway for Ukraine, including a roadmap with specific milestones and benchmarks. Regularly review and assess progress to ensure alignment with EU standards and criteria.

− High-Level Dialogues. Maintain high-level political and diplomatic dialogues to strengthen bilateral relations. Engage in regular consultations and coordination on key issues such as security, trade, and regional stability.

5.2. Technical and Financial Assistance:

− EU Funds and Programs. Increase access to EU funds and programs, such as Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, and the European Structural and Investment Funds. Support projects that promote innovation, research, education, and regional development.

− Bilateral Aid. Enhance bilateral aid programs to support Ukraine's reform agenda. Focus on capacity building, infrastructure development, and social inclusion initiatives that align with EU priorities.

The integration of new member states into the EU is a complex and ongoing process that requires strategic policy adjustments to ensure its success. By enhancing governance frameworks, promoting economic convergence, fostering social inclusion, ensuring security and stability, and strengthening diplomatic engagement, the EU can facilitate a smoother and more effective integration process. These policy recommendations aim to address the diverse challenges faced by candidate countries and pave the way for a more unified, prosperous, and resilient European Union.

Enhancing Ukraine's integration process into the EU requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that addresses governance, economic development, social cohesion, and security challenges. By implementing these strategic policy recommendations, the EU can support Ukraine in its journey towards full membership, ensuring a stable, prosperous, and democratic future. This integration process not only benefits Ukraine but also strengthens the EU's strategic position and promotes stability and prosperity in the broader European neighborhood.

Conclusions

The European Union stands as a unique political and economic entity, characterized by its commitment to regional integration, democratic governance, and economic prosperity. As of the current state, the EU faces both significant achievements and considerable challenges that shape its prospects.

1. Economic Performance: The EU maintains its position as one of the largest economies globally, driven by a diverse and integrated market. The economic performance varies across member states, with the core economies of Germany, France, and the Netherlands showing robust growth, while southern and eastern members continue to face economic disparities.

− The EU's Single Market remains a cornerstone, facilitating the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. This integration has enhanced competitiveness and innovation, contributing to economic resilience.

− The EU has made significant strides in recovering from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The NextGenerationEU recovery plan, with its focus on green and digital transitions, is instrumental in driving sustainable growth.

− Despite progress, challenges such as high public debt in some member states, varying levels of economic development, and the need for structural reforms persist.

2. Political Cohesion: Political cohesion within the EU is crucial for its stability and effectiveness. The EU continues to grapple with internal political dynamics that impact its unity and decision-making processes.

− The EU's institutions, including the European Commission, European Parliament, and European Council, play pivotal roles in ensuring democratic governance and policy implementation. However, differences in national interests often lead to complex negotiations and compromises.

− Upholding the rule of law is a fundamental principle. The EU has mechanisms in place to address violations, but instances of non-compliance in some member states pose ongoing challenges.

− The departure of the United Kingdom has had profound implications, leading to adjustments in EU policies and highlighting the need for deeper integration among remaining members.

3. Social Integration: Social integration and cohesion are vital for the EU's unity. The EU's social policies aim to address inequalities and promote inclusivity across member states.

− The European Pillar of Social Rights outlines principles for fair working conditions, social protection, and inclusion. Efforts to reduce disparities in education, healthcare, and employment are ongoing.

− Managing migration remains a complex issue. The EU has implemented policies to address refugee flows and integrate migrants, but disparities in member states' responses and public opinion continue to pose challenges.

− The EU values cultural diversity, promoting multilingualism and cultural exchange. Programs like Erasmus+ enhance educational and cultural integration, fostering a sense of European identity.

4. External Relations: The EU's role on the global stage is defined by its diplomatic efforts, trade policies, and security initiatives.

− The CFSP aims to enhance the EU's global influence and ensure security. The EU engages in various diplomatic efforts, peacekeeping missions, and partnerships to address global challenges.

− The EU is a major global trading partner, with comprehensive trade agreements enhancing economic ties. Key partners include the United States, China, and neighboring countries.

− The EU faces security challenges such as terrorism, cyber threats, and geopolitical tensions. Cooperation with NATO and regional security initiatives are crucial for addressing these threats.

Prospects for the Future. The future economic prospects of the EU are shaped by its commitment to innovation, sustainability, and resilience.

− The EU's focus on green and digital transitions is expected to drive future growth. Investments in renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and green technologies will create new opportunities and enhance competitiveness.

− Efforts to reduce economic disparities among member states will continue, supported by structural reforms, cohesion funds, and targeted investments.

Political cohesion and effective governance will be critical for the EU's stability and ability to respond to internal and external challenges.

− Potential reforms to EU institutions aim to enhance efficiency, transparency, and democratic accountability. Strengthening the rule of law and addressing political fragmentation will be key priorities.

− The prospect of further enlargement, including the integration of Western Balkan countries and potentially Ukraine, requires careful consideration of political, economic, and social impacts.

Social policies will continue to focus on promoting equality, social protection, and inclusion.

– The implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights will guide efforts to ensure fair working conditions and social protection across the EU.

– Effective management of migration and integration policies will be crucial for social cohesion. Balancing security concerns with humanitarian principles will remain a key challenge.

The EU's global influence will depend on its ability to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes and strengthen strategic partnerships.

– The EU aims to assert itself as a leader in addressing global challenges such as climate change, human rights, and multilateralism. Strengthening alliances and partnerships will be essential.

– Enhancing security and defence capabilities through cooperation with NATO and regional initiatives will be vital for addressing emerging threats and ensuring stability.

The EU's current state reflects a blend of significant achievements and ongoing challenges. Its prospects for the future depend on effective policy adjustments, strategic investments, and cohesive governance. By fostering economic resilience, political unity, social cohesion, and global engagement, the EU can navigate its future path successfully, ensuring stability and prosperity for its member states and citizens. The journey ahead requires continuous adaptation and innovation, but the EU's foundational principles of unity, democracy, and solidarity provide a strong basis for addressing future challenges and seizing emerging opportunities.

Ukraine's path toward integration with the European Union has been marked by significant milestones, complex challenges, and resilient efforts to align with European standards and values. As Ukraine continues to navigate its path toward EU membership, understanding these highlights is essential for appreciating the depth and breadth of its efforts.

Key Milestones and Agreements:

(1) Partnership and Cooperation Agreement;

(2) Eastern Partnership;

(3) Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.

Ukraine has undertaken significant political and economic reforms to align with EU standards. In the realm of governance and rule of law, judicial reforms aim to enhance the independence, transparency, and efficiency of the judiciary, with initiatives such as establishing anti-corruption courts and judicial vetting processes. Tackling corruption has been a priority, leading to the creation of institutions like the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), which investigate and prosecute high-level corruption cases.

Economic transformation has been crucial in aligning Ukraine's economy with European standards and promoting sustainable growth. Market-oriented reforms have liberalized the economy, reduced state intervention, and enhanced competitiveness through the privatization of state-owned enterprises and deregulation. The energy sector has seen significant reforms aimed at increasing efficiency, reducing dependency on Russian energy, and integrating with the EU energy market by diversifying energy sources and promoting renewable energy projects.

Social and cultural integration has been fostered through education and mobility programs. Youth engagement initiatives have promoted a European identity among young Ukrainians, encouraging democratic values and active citizenship. Civil society organizations and human rights initiatives have been pivotal in driving social and cultural integration, with EU support empowering grassroots movements advocating for democratic reforms, transparency, and human rights, and efforts to protect human rights through legislative reforms, awareness campaigns, and support for marginalized communities.

Security and geopolitical challenges, particularly the ongoing war with Russia, have profoundly impacted Ukraine's integration journey. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Ukraine have heightened geopolitical tensions, necessitating robust diplomatic and security responses. The EU has provided political and economic support, and sanctions against Russia aim to pressure for resolution. The conflict has also resulted in significant humanitarian challenges, including displacement, casualties, and economic disruption, with the EU and international community offering humanitarian aid and support for conflict-affected regions. Strengthening security cooperation with the EU and NATO has been a key aspect of Ukraine's integration efforts, with military reforms enhancing defence capabilities and aligning with NATO standards, and the EU and NATO providing security assistance to bolster Ukraine's defence posture and ensure regional stability.

Future Prospects and Challenges

1. Ukraine's ultimate goal is full EU membership, which requires meeting stringent political, economic, and legislative criteria.

− Developing a clear and credible roadmap for accession is essential. This roadmap should outline specific milestones and benchmarks, guiding Ukraine's reforms and integration efforts.

− Maintaining public support for EU integration is crucial. Efforts to communicate the benefits and address public concerns will enhance societal cohesion and ensure sustained momentum.

2. Ukraine faces several obstacles on its path to EU integration, including political instability, economic vulnerabilities, and security threats.

− Sustaining political will for reforms amidst internal and external pressures is vital. Strong leadership and consistent policy implementation are necessary to overcome these challenges.

− Enhancing economic resilience through diversification, innovation, and sustainable development will support Ukraine's integration efforts. Addressing structural weaknesses and promoting inclusive growth are key priorities.

Ukraine's integration journey with the EU is a testament to its resilience and commitment to European values. Significant milestones such as the Association Agreement and DCFTA, along with comprehensive political and economic reforms, underscore Ukraine's dedication to aligning with EU standards. While challenges remain, including geopolitical tensions and internal obstacles, the future prospects for Ukraine's integration are promising. By continuing to pursue robust reforms, fostering social and cultural ties, and enhancing security cooperation, Ukraine can navigate its path toward EU membership, contributing to a stable, prosperous, and united Europe. The journey ahead requires sustained effort, but the shared vision of a European future provides a strong foundation for overcoming challenges and achieving integration.

Ukraine's potential membership in the European Union is a development of profound geopolitical, economic, and cultural significance for both the region and the EU itself.

Geopolitical Implications

1. Ukraine's accession to the EU would markedly enhance regional stability in Eastern Europe. Given Ukraine's strategic location and its history of geopolitical tensions, particularly with Russia, its EU membership would act as a stabilizing force.

− Buffer Against Aggression. By integrating Ukraine into the EU, the region would gain a more substantial buffer against external aggression, particularly from Russia. This would deter potential military conflicts and foster a more secure environment in Eastern Europe.

− Conflict Resolution. EU membership would also facilitate conflict resolution within Ukraine. The EU's diplomatic leverage and conflict mediation expertise could be pivotal in achieving lasting peace and reconciliation.

2. Incorporating Ukraine into the EU would expand the Union's geopolitical influence, reinforcing its role as a significant global actor.

− Strategic Expansion. The EU's eastern border would extend, encompassing Ukraine, thereby consolidating its presence in Eastern Europe.

This expansion would signal a commitment to supporting democracies on Europe's periphery and countering authoritarian influences.

− Energy Security. Ukraine's vast natural resources and its role as a key transit country for energy supplies would enhance the EU's energy security. Diversifying energy routes and sources through Ukraine would reduce dependency on Russian gas and promote energy resilience.

Economic Impact

1. Ukraine's integration into the EU would stimulate significant economic growth and development, benefiting both Ukraine and the broader EU economy.

− Market Expansion. With a population of over 40 million, Ukraine represents a substantial market for EU goods and services. Integration would facilitate trade, investment, and economic exchanges, driving growth on both sides.

− Agricultural Potential. Ukraine's fertile agricultural lands would bolster the EU's food security and agricultural output. Enhanced agricultural trade and investment in agribusiness would be mutually beneficial, promoting sustainable development and innovation.

2. EU membership would attract substantial foreign direct investment (FDI) into Ukraine, leading to modernization and infrastructure development.

− Investment Climate. Alignment with EU regulations and standards would improve Ukraine's investment climate, making it more attractive to investors. This influx of FDI would spur job creation, technological advancement, and economic diversification.

− Infrastructure Projects. EU funds and expertise would support critical infrastructure projects in Ukraine, enhancing connectivity, transport networks, and digital infrastructure. These improvements would integrate Ukraine more closely with the EU economy and boost regional development.

Political and Social Dimensions

1. Ukraine's accession would underscore the EU's commitment to promoting democratic governance, rule of law, and human rights.

− Democratic Reforms. EU membership would necessitate comprehensive political reforms in Ukraine, strengthening democratic institutions, judicial independence, and anti-corruption measures. This alignment with EU standards would fortify Ukraine's democracy.

− Human Rights Protection. Enhanced protection of human rights would be a fundamental aspect of Ukraine's EU integration. The EU's emphasis on human rights and social inclusion would drive positive changes in Ukraine's legal and social frameworks.

2. EU membership would foster social cohesion and cultural integration, enriching the European cultural mosaic.

− Cultural Exchange. Increased cultural exchanges and educational programs would promote mutual understanding and solidarity between Ukrainians and other EU citizens.

− Social Policies. Adoption of EU social policies would improve living standards, healthcare, and education in Ukraine. This social upliftment would contribute to greater cohesion and reduce disparities within the Union.

Strategic and Long-Term Benefits

1. Ukraine's membership would enhance the EU's collective identity, reinforcing the notion of a united Europe committed to shared values and aspirations.

− European Solidarity. Ukraine's integration would symbolize European solidarity and the power of the EU's transformative influence. It would demonstrate the Union's ability to bring stability and prosperity to its neighbors through cooperation and integration.

− Historical Significance. The accession of Ukraine, a country with deep historical ties to Europe, would represent a significant historical milestone. It would validate the EU's vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace.

2. Integration would spur innovation and the development of a knowledge economy, leveraging Ukraine's educational and scientific potential.

− Research and Development. Collaboration in research and development (R&D) would accelerate technological advancements. Ukrainian universities and research institutions could participate in EU research programs, driving innovation and scientific progress.

− Digital Economy. The digital transformation would be a key area of focus, with investments in digital infrastructure and skills. This would position Ukraine as a hub for technology and innovation within the EU.

The potential membership of Ukraine in the European Union holds transformative implications for both the region and the EU itself. From bolstering regional stability and enhancing geopolitical influence to driving economic growth and fostering social cohesion, Ukraine's integration journey is pivotal in shaping the future landscape of Europe. The strategic, economic, political, and cultural dimensions of this integration highlight the multifaceted benefits and the profound significance of Ukraine's EU accession. As the EU and Ukraine continue to navigate this path, the shared commitment to democratic values, economic prosperity, and regional stability will be the cornerstone of a united and resilient Europe. The journey ahead, while challenging, promises a future of collective strength and unity, reinforcing the EU's vision of peace, democracy, and prosperity for all its members.

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CHAPTER 3
UKRAINE: FROM EUROPEAN CHOICE TO THE DEFENCE OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Introduction

The trajectory of Ukraine's modern history has been profoundly shaped by its evolving relationship with the European Union, encompassing a dynamic interplay of historical memory, political transformation, and security imperatives. This chapter examines Ukraine's European path through four interrelated dimensions. First, it reconstructs the history of Ukraine–EU relations, tracing the emergence of a strategic dialogue from the early years of independence to the signing of the Association Agreement and the development of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Second, it explores the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) as a turning point that crystallised Ukraine's European choice, not merely as a foreign policy orientation but as a civilisational commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Third, it analyses the threats to democracy posed by Russia's hybrid war between 2014 and 2022, which targeted Ukraine's sovereignty, information space, and institutional stability. Finally, it assesses Ukraine's role as a strategic and normative shield in the context of the full-scale Russian–Ukrainian war, highlighting its dual function as both a security provider and a defender of shared European values.

The analytical framework of this chapter integrates historical, political, and normative perspectives. The historical dimension examines how Ukraine's interactions with the EU have been shaped by post-Cold War transformations, enlargement policy, and the EU's evolving neighbourhood strategy. The political dimension addresses how internal reforms and popular mobilisation – most notably during the Revolution of Dignity – redefined Ukraine's domestic political order and its alignment with European standards. The security dimension assesses the hybrid war and its disruptive effects on Ukraine's democratic consolidation, linking these to broader challenges in European security architecture. The normative dimension situates Ukraine's struggle within the global contest between authoritarian coercion and democratic resilience, arguing that Ukraine's wartime governance and international advocacy actively reinforce the EU's own value system.

The chapter's central research question asks: to what extent has Ukraine's integration trajectory transformed it from an aspirant to a co-shaper of the European project, and how does this transformation affect both the EU's

security order and its normative identity? Addressing this requires a multi-level analysis at *the historical level*, charting the evolution of Ukraine–EU relations from partnership to association; *the political level*, evaluating the role of mass civic movements and institutional reforms in advancing the European agenda; *the security level*, assessing Ukraine's contribution to defending Europe from hybrid and conventional threats; and *the normative level*, examining how Ukraine's commitment to democratic principles under conditions of existential threat enhances the EU's own legitimacy and cohesion.

Methodologically, the chapter adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical reconstruction, political analysis, and normative theory. Primary sources include official EU and Ukrainian policy documents, treaties, and speeches, while secondary sources draw on scholarly debates in European studies, security studies, and international law. This multi-perspective methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of how Ukraine's European path has evolved from association-building to active co-production of security and values within the Euro-Atlantic space.

In its entirety, the chapter argues that Ukraine's European trajectory is not a linear accession process but a complex, historically embedded transformation. By linking the historical consolidation of Ukraine–EU relations, the moral and political impetus of the Revolution of Dignity, the destabilising impact of hybrid warfare, and Ukraine's emergence as a normative security actor, this analysis positions Ukraine as both a frontline defender and an active architect of Europe's democratic future.

3.1. History of Ukraine–European Union Relations
(Yuriy Kotlyar, Yevgen Kobets, and Anastasiia Chokova)

The first concrete attempts to establish relations between independent Ukraine and the European Union began in 1991. In December of the same year, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, representing the presiding country of the EU, officially recognized the independence of Ukraine, noting this in a letter on behalf of the European Union. From this moment, official relations between Ukraine and the EU officially began[193].

In September 1993, the Delegation of the European Commission was opened in Ukraine. Starting from 1 December 2009, the Delegation of the European Commission became the Delegation of the EU to Ukraine. This transformation occurred after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty[194], which introduced changes to the EU constitution.

Ukraine's intention to develop relations with the European Union was first declared in the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of 2 July 1993 "On the Main Directions of Ukraine's Foreign Policy"[195]. Ukraine's aspiration to join European organizations dates back to 1994, when the government proclaimed integration into the EU as the main goal of the country's foreign policy.

However, little had been accomplished by 1994, as Kyiv remained attentive to Russia's position, which continued to be its main trading partner and supplier of natural gas and fossil fuels.

The next stage and legal basis of relations between Ukraine and the EU was the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* of 16 June 1994[196], which became the foundation for cooperation in numerous political, economic, and humanitarian matters. The document emphasized the need to improve public administration and to ensure freedom of the press and civil rights. The structure of political dialogue was modest: annual meetings of the EU Presidency Trio (three consecutive member states holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU) with Ukrainian leaders and several interministerial

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[193] Історія становлення відносин Україна-ЄС. *Міністерство юстиції України.* https://minjust.gov.ua/m/istoriya-stanovlennya-vidnosin-ukraina-es

[194] The Treaty of Lisbon. *European Parliament.* https://cutt.ly/urGCI36t

[195] Постанова Верховної Ради України від 2 липня 1993 року «Про основні напрями зовнішньої політики України». https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3360-12#Text

[196] Угода про партнерство та співробітництво між Україною і Європейськими Співтовариствами та їх державами-членами. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_012#Text

consultations. The 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement entered into force in 1998 and expired in 2008.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement is a source of norms in four types of legal systems: (1) international public law; (2) the law of each of the European Communities; (3) the law of each EU member state; and (4) the law of Ukraine. The status of the provisions of the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* within each of these legal systems is determined by the respective system's own rules. International agreements concluded by the Community "shall be binding upon the institutions of the Community and upon the Member States"[197].

According to Article 6 of the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement*, the Parties shall establish a regular political dialogue, which they intend to develop and deepen. This dialogue shall accompany and reinforce the cooperative relationship between the Community and Ukraine, support the political and economic changes taking place in the country, and contribute to the creation of new forms of cooperation.

A political dialogue between Ukraine and the EU continues, which includes:

– strengthening Ukraine's relations with the Community, and thus with the community of democratic states; economic convergence through this Agreement will lead to closer political ties;

– contributing to the further alignment of views on international issues of common interest, thereby enhancing security and stability;

– envisaging that the Parties will seek to cooperate on matters related to strengthening stability and security in Europe, respect for democratic principles, respect for and the promotion of human rights, in particular the rights of ethnic minorities, and, where necessary, hold consultations on related issues[198].

Thus, the 1994 *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* marked the starting point of Ukraine–EU relations. Their development took place on multiple levels, creating opportunities to advance the country on all fronts – economic, political, and cultural.

The next step in the evolution of relations was the first Ukraine–EU Summit, held in Kyiv on 5 September 1997. The Ukrainian delegation was

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[197] Хорольський Р. Угода про партнерство та співробітництво між Україною і Європейськими співтовариствами та їх державами-членами 1994 року як джерело права Європейського співтовариства. *Вісник Академії правових наук України*. 2006. Вип. 4 (47). С. 198–207.

[198] Угода про партнерство та співробітництво між Україною і Європейськими Співтовариствами та їх державами-членами. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_012#Text

headed by President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, while the EU delegation was represented by President of the European Council Jean-Claude Juncker and President of the European Commission Jacques Santer[199].

During the meeting, Ukraine's European choice was reaffirmed in accordance with the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* between Ukraine and the European Community and its Member States, signed in 1992. The parties discussed the shared legal and contractual framework of their relations and the ways to deepen economic cooperation.

On the sidelines of the summit, an agreement was signed between the European Coal and Steel Community and the Government of Ukraine on trade in steel products. Since then, Ukraine–EU summits have been held annually, addressing current issues of Ukraine's European integration.

On 16 October 1998, the second Ukraine–European Union Summit took place in Vienna. The Ukrainian delegation was headed by President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma. The European delegation was represented by President of the European Council Viktor Klima, President of the European Commission Jacques Santer, and the Secretary-General of the European Council.

The leaders described the cooperation between Ukraine and the EU as a "unique and strategic partnership" and discussed a range of issues related to cooperation in the fields of foreign policy and security policy. Ukraine, for the first time, declared its willingness to engage with the European Union on the basis of corresponding rights, and the EU took into account the relevant provisions of the *Strategy for Ukraine's Integration into the European Union*[200], approved by the European Union and by the Presidential Decree of Ukraine of 11 June 1998[201].

On 23 July 1999, work began in Kyiv on the introduction of a free trade mechanism between Ukraine and the EU. In particular, the decision focused on eliminating trade and investment barriers. The European side welcomed the signing of the INOGATE[202] framework agreement and Ukraine's

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[199] Саміти Україна–ЄС. *Міністерство закордонних справ* України. 5 серпня 2021 https://mfa.gov.ua/yevropejska-integraciya/samiti-ukrayina-yes

[200] Указ Президента України «Про затвердження Стратегії інтеграції України до Європейського Союзу» від 11 червня 1998 року. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/615/98#Text

[201] Саміти Україна–ЄС. https://mfa.gov.ua/yevropejska-integraciya/samiti-ukrayina-yes

[202] Національний план дій INOGATE для України Технічна допомога Держенергоефективності у перенесенні правових актів ЄС з енергетичного маркування та екодизайну в українське законодавство. https://saee.gov.ua/sites/default/files/INOGATE_2016.pdf

initiative to organize the Baltic–Black Sea Summit, viewing it as Ukraine's contribution to the development of regional cooperation. Ukraine and the EU reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the G7 Memorandum on the closure of the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant in order to promote the development of efficient and environmentally friendly energy in Ukraine.

On 15 September 2000, in Paris, Ukraine announced the progress of implementing the *Strategy for Ukraine's Integration into the EU*, in particular the adoption of the *National Program for Ukraine's Integration into the EU*[203]. The EU supports Ukraine's intention to align its trade evaluation standards system with that of the EU and welcomes Ukraine's targeted implementation of the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade.

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On 11 September 2001, during negotiations in Yalta, Ukraine and the European Union agreed to improve Ukraine's legislative framework in the areas of mass media, security, and working conditions for journalists. Emphasis was placed on the capacity to conduct objective investigations into crimes against journalists. The EU assured that it would continue to support Ukraine's efforts to develop free and independent media. "The EU welcomes the government's program of economic reforms and calls for further measures in the areas of taxation, standardization, competition policy, and state aid, as well as the continuation of large-scale privatization under transparent market conditions"[204], the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine stated.

The Parties agreed to jointly combat organized crime, money laundering, drug and arms trafficking, as well as to cooperate closely on issues of illegal migration, asylum, smuggling, and human trafficking.

On 4 July 2002, the EU called for the continuation of reforms in Ukraine's energy sector, including privatization in the energy production and distribution sectors, as well as reforms in the coal industry, and the establishment of three Ukraine–EU working groups in the field of energy production and distribution.

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[203] Програма інтеграції України до Європейського Союзу. *Верховна Рада України*. 14 вересня 2000. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/n0001100-00#Text
[204] Саміти Україна–ЄС. https://mfa.gov.ua/yevropejska-integraciya/samiti-ukrayina-yes

The Parties agreed to strengthen cooperation in the field of transport. The EU particularly welcomed Ukraine's accession to the international agreements of the European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation (*Eurocontrol*)[205] and supported Ukraine's registration as a member of the Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA).

On 7 October 2003, Ukraine and the EU discussed the "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood" initiative and agreed that a number of new opportunities and related instruments would help Ukraine expand its participation in the EU internal market[206].

The annual Ukraine–EU meetings within the framework of the Cooperation Council reviewed the progress in implementing the priorities defined at the previous meeting, approved the priority areas of the bilateral cooperation agreement for the next stage under the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* between Ukraine and the EU. Cooperation focused on the implementation of the EU Action Plan adopted by the Council and Ukraine. This included the preparation of a program, monitoring and evaluation, and the identification of annual priority areas. Priority areas of activity in the fields of justice and home affairs included negotiations on a readmission agreement, strengthening border management, including the development of border infrastructure, migration issues, judicial reform, rule of law, combating organized crime in all areas, and counterterrorism. The sides also discussed EU enlargement issues, particularly visa issues. Bringing Ukrainian legislation closer to EU norms and standards was a key task and reflected in EU technical assistance.

In addition to cooperation in the field of nuclear safety, the sides intended to focus their work primarily on implementing the Kyoto Protocol[207]. Cooperation also addressed issues related to the deterioration of the environmental situation in the Danube and Black Sea, particularly wastewater treatment.

Cooperation in the transport sector aimed to further integrate Ukraine's transport infrastructure, especially ports, into the European transport network

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[205] Спеціальна Угода між Державною авіаційною службою України та Європейською організацією з безпеки аеронавігації щодо надання ЄВРОКОНТРОЛЕМ підтримки у відновленні можливостей України у галузі авіації. *Debet-Kredyt*. 27 July 2023. https://docs.dtkt.ua/doc/944_001-23

[206] Саміти Україна–ЄС. https://mfa.gov.ua/yevropejska-integraciya/samiti-ukrayina-yes

[207] Кіотський протокол до Рамкової конвенції Організації Об'єднаних Націй про зміну клімату. *Верховна Рада України*. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_801#Text

within the Trans-European Transport Corridor, the Trans-European Black Sea Maritime Space PETRA, and TRACECA.

To properly address all priority areas of cooperation and in the context of EU enlargement, strengthening regional and cross-border cooperation was particularly important.

On 8 July 2004, the 8th Ukraine–EU Summit was held in The Hague, the Netherlands. This was the first summit after the largest wave of enlargement in the history of the EU. The summit addressed issues of the internal development of Ukraine and the European Union, the state and prospects of deepening Ukraine–EU cooperation in the fields of trade and economy, security, as well as justice and home affairs[208].

Within the framework of the summit, an Agreement on Ukraine's participation in the EU Police Mission in Macedonia was signed, and the Ukraine–EU Action Plan on cooperation in science and technology was adopted. The summit also discussed the prospects of Ukraine–EU relations within the framework of EU implementation, in particular the preparation of the *Ukraine–EU Action Plan*. The Ukrainian side stated clearly that the main objective of this Action Plan was not only to systematize the existing areas of cooperation with the EU but also to preserve added value and open real prospects for granting Ukraine access to the four freedoms – the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people[209]. Ukraine also noted that the European Commission's proposal to conclude an Association Agreement, which would replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, currently does not meet the interests of our state.

The key trade issues identified by the Parties at the summit as priorities were:

– granting Ukraine market economy status[210] within the framework of the European Union's anti-dumping legislation. The Parties agreed that this status would be granted to Ukraine once the necessary conditions were met (issues remaining to be resolved included state interference in the valuation process in certain sectors and specific aspects of bankruptcy legislation);

– addressing outstanding issues in bilateral trade, including the gradual elimination of export duties on scrap metal and the removal of discrimination in the automotive sector.

Discussions at the summit confirmed the importance that the sides attach to deepening cooperation between Ukraine and the EU to enhance stability,

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[208] Саміти Україна–ЄС. https://mfa.gov.ua/yevropejska-integraciya/samiti-ukrayina-yes

[209] Ibid.

[210] Україна нарешті стала ринковою. https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2005/12/30/3044718/

security, and prosperity on the European continent and to avoid the emergence of new dividing lines.

On 21 February 2005, at an extraordinary meeting of the Ukraine–EU Cooperation Council in Brussels, the *Ukraine–EU Action Plan* was signed[211]. This Plan was developed based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, taking into account the provisions of the European Neighborhood Policy and establishing a comprehensive list of priorities both internally and internationally outside the scope of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. The *Ukraine–EU Action Plan* is aimed at strengthening political, security, economic, and cultural relations, including cross-border cooperation and joint responsibility for conflict prevention and resolution.

Among the priorities outlined in the Action Plan are:

– continuing to strengthen the stability and effectiveness of institutions to ensure democracy and the rule of law;

– conducting democratic presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine in accordance with OSCE standards;

– respect for press freedom and freedom of expression;

– developing opportunities for further consultations between Ukraine and the EU on crisis management;

– expanding cooperation in disarmament and non-proliferation;

– deepening cooperation on common neighborhood policy and regional security, particularly in developing an effective solution to the Transnistrian conflict in Moldova, including border regulation;

– Ukraine's accession to the WTO;

– gradually removing restrictions and non-tariff barriers that hinder bilateral trade and implementing necessary regulatory reforms;

– improving the investment climate by ensuring non-discriminatory, transparent, and predictable trade conditions, simplifying administrative procedures, and fighting corruption;

– tax reform, improving the functions of tax administration, and efficient use of state funds;

– initiating constructive dialogue on simplifying the visa regime between Ukraine and the EU in preparation for future negotiations on concluding a visa facilitation agreement, recognizing the need to achieve progress in ongoing negotiations;

– gradually bringing Ukrainian legislation, rules, and standards closer to EU legislation, rules, and standards;

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[211] The Council of Europe Action Plans for Ukraine. *Permanent Representation of Ukraine to the Council of Europe.* 17 August 2022. https://coe.mfa.gov.ua/en/partnership/council-europe-action-plans-ukraine

–   building the capacity of administrative and judicial authorities;

–   promoting dialogue on employment issues and advancing initiatives under the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to ensure the absence of discrimination based on nationality in the treatment of labour migrants;

–   full implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on the closure of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, including the completion and operation of reactors H2/P4 in accordance with internationally recognized standards of nuclear safety and international permits[212].

It should be noted that according to the mission of the *Ukraine–EU Action Plan* to ensure the effectiveness of the fight against corruption, the Main Administration of Civil Service of Ukraine has been assigned a key role in promoting transparency and accountability to the wider public.

Overall, the *Ukraine–EU Action Plan* supported Ukraine's goal of deeper integration into European economic and social structures and was designed for a three-year period. Progress in implementing the defined priorities was monitored by agencies established according to the rules of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

Bringing Ukrainian legislation closer to EU norms and standards is the "key" condition for Ukraine's integration into the European Community. The success of the adaptation process requires not only changes to legislation in areas defined as priorities in joint Ukrainian–European agreements but also the full acceptance of principles, concepts, criteria, doctrines, and legal concepts that form the foundation of everything achieved by the European community.

Part of the membership criteria in the EU is related to the administrative resource – in connection with this, standards are established in six areas, including civil service. This is explained by the fact that civil service systems in different countries differ, but there are certain fundamental values and their definitions after joining the EU[213].

On 27 October 2006, the 10th Ukraine–EU Summit was held in Helsinki. In particular, the Parties positively assessed the progress achieved in implementing the *Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Energy*. Emphasis was placed on the need to strengthen the security of energy supplies to Ukraine and the transportation of gas to the EU market[214]. The Parties agreed to continue implementing energy infrastructure development projects in cooperation with the European Investment Bank and

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[212] Ibid.

[213] Відносини між Європейським Союзом та Україною. 28 березня 2019. https://dobra-rada.gov.ua/eurounion/vdnosini-mzh-yevropeyskim-soyuzom-ta-ukrayinoyu/

[214] Євробюлетень. Київ, 2006. № 10. С. 28.

the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in order to enhance the transparency of cross-border energy flows, improve the efficiency of gas infrastructure and domestic energy systems, ensure accurate energy consumption metering, and connect to electricity grids. The EU welcomed Ukraine's intention to fulfill the necessary conditions for joining the *Energy Community Treaty*[215].

In 2007, Ukrainian and European leaders reaffirmed their intention to continue developing cooperation aimed at resolving regional conflicts and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, primarily within the framework of the Global Partnership Initiative against the Spread of Nuclear Weapons and Weapons of Mass Destruction. This cooperation also encompassed combating terrorism, preventing emergencies, and destroying small arms, light weapons, as well as obsolete and surplus ammunition.

On 9 September 2008, in Paris, the European side congratulated Ukraine on its accession to the WTO and highly praised the progress achieved in implementing economic reforms. The leaders stressed that political stability in Ukraine, constitutional reform, strengthening the rule of law – including in the investment sector – and full compliance with WTO obligations were essential conditions for continuing reforms and deepening Ukraine–EU relations.

In May 2009, the EU launched the *Eastern Partnership* initiative[216], which became the Eastern European dimension of the EU's neighbourhood policy towards six countries (Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova). The emergence of the Eastern Partnership formalized a clear distinction between the EU's European neighbours and the EU's neighbours in Europe's periphery (North Africa and the Middle East), which, even from a formal perspective, have no right to claim EU membership. The founding documents of the Eastern Partnership (in particular, the Joint Declaration of the Prague Summit of 7 May 2009[217]) contain provisions on the complementarity of the Initiative with the bilateral relations between the EU and the partner countries[218].

In its relations with partner countries, the Eastern Partnership initiative also introduces innovative provisions compared to the classical European

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[215] Саміти Україна–ЄС. https://mfa.gov.ua/yevropejska-integraciya/samiti-ukrayina-yes

[216] Eastern Partnership. *Diplomatic Service of the European Union*. 8 May 2025. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eastern-partnership_en

[217] Спільна заява Саміту Східного партнерства у Празі. *Верховна Рада України.* 7 травня 2009. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_437#Text

[218] Історія Східного партнерства. *Ukrainska Natsionalna Platforma.* http://eap-csf.org.ua/pro-nas/pro-skhidne-partnerstvo/

Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), such as the signing of Association Agreements with the EU, including the creation of a free trade area and the establishment of a visa-free regime[219]. The launch of the Eastern Partnership led to a divergence in the EU's foreign policy approach towards its southern and eastern neighbours, which had previously been treated under similar conditions in the EU's neighbourhood policy. From Ukraine's perspective, this is a step in the right direction, as all of its Eastern neighbours are European countries and may apply for EU membership if they meet the relevant criteria.

Ukraine's strategic interest in the Eastern Partnership lies in offering interested partner countries the prospect of EU membership, thereby transforming the initiative into a link with the EU's enlargement policy[220].

The multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership operates at four levels:

– meetings of the Heads of State and Government of the Eastern Partnership (every two years);

– summits held as follows: Inaugural Summit – 7 May 2009 in Prague; Second Summit – 29–30 September 2011 in Warsaw; Third Summit – 28–29 November 2013 in Vilnius[221];

– meetings of the foreign ministers of the EU Member States and partner countries to review progress achieved and set political guidelines (annually);

– four thematic platforms corresponding to the main areas of cooperation: (1) democracy, good governance, and stability; (2) economic integration and convergence with EU policies; (3) energy security; (4) people-to-people contacts[222].

Within the multilateral aspect, the following activities are also organized: informal dialogue at the level of foreign and industry ministers of partner countries and EU commissioners on multilateral sectoral cooperation and joint development initiatives. To ensure broad public participation in the work, civil society forums are organized.

The aim of the Forum is to develop links between civil society organizations and promote their dialogue with state authorities. It operates according to the principles of the aforementioned thematic platforms and

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[219] Ініціатива ЄС «Східне Партнерство». *Міністерство молоді та спорту України.* https://mms.gov.ua/mizhnarodne-spivrobitnictvo/yevropejska-integraciya/iniciativa-yes-shidne-partnerstvo

[220] Східне партнерство. *Міністерства розвитку громад та територій України.* 14 січня 2025. https://mindev.gov.ua/diialnist/yevrointehratsiia/skhidne-partnerstvo

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ініціатива ЄС «Східне Партнерство». https://mms.gov.ua/mizhnarodne-spivrobitnictvo/yevropejska-integraciya/iniciativa-yes-shidne-partnerstvo

receives financial support from the European Commission. National forum platforms have been established in each partner country.

The Ukrainian national platform of the Forum brings together over 150 civil society organizations in Ukraine[223]; the parliamentary aspect is ensured by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly[224], in which Ukraine is represented by a permanent delegation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

The EU considers the Eastern Partnership an integral part of the European Neighborhood Policy, which, in turn, forms the framework policy of the EU towards neighboring countries. In other words, from the EU's perspective, the sum of bilateral relations between Ukraine and the EU (and other Eastern partners) constitutes the bilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership.

Given that the Eastern Partnership is based on the main achievements Ukraine had in relations with the EU at the time of the initiative's establishment (negotiation process for the Association Agreement, visa-free dialogue, etc.), our country considers the Eastern Partnership not a political structure but a supplement to a more ambitious bilateral format in relations with the EU. Therefore, the unconditional priority for Ukraine is the development of relations with the EU in a bilateral format, while the Eastern Partnership is primarily seen as a multilateral dialogue forum for implementing reforms and relations with the EU[225].

Ukraine supports the approach to further developing the Eastern Partnership, taking into account the peculiarities of bilateral relations between the EU and partner countries, their priorities and needs, as well as progress on the path of reforms. In this context, Ukraine remains committed to continuing large-scale transformations outlined in the path to European integration enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine, particularly in the areas of justice and crime fighting, as well as strengthening democratic principles and thanking the EU for its financial support and expertise[226].

In September 2011, the Warsaw Summit brought the EU's Eastern European partners closer together and agreed on an ambitious agenda for the

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[223] Східне партнерство. https://mindev.gov.ua/diialnist/yevrointehratsiia/skhidne-partnerstvo

[224] The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly (Euronest PA). *Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the European Union*. 30 September 2020. https://cutt.ly/IrGCHXO6

[225] Eastern Partnership. https://cutt.ly/HrGR6JBk

[226] Коментар МЗС у зв'язку зі схваленням Радою ЄС Висновків щодо ініціативи ЄС «Східне партнерство». *Міністерство закордонних справ України.* 11 травня 2020. https://mfa.gov.ua/news/komentar-mzs-u-zvyazku-zi-shvalennyam-radoyu-yes-visnovkiv-shchodo-iniciativi-yes-shidne-partnerstvo

future[227]. In this context, they emphasized the need to fulfill the agreed commitments, particularly with regard to political, economic, and social reforms. The summit participants reaffirmed the importance they attach to the *Eastern Partnership* based on shared interests and commitments, as well as joint ownership, responsibility, differentiation, and accountability.

The partnership is based on a commitment to the principles of international law and fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as economic markets, sustainable development, and good governance.

All participating countries in the Eastern Partnership commit to respecting these goals and principles of international law through appropriate international instruments, and each EU member state also commits to respecting these goals and principles of international law through appropriate international instruments. Recognizing and approving the progress made, they also remind us that much remains to be done to overcome current challenges in democracy, respect for fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.

In this context, summit participants emphasized that progress in upholding these shared values is conditioned, among other things, by strengthening the effectiveness and independence of the judiciary; effective anti-corruption measures, and the implementation of administrative reform[228].

The Eastern Partnership Transport Council was established in October 2011[229] and operates within the framework of the platform "Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies". The Communication of the European Commission defines the main areas of EU cooperation with neighbouring regions in the field of transport, namely:

− expanding the EU's internal aviation market and the common European airspace towards neighboring regions;

− liberalizing maritime transport. In the long term, plans are to include neighboring countries in the "Green Belt" of free maritime traffic in Europe and on European borders;

− creating an effective and sustainable system of inland waterway transport;

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[227] На саміті «Східного партнерства» у Варшаві Україну вітають і застерігають. https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/24344293.html

[228] Спільна Декларація Саміту «Східного партнерства», Вільнюс, 28–29 листопада 2013 року. https://cutt.ly/0rGCZwlN

[229] Transport. *Mission of Ukraine to the European Union*. 30 October 2020. https://ukraine-eu.mfa.gov.ua/en/2633-relations/galuzeve-spivrobitnictvo/transport

– increasing the efficiency of road transport by simplifying administrative procedures at borders, solving congestion problems, improving road safety, and adhering to international standards of technical safety and environmental protection;

– considering access to the road transport market;

– developing railway infrastructure and simplifying border crossing procedures for rail transport, especially on the Asia-Europe route;

– developing transport infrastructure networks beyond the EU by identifying transport routes, priority projects, and funding sources[230].

For the promotion of projects of common interest, both existing financial instruments (the Neighbourhood Investment Facility – NIF, the Connecting Europe Facility – CEF) and new ones may be used.

In 2013, Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013[231] of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network was adopted.

On 9 October 2013, in Luxembourg, the Joint Declaration *"Future Cooperation in the Field of Transport within the Eastern Partnership"* was adopted, approving the map of the regional transport network of the Partnership[232]. Two corridors pass through the territory of Ukraine:

– the Rhine–Danube Corridor connects, via the inland waterways of the Main and the Danube, with an important branch from Munich to Prague, Žilina, Košice, and to the Ukrainian border;

– the Mediterranean Corridor runs from the Iberian Peninsula towards the Hungarian–Ukrainian border.

The priorities of cooperation within the Eastern Partnership transport group are as follows:

(1) development of the transport network in the form of integrated transport corridors, as well as the "revitalization of connections" that have effectively been lost due to the suspension of cooperation within the framework of the Trans-European Transport Corridors;

(2) conducting an analysis of "bottlenecks" in the national transport network connected to the TEN-T network, preparing and setting priorities for infrastructure projects for the implementation of EU subsidies;

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[230] Східне партнерство. https://mindev.gov.ua/diialnist/yevrointehratsiia/skhidne-partnerstvo

[231] Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013. *EUR-Lex.* 2013. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1315/oj/eng

[232] Ibid.

(3) inclusion of Ukraine's inland waterways (the Dnipro, the Southern Buh, and the Ukrainian section of the Danube) into the regional TEN-T network.

In accordance with the arrangements set out in the Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Transport of the EU Member States and the Eastern Partnership countries *"Future Cooperation in the Field of Transport within the Eastern Partnership",* the Ukrainian side carried out work on the inclusion of Ukraine's inland waterways in the regional TEN-T network[233] (Ukraine's proposal for inclusion was prepared in accordance with the criteria and requirements set out in Section 2 (Articles 14–16) of Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013[234] of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013).

Thus, the first High-Level Transport Dialogue Ukraine–EU became an important step towards deepening relations in the transport sector between the EU and Ukraine[235].

On 22 November 2010, the 14th Ukraine–EU Summit was held in Brussels[236]. The sides welcomed the implementation of the action plan for visa liberalization for Ukraine and confirmed their joint commitment to creating a deep and comprehensive free trade area between Ukraine and the EU to enable Ukraine to access the EU internal market. EU leaders welcomed Ukraine's signing of the *Protocol on Accession to the Energy Community Treaty*[237].

During the summit, a protocol to the agreement on cooperation and partnership between Ukraine and the European Communities and their Member States concerning the Framework Agreement between Ukraine and the European Communities on General Principles of Participation of Ukraine in Community Programs, particularly in business, business, energy, information, media, and technology, was signed. The sides discussed adherence to human rights, fundamental freedoms, democratic values, and the rule of law based on an independent and impartial judiciary.

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[233] *Commission staff working document. The planning methodology for the Trans-European transport network (TEN-T).* https://mtu.gov.ua/files/TEN-T_planning_methodology.pdf

[234] Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013. *EUR-Lex.*

[235] Східне партнерство. https://mindev.gov.ua/diialnist/yevrointehratsiia/skhidne-partnerstvo

[236] Євробюлетень. Київ, 2006. № 12. С. 28.

[237] Протокол про приєднання України до Договору про заснування Енергетичного Співтовариства. *Верховна Рада України.* 15 грудня 2010. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/994_a27#Text

They particularly emphasized the importance of press freedom and confirmed the need for further strengthening of democratic development in Ukraine, especially voting rights. The European side called on the Ukrainian government to carry out a broad and comprehensive constitutional reform in close cooperation with the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.

On 19 December 2011, the Parties reached agreement on the full text of the Association Agreement and emphasized its particular importance for a new stage in the development of Ukraine–EU relations. Progress was also achieved in implementing the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, and the EU reaffirmed its joint commitment to a visa-free regime with Ukraine. The Parties confirmed their adherence to the rule of law, including the independence of the judiciary, recognizing this principle as a foundation of the Association Agreement, as well as acknowledging the challenges in this area. The need for urgent action was also underscored, particularly through the deepening of judicial reform.

In the context of the parliamentary elections in Ukraine on 28 October 2012, the need for full implementation of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations aimed at addressing the shortcomings identified during the elections was discussed. The Parties reaffirmed their continued support for the work of the European Parliament's monitoring mission in Ukraine, particularly regarding judicial cases of increasing concern. Ukraine confirmed its readiness to promptly implement the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights and the recommendations of the Council of Europe concerning the conditions of detention and the provision of medical care to detainees.

On 25 February 2013, at the 16th Ukraine–EU Summit[238] the Parties discussed judicial reform in Ukraine and welcomed the adoption of the new Criminal Procedure Code and the new law on the recognition of plea agreements, as well as the establishment of a national preventive mechanism against torture. A new law on freedom of assembly was approved, and the importance of constitutional reform for creating a system of checks and balances regarding freedom of assembly and the media was acknowledged. The EU recognized Ukraine's reliability as a transit country and emphasized the importance of Ukraine's gas transportation system for delivering gas to EU Member States, noting that it would support further modernization of the system.

Thus, the establishment and development of relations between Ukraine and the European Union have a long history. Since the first day of gaining

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[238] Спільна заява шістнадцятого саміту Україна–ЄС. *Міністерство закордонних справ України.* 25 лютого 2013. https://cutt.ly/yrGCUVWP

independence, Ukraine has maintained a course towards European integration. This is evident in a series of strategic reforms aimed at bringing Ukraine closer to European standards in the areas of politics, economics, and law. Supportive measures and a positive attitude from European partners confirm the importance of Ukraine to the EU. This includes financial assistance, expert support, and the exchange of experience to promote the effective development of the country. Throughout this period, Ukraine has achieved significant milestones in establishing and developing relations with the European Union. The future promises further refinement in all areas and continued cooperation to achieve common strategic goals.

All these factors indicate that the relations between Ukraine and the EU are a crucial element of the geopolitical landscape, defined not only by economic cooperation but also by shared values and the desire to achieve stability and prosperity in the region.

3.2. The Revolution of Dignity: Choosing a European Future
(Yuriy Kotlyar, Oleksandr Mosin, and Alina Tikhonova)

In a period of history when nations strive for freedom, justice, and dignity, events occur that dismantle totalitarian systems and set a new course of development. One such pivotal era was the Revolution of Dignity, which swept through Ukraine in 2013–2014. This landmark event not only transformed the face of the country but also carried profound symbolism, expressing the aspiration for European values and a European future.

The Revolution of Dignity grew out of genuine public discontent with injustice, corruption, and the lack of dignity within the structures of power. The people's resistance became a symbol of choosing a European future, in which the rights and freedoms of every citizen are fundamental values. This period of active civic engagement determined not only the country's subsequent political trajectory but also affirmed its commitment to close cooperation with the European Union.

It should be noted that the Ukrainian people had long been separated from the European community, isolated from the cultural, political, and spiritual life of Europe. The complex and protracted process of Ukrainians' self-identification as Europeans was significantly influenced by the legacy of the Soviet Union, particularly among the older generation, as well as by the anti-European ideology of the "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*) among the population of certain regions of Ukraine[239].

The Ukrainian revolution of late 2013–early 2014, known as the Euromaidan, was a unique political phenomenon unprecedented in the world, expressed in the form of peaceful popular resistance. It was on the Maidan in Kyiv that a new Ukrainian nation was forged – highly principled, ready to stand to the end and fight for the future of its homeland, even at the risk of their own lives. The events of the Euromaidan became Ukraine's revolution of spirit, a symbol of every Ukrainian's freedom of speech. Peaceful protest actions grew into an uprising of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians[240].

Ukraine and the European Union had been cooperating for many years; however, 2013 became a turning point in the context of Ukraine's European integration.

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[239] Мосін О. В. Шлях України до Європи в контексті Революції Гідності. *«Україна і Європа: спільність історичної долі (ціннісний аспект)» в рамках міжнародного проєкту Erasmus+ за напрямком Jean Monnet «Implementation of European values as a basis of democracy in Ukraine»:* тези доповідей. Миколаїв: Вид-во ЧНУ ім. Петра Могили, 2022. С. 113.

[240] Ibid. С. 114.

In November 2013, after lengthy negotiations, Ukraine and the European Union stood on the threshold of signing a cooperation agreement. However, it became known that, due to Ukraine's failure to meet the requirements set by the EU and the growing tensions in Ukraine's relations with the Russian Federation (RF), this Agreement was unlikely to be signed. On 20 November 2013, then Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, speaking at a press conference in the RF, stated that Ukraine was actively cooperating with the EU and preparing to sign the Association Agreement[241].

However, the very next day, on 21 November 2013, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted Resolution No. 905 "On the Conclusion of the Association Agreement between Ukraine, of the one part, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community, and their Member States, of the other part". Under this resolution, the process of preparing for the signing of 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 hand, was suspended, while trade and economic relations, international trade, and active dialogue with the RF were resumed. This resolution, signed by then Prime Minister Mykola Azarov (later repealed on 2 March 2014 by the new Prime Minister Arsenii Yatseniuk following the overthrow of the Yanukovych-Azarov regime[242]) played a significant role in triggering mass Ukrainian protests against the Yanukovych regime and in support of Ukraine's European course of development[243].

In addition to the refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, there were a number of other significant reasons that prompted the people to take to the streets in mass protests. In particular, the influence of oligarchs on political processes in Ukraine was steadily increasing. Their pro-Russian sentiments contributed to the near-complete return of Ukraine under Russia's influence.

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[241] *Агресія Росії проти України: Історичні передумови та сучасні виклики* / П.П. Гай-Нижник (керівник проекту, упоряд. і наук. ред.); авт. кол.: П.П. Гай-Нижник, Л.Л. Залізняк, І.Й. Краснодемська, Ю.С. Фігурний, О.А. Чирков, Л.В. Чупрій. Київ: «МП Леся», 2016. С. 300.

[242] Про скасування розпорядження Кабінету Міністрів України № 905 від 21 листопада 2013 року: Розпорядження Кабінету Міністрів України № 113-р від 02 березня 2014 року. Київ, 2014. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/113-2014-%D1%80#n2

[243] Питання укладання Угоди про асоціацію між Україною, з однієї сторони, та Європейським Союзом, Європейським Співтовариством з атомної енергії і їх державами – членами з іншої сторони: Розпорядження Кабінету Міністрів України № 905-р від 21 листопада 2013 року. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/905-2013-%D1%80#Text

With the start of President Yanukovych's tenure in 2010, the presidential-parliamentary form of government was restored in Ukraine, which led to the flourishing of authoritarianism and the excessive concentration of power in the hands of the president. The presidential-parliamentary form of government is also found in Russia, Belarus, Venezuela, Kazakhstan, South Korea, and other states[244].

Later, in 2012, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the so-called "Kivalov-Kolesnichenko Law", which facilitated the expanded use of regional languages, including Russian. It is worth noting that one of the co-authors of this language law, Serhii Kivalov, at that time maintained close contacts with the President of the RF, Vladimir Putin[245]. As a result, the law restricted the use of Ukrainian as the state language, promoted large-scale Russification, and its adoption sparked mass protests among the population.

Moreover, there was a noted increase in corruption, unemployment, and inflation, as well as a general deterioration in the standard of living[246]. In addition, in 2010, President Viktor Yanukovych and then President of Russia Dmitriy Medvedev signed the so-called *"Kharkiv Agreements"* between Ukraine and the RF, under which the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, in the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, was extended for 25 years in exchange for "cheap" gas for Ukraine[247].

This course of events outraged Ukrainians. The discontent of a large part of Ukrainian society over political, economic, and social issues led thousands of public figures, journalists, students, and activists to gather on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (*Independence Square*) in Kyiv for a peaceful rally, demanding significant changes in Ukraine's political course and the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. When it became clear that then-President Yanukovych would not sign the Agreement, activists began to call for his resignation. Peaceful protests turned

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[244] Литвин В.С. *Напівпрезидентська система правління: конституційно-правові виклики та перспективи для України на фоні світового інституційного досвіду*. Львівський національний університет імені Івана Франка, 2014. 26 с. https://filos.lnu.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/spukr-1.pdf

[245] Ухвалено новий закон про мову. Перелік основних положень. *Радіосвобода*. 25 квітня 2019. https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29903678.html

[246] Гай-Нижник П. Бій за свободу і Гідність: Революційне повстання проти проросійського проросійського режиму внутрішньої окупації України (листопад 2013 – лютий 2014 рр.). С. 300–325.

[247] Угода між Україною та Російською Федерацією з питань перебування Чорноморського флоту Російської Федерації на території України (укр/рос). Харків, 21 квітня 2010. *Верховна Рада України*. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/643_359#Text

into an uprising of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians on Maidan Nezalezhnosti. The popular protest became known as the Revolution of Dignity[248].

Thus, the refusal to sign the Association Agreement became the last straw for Ukrainians. On 21 November 2013, calls began to appear on social media to gather on the Maidan in Kyiv and demand a pro-European future for Ukraine. One of the first to publish a post on Facebook expressing outrage and calling for mass gatherings was journalist Mustafa Nayyem. He wrote that "a meeting of all those willing is planned for 10:30 p.m. on Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kyiv" and asked readers to spread his post as widely as possible[249].

The main tool chosen by the protesters for communication was social media, namely Facebook and Twitter. It was in these social networks that the hashtag #Euromaidan first appeared, actively used for publications both by Ukrainian users and worldwide[250]. Thanks to this hashtag, people across Ukraine were able to track when and where gatherings were taking place[251].

Journalist Anastasiia Tulovska wrote in her article that the Uprising of Dignity began on 21 November 2013 and unfolded in four phases: the student protest, the peaceful Maidan, the radical Maidan, and the bloody Maidan. In total, during the first week of the Euromaidan, 157 mass protests took place across Ukraine[252].

A significant event in the media space was the statement by then Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov, who, on 22 November 2013, during a session of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, announced the official freezing of the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union due to the difficult economic situation in the country[253].

It is worth noting that 22 November 2013 marked the ninth anniversary of the Orange Revolution, which civic organizations had planned to

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[248] Мосін О. В. Шлях України до Європи в контексті Революції Гідності. С. 113.

[249] Найєм М. #Євромайдан. Архіви влади. Документи. *Українська правда.* 20 листопада 2014. https://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/nayem/546e2ff4e9e2b/

[250] Twitter візуалізував усі записи світу із хештегом #euromaidan. http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/material/27149

[251] Галушко К., Зорба Н. «Українська Facebook-революція?» Соціологічне дослідження «Соціальні мережі на тлі Євромайдану» (листопад-грудень 2013 р.). http://historians.in.ua/index.php/doslidzhennya/1162-kyrylo-halushko-nataliia-zorba/

[252] Туловська А. Майдан Гідності: Як це було. *Український інтерес*. 21 листопада 2022. https://uain.press/blogs/12311-12311

[253] 5 канал. Азаров оголошує призупинення Асоціації з ЄС [Video]. *YouTube.* 22 листопада 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8k0x0tQPXGs&t=1s

commemorate with a nationwide protest action. Posts by activists calling on people to join rallies appeared on social media[254].

One of the initiators and active participants in the protests against the regime of Yanukovych was Oleksandr Danyliuk, coordinator of the "Spilna Sprava" movement. He was the first to call on people to gather on the Maidan on the anniversary of the Orange Revolution and sought to ensure that the government stopped shifting the blame for the non-signing of the Association Agreement with the EU onto parliament. He also advocated for early parliamentary elections to choose a new Prime Minister of Ukraine[255]. In order to maintain order in the capital, the Kyiv District Administrative Court issued a ruling prohibiting the holding of rallies in the city centre, as well as the installation of tents and kiosks, from 22 November 2013 to 7 January 2014[256].

On the first day of the protest, around 1,500 Maidan participants gathered with the flags of Ukraine and the European Union. The protesters marched to Bankova Street, which was blocked by security forces, and headed towards the Presidential Administration, singing the national anthem of Ukraine. Other cities joined Kyiv in protest, including Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Khmelnytskyi, Zhytomyr, Rivne, Kirovohrad, Luhansk, Chernivtsi, Chernihiv, and Cherkasy. The next day, the number of protesters in Kyiv grew to 5,000; the protest action was expanding but remained peaceful[257]. It was at that time that the slogans "Ukraine is Europe", "Ukraine is part of Europe", and "I am for the European Union" first appeared[258]. In Lviv, more than one hundred students and lecturers gathered in front of the regional

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[254] *День Гідності та свободи (21 листопада). Інформаційно-методичні матеріали.* Український інститут національної пам'яті, 2023. С. 19. https://cutt.ly/BrGCSgqk

[255] Перевозна О. Річницю помаранчевої революції відзначатимуть на Майдані. *Газета по-українськи.* 22 листопада 2013. https://gazeta.ua/articles/ukraine-newspaper/_richnicyu-pomaranchevoyi-revolyuciyi-vidznachatimut-na-majdani/527282

[256] Про обмеження права на мирні зібрання: Постанова Окружного адміністративного суду м. Києва від 22 листопада 2013. https://zakononline.com.ua/court-decisions/show/35641960

[257] Головко В. В. Революція Гідності 2013–2014. *Енциклопедія історії України: Додатковий том. Кн. 1: А–Я* / Редкол.: В. А. Смолій (голова) та ін. НАН України. Інститут історії України. Київ: В-во «Наукова думка», 2021. 773 с. http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=revoljutsija_gidnosti

[258] 5 канал. Євромайдан: Революція Гідності. Повна хронологія [Video]. *YouTube.* 22 листопада 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWs62YiXPDA

administration building, demanding that the government reconsider its decision regarding Ukraine's European future[259].

Thus, in the first days of the Euromaidan, there were no political slogans, party flags, or other political symbols. The main participants in the protests were civic activists, students, and young people without top-down leadership. However, on 24 November 2013, Ukrainian opposition parties joined the protests, and a stage was set up on European Square[260]. On that day, the largest march "For a European Ukraine" took place in Kyiv, bringing together around 150,000 participants. The protesters demanded the resignation of the government and the dissolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine if the Association Agreement was not signed[261].

While the protest on Maidan Nezalezhnosti was modest (with only one microphone set up, from which any activist could express their opinion), at the same time a large-scale event was taking place on European Square. Politicians were invited to the stage one after another: Oleksandr Turchynov, representing the interests of Yuliia Tymoshenko, who was imprisoned at the time, and Petro Poroshenko, an independent member of parliament. The speakers demanded the government's resignation, the signing of the Association Agreement, an end to political repression, and urged the crowd to march to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and then to the Presidential Administration[262].

That same evening, the first clashes took place between protesters and "anti-Maidan" supporters, hired thugs (*titushky*), and special police units. The Berkut riot police[263] used tear gas and smoke grenades to disperse the participants in the protests against the government[264].

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[259] Національний меморіальний комплекс Героїв небесної сотні – Музей Революції Гідності. *Офіційний сайт*. https://maidanmuseum.org/uk

[260] Винницький М. *Український майдан, російська війна. Хроніка та аналіз Революції Гідності. Серія книг: Біографії та мемуари*. Львів: Видавництво Старого Лева, 2021. С. 93.

[261] *День Гідності та свободи (21 листопада). Інформаційно-методичні матеріали.* Український інститут національної пам'яті, 2023. С. 21.

[262] Винницький М. *Український майдан, російська війна. Хроніка та аналіз Революції Гідності*. С. 94.

[263] Віртуальний музей російської агресії. *«Беркут»: Офіційний сайт.* https://cutt.ly/lrGCDKBg

[264] *МВС України.* Події біля Кабміну України 24.11.2013 [Video]. *YouTube.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ue5qlYdEaqo; *ТСН.* 94 дні. Євромайдан очима ТСН. [Video]. *YouTube.* 26 вересня 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0icRY1Ae5A

In the meantime, a tent camp was set up on Maidan Nezalezhnosti, with A. Parubii elected as its commandant.[265] Late in the evening, security forces attempted to clear the square of the protesters' camp, and Berkut officers carried out the first assault on the Euromaidan. Around one thousand security force personnel took part in the attack on the protesters, but the demonstrators were able to push them back[266].

Historian Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk published on his personal website an order from the Head of the Main Directorate of the Security Service of Ukraine in Kyiv, Major General Oleksandr Shcheholiev, addressed to the heads of regional bodies of the entities involved in combating terrorism, dated 24 November 2013, *"On bringing the readiness level to 'heightened'",* which stated that mass terrorist acts were being prepared in Kyiv[267]. Thus, for the first time, the authorities classified the protesters as a "terrorist" threat.

After the start of the mass protests, the *"Plan for Ensuring Public Order during the Enforcement of Court Decisions Related to the Unblocking of Streets in the Central Part of Kyiv"* was made public. It had been prepared by the security forces to suppress the uprisings and stop violations of public order[268]. This document served as evidence that the authorities at the time officially regarded the rallies of the Ukrainian people as acts of terrorism, which gave them grounds to develop plans for a crackdown by security forces on the protesters.

From the very beginning of the mass protests, then-President of Ukraine Yanukovych addressed the Ukrainian people only on 25 November 2013. He recorded a televised address to the nation, stating that he would never take a single step that could harm Ukraine and would not alter its European

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[265] Парубій Андрій Володимирович. *Інтернет-ЗМІ «ПолітХаб Чесно».* https://www.chesno.org/politician/305/

[266] Гай-Нижник П. Бій за свободу і Гідність: Революційне повстання проти проросійського проросійського режиму внутрішньої окупації України (листопад 2013 – лютий 2014 рр.). С. 301.

[267] СБУ. Щодо приведення до ступеня готовності «підвищена». Керівникам регіональних органів суб'єктів боротьби з тероризмом – членам Координаційної групи АТЦ при Головному управлінні СБ України у м. Києві та Київській області (Начальник Головного управління генерал-майор О. Щеголєв). *Павло Гай-Нижник – доктор історичних наук. Особистий сайт.* 24 листопада 2013. http://hai-nyzhnyk.in.ua/doc2/2013(11)24.maidan_sbu.php

[268] План до забезпечення охорони громадського порядку під час виконання судових рішень, пов'язаних з розблокуванням вулиць у центральній частині міста Києва. *Павло Гай-Нижник – доктор історичних наук. Особистий сайт.* http://hai-nyzhnyk.in.ua/doc2/2013(12).maidan_rozgon.php

course[269]. On the same day, the situation in Kyiv remained calm. However, in Odesa and Dnipro, the Euromaidan was violently dispersed by Berkut special police units and regular law enforcement officers[270].

From 26 to 28 November 2013, Ukrainian students declared a strike in protest against the suspension of the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union. Demonstrations were held by students from a number of higher education institutions in various cities across Ukraine. The leading role in the nationwide student strike was played by the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, Lviv National University etc.[271] Protest rallies on Maidan Nezalezhnosti and European Square in Kyiv were held under the slogan "No Politics"[272].

On 29 November 2013, during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius (Lithuania), Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, explaining this decision as "an awareness of the enormous economic losses that Ukraine could suffer due to difficulties in trade with Russia" [273]. At the same time, in Kyiv, supporters of European integration formed a human chain with the slogan "Sign it", demanding that the President of Ukraine sign the Association Agreement. However, no miracle occurred, and Yanukovych returned from Vilnius without any positive results[274].

A turning point in the Euromaidan movement came on 30 November 2013. After speeches on the Maidan Nezalezhnosti stage by politicians Arsenii Yatseniuk, Vitalii Klychko and Oleh Tiahnybok, who demanded the government's resignation, only a few hundred protesters remained on the square overnight, many of them students. At around 4:00 a.m., Berkut special police[275] units brutally beat the demonstrators in the city center – kicking them, striking with rubber batons, and injuring both adults and minors. Seeking to escape the violence, protesters took refuge in St. Michael's

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[269] *Подробиці.* Віктор Янукович звернувся до народу [Video]. *YouTube.* 25 листопада 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PL9IfmXHN0

[270] *ТСН.* 94 дні. Євромайдан очима ТСН [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0icRY1Ae5A

[271] *День Гідності та свободи (21 листопада). Інформаційно-методичні матеріали.* Український інститут національної пам'яті, 2023. С. 19.

[272] Panin Yu. 27 листопада – загальноукраїнський студентський страйк [Video]. *YouTube*. 27 листопада 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJS9xpqmHWE

[273] Янукович В. Народ договорится, и Украина станет единой. *Аргументи і Факти*. 24 лютого 2014. № 52.

[274] 94 дні. Євромайдан очима ТСН. https://euromaidan.tsn.ua/

[275] Віртуальний музей російської агресії. https://cutt.ly/lrGCDKBg

Monastery. Within half an hour, the special forces had completely cleared Maidan Nezalezhnosti[276].

The dispersal of the protesters was led by the head of the Kyiv Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Valerii Koriak, with Berkut units commanded by Serhii Kusiuk, and the entire operation coordinated by the Deputy Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, Volodymyr Sivkovych[277]. Yanukovych publicly condemned the actions of the police and assured the public that he had not given the order to disperse the protesters[278].

That day marked a turning point for Ukraine: the peaceful Euromaidan transformed into the bloody Revolution of Dignity.

The following day, 1 December 2013, outraged by the brutality of the authorities, Kyiv residents gathered en masse on Maidan Nezalezhnosti. On that day, approximately one million people joined the protests. Violent clashes erupted between demonstrators and Berkut units, during which both Ukrainian and foreign journalists were injured. A tent camp was established on Khreshchatyk Street, and traffic was blocked[279].

Attacking the police and security forces, protesters wearing balaclavas managed to enter the Presidential Administration building using a tractor with a front bucket, thereby demonstrating their radical stance toward the government. Mykhailo Vynnytskyi asserts that there are theories suggesting that the attack by radical protesters on the police cordon had been pre-planned and was intended to provoke the declaration of martial law in Kyiv. According to the scholar, another theory posits a conspiracy between radical Ukrainian activists and Russian agents, as Russian journalists were able to film the disturbances taking place in the central square of Ukraine's capital, thus portraying the image of Kyiv to the world as a stronghold of "fascist radicals"[280].

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[276] Філберг Л. *Майдан. Свідчення. Київ 2013-2014 роки. Серія книг: Бібліотека спротиву, бібліотека надії.* Видавництво «Дух і Літера», 2016. 784 с.; Пушнова Т. *94 дні. Євромайдан очима ТСН.* Київ: Основи, 2014. 176 с.; 94 дні. Євромайдан очима ТСН. https://euromaidan.tsn.ua/#30.11.2013

[277] Головко В.В. Революція Гідності 2013–2014. http://www.history.org.ua/ ?termin=revoljutsija_gidnosti

[278] Ibid; Экс-начальник Генштаба Замана: Янукович не отдавал приказ стрелять по Майдану. Зачистить его приказали Лебедев, Якименко и Пшонка. *Павло Гай-Нижник – доктор історичних наук. Особистий сайт.* http://hai-nyzhnyk.in.ua/doc2/2014(07)31.zamana.php

[279] Національний меморіальний комплекс Героїв небесної сотні – Музей Революції Гідності. https://maidanmuseum.org/uk; 94 дні. Євромайдан очима ТСН. https://euromaidan.tsn.ua/#1.12.2013

[280] Винницький М. *Український майдан, російська війна. Хроніка та аналіз Революції Гідності*. С. 115.

Following the clash between Euromaidan protesters and the police cordon, units of the Berkut special forces brutally attacked the demonstrators, beating them with rubber truncheons and batons. Approximately 170 individuals were injured, one-third of whom were journalists[281]. As a result, a significant number of foreign journalists, historians, political scientists, and activists began to publicly express their discontent with the events in Ukraine and the government's harsh policy toward its own people. Rachel Denber, Deputy Director of the Europe and Central Asia Division at Human Rights Watch, stated that the world was shocked by the brutality of the police. She emphasized that the authorities should have stopped the violence against civilians and protected the Presidential Administration by other peaceful means. Dunja Mijatović, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, in her statement called on the Ukrainian authorities to cease the violent crackdown on demonstrators and the attacks on journalists, many of whom sustained serious physical injuries during the dispersal of protests[282].

Following the brutal crackdown by security forces on young people in Kyiv's central square, the protests evolved into a prolonged campaign of civil uprising against the corrupt regime in power and widespread human rights violations[283].

People from more than 20 countries expressed their solidarity and support for the Ukrainian protesters. The largest rallies took place in various cities across Canada, the United States, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, Italy, and France. Local activists also organized protest events in Austria, Australia, Belgium, Georgia, Estonia, Spain, Portugal, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, the Czech Republic, and many other countries worldwide[284].

The peaceful phase of the Revolution of Dignity lasted throughout December and the first half of January. In total, 477 mass protest events took place across Ukraine[285].

In an effort to counter the protesters, the authorities began organizing their own anti-Maidan and holding pro-government rallies. Supporters of the government's policies and of Yanukovych's regime gathered for several

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[281] Ibid. C. 117.

[282] Ukraine: Excessive force against protesters. Hundreds injured in Kiev as riot police crack down. *Human Rights Watch.* 3 December 2013. https://cutt.ly/DrGCANwG

[283] Національний меморіальний комплекс Героїв небесної сотні – Музей Революції Гідності. https://maidanmuseum.org/uk

[284] Андрєєва О., Бернард I, Фінберг Л. *Майдан. Свідчення. Допомога постраждалим. Міжнародна солідарність.* Київ: Видавництво «Дух і Літера», 2018. 816 с.

[285] Туловська А. Майдан Гідності: Як це було. https://uain.press/blogs/12311-12311

months in Mariinsky Park as a counterweight to the Euromaidan[286]. According to eyewitness accounts, anti-Maidan participants admitted that they were paid 300 hryvnias per day for attending the demonstrations[287].

A landmark event was the "March of the Million" on 8 December 2013, during which the monument to Lenin in Kyiv was toppled. This act resonated throughout the country, triggering a large-scale phenomenon in almost every region of Ukraine known as the so-called *Leninopad* ("Leninfall") – a symbolic occurrence reflecting the Ukrainian people's desire to overcome the totalitarian Soviet regime and political repression[288].

In an effort to resolve the political crisis in Ukraine, President Yanukovych held a meeting on 10–11 December 2013 with three former Presidents of Ukraine – Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yushchenko. They were joined by representatives of the United States and the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Participants of the round table discussed ways to overcome the crisis in Ukraine through peaceful means[289]. Subsequently, on 12 December, negotiations were held in Brussels, during which the EU refused Ukraine's request for €20 billion in financial assistance, condemned Russia's economic pressure on Ukraine, and pledged to introduce a visa-free regime for Ukrainian citizens[290].

In the following days, large-scale rallies took place on the Maidan, including a *narodne viche* (people's assembly) aimed at preventing the signing of an agreement on Ukraine's accession to the Customs Union with Russia[291]. However, on 17 December 2013, President Yanukovych met with President Vladimir Putin of the RF. The meeting resulted in the signing of a joint action plan between Russia and Ukraine[292].

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[286] Винницький М. *Український майдан, російська війна. Хроніка та аналіз Революції Гідності.* С. 124.

[287] Стражний О. *Майдан: Події – Свідчення – Менталітет.* Київ: Дух і Літера, 2016. С. 153–154; Щербак В. *Мій Майдан.* Київ: Видавництво «Самміт-Книга», 2015. С. 118.

[288] *День Гідності та свободи (21 листопада). Інформаційно-методичні матеріали.* Український інститут національної пам'яті, 2023. С. 24.

[289] *Революція Гідності 2013-2014 рр. та агресія росії проти України: Науково-методичні матеріали* / За заг. Ред. П. Полянського. Київ: Київський національний університет імені Б. Грінченка, 2015. С. 18.

[290] Гай-Нижник П. Бій за свободу і Гідність: Революційне повстання проти проросійського режиму внутрішньої окупації України (листопад 2013 – лютий 2014 рр.). С. 306.

[291] Пушнова Т. *94 дні. Євромайдан очима ТСН.* С. 54.

[292] Гай-Нижник П. П. *Росія проти України (1990–2016 рр.): Від політики шантажу і примусу до війни на поглинання та спроби знищення.* Київ: «МП Леся», 2017. С. 170.

In parallel, the sixth meeting of the Interstate Russian–Ukrainian Commission took place. According to the meeting protocol, the presidents agreed on an action plan for the celebration of the 200th anniversary of T.H. Shevchenko in 2014; an action plan to address trade restrictions in bilateral trade for the period from 2013 to 2015; the signing of an agreement on state support for the resumption of AN-125 aircraft production; a memorandum on cooperation in shipbuilding; collaboration in the field of disaster, accident, and natural hazard prevention; joint control on the Ukrainian–Russian border; cooperation in the space and rocket industry; and the exchange of information in the sphere of nuclear and radiation safety. The members of the Interstate Commission also agreed on the construction of a transport link across the Kerch Strait[293].

This course of events triggered a new wave of uprisings among the Maidan protesters. On 22 December 2013, Turchynov announced the creation of the All-Ukrainian National Union "Maidan", whose primary objective was the resignation of President Yanukovych. The Maidan Council included more than 40 members, comprising both politicians and prominent civic leaders and activists[294]. A significant role in the mass protests was played by AutoMaidan – a movement of convoys of activists using their own vehicles. They assisted in transporting the wounded, delivering supplies to the Maidan, blocking the movement of buses carrying security forces, and regularly visiting Yanukovych's residence[295].

While confrontation between the government and the people was unfolding in the Ukrainian capital and international partners were offering their assistance while urging peaceful negotiations, then-Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov met with Dmitriy Medvedev in Moscow on 24 December 2013 to discuss the revival of the previously lost bilateral relations[296].

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[293] Гай-Нижник П. П. Кримський вузол і питання Чорноморського флоту рф у російсько-українських воєнно-політичних взаєминах (1991–2013 рр.). *Гілея*. 2017. Вип. 117 (2). С. 77–90. https://hai-nyzhnyk.in.ua/downloads/2017doc.krym-chornom-flot.pdf

[294] Національний меморіальний комплекс Героїв небесної сотні – Музей Революції Гідності. https://maidanmuseum.org/uk

[295] Спяк У. Цілі, рушійні сили та результати Революції гідності. *Соціокультурні та політичні пріоритети української нації в умовах глоб алізації* : щоріч. наук. пр. / відп. за вип. Т.В. Гончарук. Тернопіль: ТНЕУ, 2019. С. 108–109. http://dspace.wunu.edu.ua/bitstream/316497/34793/1/108.pdf

[296] Гай-Нижник П. П. *Росія проти України (1990–2016 рр.): Від політики шантажу і примусу до війни на поглинання та спроби знищення*. С. 175.

As a result of this visit, intimidation and violence by the security forces against the Maidan protesters intensified. Abductions of activists began[297]. The main news story of the day was the brutal beating of journalist and activist Tetiana Chornovol, as reported on Twitter by journalist Nayyem[298]. It is worth noting that Chornovol was a contributor to *Ukrainska Pravda* and had written exposés about Yanukovych, his family, and his close circle. It also became known that several activists sustained gunshot and stab wounds, and that the cars of Maidan activists were set on fire[299].

By mid-January 2014, the Maidan had somewhat scaled down its activity; however, tensions escalated sharply following the vote by the pro-government majority in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on 16 January 2014 to adopt the so-called "draconian laws" – a set of legislative acts aimed directly against the Revolution of Dignity[300]. As noted by the head of the counting commission, Volodymyr Oliinyk, "the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine voted by a show of hands, which was difficult to count; nevertheless, despite the illegality of this procedure, Speaker of the Rada Volodymyr Rybak signed the entire package of laws the same day, in violation of nearly all provisions of the parliamentary regulations"[301].

In total, eleven key legislative acts were considered and adopted, each imposing significant restrictions on the rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens, including freedom of assembly, marches, demonstrations, and other public gatherings. They prohibited the movement of a group of vehicles without prior authorization from law enforcement agencies (a measure aimed specifically at curbing the activity of the AutoMaidan movement, which had gained wide popularity during the Revolution of Dignity); increased fines for organizing rallies, resisting representatives of the authorities or law enforcement bodies; wearing masks, balaclavas, or any clothing resembling military or law enforcement uniforms; and installing tents.

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[297] Гай-Нижник П. Бій за свободу і Гідність: Революційне повстання проти проросійського проросійського режиму внутрішньої окупації України (листопад 2013 – лютий 2014 pp.). С. 313.

[298] Найєм М. #Євромайдан. Архіви влади. Документи. https://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/nayem/546e2ff4e9e2b/

[299] Побили Тетяну Чорновол, яка писала про Захарченка, Медведчука, Клюєва, Льовочкіна та Януковича. *Українська правда*. 25 листопада 2013. https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2013/12/25/7008295/

[300] Закон України: Про визнання такими, що втратили чинність, деяких законів України від 02.02.2014. https://cutt.ly/jrGCHdJk

[301] Диктаторські закони 16 січня: Як Україну намагалися перетворити на Росію. *Obozrevatel.* 16 січня 2020. https://news.obozrevatel.com/ukr/society/zakoni-16-sichnya.htm

The ban on protesters using personal protective equipment prompted a rather specific response: the following day, demonstrators appeared at rallies wearing cooking pots on their heads[302]. The authorities were granted the power to block social media platforms and any websites in Ukraine for disseminating "extremist" materials or for coordinating the activities of Revolution of Dignity participants. Law enforcement officers obtained the right to arrest not only those who violated these provisions, but also anyone assisting protesters – by providing food, essential goods, transportation, or medicine. As a result, the Euromaidan volunteer movement also came under threat from the implementation of these laws[303]. By passing these laws in violation of legal procedure, Yanukovych sought to respond to the mass protests of Euromaidan and to intimidate demonstrators. However, the adoption of these "dictatorial" laws provoked a strong reaction from civil society, numerous politicians, journalists, and Ukraine's international partners, ultimately leading to even larger protests on Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti.

For the two weeks preceding the repeal of these "draconian laws" on 2 February 2014[304], the Yanukovych regime functioned in a distinctly authoritarian manner, with the adopted legislative package serving as an act of political repression and a catalyst for Euromaidan, provoking protesters to engage in further radical and violent confrontation.

Thus, the authorities acquired legal powers to violently suppress the Maidan. The peaceful phase of the protests evolved into a radical one. Some members of the ruling elite resigned from their positions, as they opposed the use of force to resolve the political crisis in the country[305].

Across Ukraine, a wave of mass protests erupted against the laws adopted in an unconstitutional manner. On 19 January 2014, opposition representatives gathered on the Maidan for a People's Assembly and appealed to the President of Ukraine not to sign the "draconian laws"[306]. On the same day, clashes broke out between hundreds of thousands of protesters and the Berkut special police unit on Mykhaila Hrushevskoho Street in Kyiv. Police and special forces used stun grenades, tear gas, rubber bullets, and

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[302] Ibid.

[303] 16 січня рік тому – як це відбувалося, і які мало наслідки. *24 канал*. 16 січня 2015.https://24tv.ua/16_sichnya_rik_tomu_yak_tse_vidbuvalosya_i_yaki_malo_nasl idki_n532318

[304] Закон України: Про визнання такими, що втратили чинність, деяких законів України від 02.02.2014. https://cutt.ly/jrGCHdJk

[305] Головко В.В. Революція Гідності 2013–2014. http://www.history.org.ua/ ?termin=revoljutsija_gidnosti

[306] 94 дні. Євромайдан очима ТСН. https://euromaidan.tsn.ua/#18.01.2014

other means against the demonstrators. It was at this time that Molotov cocktails were used for the first time against the security forces[307]. Police buses were set on fire, and barricades made of tires, erected by the Maidan protesters, were engulfed in flames. Mykhaila Hrushevskoho Street was ablaze[308].

On 22 January 2014, the Berkut special police unit carried out several assaults on the Maidan, during which firearms were used for the first time. The first casualties of the Revolution of Dignity were recorded: 20-year-old Armenian Serhii Nihoian, Belarusian Mykhailo Zhyznevskyi, and Ukrainian Roman Senyk were killed[309]. It is worth noting that among the three slain activists – later to be honoured as part of the "Heavenly Hundred"[310] – only one was an ethnic Ukrainian, which refutes the portrayal of the Maidan as a nationalist uprising[311].

Torture of protesters and the mass abduction of activists became a method of intimidation employed by the security forces. According to journalists and social media reports, on a single day – 22 January 2014 – 21 individuals were abducted and brutally beaten[312]. On the same day, the tortured body of activist Yurii Verbytskyi, who had been abducted the day before together with activist Ihor Lutsenko directly from a hospital, was discovered. It later became known that they had been interrogated regarding the organization and funding of protests against the government of Azarov and the regime of Yanukovych[313]. Fearing to seek medical attention, activist Oleksandr Badera

[307] *Революція Гідності 2013–2014 рр. та агресія Росії проти України: науково-методичні матеріали.* С. 20; *ТСН.* 94 дні. Євромайдан очима ТСН [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0icRY1Ae5A

[308] Винницький М. *Український майдан, російська війна. Хроніка та аналіз Революції Гідності.* С. 150–152; Кошкіна С. *Майдан. Нерозказана історія.* Київ: Брайт Старт Паблишинг, 2015. С. 176–180.

[309] Стражний О. Майдан: Події – Свідчення – Менталітет. С. 185.

[310] Корнійчук Н. *Небесна сотня.* Луцьк: Обласна друкарня, 2014. С. 30; Національний меморіальний комплекс Героїв небесної сотні – Музей Революції Гідності. https://maidanmuseum.org/uk

[311] Винницький М. *Український майдан, російська війна. Хроніка та аналіз Революції Гідності.* С. 153.

[312] *Телеканал ICTV.* Революція Гідності. Спецпроект ICTV [Video]. *YouTube.* 4 березня 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qukYAlUHX6k

[313] *Головко В. В.* Революція Гідності 2013–2014. http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=revoljutsija_gidnosti

– a Kyiv resident and private entrepreneur – died on 28 January 2014 from injuries and hypothermia[314].

The radical phase of the Maidan continued until mid-February. During this period, the largest number of protests in the entire course of the Revolution – 534 – took place[315].

On 28 January 2014, Prime Minister Azarov was dismissed by the parliament, and the controversial "dictatorial" laws were repealed. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine declared an amnesty for protesters who had been arrested during the demonstrations[316] and adopted the Law of Ukraine "On Eliminating the Negative Consequences and Preventing the Prosecution and Punishment of Persons in Connection with the Events that Took Place During Peaceful Assemblies"[317]. Thus, a temporary truce was announced.

Dissatisfied with the developments in Ukraine, the President of Russia raised tariffs on imports of Ukrainian goods to Russia from 5% to 40%. Researcher Vynnytskyi notes that Putin sought to exercise personal control over Yanukovych, turn him into a Kremlin puppet, and prevent Ukraine from balancing between Russia and the West[318].

On 18 February 2014, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine opened a new session devoted to addressing the political crisis in the country, forming a new government, restoring the 2004 Constitution, and returning to a parliamentary-presidential form of government[319]. On that same day, activists and leaders of the Euromaidan planned a large-scale protest near the Verkhovna Rada, drawing approximately 20,000 demonstrators[320]. Meanwhile, units of security forces and special police, numbering a total of

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[314] *День Гідності та свободи (21 листопада). Інформаційно-методичні матеріали*. Український інститут національної пам'яті, 2023. С. 27.

[315] Туловська А. Майдан Гідності: Як це було. https://uain.press/blogs/12311-12311

[316] *День Гідності та свободи (21 листопада). Інформаційно-методичні матеріали*. Український інститут національної пам'яті. 2023. С. 28.

[317] Про усунення негативних наслідків та недопущення переслідування та покарання осіб з приводу подій, які мали місце під час проведення мирних зібрань: Закон України № 712 від 22.01.2014 р. Київ. *Верховна рада України.* 22 січня 2014. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/712-18#Text

[318] Винницький М. *Український майдан, російська війна. Хроніка та аналіз Революції Гідності*. С. 163.

[319] Головко В. В. Революція Гідності 2013–2014. http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=revoljutsija_gidnosti

[320] Кошкіна С. *Майдан. Нерозказана історія.* С. 228.

22,000 personnel and operating under the code name *"Boomerang"*, gathered on Kyiv's central square with the objective of clearing the Euromaidan[321].

According to eyewitness accounts, columns of Maidan protesters approached the police barricades, prepared to advance[322]. The first shots were fired by the security forces, and the Berkut riot police launched a brutal assault[323]. That day, 29 people were killed – later commemorated as part of the "Heavenly Hundred"[324] – and approximately 500 protesters were injured[325]. During an attempt by security forces to seize the Trade Unions Building in Kyiv, the structure was set on fire; by morning, the charred bodies of two Maidan protesters were found inside[326].

The defence of the Maidan continued the following day, as activists from the western regions of Ukraine arrived by bus to join the protesters. The killing of Euromaidan participants persisted. In total, over these two bloody days, 36 people were killed, including 11 law enforcement officers[327].

The latest events in the capital shook the entire country. Such an outbreak of violence had not occurred since the Second World War. The western and central regions of Ukraine, which actively supported the Maidan and sought to overthrow the pro-Russian President of Ukraine, Yanukovych, reacted swiftly and vigorously. In various cities across Ukraine, enraged protesters began storming the buildings of the Security Service (SBU), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVS), regional state administrations (ODA), prosecutor's

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[321] *Революція Гідності 2013–2014 рр. та агресія Росії проти України: науково-методичні матеріали.* С. 21.

[322] Орлова Ю. *111 днів майдану: Записки київлянки.* Київ: Видавництво «Дуліби», 2014. С. 85; *Літопис самовидців: Дев'ять місяців українського спротиву* / автор проекту О. Забужко. Київ: Комора, 2014. С. 112.

[323] *ТСН.* Кривавий день Євромайдану: хронологія подій 6-річної давності [Video]. *YouTube.* 18 лютого 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WX7NQgMyTlQ; *5 канал.* Революція Гідності: унікальні кадри з іншого боку барикад Майдану – архів МВС [Video]. *YouTube.* 18 лютого 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmIK8v5w-tE; Сповідь львівського «беркутівця». Ягнятами ми там не були. *Galnet.* 21 березня 2014. http://galnet.org/interview/120876-spovidlvivskoho-berkutivtsya-yahnyatamy-my-tam-ne-buly

[324] Національний меморіальний комплекс Героїв небесної сотні – Музей Революції Гідності. https://maidanmuseum.org/uk

[325] *День Гідності та свободи (21 листопада). Інформаційно-методичні матеріали.* Український інститут національної пам'яті. 2023. С. 29.

[326] Ibid.

[327] Національний меморіальний комплекс Героїв небесної сотні – Музей Революції Гідності. https://maidanmuseum.org/uk; Винницький М. *Український майдан, російська війна. Хроніка та аналіз Революції Гідності.* С. 169.

offices, police departments, and tax inspection offices. Clashes resulted in injuries and fatalities[328]. The Yanukovych regime found itself under threat.

The authors of a Ukrainian history textbook, Vitalii Vlasov and Stanislav Kulchytskyi, note that the events in Ukraine provoked a large-scale reaction among international partners and global media, while the RF – just as Soviet Russia had done a century earlier – was driven by the desire to assert itself as a superpower in order to gain control over Ukraine[329].

Thus, there emerged signs of Russian assistance to Yanukovych – arms and military-technical support were provided to suppress the uprising. These supplies were overseen by officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine – S. Lekar, V. Zakharchenko, P. Zinov, and V. Ratushniak – who, using state funds, purchased special equipment of Russian manufacture for use against the insurgents[330].

Meanwhile, representatives of European countries – Poland, Germany, and France – arrived in Kyiv, demanding an end to the use of brutal methods against demonstrators and expressing their unequivocal position regarding the responsibility of the country's political leadership[331]. Poland provided substantial assistance, including international support, medical treatment for the wounded, humanitarian aid, support for the families of the deceased, and dissemination of information about the Ukrainian revolution in the media space. The book *Polish Solidarity with the Maidan* compiles articles, newspaper excerpts and publications, as well as recorded stories and testimonies of those who took part in providing aid to Ukrainian Maidan activists[332].

According to the then-head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), Oleksandr Yakymenko, "the latest events in Ukraine demonstrate the escalation of violent confrontations and the active use of weapons in mass protests among extremist groups. Many regions of the country are suffering from the lawlessness of vandals: government bodies, state institutions, military units, and weapons and ammunition depots are being seized; private residential buildings are being destroyed; premises are burning; and innocent

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[328] Ibid.

[329] Власов В. С., Кульчицький С. В. *Історія України.* Київ: Літера ЛТД, 2019. 256 с.

[330] Гай-Нижник П. Бій за свободу і Гідність: Революційне повстання проти проросійського проросійського режиму внутрішньої окупації України (листопад 2013 – лютий 2014 рр.). С. 317.

[331] Головко В. В. Революція Гідності 2013–2014. http://www.history.org.ua/ ?termin=revoljutsija_gidnosti

[332] Андрєєва О., Бернард І, Фінберг Л. *Польська солідарність з Майданом*. Київ: Видавництво «Дух і Літера», 2020. 400 с.

civilians are dying. In other words, there is deliberate violence against the population of Ukraine with the use of weapons, which constitutes an act of terrorism"[333]. Accordingly, on 19 February 2014, the SBU and the Anti-Terrorist Center of Ukraine decided to launch an anti-terrorist operation across the entire territory of Ukraine, thereby introducing measures to enhance public security and strengthen the protection of public order and border areas.

Anita Hrabska, in her article, noted that the SBU launched an "anti-terrorist operation" involving the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the State Border Guard Service, as well as central and local government bodies. It was announced that law enforcement officers had been issued live firearms to disperse the protesters. Consequently, in the morning of 20 February 2014, snipers opened fire on Maidan demonstrators in Kyiv, killing 49 people and injuring approximately 90 others with gunshot wounds[334].

The Berkut withdrew from Mykhaila Hrushevskoho Street, thus opening the way for protesters toward administrative buildings. The authorities began evacuating the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Cabinet of Ministers, attempting to lure the Maidan demonstrators into a trap in order to justify a violent dispersal and the massacre of the protest. However, the protesters chose to move in the opposite direction, following the Berkut. As a result, snipers and automatic gunmen opened fire on the crowd from the rooftops of surrounding buildings[335].

The then Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zamana, testified that he had not received any personal order from President Yanukovych to disperse the protesters, whereas Minister of Defence Pavlo Lebedev did everything possible to involve the Armed Forces of Ukraine in suppressing the people. Zamana stated that "he received an order from Lebedev to send the military to clear the Maidan, but the Chief of the General Staff refused, for which he paid with his position". Furthermore, during a second meeting between Turchynov and Yanukovych, the President threatened the opposition leader that he would brutally crack down on the

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[333] Заява Голови Служби безпеки України Олександра Якименка «Про прийняття рішення про проведення антитерористичної операції». *Офіційний інтернет-портал Деснянської районної в м. Києві державної адміністрації*. 19 лютого 2014. https://desn.kyivcity.gov.ua/news/540.html

[334] Грабська А. СБУ починає «антитерористичну операцію». *Deutsche Welle*. 19 лютого 2014. http://dw.com/ p/1BBeQ

[335] *Революція Гідності 2013-2014 рр. та агресія Росії проти України: науково-методичні матеріали*. С. 22.

protesters and all activists[336]. By that time, plans by Putin to annex Ukraine were already known[337].

The bloodiest day of the Revolution of Dignity is considered to be 20 February 2014, when fighters of the "Black Company" of the Berkut special police unit opened fire on unarmed people on the Maidan. On that day, 49 people were killed[338]. Those participants of the Revolution of Dignity who were killed by law enforcement officers and hired fighters were honoured as the Heroes of the "Heavenly Hundred". This title was bestowed on 107 individuals, the youngest of whom was 17 years old and the oldest 82[339].

It is worth noting that in 2014, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine established the Order of the Heroes of the "Heavenly Hundred", awarded for acts of courage, patriotism, the defence of human rights, as well as charitable and civic engagement. Moreover, 20 February was officially designated as the Day of the Heroes of the "Heavenly Hundred", which has since been commemorated annually in Ukraine[340].

Eyewitnesses to the Maidan events wrote extensively about the fallen Heroes of the "Heavenly Hundred". One such witness to the events of November 2013–February 2014 was Volodymyr Shcherbak, author of the memoir *My Maidan*, in which he compiled a list of the Heroes of the "Heavenly Hundred" who gave their lives during the Revolution of Dignity and described the circumstances of their deaths on the Maidan. The horrific footage of the February shootings on the Maidan was broadcast worldwide[341].

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[336] Экс-начальник Генштаба Замана: Янукович не отдавал приказ стрелять по Майдану. Зачистить его приказали Лебедев, Якименко и Пшонка. http://hai-nyzhnyk.in.ua/doc2/2014(07)31.zamana.php

[337] Пашинський С. У Путіна на столі бачили готовий план анексії України. Ще у травні минулого року. *Українська правда*. 5 серпня 2014. http://www.pravda.com.ua/ articles/2014/08/5/7034007/

[338] *День Гідності та свободи (21 листопада). Інформаційно-методичні матеріали.* Український інститут національної пам'яті. 2023. С. 32.

[339] Національний меморіальний комплекс Героїв небесної сотні – Музей Революції Гідності. https://maidanmuseum.org/uk

[340] Ibid; Про вшанування подвигу учасників Революції гідності та увічнення пам'яті Героїв Небесної Сотні: Указ Президента України № 69 від 11 лютого 2015 року. Київ. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/69/2015#Text

[341] Люта українізація з Антіном Мухарським. Документальний фільм Антіна Мухарського Майдан. Мистецтво спротиву [Video]. *YouTube.* 21 листопада 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixQSJ9Yg_0E; *Суспільне культура.* Майдан. Шість літер нашої свободи [Video]. *YouTube*. 20 лютого 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJaK8_uKHh4; Taylor-Lind A. *Maidan. Portrets from the black square*. London: GOST, 2014. 142 p.

Foreign periodicals, journals, and news outlets reported that the pro-European local rallies had escalated into a large-scale nationwide revolution aimed at rising up against the corrupt schemes of the then criminal, pro-Russian Ukrainian government[342]. International representatives, journalists, and eyewitnesses documented the history of Ukrainians' struggle for a free European future for their nation, the origins of the Euromaidan, the chronology of events, the heroes who perished on the Maidan, Russia's role in the Revolution of Dignity, and the onset of Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine[343].

One of the members of the Lviv Berkut riot police unit recalled in his memoirs the bloody and brutal events of November 2013–March 2014. He recounted that "on 22 January 2014, the bloodiest clashes began on Mykhaila Hrushevskoho Street, with the first casualties and the use of live firearms", and that "on 20 February 2014, Berkut officers, special forces, and *titushky* fired at protesters with automatic weapons, and there was utter chaos"[344].

According to official data from a sociological survey conducted by the "Socinform" Center, more than 6.5 million people across Ukraine took part in the Revolution of Dignity, while the results of a study by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology indicated that approximately 8 million people participated in the Euromaidan[345].

Following the bloody and brutal events of 18–20 February 2014 in Kyiv, during which more than one hundred people were killed and several hundred injured, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted Resolution No. 740 of 20 February 2014, *"On Condemning the Use of Violence That Led to the Death*

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[342] Бентя Ю. Osteuropa. *Критика*. 2014. № 1–2. С. 29.

[343] Kacewicz M. *Sotnie wolnosci. Ukraina od Maidanu do Donbasu.* Warzawa: Ringier Axel Springer, 2014. 311 p.; *Euromaidan. Was in der Ukraine auf dem Spiel steht.* Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014. 207 p.; Upheaval in Ukraine. Shape and significance of a revolution. *Religion & Society in East and West.* 5-6/2014. Vol. 42. Zurich. 47 p.; Risch W.J. What the far right does not tell us about the Maidan. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History.* 2015. Vol. 16(1) (Winter). P. 137–144. https://cutt.ly/HrGCYS0Q; Rospigliosi A., Greener S. *Proceeding of the European Conference on social media.* Brighton: University of Brighton, 2014. 787 p.; Mackey R. Video and Tweets from Kiev's Independence Square. *The New York Times.* 21 February 2014. https://cutt.ly/urGKpEb7; Ukraine: Excessive force against protesters. Hundreds injured in Kiev as riot police crack down. https://cutt.ly/DrGCANwG

[344] Сповідь львівського «беркутівця». Ягнятами ми там не були. https://cutt.ly/wrGCIugF

[345] Річниця Майдану – опитування громадської та експертної думки. Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи імені Ілька Кучеріва». Круглий стіл від 19.11.2014. https://dif.org.ua/article/richnitsya-maydanu-opituvannya-gromadskoi-ta-ekspertnoi-dumki

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of People". The resolution condemned all forms of violence that resulted in deaths and injuries, prohibited the use of any type of weapon against participants in protest actions, and forbade the Security Service of Ukraine from conducting the anti-terrorist operation[346].

It was later revealed that, on 20 February 2014, seven operatives of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) secretly arrived in Kyiv. They visited the Maidan, met with representatives of the Security Service of Ukraine, and returned to Moscow on 21 February. On 27 February 2014, they landed in Simferopol, marking the beginning of a Russian special forces military operation to occupy the Crimean Peninsula[347].

On 21 February 2014, President Yanukovych signed a peace agreement with the opposition, which called for an end to the confrontation and bloodshed, the reinstatement of the 2004 Constitution of Ukraine, the formation of a new government within ten working days, and the release from liability of all detained participants of the protests[348]. The document was witnessed by representatives of foreign states – the Republic of Poland, France, and the Federal Republic of Germany. The representative of the RF did not sign the agreement.

During the night of 21–22 February 2014, Yanukovych fled Ukraine on a charter flight to Russia, while Turchynov assumed the position of Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and coordinated the work of the Cabinet of Ministers[349]. At the same time, news broadcasts featured an interview with Yanukovych, in which he insisted that he had not resigned and described the events in the country as a coup d'état[350].

On 23 February 2014, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted Resolution No. 764, "On Assigning the Duties of the President of Ukraine to the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in Accordance with Article 112 of the Constitution of Ukraine", according to which Turchynov temporarily assumed the responsibilities of the President of Ukraine until a

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[346] Про засудження застосування насильства, що призвело до загибелі людей: Постанова Верховної Ради України № 740 від 20 лютого 2014 року. Київ. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/740-18#Text

[347] Кошкіна С. *Майдан. Нерозказана історія*. С. 254.

[348] Угода про врегулювання кризи в Україні. *Українська правда*. *Київ*, 21 лютого 2014 року. https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2014/02/21/7015533/

[349] Спяк У. Цілі, рушійні сили та результати Революції Гідності. http://dspace.wunu.edu.ua/bitstream/316497/34793/1/108.pdf

[350] *ТСН.* Янукович у відеозверненні прокоментував ситуацію у країни [Video]. *YouTube*. 22 лютого 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7WVMRcj-8k

new president was elected[351]. The presidential election was scheduled for 25 May 2014[352].

The new revolutionary government established an effective administration, with the "European Choice" coalition formed and a new Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine headed by Arsenii Yatseniuk. The legitimacy of the new governing regime was consolidated following the presidential and parliamentary elections.

In June 2014, the inauguration of the newly elected President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, took place. He subsequently signed the Association Agreement with the European Union. The political component of the Agreement between Ukraine and the EU was signed on 21 March 2014, followed by the economic component on 27 June 2014. The ratification process of the Association Agreement lasted from 16 September 2014 to 1 September 2017, after which the Agreement entered into full force[353]. This marked a clear choice for Ukraine's further development along a European path. The country acquired the status of an associated member of the EU, granting Ukrainian citizens the opportunity for visa-free travel across EU member states.

Thus, the Revolution of Dignity became a period of profound transformation in Ukraine, marked by both heroic and tragic moments. The Ukrainian people demonstrated their unwavering commitment to the ideals of freedom and dignity, sacrificing the lives of 107 protest participants who were posthumously awarded the title of Hero of Ukraine and entered history as the "Heavenly Hundred". The Revolution of Dignity brought about a significant mental shift, not only overcoming authoritarianism – the vestige of the Soviet mentality – but also revealing new traits of the young generation of Ukrainians: defiance, determination, tolerance, the aspiration for freedom and justice, and the capacity for self-sacrifice, which became particularly

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[351] Про покладання на Голову Верховної Ради України виконання обов'язків Президента України згідно із статтею 112 Конституції України: Постанова Верховної Ради України № 764 від 23 лютого 2014 року. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/764-18#Text

[352] Гай-Нижник П. П. *Росія проти України (1990–2016 рр.): Від політики шантажу і примусу до війни на поглинання та спроби знищення*. С. 187.

[353] Угода про асоціацію між Україною, з однієї сторони, та Європейським Союзом, Європейським співтовариством з атомної енергії і їхніми державами-членами, з іншої сторони. Брюссель, 21.03.2014. *Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України.* https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/984_011/page#Text

evident during the Russian–Ukrainian war that began in eastern Ukraine in 2014[354].

According to the Decree of 13 November 2014 issued by President Poroshenko, 21 November is celebrated in Ukraine as the Day of Dignity and Freedom, in honor of the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity of 2013[355]. These two events in Ukraine's modern history are of decisive importance for the Ukrainian people and their free European future.

The post-revolutionary period in Ukraine was marked by the launch of large-scale reforms in public administration, the economy, the judiciary, and the fight against corruption. These measures were essential for meeting the standards and requirements of the European Union on Ukraine's path toward Euro-Atlantic integration.

A milestone in Ukraine's European integration was the adoption by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, on 7 February 2019, of the Law "On Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine (on the Strategic Course of the State toward the Acquisition of Full Membership of Ukraine in the European Union and in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization)". These amendments, which legally enshrined Ukraine's course toward membership in the EU and NATO, entered into force on 21 February 2019[356].

By defending the ideals of democracy, upholding human rights and freedoms, and safeguarding the European future of their country, Ukrainians took a decisive step that crowned the strength of spirit and resilience of its citizens, altering the course of Ukraine's history. Moreover, the international community recognized and supported the Ukrainian people's aspirations for European integration in the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity. This, in

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[354] Котляр Ю., Соловйова А. Українська ментальність в умовах суспільних трансформацій (1991–2014 pp.). *Rozdroża: Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia w refleksjach humanistów* / Ред. R. Dymczyk, I. Krywoszeja & N. Morawiec. Częstochowa–Humań–Poznań, 2016. Том III. С. 123–130.

[355] Про День Гідності та Свободи: Указ Президента України № 872 від 13 листопада 2014 року. Київ. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/872/2014#Text

[356] Про внесення змін до Конституції України (щодо стратегічного курсу держави на набуття повноправного членства України в Європейському Союзі та в Організації Північноатлантичного договору): Закон України № 2680 від 07.02.2019 року. Київ, 2019. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2680-19#Text

turn, stimulated the country's intensified efforts toward accession to the EU and NATO[357].

Analyzing the place and role of the Euromaidan in contemporary society and its consequences for Ukraine and the world, it is important to note that it became a catalyst for the awakening of Europe as a whole and for the reassessment of its values. During the Euromaidan, Ukrainians proved themselves to be stronger defenders of European values than, at times, even the citizens of the European Union themselves. This very national resolve led to growing admiration for Ukraine and Ukrainians around the world[358].

Columbia University Professor S. Sestanovych wrote that the Euromaidan was the event of the decade and would prompt Europe and the United States to regard Ukraine as a great nation within the civilized world[359]. Researcher Leonidas Donskis noted that the Ukrainian revolution played a significant role for Europe, and that Ukrainian society managed to overthrow the criminal government within the country, generating a powerful resonance among European nations[360].

French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy observed that the Euromaidan defined Ukraine's Euro-integration priorities, revived within Ukrainian society an orientation toward European standards, and strengthened solidarity with European values. He wrote that "Ukraine's dream is a vibrant, heroic Europe of values" and emphasized that Ukraine, through the events of the Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity, delivered a worthy lesson to Europe – demonstrating the extent to which a people is willing to go for the sake of a European future[361].

The events of 2013–2014 in Ukraine had a profound impact on the revival of European values in the country. They became a symbol of the struggle for

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[357] Мосін О. Роль та місце євромайдану в сучасних євроінтеграційних реаліях. *«Європейський Союз і Україна: передісторія, історія, сучасність» в рамках міжнародного проєкту Erasmus+ за напрямком Jean Monnet «Implementation of European values as a basis of democracy in Ukraine»:* тези. Миколаїв: Вид-во ЧНУ ім. Петра Могили, 2023. С. 184–185.

[358] Потапенко Я. Рецепція Євромайдану в сучасному українському соціокультурному дискурсі. *Наукові записки. Політика і суспільство.* 2018. Випуск 4 (78). С. 4–21.

[359] Євромайдан – подія десятиліття – екс-спецпредставник Мадлен Олбрайт. *Українська правда.* 12 січня 2014. https://www.pravda.com.ua/photo-video/2014/01/12/7009379/

[360] Донскіс Л. Ретроспективний погляд із 2014-го в 1989-й. *Український тиждень.* 2015. № 52 (372). С. 48.

[361] Бернар А.-Л. *Ми всі українці.* http://www.3republic.org.ua/ua/analytics/12687; Бернар А.-Л. Україна носить ідею Європи. *Громадське радіо.* 20 лютого 2015. https://cutt.ly/RrGCCp2C

democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The Revolution of Dignity contributed significantly to the restoration of a number of European values in Ukraine – above all, democracy and civil society. Euromaidan strengthened the role of civil society in Ukraine: the mass protests on Kyiv's Independence Square reflected the Ukrainian people's strong desire to choose their leaders independently and to freely express their opinions. Citizens actively defended their rights and demanded participation in decision-making, thereby reinforcing democratic values. The principal value revived by the events on the Maidan was Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The Revolution of Dignity set Ukraine's course toward membership in European institutions. The country strives to move closer to the European Union and NATO, embracing their standards and values. This trajectory entails deep economic, political, and cultural transformations on the path toward European integration[362].

Thus, the Revolution of Dignity made it possible to preserve Ukraine's state sovereignty, dismantle the dictatorial and corrupt regime of Yanukovych, restore the country's orientation toward democratic freedoms and European standards of living, strengthen the patriotism of the Ukrainian people, and complete the formation of Ukraine's political authority and civil society based on European values. The Revolution of Dignity should be associated with modern European history and with the latest ideas of the European space. As a societal phenomenon, Euromaidan facilitated the transition to a new standard of living and opened a clear prospect for Ukraine's European development.

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[362] Мосін О. Вплив Революції Гідності на відродження європейських цінностей України. *«Становлення сучасної Української держави: роль європейських цінностей у формуванні демократичного буття» в рамках міжнародного проєкту Erasmus+ за напрямком Jean Monnet «Implementation of European values as a basis of democracy in Ukraine»:* тези. Миколаїв: Вид-во ЧНУ ім. Петра Могили, 2023. С. 175–176.

3.3. The Threat to Democracy: Hybrid War of 2014–2022
(Yuriy Kotlyar, Oleksandr Mosin, and Alina Tikhonova)

The long struggle of Ukraine against Russian encroachments on its historical heritage and independence shows that the Revolution of Dignity caused moral awakening, led to renewal and revival not only of Ukraine, but also of all of Europe. The Revolution of Dignity restored almost destroyed by Viktor Yanukovych system of national security in Ukraine, at least partially overcame corruption, traitors and banditry in government. Today, the awakening of national identity and moral upliftment of Ukrainian people help Ukraine to fight back against the bitter enemy – Russia, despite everything[363].

The Revolution of Dignity allowed Ukraine to preserve national sovereignty, eliminate dictatorial and corrupt regime of then-President Yanukovych, restore Ukraine's orientation towards democratic freedoms and European standards of living, raise the level of patriotism among the people of Ukraine, as well as finish the formation of Ukrainian political government and civil society, according to standards, which protect European values. It acted like a catalyst for political, economic and socio-cultural changes, aimed to support Ukraine's European integration process and improve its position on the way to the community of western democratic countries.

The overthrow of Yanukovych's regime opened broad prospects for Ukraine's European development and Euro-Atlantic integration. These events in Ukraine posed a threat to and undermined the Russian government's plans to dominate Europe through alignment with Ukraine. Consequently, Russia launched a campaign to discredit Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity, portraying it as a call to resist a so-called "fascist government" that had allegedly seized power illegally. These developments led to the outbreak of the Russian–Ukrainian war in 2014, which began in eastern Ukraine and in Crimea and has continued to the present day[364].

After the outbreak of the conflict on Ukrainian territory in 2014, a new term emerged to emphasize the combination of military and non-military instruments of armed confrontation – *"hybrid warfare"*. Russia's attack on Ukraine was not accompanied by the traditional forms and means of warfare; rather, it took on a hybrid character. The distinctive feature of such warfare was the use of non-military means of confrontation: informational, economic,

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[363] Власюк О.С., Кононенко С.В. *Кремлівська агресія проти України: роздуми в контексті війни: монографія.* Київ: НІСД, 2017. 304 с.

[364] Біла книга антитерористичної операції на Сході України (2014–2016) / [під заг. ред. І. Руснака). Київ: Національний університет оборони України імені Івана Черняховського, 2017. С. 12.

ideological, terrorist, diplomatic, and socio-political measures. Thus, hybrid warfare can be defined as the attainment of objectives through the use of psychological, informational, cyber, and electronic tools, in conjunction with the actions of armed forces, special services, and economic pressure[365].

One of the hallmarks of hybrid warfare is the deliberate creation of disorder among the civilian population, the military, and state institutions. In such chaos, it becomes difficult to distinguish between civilians and terrorists, as well as to identify enemies and allies. The aggressor focuses its military actions more on exhausting and demoralizing the opponent's armed forces than on their outright destruction[366].

Former UN and NATO security adviser Frank van Kappen described the events in Ukraine in 2014 as "a classic example of warfare combined with the use of private military formations. The country that wages hybrid war categorically denies cooperation with non-state armed organizations – the so-called contractors or mercenaries. These mercenaries perform all the dirty work, as the state must formally comply with the Geneva and Hague Conventions on the laws of war"[367]. Such methods of warfare were employed by Russia on Ukrainian territory in 2014: the Armed Forces of the RF largely refrained from crossing the Ukrainian border directly, instead deploying hired separatist non-state formations – whose affiliation it denied – to engage in the conflict on Ukrainian soil. At the same time, Russia conducted a large-scale information campaign aimed at political and economic destabilization in Ukraine[368].

Thus, in light of the above, the RF in 2014 launched a genuine hybrid war against Ukraine, employing a wide range of non-military instruments of confrontation, along with methods of manipulation and nuclear blackmail.

It is important to note that the origins of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine date back to 20 February 2014, when armed Russian military personnel without insignia entered the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea[369]. Even prior to the start of hybrid warfare, a Russian intelligence

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[365] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України* / за заг. ред. А. М. Сиротенка. Київ: НУОУ ім. Івана Черняховського, 2020. С. 13. https://cutt.ly/lrGCIYJM

[366] Авер'янова Н. М. Гібридна війна: російсько-українське протистояння. *Філософські науки. Молодий вчений.* 2017. Випуск 3 (43). С. 30.

[367] Путін веде в Україні гібридну війну – генерал Каппен. *Радіо Свобода.* 26 квітня 2014. http:// www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/25363591.html

[368] Авер'янова Н. М. Гібридна війна: російсько-українське протистояння. С. 30.

[369] *Російсько-українська війна. Ч. 1: Неоголошена війна (20 лютого 2014 – 24 лютого 2022): рекомендаційний покажчик* / уклад. Ю. І. Левченко ; Міністерство освіти і науки України, Нац. пед. ун-т імені М.П. Драгоманова,

network had been established on the Ukrainian peninsula, which had been preparing in advance to destabilize the political and social situation. The RF had long planned and meticulously developed detailed steps for the onset of its armed anti-Ukrainian aggression[370].

As early as January 2014, against the backdrop of mass protests across Ukraine, the Russian government understood that it was losing its pro-Russian Ukrainian leadership and began to formulate geopolitical strategies aimed at developing a plan for the partition of Ukrainian territory and the destruction of Ukrainian statehood. In the RF, a document entitled "On the Crisis in Ukraine" was approved, outlining a large-scale action plan for the political destabilization of Ukraine and the incorporation of half of its regions into the RF [371]. To ensure security during the 2014 Winter Olympic Games, an operational grouping of Russian troops was deployed in the Southern Military District (near the Ukrainian border), impressive in its size[372].

The beginning of the operation to occupy the Crimean Peninsula by Russian forces is dated to 20 February 2014. On that day, violations of Ukraine's state border regime were recorded, as armed units of the RF crossed the Kerch Strait[373]. At that time, the top leadership of Ukraine – the President, heads of the Ministries of Defence and Internal Affairs, the Security Service, the Armed Forces, the Prosecutor General's Office, and the heads of regional and district administrations – abandoned their posts, with some fleeing to other countries. This plunged Ukraine into a legal vacuum and left it without its governing leadership. These actions by the Ukrainian authorities, carried out in prior collusion with the Russian side, were aimed at paralysing the functioning of state institutions in Ukraine and preventing the organization of resistance to the armed Russian aggression[374].

Наукова бібліотека. Київ: Вид-во НПУ імені М. П. Драгоманова, 2022. С. 5. https://cutt.ly/yrGKVfR5

[370] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України.* С. 24.

[371] О кризисе на Украине (Совет нацбезопасности России) [План дій по дестабілізації України і включення 12 українських областей та м. Києва до складу Російської Федерації] (січень 2014 р.). *Павло Гай-Нижник – доктор історичних наук. Особистий сайт*. https://hai-nyzhnyk.in.ua/

[372] *До другої річниці агресії Росії проти України (20 лютого 2016 року). Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень.* Київ: НІСД, 2016. С. 23. https://cutt.ly/vrGCCWd1

[373] Про внесення змін до деяких законів України щодо визначення дати початку тимчасової окупації: Закон України від 15.09.2015 № 685-VIII. Київ, 2015. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/685-19#Text

[374] *До другої річниці агресії Росії проти України (20 лютого 2016 року). Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень*. С. 23.

Nevertheless, the Ukrainian parliament assumed responsibility for restoring constitutional order in the country, electing a new Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, appointing the Acting President of Ukraine, and forming new bodies within the defence and security sector, as well as a new government[375].

According to a pre-prepared Russian plan for the seizure of the Crimean Peninsula[376], pro-Russian rallies were organised in the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea starting on 20 February 2014. Russian agents and military units brought citizens of the RF into Crimea to pose as local residents dissatisfied with the Ukrainian authorities, create conflict-driven destabilising situations, and organise mass gatherings[377]. On 23 February 2014, a large rally of 20,000 people took place in Sevastopol, during which a new pro-Russian mayor, Oleksiy Chalyi (a Russian citizen), was elected. Following his decision, Russian checkpoints and military equipment appeared at the entrances to the city. At this time, Ukrainian military personnel were courageously resisting the Russian army[378].

In Moscow, rallies were held advocating the division of Ukraine into three parts and the deployment of volunteer formations to "protect" the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine from so-called "Banderite fascists" [379].

On 26 February 2014, "dissatisfied Crimeans" brought in by Russian intelligence services organised a rally in front of the Crimean parliament under the slogan of the so-called "Russian Spring"[380]. However, it proved unsuccessful due to the resistance of Ukrainian patriotic forces, which thwarted the aggressor's plans and prevented Russia from justifying the occupation of the peninsula as the will of the indigenous residents of Crimea.

On 27 February 2014, Russian airborne troops and special forces seized the main administrative buildings in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea – the Council of Ministers and the Supreme Council. A session of the Crimean Supreme Council was convened, during which a decision was adopted to hold

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[375] Ibid. С. 24.

[376] Пашинський С. У Путіна на столі бачили готовий план анексії України. Ще у травні минулого року. http://www.pravda.com.ua/ articles/2014/08/5/7034007/

[377] *До другої річниці агресії Росії проти України (20 лютого 2016 року). Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень*. С. 25.

[378] *Російсько-українська війна. Ч. 1: Неоголошена війна (20 лютого 2014 – 24 лютого 2022): рекомендаційний покажчик*. С. 6.

[379] Кулик Р., Майоров М. *2014: початок російсько-української війни. Український інститут національної пам'яті*. Київ, 2019. С. 13.

[380] Смолій В., Якубова Л. *Історичний контекст формування проекту «русский мир» та практика його реалізації в Криму й на Донбасі: Аналітична записка / НАН України. Інститут історії України*. Київ: Інститут історії України, 2018. 144 с.

a "referendum" aimed at determining the status of the Crimean Peninsula[381]. The session was conducted in violation of procedural rules (only 49 out of 100 deputies were present, which is insufficient for a quorum), and under pressure from the so-called "little green men" armed with assault rifles, the deputies voted to hold the referendum and appointed Sergey Aksyonov, leader of the Russian Unity party, as head of the Crimean government[382]. It should be noted that, in reality, only 36 deputies voted for Aksyonov, while the remaining votes were cast using duplicate voting cards by the Speaker of the Crimean Supreme Council, Vladimir Konstantinov[383]. Following his appointment, Aksyonov addressed the crowd outside the seized building of the Crimean parliament, calling on the people "to unite and await assistance from the RF, which will certainly provide them with support and change the political situation in Crimea"[384].

Having seized the administrative buildings, Russian forces proceeded to take control of mass media, communications, transportation routes, Simferopol Airport, the ferry crossing to Kerch, the Belbek airfield in Sevastopol, and all other strategically important facilities, while blockading Ukrainian military garrisons in Crimea[385]. The Black Sea Fleet of the RF, stationed in Crimea under the 2010 "Kharkiv Accords" signed by Viktor Yanukovych and Dmitriy Medvedev[386], blocked access to the ships of the Ukrainian Navy located in naval bases.

On 28 February 2014 the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine called on the United States and Great Britain to help stop Russia's armed aggression on the Crimea Peninsula. According to Budapest Memorandum 1994, Ukraine completely disarmed of nuclear weapons on its territory, while receiving security guarantees from world's nuclear powers – The United Kingdom of Great

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[381] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України.* С. 24.

[382] Винницький М. *Український майдан, російська війна. Хроніка та аналіз Революції Гідності*. С. 198.

[383] Інтерв'ю з Дмитром Білоцерковцем, кримським активістом молодіжного крила партії «УДАР» та уродженцем Севастополя. *Анексія: острів Крим. Хроніки «гібридної війни»* / Т. Березовець. Київ: Брайт Стар Паблішинг, 2016. С. 94.

[384] Винницький М. *Український майдан, російська війна. Хроніка та аналіз Революції Гідності*. С. 198.

[385] *Російсько-українська війна. Ч. 1: Неоголошена війна (20 лютого 2014 – 24 лютого 2022): рекомендаційний покажчик.* С. 7.

[386] Угода між Україною та Російською Федерацією з питань перебування Чорноморського флоту Російської Федерації на території України. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/643_359#Text

Britain and North Ireland, The United States of America and the RF[387]. Then-president of the United States Barack Obama expressed his resentment and concern over the presence of Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine and warned that any armed aggression by Russia against Ukraine would end negatively for the aggressor[388].

After the actual start of armed aggression on 1 March 2014, Yanukovych asked Putin to send troops to Ukraine to regulate the law order[389]. The Council of Federation approved president Putin's decision to start a military operation on the territory of Ukraine and to send troops[390]. In such a way, Russia's military invasion into Ukraine gained its legal basis. At this time, the interim president of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov signed a decree cancelling the appointment of Aksyonov as a Head of Government of Crimea, however the decree hasn't been taken into account, because the appointment of Turchynov was considered illegitimate[391].

It was the 1 March 2014 that should be considered the official beginning of Russia's "hybrid war" against Ukraine: an official document, confirming that Russia is an aggressor, was issued. President of RF Putin made a statement that "neo-nazis, nationalists, anti-Semites and Benderites are present on the territory of Ukraine, thus Russia must protect the citizens and use all necessary means to do it"[392].

In such a difficult period, the Ukrainian military fought bravely: naval aviation pilots of the Ukrainian Navy managed to relocate aircraft and weapons from Crimea to Mykolaiv airfield, despite the blockade of military units. Unarmed Ukrainian servicemen flying the flag of the military unit and singing the Ukrainian national anthem passed through Russian troops and left

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[387] Меморандум про гарантії безпеки у зв'язку з приєднанням України до Договору про нерозповсюдження ядерної зброї. 05.12.1994. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_158#Text

[388] Statement by the President on Ukraine. *The White House*. 28 February 2014. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-pressoffice/2014/02/28/statement-president-ukraine; Обама Б. (Президент США). Заява Президента США щодо України (28 лютого 2014 року). *Павло Гай-Нижник – доктор історичних наук. Особистий сайт*. https://hai-nyzhnyk.in.ua/doc2/2014(02)28.obama.php

[389] Кулик Р., Майоров М. *2014: початок російсько-української війни. Український інститут національної пам'яті*. С. 16.

[390] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України*. С. 24.

[391] Аксьонов став прем'єр-міністром Криму з порушенням закону – указ Турчинова. *24 TV*. 1 березня 2014. https://cutt.ly/LrGLemEj

[392] Верменич Я. В. *Феномен пограниччя: Крим і Донбас в долі України*. Київ: Інститут історії України НАН України, 2018. С. 233.

the airfield Belbek, while cadets of the naval school in Sevastopol refused to go over to Russia[393].

In early March 2014, bribed demonstrators in Crimea called for the peninsula's annexation to Russia and for the holding of a referendum. As a result, 78 out of 80 deputies of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea voted in favour of holding a referendum on 16 March. Under pressure from armed Russian military personnel, the referendum in Crimea collected over 1.7 million votes (82.7% of the total population of the peninsula), with 97% of the ballots cast in favour of "joining Crimea to Russia as a constituent entity of the RF"[394]. Consequently, on 18 March 2014, the President of Russia signed the "Treaty on the Accession of Crimea to the RF"[395]. In effect, the Crimean Peninsula was unlawfully incorporated into the RF through its annexation[396].

Ukraine's international partners – the United States and the European Union – did not recognise the results of the so-called "referendum," expressed concern over the developments taking place on Ukrainian territory, and imposed the first sanctions against Russian senior officials, businesses, and foreign assets. On 27 March 2014, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity[397], and at the 23rd Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Russia was recognised as an aggressor state[398].

Along the Ukrainian border, the RF deployed a large number of military formations with the aim of intimidation and threatening a full-scale invasion[399]. In response, on 2 March, the Armed Forces of Ukraine were

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[393] Марко С. Хроніка гібридної війни. *Гібридна війна в Україні XXI сторіччя*. Київ: Альтерпрес, 2016. 236 с.

[394] Золотухін Д. Ю. та ін. Біла книга спеціальних інформаційних операцій проти України 2014–2018 / М-во інформ. політики України. Київ: Мега-прес груп, 2018. С. 200.

[395] *До другої річниці агресії Росії проти України (20 лютого 2016 року). Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень.* С. 26–28.

[396] *Агресія Росії проти України: Історичні передумови та сучасні викликики.* С. 362.

[397] Resolution of the UN General Assembly "Territorial Integrity of Ukraine confirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders". *Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna*. 28 March 2014. https://cutt.ly/FrGLyJI5

[398] Бакинська декларація і резолюції, прийняті на Парламентські асамблеї ОБСЄ на 23-й щорічній сесії. *OSCEPA*. 2014. https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/all-documents/annual-sessions/2014-baku/declaration-2/2539-2014-baku-declaration-rus/file

[399] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України.* С. 26.

placed on full combat readiness, and on 17 March, the Ukrainian authorities announced a partial mobilisation and introduced a state of special alert[400].

On 13 March, Ukraine's military leadership established a new military formation – the National Guard – vested with law enforcement functions[401]. At the same time, participants of the Revolution of Dignity began to join volunteer units en masse to fight against the external enemy. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine announced the creation of special-purpose patrol police units, which were likewise formed on a voluntary basis from among Ukrainian citizens. In total, 38 patrol police units were established[402].

On 24 March 2014, Turchynov signed a decree on the complete withdrawal of Ukrainian troops from the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea[403]. As a result, the occupying forces were able to easily seize all 193 military units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine stationed in Crimea, including ships and aircraft. The total value of all military assets that the Ukrainian authorities failed to remove from Crimea is estimated at more than 11 billion USD. Nearly half of the personnel of the Ukrainian Navy (6,000 out of 14,000) did not leave the peninsula and partly supported the aggressor[404].

In early April 2014, separatists and Russian military forces, replicating the Crimean scenario, seized administrative buildings in the eastern regions of Ukraine – Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (regions)[405]. The Russian military established terrorist pseudo-state entities of a military nature, which officially declared their goal to be the establishment of control over part of Ukraine's sovereign territory through armed aggression[406].

The situation in Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts was becoming increasingly tense: Russian military personnel and special mercenary formations attacked Ukrainian border guard units, seized police departments, Security Service of Ukraine facilities, critical infrastructure sites, transportation, military installations, mass media and communications, television, and the banking system. They took hostages, intimidated, and killed civilians[407].

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[400] Про часткову мобілізацію: Указ Президента України від 17.03.2014 № 303/2014. Київ, 2014.https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/303/2014#Text

[401] Про Національну гвардію України: Закон України від 13.03. 2014 № 876-VII. Київ, 2014. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/876-18#Text

[402] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України.* С. 26.

[403] *Агресія Росії проти України: Історичні передумови та сучасні викликики.* С. 363.

[404] Ibid.

[405] *Агресія Росії проти України: Історичні передумови та сучасні викликики.* С. 368.

[406] Ibid.

[407] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України.* С. 28.

On 12 April 2014, Russian military formations and sabotage groups seized Artemivsk, Kramatorsk, Sloviansk and Horlivka[408]. The following day, the first battle between the Ukrainian army and a Russian sabotage group took place in the Sloviansk area[409]. On 13 April 2014, the Government of Ukraine announced the launch of an anti-terrorist operation (ATO) in these territories and deployed troops to Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts[410]. Conscription into military service was reinstated[411]. Ukrainian volunteer battalions, which had first emerged in the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity and at the outset of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, joined the ATO[412]

Thus, the RF initiated an undeclared war against Ukraine in the Donbas[413]. Under extremely challenging conditions, the Armed Forces of Ukraine conducted military operations in eastern Ukraine, fighting against irregular armed formations that continuously received reinforcements in the form of manpower, weapons, and resources from Russian territory. In early May, two Ukrainian helicopters were shot down over Sloviansk for the first time. The adversary employed tactics of sabotage and guerrilla warfare, while taking cover among the local civilian population.

On 11 May 2014, under the "barrels of assault rifles", a so-called "referendum" sponsored and organized by the Russian authorities took place. Representatives of the self-proclaimed "Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics" (the DPR was declared on 7 April and the LPR on 27 April)[414] announced their "independence" and separation from Ukraine, and appealed to Putin to incorporate the DPR and LPR into the RF. The results of this "referendum" were not recognized as legitimate by Ukraine or by the

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[408] Ibid.

[409] Марко С. Хроніка гібридної війни. С. 46.

[410] Про рішення Ради національної безпеки і оборони України від 13.04. 2014 «Про невідкладні заходи щодо подолання терористичної загрози і збереження територіальної цілісності України»: Указ Президента України від 14.04.2014 № 405/2014. Київ, 2014. https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4052014-16886

[411] Марко С. Хроніка гібридної війни. С. 46.

[412] Гуральська А. *Звіт: Добровольчі батальйони. Виникнення, діяльність, суперечність.* Варшава, 2015. https://www.odfoundation.eu

[413] *Російсько-українська війна. Ч. 1: Неоголошена війна (20 лютого 2014 – 24 лютого 2022): рекомендаційний покажчик.* С 6.

[414] Про особливості державної політики із забезпечення державного суверенітету України на тимчасово окупованих територіях у Донецькій та Луганській областях: Закон України від 18.01.2018 № 2268-VIII. Київ, 2018. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2268-19#Text

international community[415]. Russia also attempted to establish "people's republics" in a number of other Ukrainian regions – Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, and Zaporizhzhia – but these efforts proved unsuccessful[416].

Through these actions, Russia demonstrated complete disregard for the norms of international law and, in defiance of the fundamental principles of the inviolability of Ukraine's existing state borders – as enshrined in the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the RF and in the Budapest Memorandum – carried out armed aggression in eastern Ukraine and occupied the Crimean Peninsula[417].

One of the main problems in Ukraine at that time was that the national security and defence system was oriented solely toward stability and the maintenance of peace in Europe and worldwide, without accounting for a potential real threat of war. This was largely due to the fact that, as early as 1994, Ukraine had received security assurances from the world's largest and most powerful states[418].

Ukraine's non-aligned status did not guarantee its territorial integrity and security, nor could it halt Russia's aggression in pursuing its plans for the full occupation of Ukraine[419]. Accordingly, on 28 August 2014, the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine adopted the decision "On Urgent Measures to Protect Ukraine and Strengthen Its Defence Capability", which emphasized the development of Ukraine's relations with the European Union, NATO, and the United States[420].

A striking and tragic event occurred near Volnovakha (Donetsk region) on 22 May 2014, when a sabotage group attacked a Ukrainian Armed Forces checkpoint during the ATO, resulting in the deaths of 17 Ukrainian servicemen and injuries to 32 others[421].

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[415] Гай-Нижник П. П. *Росія проти України (1990–2016 рр.): Від політики шантажу і примусу до війни на поглинання та спроби знищення.* С. 232.

[416] *Російсько-українська війна. Ч. 1: Неоголошена війна (20 лютого 2014 – 24 лютого 2022): рекомендаційний покажчик.* С. 6.

[417] *Аналітична доповідь Національного інституту стратегічних досліджень до позачергового Послання Президента України до Верховної Ради України «Про внутрішнє та зовнішнє становище України у сфері національної безпеки».* Київ: НІСД, 2014. С. 17. https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2015-12/Dopovid_Prezudentps-0ab72.pdf

[418] Ibid. С. 19.

[419] Ibid. С. 20.

[420] Про невідкладні заходи щодо захисту України та зміцнення її обороноздатності: рішення РНБО України від 28 серпня 2014 року. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/n0011525-14#Text

[421] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України.* С. 29.

On 25 May 2014, as a result of the presidential elections, Petro Poroshenko was elected President of Ukraine. The newly elected President pledged to end the ATO in eastern Ukraine in the shortest possible time and promised to raise the daily combat pay for military personnel participating in hostilities to 1,000 UAH[422]. At that time, the ATO forces were expanding: more than 200,000 servicemen were mobilised, 15 combat brigades, one regiment, five divisions, and 27 territorial defence battalions were formed, and over 6,000 vehicles were deployed[423].

By the end of May 2014, Ukrainian forces had succeeded in regaining control over part of the territory of Donetsk Oblast. On 26 May, a fierce battle for Donetsk Airport began, lasting 242 days[424]. This confrontation became a symbol of the courage and heroism of Ukrainian soldiers, and the defenders of Donetsk Airport came to be known as "Ukrainian Cyborgs"[425].

Between June and August 2014, battles of the Armed Forces of Ukraine continued, inflicting significant losses on the "hybrid" occupation forces. Ukrainian troops regained control over a substantial portion of the territories in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, returning key settlements – including Mariupol, Krasnyi Lyman, Shchastia, and Yampil – under the Ukrainian flag. The consolidation of national forces enabled the successful conduct of more than forty operations by the end of August, resulting in the liberation of two-thirds of the occupied territories and, in total, over 100 settlements in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. These developments were bringing the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine closer to resolution.[426].

The successes of the Ukrainian military forced the Russian aggressors to conduct artillery strikes from the territory of the RF against the Ukrainian army. Enemy artillery began to shell the positions of Ukrainian defenders on Savur-Mohyla almost around the clock[427].

On 17 July 2014, a Malaysian Boeing airliner carrying 283 civilian passengers and 15 crew members was shot down. Russia claimed that Ukraine had downed the aircraft, allegedly mistaking it for a transport

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[422] Гай-Нижник П. П. *Росія проти України (1990–2016 рр.): Від політики шантажу і примусу до війни на поглинання та спроби знищення*. С. 232.

[423] Біла книга-2014. Збройні Сили України. Київ: МОУ, ГШ ЗС України, 2015. С. 3–4.

[424] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України.* С. 29.

[425] Ibid. С. 34.

[426] Віднянський С. Україна–Європейський Союз: Новий етап взаємовідносин в умовах російсько-української війни 2014–2022. *Міжнародні зв'язки України: наукові пошуки і знахідки*. 2022. № 31. С. 11–37. https://doi.org/10.15407/mzu2022.31.010

[427] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України.* С. 31.

carrying Russian military personnel and weapons. In 2019, the Joint Investigation Team, having conducted an investigation, concluded that the airliner was shot down by a missile launched from a Buk surface-to-air missile system belonging to the 53rd Brigade of the Russian Armed Forces, based in Kursk [428].

In mid-June 2014, newly elected President Poroshenko proposed a plan for the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Donbas and ordered Ukrainian troops to unilaterally cease the use of weapons until the end of June, while also calling on the Russian side to engage in negotiations. In line with this plan, provisions were made for the creation of a corridor for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory, the holding of early local government elections, the free use of languages, and contributions to the development of Donbas[429]. However, the hybrid occupation forces refused to meet these proposals and continued shelling Ukrainian positions[430].

On the night of 24–25 August 2014, following a massive artillery barrage, Russian formations – carrying neither identification documents nor insignia on their uniforms and military equipment – crossed the state border into Ukrainian territory and advanced toward Ilovaisk, Luhansk, and Mariupol. The Ukrainian army was forced to retreat; however, it managed to stabilize the front line and hold key settlements, including Sievierodonetsk, Lysychansk, Debaltseve, Artemivsk, Sloviansk, and Mariupol. Units of the ATO forces prevented the enemy from advancing deeper into Ukrainian territory, particularly by land toward Crimea[431]. During these days, eleven servicemen of the RF's 98th Airborne Division were taken prisoner, providing official confirmation of the fact of the Russian military's incursion into Ukrainian territory [432].

The Ilovaisk tragedy (25–29 August 2014) drew significant international attention. At the time of the Russian military's incursion, the Ukrainian Armed Forces were stationed in the city of Ilovaisk. Consequently, Ukrainian servicemen were surrounded and trapped in the city, engaging in fierce combat with the occupying forces for four days. In an effort to break the encirclement, an agreement was reached with the Russian side for a temporary ceasefire and guarantees of safe passage for the Ukrainian military

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[428] ПАРЄ: МН17 збив російський «Бук». Росія має вибачитись. *BBC News Україна*. 24 червня 2022. https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-61921261

[429] *Революція Гідності 2013–2014 рр. та агресія Росії проти України: науково-методичні матеріали*. С. 42.

[430] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України*. С. 31.

[431] *Революція Гідності 2013–2014 рр. та агресія Росії проти України: науково-методичні матеріали*. С. 43.

[432] *Воєнні аспекти протидії «гібридній» агресії: досвід України.* С. 33.

columns out of the city. However, Russian war criminals reneged on their promises and opened fire on Ukrainian soldiers during their withdrawal from Ilovaisk[433]. This constituted a war crime by Russia, which it has refused to acknowledge. According to the investigation, the criminal actions of Russian forces at Ilovaisk resulted in the deaths of 366 Ukrainian servicemen, injuries to 429, the disappearance of 158, and the capture of 128 soldiers[434].

In September 2014, having halted the advance of the occupying forces, units of the ATO began constructing a defensive line in eastern Ukraine. At the same time, diplomatic negotiations took place in Belarus, resulting in the signing of the First Minsk Agreement aimed at establishing a temporary ceasefire. Under the terms of the agreement, a 30-kilometre buffer zone was established along the Ukrainian–Russian border, to be monitored by OSCE observers[435]. However, the illegal non-state armed formations under Russian control, despite the political agreements, continued shelling Ukrainian positions and advancing in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Mariupol, and Debaltseve sectors. Furthermore, Moscow initiated the organization of elections for the heads of the self-proclaimed "DPR" and "LPR"[436].

Following these events, the international community intensified sanctions against the RF: oil prices were reduced, and Russia was expelled from the Group of Eight (G8). The aggressor's economic situation began to deteriorate. It was at this point that the RF, for the first time, openly threatened the world with nuclear weapons[437].

On 16 September 2014, President Poroshenko submitted to the Verkhovna Rada a draft law "On the Special Procedure for Local Self-Government in Certain Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions"[438], and on 4 February 2015, the Ukrainian authorities officially recognised the pseudo-state entities of the DPR and LPR as terrorist organizations[439].

Following the signing of the Second Minsk Agreement in February 2015, the Russian army ceased its active offensive operations. A "ceasefire" phase

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[433] Ibid.

[434] *Іловайський мартиролог. 7–29 (31) серпня 2014 року* / Упорядник Я. Тинченко. Київ: Національний військово-історичний музей України, 2018. 120 с.

[435] *Революція Гідності 2013–2014 рр. та агресія Росії проти України: науково-методичні матеріали*. С. 43.

[436] Ibid. С. 45.

[437] Ibid. С. 46.

[438] Про особливий порядок місцевого самоврядування в окремих районах Донецької та Луганської областей: Закон України від 16 вересня 2014 р. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1680-18

[439] Кулик Р., Майоров М. *2014: початок російсько-української війни. Український інститут національної пам'яті*. С. 35.

was introduced, which was repeatedly violated by provocations from Russian armed terrorist formations. During this period, the Ukrainian army began to strengthen its defensive lines, improve its command-and-control systems, and conduct effective reconnaissance operations[440].

It is worth noting that, despite all agreements, the President of Russia did not abandon his intention to destroy Ukraine as an independent state, and in April 2015, the headquarters of the Western Military District of the Russian Armed Forces developed a secret plan to seize the Left-Bank Ukraine along with Kyiv[441].

Significant changes in the Russian–Ukrainian war in eastern Ukraine were brought about by the decision signed in Minsk in 2016 by the Trilateral Contact Group on the disengagement of forces and hardware in the Donbas, that is, the withdrawal of troops from the positions they had seized[442].

At the end of April 2018, the President of Ukraine signed the Decree "On the Launch of the Joint Forces Operation to Ensure National Security and Defence, Repel and Deter Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation in the Territory of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts"[443]. The pressure exerted by Russian "hybrid" forces on the positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine continued to mount, accompanied by an increase in the intensity of shelling of Ukrainian defenders' positions. Between 2019 and 2021, the Russian Federation significantly increased its military expenditures. In particular, in 2021, its military budget grew by 2.9% compared to 2020, reaching 4.1% of GDP and amounting to $65.9 billion[444].

Subsequently, under the pretext of military exercises, the RF concentrated its forces near the Ukrainian borders, preparing for a potential full-scale

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[440] Гай-Нижник П. П. *Росія проти України (1990–2016 рр.): Від політики шантажу і примусу до війни на поглинання та спроби знищення.* С. 271.

[441] План захоплення Росією Лівобережної України («Доклад решения на применение группировки войск «Север» в специальной операции»; «Пояснительная записка к решению на применение группировки войск «Север»; 8–9 апреля 2015 г., Санкт-Петербург, штаб Западного военного округа). *Павло Гай-Нижник – доктор історичних наук. Особистий сайт.* http://hai-nyzhnyk.in.ua/doc2/2015(04)08.capture_plan.php

[442] The white book of the anti-terrorist operation in the East of Ukraine in 2014–2016. Brusel: NUOU – DEEP NATO, 2017. P. 38

[443] Про рішення Ради національної безпеки і оборони України від 30.04.2018 «Про широкомасштабну антитерористичну операцію в Донецькій та Луганській областях»: Указ Президента України від 30.04.2018 № 116/2018. *Liga Zakon.* https://ips.ligazakon.net/document/view/U116_18

[444] World military expenditure passes $2 trillion for the first time. *SIPRI: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.* 25 April 2022. https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/world-military-expenditure-passes-2-trillion-first-time

attack on Ukraine. During this period, Ukraine actively prepared to repel any invasion, employing diplomatic instruments to deter the neighbor's potentially aggressive intentions.

Thus, beginning on 20 February 2014, the RF invaded the territory of Ukraine and effectively launched a "hybrid war" against Europe, the entire democratic world, and the fundamental human rights and international norms of coexistence in Europe and the world at large[445].

It is worth noting that, following the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the onset of Russia's so-called "hybrid war" against Ukraine in February 2014, many international politicians were convinced that Ukraine would abandon its aspirations for EU and NATO membership. For instance, then-President of France Nicolas Sarkozy stated that, being at a geopolitical crossroads between Europe and Russia, Ukraine should maintain friendly relations with all parties and renounce its ambition to join NATO and the EU. In December 2021, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz assured Russian President Putin that Ukraine could potentially join NATO, but not for at least another 30 years. However, some influential global leaders, fortunately, held a different view regarding Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic future[446].

Therefore, taking into account the opinions of world leaders and national interests, the processes of European and Euro-Atlantic integration remain integral strategic priorities in the policy of independent Ukraine. The great meaning of this area of Ukraine's future is confirmed not only by the events of the current comprehensive phase of the Russian–Ukrainian war, but also by the reaction of the democratic world, especially member-states of the EU and NATO, which are very active in supporting Ukraine. This approach of the world contributes to preservation of statehood and national identity, restoration of territorial integrity and future modernisation of Ukraine, which will become an integral part of the common European space.

Thus, the Russian–Ukrainian "hybrid" war, which began in February 2014 in eastern Ukraine, had a significant impact on the perception and implementation of European values by Ukraine. Russia's armed aggression led to a disregard for the basic principles of democracy, human rights and the fundamentals of warfare. Violations of human rights, the territorial integrity of sovereign Ukraine and the disregard for international legal standards in general have become a serious challenge to the protection and implementation of European values not only for Ukraine but also for the entire international community. The Russian aggression in the east of

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[445] Віднянський С. Україна–Європейський Союз: Новий етап взаємовідносин в умовах російсько-української війни 2014–2022. С. 11–37.
[446] Ibid.

Ukraine and occupation of Crimea Peninsula caused a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, which has affected a significant number of displaced persons, caused psychological traumas and sufferings among the civilian population. The hostilities have increased tensions in the region and aggravated relations between countries, threatening a peaceful coexistence in Europe.

The Russian aggression, ongoing since 2014, escalated into a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Massive missile and bomb strikes were launched across Ukrainian territory, while Russian forces advanced into Ukraine from the directions of Russia, Belarus, and the Crimean Peninsula[447].

Long before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the RF had never abandoned its attempts to seize Ukraine and deprive it of its independence. As a result, it occupied Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions immediately after the events of the Maidan in Ukraine, in which Russia also played a significant role[448].

On the first day of the full-scale invasion, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky began negotiations with world leaders and international partners regarding support for Ukraine in its fight against the aggressor. The European Union immediately responded to Russia's occupation policy against Ukraine by imposing sanctions. Europe's assistance was extensive: Ukraine received military and financial aid, shelter was provided for Ukrainian refugees, and European states took part in investigating war crimes committed by Russian forces in Ukraine[449].

A historic decision taken during the full-scale invasion was Ukraine's submission, on 28 February 2022, of its application for membership in the European Union, followed by the European Council's decision in June 2022 to grant Ukraine candidate status for EU accession. After this decision, Ukraine was presented with key requirements to begin accession negotiations. According to the European Commission's analytical report,

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[447] Повномасштабне вторгнення Росії в Україну: історичний контекст. *Український інститут національної пам'яті.* Статті від 28 березня 2022. https://uinp.gov.ua/aktualni-temy/povnomasshtabne-vtorgnennya-rosiyi-v-ukrayinu-istorychnyy-kontekst

[448] Kotlyar Yu., Lymar M., Ahieieva-Karkashadze V. The U.S.–European coordination for assisting Ukraine, reviving the Alliance and protecting European values. *American History & Politics.* 2022. № 14. P. 7–20. https://doi.org/10.17721/2521-1706.2022.14

[449] Війна Росії проти України і Захід: помилки та висновки. Інтерв'ю Б. Джонсона. *Радіо Свобода.* 2 лютого 2023. https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/vitaliy-portnykov-zakhid-rosia-viyna-pomylky-vysnovky/32252438.html

Ukraine has partially fulfilled the tasks set before it and is currently in the negotiation phase[450].

It should be noted that, under the current conditions of full-scale war, further fulfilment of the requirements for EU accession – namely, the implementation of a series of reforms, resolution of internal conflicts, combating corruption, and aligning Ukrainian legislation with European standards – may take several more years.

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[450] Буквич А. На шляху до ЄС: до і після початку переговорів. *Юрліга*. 25 грудня 2023. https://jurliga.ligazakon.net/news/224473_na-shlyakhu-do-s-do--pslya-pochatku-peregovorv; Баконіна О. Україна на шляху до членства в ЄС: які кроки вже позаду і що ще необхідно зробити. *Liga Zakon*. 15 грудня 2023. https://cutt.ly/jrGypNEk

3.4. Ukraine as a Strategic and Normative Shieldin the Context of the Russian–Ukrainian War
(Yuriy Kotlyar and Marharyta Lymar)

Since the onset of Russian aggression in 2014, Ukraine has undergone a profound transformation from a security recipient on Europe's periphery to an active contributor to the stability of the international security system. This evolution – forged through hybrid warfare, sustained political resilience, and gradual institutional adaptation – has positioned Ukraine not only as a frontline defender of sovereignty, but also as a normative actor capable of influencing global security debates. The events of 2022 marked an escalation rather than the beginning of this process, amplifying Ukraine's strategic and value-based role on the world stage.

Russia's military invasion, which began on 20 February 2014 with the occupation of Crimea and later the escalation in Donbas, marked the start of an undeclared hybrid war that flagrantly violated international law. The full-scale phase of this war, launched on 24 February 2022, became not only a logical continuation of Russia's long-standing expansionist policies but also a turning point in European and global security. Emerging from the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity and the collapse of the Yanukovych regime, Ukraine found itself at the epicentre of one of the deepest socio-political and civilizational fractures of the modern era.

Since 2014, and especially after the start of full-scale hostilities in 2022, Ukraine has assumed a dual role: as both a frontline state defending its territorial integrity and a key normative–actor upholding core European values – dignity, freedom, sovereignty, and the rule of law. Russia's aggression against Ukraine, as well as its broader hybrid offensives against the West, have not only destabilised Eastern and Central Europe – regions still marked by the legacy of totalitarianism and Moscow's dominance – but have also exposed critical vulnerabilities in the international security architecture.

The war has catalysed global shifts, including disruptions in energy and food supply chains, the weaponisation of migration, nuclear blackmail, and large-scale environmental degradation. Simultaneously, it has forced transatlantic institutions to revisit their foundational principles and defence postures. Ukraine's response – characterised by resilience, democratic mobilisation, and institutional coherence – has increasingly positioned the country as a "norm entrepreneur", shaping discourses of collective defence, international justice, and moral leadership.

To fully understand Ukraine's evolving role within the international security system, it is essential to examine the multifaceted consequences of Russian aggression – not only in terms of military dynamics but also through

the broader socio-economic, ecological, demographic, legal, and geopolitical dimensions. These interconnected spheres reveal the scale of disruption caused by the war and Ukraine's response as a resilient actor and value-based partner.

Given the complexity and protracted nature of the conflict, scholars and analysts have developed various frameworks to classify its stages. In modern historical research, there is no single agreed periodisation of the Russian–Ukrainian war (2014–2024). Taking the escalation since 24 February 2022 as a key milestone, military historian Valerii Hrytsiuk proposed one of the most widely cited models of periodisation:

I (20 February–April 2014) – the occupation of Crimea;

II (14 April 2014 – 23 February 2022) – Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) / Joint Forces Operation (JFO);

III (24 February 2022–present) – the full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine[451].

In addition, Hrytsiuk, co-authored with the well-known Ukrainian historian Oleksandr Lysenko, described each of the periods and provided a thorough description of the third one, which, in their opinion, includes the following four phases:

I (20 February – April 2014) – the occupation of Crimea;

II (14 April 2014 – 23 February 2022) – Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) / Joint Forces Operation (JFO);

III (24 February 2022 – present) – the full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine .

In addition, Hrytsiuk, co-authored with the well-known Ukrainian historian Oleksandr Lysenko, described each of the periods and provided a thorough description of the third one, which, in their opinion, includes the following four phases:

Phase I (24 February – 17 April 2022): The course of events was determined by the Battle of Kyiv, which eliminated the occupiers' plans to completely capture Ukraine; the successful defence of Sumy, Chernihiv, and Kharkiv also played an important role at this stage;

Phase II (18 April – 28 August 2022) involved the concentration of the enemy's main efforts in eastern Ukraine and included the second strategic defensive operation that created the conditions for the Armed Forces of Ukraine to move to offensive actions;

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[451] Грицюк В.М. Історична періодизація широкомасштабної збройної агресії Російської Федерації проти України. *Українське військо: сучасність та історична ретроспектива* : Збірник матеріалів ІІІ Міжнародної науково-практичної конференції 23 листопада 2022 р. Київ, 23 листопада 2022. С. 45.

Phase III (29 August – end of December 2022) characterised by a strategic offensive by the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which made it possible to liberate Kharkiv region and the right bank of Kherson region;

Phase IV (October 2022 – March 23): Deterrence of the Russian offensive in the East of Ukraine; Russian strategic operation to destroy Ukraine's energy system .

In our opinion, the most complete and objective periodisation of the Russian–Ukrainian war is presented in the publication of the Ukrainian historian Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk:

Period I: Occupation and annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (20 February – 24 March 2014) – "Front without Resistance";

Period II: Anti-terrorist operation (1 March (officially – 13 April) – 24 August 2014) – "The Internal Front";

Period III: Russia's invasion of Donbas (24 August 2014 – 19 February 2015) – "Eastern Front: The Donbas Battlefield";

Period IV: Positional war (20 February 2015 – 20 September 2016) – "Eastern Front: The Minsk Trap";

Period V: Fragile war (20 September 2016 – 20 May 2019) – "Eastern Front: 'The Normandy' Trenches";

Period VI: Waiting war (20 May 2019 – 23 February 2022) – "The Eastern Front: The Workaround to Peace";

Period VII: Total war (24 February – ... 2024) – "The Battle of the Five Fronts".

It is emphasised that the Russian–Ukrainian war goes beyond a bilateral conflict and has signs of a general crisis in the global security system, which will lead to global changes of planetary significance.

The seventh period of the Russian–Ukrainian war began at 5 a.m. on 24 February 2022, after Putin announced a 'special operation' in Ukraine and intensive shelling of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) in the east began, and Russian troops crossed the north-eastern border, as well as launched missile and bomb attacks on military command centres, airports in Boryspil, Ozerne, Kulbakyne, Chuhuiv, Kramatorsk, Chornobaivka, as well as on military warehouses and facilities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine throughout Ukraine. The bombing also began in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, Dnipro, Mykolaiv, Mariupol, Berdiansk, Kramatorsk, Boryspil, Vasylkiv and other cities and towns. Russia launched a massive missile attack on Ukraine and a land offensive from the north (Belarus and Russia), south (Crimea) and east (occupied Donbas). Ukraine's information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure has deteriorated as a result of cyberattacks and bombings. On the very first day of the war, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine unanimously approved the introduction of martial law. Several Ukrainian cities were

occupied as well as the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. Late in the evening of the first day of the Russian offensive, on 24 February, a decree on general mobilisation signed by President Zelenskyy was made public[452].

The current treacherous aggressive war of the Russian federation against Ukraine is yet another attempt to erase everything Ukrainian in the European and global civilisation space, to appropriate the Ukrainian historical discourse in its broadest sense[453].

Just like a thousand years ago, Ukraine has once again become the Rubicon that separates peace from war, light from darkness, democratic dignity from totalitarian despotism, and ultimately civilisation from barbarism. For more than 1155 years, Ukraine has played the role of a kind of shield, the so-called "Ukrainian Shield", which remains the defender of European civilisation, protecting it from destruction by various enemies. This process began in 867, when the legendary Kyivan princes Askold and Dir defeated the Pechenegs, and continues in 2023, when Ukrainians stop the latest Moscow horde that threatens the whole world.

The periodisation of the Ukrainian Shield was developed by the authors on the basis of the stages of Ukrainian statehood:

Stage I. Princely Statehood:
− wars with the Pechenegs (867–1036);
− struggle against the Torks (1055–1060);
− confrontation with the Polovtsians (1060–1238);
− struggle with the Mongol-Tatars (1223–1241);

Stage II. Cossack Era:
− confrontation with the Turks and Tatars (1478–1775);

Stage III. The Ukrainian National Revolution:
− the struggle of the Ukrainian insurgency against the realization of the Bolsheviks' World Revolution idea (1917–1923);

Stage IV. The Modern Ukrainian Independent State:
− the Russian–Ukrainian war (2014–2023)[454].

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[452] Ibid. C. 69.

[453] Киридон А.М., Троян С.С. Цивілізаційна війна 2014-2022 рр.: національно-визвольна війна України ХХІ століття (теоретичний дискурс). *The Russian–Ukrainian war (2014–2022): Historical, political, cultural-educational, religious, economic, and legal aspects: Scientific monograph* / edited by V. Bodak, M. Pantiuk, M. Haliv, V. Ilnytskyi, M. Vikhliaiev. Riga, Latvia: Baltija Publishing, 2022. P. 528. https://cutt.ly/rrx5dR44

[454] Kotlyar Yu., Lymar M. Ukrainian shield in defense of European civilization: Chronology and periodization. *Eminak: Scientific Quarterly Journal.* 2023. Vol. 3(43). P. 269. https://doi.org/10.33782/eminak2023.3(43).669

Russia's full-scale invasion of the territory of sovereign Ukraine has forced world leaders to rethink their military and defence priorities and the future defence and security architecture of Europe. In the extremely difficult conditions, when Ukraine is defending its independence, NATO member states and European leaders are gradually becoming convinced of the need to strengthen the structures and mechanisms of the international security system. Moreover, it is becoming clear that the transatlantic defence system will become more prepared to respond to security challenges if Ukraine, which has absorbed advanced knowledge and has real experience in combat, becomes a full-fledged participant. Russia's ambitions are obvious, and judging by the numerous statements of its leaders, it is clear that regardless of the terms of the post-war treaty, it is likely to continue to try to defend and expand its sphere of influence. That is why Ukraine as a state, and not just as a shield territory, is a powerful force in protecting Europe from further Russian aggression.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to significant human losses and a humanitarian crisis, increased financial instability, slower economic growth, accelerated inflation, disinvestment in sustainable development, restructuring of global supply chains and higher prices for food, fuel and fertilisers. Actually, the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine should be assessed in the context of the international security system. In this context, there are a number of problems that we will focus on in this study.

Economic disruption and inflationary spillover. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered profound disruptions in global markets, exacerbating inflation, destabilising supply chains, and accelerating systemic crises across both developed and developing economies. As one of the world's key exporters of grain, corn, sunflower oil, and other critical commodities, Ukraine has traditionally played a stabilising role in global agri-food and resource markets. However, the war and the blockade of Ukrainian ports have drastically reduced export volumes, intensifying global food insecurity and commodity price shocks.

In 2022, the World Trade Organization forecasted a slowdown in global GDP growth from 5.7% to 2.8%, while global trade projections were revised down due to instability in energy and agriculture markets. The Economist Intelligence Unit downgraded its global growth forecast from 3.9% to 3.4%, attributing the shift to the war's far-reaching impact[455]. These projections aligned with World Bank data showing that over half of Ukrainian businesses

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[455] Global Economic Outlook 2022. Assessing the impact of war on G7 economies, Russia and Ukraine. *Economist Intelligence Unit*. 2022. https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/impact-of-war-on-g7-economies-russia-and-ukraine/

had ceased operations, while the remaining enterprises functioned under severe constraints. At that stage, the total damage to Ukrainian infrastructure was estimated at more than two-thirds of GDP.

By early 2025, the cost of Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction was officially estimated at $524 billion over the next decade, based on a joint assessment by the Government of Ukraine, the World Bank, the European Commission, and the United Nations[456]. This amount equals nearly 2.8 times the country's 2024 nominal GDP. Ukraine's economy was expected to grow by 2% in 2025[457], although inflation remains high at 12.6%, and the state faces external financing needs of around $42.8 billion[458]. However, as of mid-2025, economic recovery appears more modest – GDP is now projected to grow by around 2.1 %[459], while inflation remains elevated at approximately 14%[460], despite observable easing from its May peak of 15.9 %[461]. At the same time, Ukraine continues to face substantial external financing needs, estimated at around $54 billion in 2025[462].

Ukraine and Russia were among the world's leading agricultural producers and, prior to the full-scale war, the two largest exporters of grains and oilseeds – jointly accounting for approximately 30% of global wheat exports in 2021 and nearly 80% of international trade in sunflower oil and related products. Ukraine, in particular, has been a major supplier of corn and other key agricultural commodities consumed globally, playing an especially vital role in food security across Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa,

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[456] Updated Ukraine recovery and reconstruction needs assessment released. *World Bank Group***.** 25 February 2025. https://cutt.ly/nrx7htex

[457] Мухіна О. Світовий банк прогнозує 2% зростання економіки України у 2025 році попри триваючу війну. *Euromaidan Press*. 17 січня 2025. https://cutt.ly/3rx77Rj3

[458] European Commission worsens forecast for Ukraine's economic growth. *UNN: Ukrainian National News*. 19 May 2025. https://cutt.ly/Rrx5wC8p; *Macro poverty outlook for Ukraine: April 10, 2025*. Macro Poverty Outlook (MPO). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2025. https://cutt.ly/Krx7Rp7A

[459] Hrazhdan O. Ukraine's economy slows due to multiple factors. *Kyiv Post.* 2 August 2025. https://www.kyivpost.com/post/57409

[460] NBU June 2025 Inflation Update. *National Bank of Ukraine*. 10 July 2025. https://cutt.ly/3rGC1b5z

[461] Ukraine's May inflation at 15.9% due to rising food prices. *Reuters*. 10 June 2025. https://cutt.ly/arGC0tXg

[462] Hrazhdan O. Ukraine's economy slows due to multiple factors. *Kyiv Post.* 2 August 2025. https://www.kyivpost.com/post/57409

including countries such as Egypt and Lebanon whose political and economic stability are of critical regional importance[463].

According to the UN World Food Programme, prior to the invasion Ukraine produced enough food to feed 400 million people, making it a critical pillar of global food security[464]. In an attempt to disrupt the sowing season and undermine Ukraine's role in global food supply, Russian forces deliberately targeted the country's agricultural sector. They shelled agricultural infrastructure and fuel depots, looted grain and transported it to Russian territory, mined fields and farming equipment, and blockaded key Black Sea ports through which Ukraine exports much of its agricultural produce. Despite the Black Sea Grain Initiative (2022–2023), renewed Russian attacks on port infrastructure in Odesa and Mykolaiv in 2024 undermined global confidence and pushed millions toward food insecurity[465].

Before the war, Ukraine exported around 5 million tonnes of grain per month, primarily through Black Sea ports. By contrast, during the conflict, only about 600,000 tonnes per month could be exported by rail to Europe, severely constraining delivery capacities and affecting global food supply chains[466]. In the 2023/2024 marketing year, Ukraine exported 9.79 million tonnes of grains and pulses as of early November, compared to 14.27 million tonnes during the same period of 2022/2023. The influx of cheaper Ukrainian grain into neighbouring markets has caused losses estimated at €417 million for farmers in Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovakia, creating trade tensions and complicating Ukraine's relations with these states.

Although Ukraine succeeded in restoring its agricultural exports to nearly pre-war levels – reaching $24.5 billion in 2024[467], including substantial volumes of sunflower oil, corn, and wheat – the global food security situation remains deeply troubling. According to the United Nations, over 295 million people in 53 countries experienced crisis-level or worse hunger in 2024, a 5%

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[463] Брусієнцева О. Глобальні виклики російсько-української війни. *The Russian– Ukrainian war (2014–2022): Historical, political, cultural-educational, religious, economic, and legal aspects: Scientific monograph* / edited by V. Bodak, M. Pantiuk, M. Haliv, V. Ilnytskyi, M. Vikhliaiev. Riga, Latvia: Baltija Publishing, 2022. P. 840– 847. https://cutt.ly/rrx5dR44

[464] Ukraine. *WFP: World Food Programme.* 2025. https://cutt.ly/1rx5nb1y

[465] Welsh C., Glauber J., Dodd E. Russia's renewed attacks on Ukraine's grain infrastructure: Why now? What next? *Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS)*, 2024. https://cutt.ly/Hrx5R41K

[466] Кузьменко Ю. Експорт зерна з України за рік упав на понад 30%. *Суспільне новини*. 6 листопада 2023. https://cutt.ly/QrGCNcuG

[467] In 2024, Ukraine reached its pre-war export levels. *The Odessa Journal*. 3 January 2025. https://cutt.ly/jrx5GxWm

increase compared to the previous year[468]. WFP data further indicate that among the 811 million people facing chronic hunger in 43 countries, 283 million suffer from acute food shortages, and 45 million are on the brink of famine[469]. Countries such as Somalia, Yemen, Lebanon, and Egypt are particularly vulnerable due to their high dependency on Black Sea grain, with Somalia relying on it for 100% of its wheat supply and Yemen importing a third of its grain from Ukraine[470].

The primary drivers of this deterioration include armed conflict, climate-related disasters, and economic shocks, which increasingly intersect and reinforce one another. The crisis was expected to escalate further in 2025 due to substantial cuts in humanitarian food assistance, including a significant reduction in funding by the U.S. Agency for International Development. As of mid-2025, these cuts have indeed materialised, with the World Food Programme reporting a reduction in global aid coverage by over 20% compared to 2024, forcing the suspension or downsizing of assistance to millions in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia[471].

In Europe, economies already weakened by the COVID-19 crisis were hit hard. Energy insecurity, inflation, and redirected public spending toward refugee assistance and military aid forced significant budgetary adjustments. Countries such as Germany and Italy, previously reliant on Russian gas, were compelled to reconfigure their energy strategies and accelerate green transitions, despite immediate economic losses.

Although earlier projections estimated that the cumulative global economic cost of the war could reach $1.5 trillion by 2025, recent developments suggest that this figure may soon be surpassed – not only due to sustained disruptions in trade and inflationary pressures, but also because of rising reconstruction costs and a projected surge in defence spending. Europe alone is preparing for what has been described as a "big bang" moment, potentially unlocking over one trillion dollars in new military investments over the next decade, in response to the erosion of U.S. support

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[468] Global Report on Food Crises 2025. *Rome: FSIN*. https://cutt.ly/nrx51W1c

[469] Брусєнцева О.А. Глобальні виклики російсько-української війни. P. 843.

[470] Aizenman N. Russia's war on Ukraine is dire for world hunger. But there are solutions. *NPR*. 6 March 2022. https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2022/03/06/1083769798/russias-war-on-ukraine-is-dire-for-world-hunger-but-there-are-solutions

[471] Nierenberg D. With humanitarianfunding at an 'unprecedented crisis,' hard-won food solutions are disappearing. *Foodtank.* https://cutt.ly/UrGyDgbB

and the need to reinforce the continent's own security architecture[472]. As of mid-2025, independent assessments reveal that actual figures have indeed exceeded earlier estimates: consumer price inflation in Ukraine peaked at 15.9% in May 2025, driven by food price increases of 22.1%[473]; meanwhile, aid data show that Europe surpassed U.S. military assistance for the first time since 2022, with €72 bn pledged compared to the U.S.'s €65 bn by early 2025[474]. When combined with the existing burden of humanitarian aid, military assistance, industrial disruptions, and infrastructure losses, the total cost of the war is likely to exceed earlier estimates.

Western sanctions against Russia have included freezing $643 billion of the Central Bank's foreign currency reserves,[475] disconnecting major Russian banks from the SWIFT payment system, restricting access to high technology exports, and prohibiting the use of sovereign wealth funds, significantly limiting the Kremlin's financial manoeuvrability[476].

As Professor Sebastian Galiani[477] observes, the war has reshaped the structure of the global economy in at least three fundamental ways: by accelerating the energy transition, pushing inflation to unprecedented levels, and destabilising the financial foundations of emerging markets. The feedback loop created by disrupted grain and fertiliser exports, logistical breakdowns, and geopolitical fragmentation threatens to redefine the rules of global trade and investment for years to come.

Demographic crisis and humanitarian fallout. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has precipitated one of the largest displacement crises in Europe since World War II. As of August 2024, approximately 6.7 million

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[472] Monaghan S. Europe's trillion dollar opportunity to save Ukraine—and the free world. *Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS).* 5 March 2025. https://cutt.ly/2rx6dXwv

[473] Ukraine's May inflation at 15.9% due to rising food prices. *Reuters*. 10 June 2025. https://cutt.ly/arGC0tXg

[474] Cook L. NATO to coordinate regular and large-scale arm deliveries to Ukraine. Most will be bought in the US. *AP: Associated Press*. 6 August 2025. https://cutt.ly/IrGC1N2G

[475] Bernstam M. Central bank sanctions strike at the foundations of Russia's economy. *Financial Times.* 3 March 2022. https://www.ft.com/content/3f1c7151-93ed-48ff-a23c-496320919621

[476] Wiseman P., McHugh D. The Worldwide effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. *Learning English*. 6 March 2022. https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/the-worldwide-effects-of-russia-s-invasion-of-ukraine/6468531.html

[477] Як війна в Україні змінює економічний і бізнесовий ландшафти країн, регіонів та світу. Пояснює професор економіки Себастіан Ґаліані. *Forbes Україна*. 25 серпня 2023. https://forbes.ua/money/velika-ekonomichna-perebudova-25082023-15642

Ukrainians fled abroad, including over 6.2 million residing in European countries. Also, Ukraine still hosts around 3.7 million internally displaced persons[478]. At the onset of the full-scale invasion in early 2022, displacement figures were already unprecedented: by late April 2022, over 5.4 million Ukrainians had fled abroad, while the number of internally displaced persons reached **7**.1 million, exceeding three times the number of Syrian refugees worldwide at that time. The largest refugee flows were to Poland (2.9 million), Romania (774,094), Hungary (489,754), Moldova (433,214), and Slovakia (354,329)[479]. These movements have profound implications for Ukraine's labour market, demographic stability, and post-war recovery.

Since 24 February 2022, almost 6.5 million people fleeing Ukraine have been documented globally as of 15 February 2024[480]. By June 2023, more than 8 million Ukrainians were living abroad – roughly 20% of the country's pre-war population, including 63% of adult citizens and 22% of children[481]. Despite some return migration, many refugees still held temporary protection status in the European Union. Countries like Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic hosted the largest Ukrainian populations. By late October 2023, 4.24 million Ukrainians were officially granted temporary protection status in the EU, with the largest numbers in Germany (1,215,365 or 28.7%), Poland (960,620 or 22.7%), and the Czech Republic (364,450 or 8.6%)[482]. In December 2023 alone, the number of Ukrainians with temporary protection in the EU increased by 37,600, reflecting ongoing instability and insecurity[483].

As of 17 April 2025, 6,357,600 Ukrainian refugees were officially registered in Europe – an increase of over 350,000 compared to the figures from February 2024. This rise reflects ongoing population displacement

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[478] Ukraine: Global Apeal 2025 situation overview. *UNHCR. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. 2024. P. 2. https://cutt.ly/1rx6IHbp

[479] Ukraine refugee situation. Operational Data Portal. 15 February 2024. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine

[480] Crisis Movements – Ukraine. *Migration Data Portal. IOM: International Organization for Migration.* 2024. https://www.migrationdataportal.org/ukraine/crisis-movements

[481] Кількість українців та їх міграція за кордон через війну. *ОПОРА*. 5 липня 2023. https://cutt.ly/Hrx6LfQ2

[482] Свиридюк Ю. Тимчасовий притулок у Євросоюзі отримали понад 4,2 млн українських біженців. *Суспільне новини*. 12 грудня 2023. https://cutt.ly/1rGCNO9L

[483] Кількість біженців з України зі статусом тимчасового захисту в ЄС у грудні зросла на 37,6 тис. *Інтерфакс-Україна.* 8 лютого 2024. https://is.gd/g2TYxY

caused by escalating hostilities and deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure[484].

The economic implications for host countries have been considerable. According to *Goldman Sachs*, the four largest EU economies – Germany, Poland, France, and Sweden – allocated up to 0.2% of their GDP to support Ukrainian refugees in 2022[485]. As of 2025, European countries have spent over €117 billion to support Ukrainian refugees, with the largest contributions coming from Germany (€30.6 billion) and Poland (€26.5 billion)[486]. While a significant portion of Ukrainians have successfully integrated into host societies and entered the labour market, another large group – both among those who fled in the early months of the war and internally displaced persons – remain unemployed and without stable means of subsistence. This creates serious socio-economic challenges for both Ukraine and the host countries. As a result, expenditures on housing, social benefits, education, and healthcare remain substantial. Particularly noteworthy is Poland's support, which allocated 4.2% of its GDP to refugee assistance – the highest share among all EU member states[487].

Within Ukraine, civilians in occupied territories suffer constant shelling, lack of basic resources, and the collapse of public services. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has documented serious humanitarian violations, including sexual violence**,** forced disappearances, and the targeting of civilian infrastructure. OHCHR and other international organizations have also reported the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, alongside heightened risks of human trafficking, particularly affecting women and girls. Notably, on 28 April 2022, Russian missiles struck central Kyiv during the visit of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, underscoring Moscow's open defiance of international diplomatic efforts[488].

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[484] Ukraine refugee situation. *Operational Data Portal*. 17 April 2024. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/680

[485] Чалюк Ю. Глобальні соціально-економічні наслідки російсько-української війни. *Економіка та суспільство*. 2022. Вип. 37. https://doi.org/10.32782/2524-0072/2022-37-54

[486] Скільки грошей країни Європи витратили на допомогу українським біженцям. *Слово і Діло*. 15 жовтня 2024. https://cutt.ly/hrcql8B6

[487] Poland helps Ukraine with almost 5% of its GDP, 85% of which goes to refugees. *European Pravda*. 14 November 2024. https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/news/2024/11/14/7198406/

[488] Henley J. Moscow confirms attack on Kyiv during UN chief's visit. *The Guardian*. 29 April 2022. https://is.gd/NmKnPg; Guterres in Ukraine: War is 'evil' and unacceptable, calls for justice. *United Nations: UN News*. 2022. https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1117132

The war has also resulted in extensive cultural destruction. According to UNESCO**,** at least 110 cultural heritage sites were damaged in the first two months of the full-scale invasion[489]. Among the notable losses was the destruction of the world's largest cargo aircraft, the An-225 Mriya, which had been used for transporting humanitarian supplies. By mid-2023, Ukraine's Ministry of Culture reported damage or destruction to 84 monuments of national significance**,** 514 of local significance**,** and 66 newly identified heritage sites, with the list continuing to grow as hostilities persist[490]. Attacks have also targeted Holocaust memorials, such as Babyn Yar in Kyiv and Drobytsky Yar in Kharkiv, in cynical contradiction of Russia's own propaganda.

Despite these devastating impacts, the Ukrainian diaspora has mobilised extensively to support the homeland. Razom for Ukraine[491], for instance, raised over $100 million for medical and mental health assistance, while the Ukrainian World Congress[492] has coordinated the delivery of military and humanitarian aid across continents.

Nuclear risk and ecological destruction. Russia's war against Ukraine has inflicted large-scale environmental destruction, combining nuclear safety threats, ecocide, and long-term ecological degradation. These consequences transcend national borders, posing serious risks to regional and global environmental security.

Nuclear safety remains a persistent concern. Since March 2022, Russian troops have militarised the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), Europe's largest, using it as a military base and obstructing maintenance operations. The plant was seized on 4 March 2022 after heavy fighting in Enerhodar, which left three Ukrainian soldiers dead and two wounded. The occupiers deployed about 50 pieces of heavy military equipment and up to 500 soldiers on-site, detonating ammunition near the ruins of the training

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[489] Як Росія знищує національну і культурну спадщину України (фотогалерея). *Радіо Свобода*. 28 квітня 2022. https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/foto-ruynuvannya-viyna-ukrayina/31823926.html

[490] МКІП продовжує фіксувати пошкодження та руйнування об'єктів культурної спадщини внаслідок російської агресії. *Урядовий портал*. 19 липня 2023. https://cutt.ly/nrGCNw6p

[491] Since start of full-scale invasion, over USD 100 million in aid collected by Razom for Ukraine charity organization. *Media Center Ukraine***.** 23 August 2023. https://cutt.ly/3rcqU06Q

[492] Ukrainian World Congress delivers $1.22 million aid package to bolster defense intelligence. *Ukrainian World Congress***.** 19 December 2024. https://cutt.ly/LrGCSG0J

centre and Reactor Unit No. 1[493]. The plant has faced repeated shelling, blackouts, and operational uncertainty. Earlier in the war, Russian forces also seized the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, triggering international alarm due to radiation risks and hostage-taking of plant personnel. During the occupation, 61 plant employees were held hostage for over three weeks, enduring shifts of up to 600 hours instead of the standard 12. On 9 March 2022, shelling caused a complete power outage, disabling safety systems, including spent fuel cooling, and raising the risk of a nuclear disaster even more severe than the 1986 Chernobyl accident. Russian forces withdrew on 31 March, with some troops suffering radiation exposure during their stay in the exclusion zone. These incidents undermine global nuclear norms and highlight gaps in international enforcement mechanisms.

A further risk has emerged at the Zaporizhzhia NPP, as Energoatom President Petro Kotin warned that the shelf life of the plant's nuclear fuel is nearing expiry, with no possibility of replacement under the current Russian occupation[494]. The destruction of the Kakhovka Dam on 6 June 2023, widely recognised as an act of ecocide, caused massive flooding, environmental contamination, and damage to critical biodiversity zones. Flooding has significantly affected three nature reserves: the Nizhnedniprovsky National Nature Park (NNP), the Kamianska Sich NNP, the Biloberezhzhia Sviatoslava NNP, and the Black Sea Biosphere Reserve, which is protected by UNESCO. In addition, the Kinburn Spit Regional Landscape Park with a total area of almost 18,000 hectares; sites of the Volyzhyn Forest Black Sea Biosphere Reserve, Dovhyi Island, Kruhlyi Island with an area of 2,700 hectares; and the Vysunsko-Inhuletskyi Regional Landscape Park with an area of 2,700 hectares were also affected[495]. The dam's collapse also disrupted the water supply for cooling reactors at Zaporizhzhia NPP, further compounding nuclear risks.

The destruction of the dam caused at least $2 billion in direct economic damage, affecting housing, energy, agriculture, transport, environment, and industry, and directly impacting around 16,000 people[496], according to an

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[493] Petro Mohyla TV: Котляр Ю.В. Чорнобиль, квітень, ядерна загроза. *YouTube, Petro Mohyla TV*. 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFu0F3DPQEs&list =PLlRRgZ43NI5G01gNczg8Q5LQWUZXrW3tq&index=9

[494] Капнік О. Через російські обстріли пошкоджено лінію Запорізької атомної електростанції. *ТСН*. 21 лютого 2024. https://cutt.ly/trGCMfM3

[495] Підрив Каховської ГЕС завдав Україні щонайменше $2 млрд прямих збитків — перші обрахунки KSE Institute. *Київська школа економіки*. 30 червня 2023. https://cutt.ly/zrcqP9lJ

[496] На Херсонщині в зоні лиха через підрив Каховської ГЕС опинилися близько 16000 людей. *Укрінформ*. 6 червня 2023. https://cutt.ly/CrGCBIzf

assessment by the KSE Institute and Ukrainian government ministries. In addition to 150 tonnes of oil leakage, floodwaters carried fuel residues, sewage waste, fertilisers, dead animals, and unexploded ordnance into the Black Sea, creating long-term ecological hazards and raising concerns about eventual desertification of surrounding areas[497].

Experts of the State Environmental Inspectorate have recorded that the salinity level of the Black Sea near Odesa is already almost three times lower than normal. Such changes can irreversibly affect the entire ecosystem and lead to massive deaths of the Black Sea flora and fauna. The Black Sea is threatened with catastrophic pollution due to the blowing up of the Kakhovka Dam[498].

Beyond these major disasters, the war has contaminated air, soil, and water across much of Ukraine. As of 2025, Ukraine is one of the most mine-contaminated areas in the world[499]. Toxic emissions from industrial sites, oil leaks, and disrupted sewage systems have polluted ecosystems and threaten long-term public health.

The nuclear threat has been further underscored by multiple missile overflights of Ukraine's other nuclear power plants: three Russian cruise missiles passed over the South Ukraine (Pivdennoukrainsk) NPP on 16 April 2022, two over the Khmelnytskyi NPP on 25 April, and two more over the Zaporizhzhia NPP on 26 April – the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster – each incident carrying the potential for catastrophic consequences.

Russia's actions in Ukraine demonstrate the weaponisation of nature as a tool of war. The concept of ecocide is increasingly used to frame these actions within international legal discourse, reinforcing calls for accountability and compensation through global environmental justice mechanisms.

Energy security and the role of Ukraine. Russia's invasion of Ukraine exposed Europe's acute vulnerability to energy coercion. For decades, Russia leveraged its dominance in fossil fuel exports – particularly natural gas – as a geopolitical tool, shaping foreign policy decisions across the continent. The war marked a turning point, triggering what EU leaders have called a "tectonic shift" in the region's energy doctrine.

Ukraine has played a critical role in this transformation – not only as a transit state for gas, but increasingly as an agent of resistance against energy

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[497] Підрив Каховської ГЕС завдав Україні щонайменше $2 млрд прямих збитків — перші обрахунки KSE Institute. https://cutt.ly/zrcqP9lJ
[498] Захарченко К. Екологічна катастрофа світового масштабу: наслідки підриву Каховської ГЕС. *Kyiv Post*. 13 червня 2023. https://www.kyivpost.com/uk/post/18238
[499] Mine action Update: Ukraine. *UNMAS: United Nations Mine Action Service*. January 2025. https://www.unmas.org/en/mine-action-update-ukraine-jan-2025

blackmail. Despite attacks on infrastructure and the occupation of key energy facilities, Ukraine has maintained energy flows where possible, resisted Russian attempts to destabilise its grid, and accelerated its own path toward energy independence. The country is now a testing ground for distributed energy resilience, with growing investments in renewables, energy efficiency, and decentralised systems.

At the European level, Ukraine's struggle has catalysed reforms. The EU's REPowerEU strategy was fast-tracked in response to the war, aiming to reduce fossil fuel dependency and diversify supply routes[500]. Countries like Germany and Italy, previously heavily reliant on Russian gas, have begun restructuring their energy sectors under pressure from both geopolitical necessity and Ukrainian advocacy. The urgency of these reforms is underscored by the fact that natural gas prices in Europe rose by 20% since the start of the war, reaching levels six times higher than at the beginning of 2021. This surge has fuelled inflation, strained household budgets, and contributed to a recession in Germany in the first quarter of 2022, while undermining hopes for a post-Covid-19 economic recovery[501].

Ukraine's experience has also exposed the dangers of the "resource curse" – a concept highlighted by scholars such as Michael Ross[502] – which links fossil fuel wealth to authoritarianism. This argument aligns with the broader "Dutch disease" hypothesis, which posits an inverse correlation between the abundance of natural resources and the pace of economic development. Slower growth, in turn, limits social and cultural transformation, impeding the spread of democratic values. In this context, Ukraine's defiance serves not just a defensive purpose, but a normative one: challenging autocratic control over energy flows and promoting democratic resilience through transparency and reform.

The war has also highlighted the knock-on effects of energy dependence on global commodity markets. Natural gas, a key feedstock for nitrogen fertiliser production, has been severely affected by supply disruptions, with Russia accounting for approximately 15% of global nitrogen fertiliser trade[503], while Russia and Belarus combined currently supply around 40% of

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[500] EU action to address the energy crisis. *European Commission.* 2025. https://commission.europa.eu/topics/energy/eu-action-address-energy-crisis_en

[501] *Чалюк Ю.* Глобальні соціально-економічні наслідки російсько-української війни.

[502] Ross M. The oil curse: How petroleum wealth shapes the development of nations. Princeton University Press, 2012. xxi+289 p.

[503] Zhang Y.-T., Li M.-Ya., Zhou W.-X. Impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on international staple agrifood trade networks. *Foods.* 2024. 4 July. 13(13). https://doi.org/10.3390/foods13132134

global potash exports[504]. Record-high fertiliser prices risk reducing usage in developing countries, lowering yields, and worsening global food insecurity at a time of already elevated prices.

Thus, Ukraine functions not merely as a victim of energy aggression, but as a normative and infrastructural shield – defending European societies from economic coercion and accelerating the continent's shift toward sustainable, decentralised energy futures.

Legal order, international norms, and the Ukrainian commitment to values. The Russian invasion of Ukraine constitutes one of the most egregious violations of international law in the twenty-first century. In 2022, Russia violated at least ten foundational principles of international law, including the sovereign equality of states, self-determination of peoples, the peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in internal affairs, the inviolability of borders, and universal respect for human rights.

Since 2022, Russia has breached multiple foundational principles of the UN Charter and customary international law, including the prohibition of the use of force, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the inviolability of borders, and the protection of civilians in times of war. The use of indiscriminate weapons – cluster munitions, phosphorus bombs – and deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and energy grids have triggered global condemnation and calls for accountability.

These actions also contravene the core tenets of international humanitarian law, which prohibit targeting civilians or launching attacks likely to cause excessive civilian harm. The indiscriminate use of multiple-launch rocket systems such as 'Grad' and 'Smerch' in populated areas, as well as the deployment of cluster munitions and phosphorus bombs, underscores Russia's deliberate disregard for these norms.

In parallel, Russia's disregard for international obligations under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the Geneva Conventions, and the Law of Armed Conflict has undermined the very foundations of the rules-based international order. In addition to breaching the Budapest Memorandum, Russia has used its control over occupied territories to deploy heavy weaponry in densely populated areas, block maritime access in the Azov and Black Seas, and restrict freedom of navigation – further violating international legal standards[505]. Its militarisation of occupied territories, weaponisation of food

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[504] Hebebrand Ch., Glauber J. The Russia-Ukraine war after a year: Impacts on fertilizer production, prices, and trade flows. *IFPRI*. 9 March 2023. https://cutt.ly/jrGCBopl

[505] Memorandum on security assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Budapest, 5 December

and energy, and systemic disinformation campaigns not only destabilise Ukraine, but threaten the credibility of global governance mechanisms writ large.

In stark contrast, Ukraine has consistently aligned itself with international legal norms and democratic values, even under conditions of existential threat. Kyiv has initiated legal proceedings at the International Court of Justice and cooperated with the International Criminal Court on war crimes investigations. Despite the devastation of war, Ukraine has maintained its commitment to human rights conventions, rule of law, and democratic governance – upholding the very values enshrined in the European and international legal traditions.

Ukraine's conduct in war reinforces its position not only as a victim of aggression but as a defender of legal and moral order. As European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated during her visit to Kyiv in May 2023, Ukraine has become a place where European values are defended daily – not just in rhetoric but in practice[506]. This perception is reinforced by Ukraine's long-standing historical role in defending Europe from external aggressors – from medieval nomadic invasions to Soviet totalitarianism – and now from Russia's imperial revanchism. Such steadfastness has accelerated Ukraine's integration into the Euro-Atlantic legal and security space and has bolstered its status as a normative actor capable of reinforcing the legitimacy of international institutions from within.

Ultimately, Ukraine's legal posture exemplifies the normative power of value-based resistance. While Russia undermines international law to pursue imperial revisionism, Ukraine's resilience contributes to the reaffirmation of global norms – and to the reconstitution of international security architecture on the basis of rights, justice, and shared democratic ideals.

Ukraine as a strategic and normative shield of Europe. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is not merely a geopolitical rupture – it is a civilisational confrontation. Ukraine today stands at the epicentre of a historic struggle between authoritarian coercion and democratic resilience. As in earlier centuries, Ukraine has once again become the shield defending Europe from aggression, disinformation, and the erosion of core values.

Yet Ukraine's role in this war transcends the traditional image of a defensive buffer zone. Through its battlefield resilience, legal initiatives, civil mobilisation, and diplomatic engagement, Ukraine has emerged not only as

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1994. United Nations: Treaty Collection. 2014. No. 3007.167-182. https://cutt.ly/ErGCS90m

[506] Каневський Д. День Європи: з чим фон дер Ляєн приїхала до Києва. *Deutsche Welle*. 9 травня 2023. https://cutt.ly/irGCBbps

a frontline state but as a *security provider* and *normative leader* within the emerging European order.

Traditionally, aspirant countries in the Euro-Atlantic space are required to meet established standards before joining NATO or the EU. However, Ukraine's wartime performance has inverted this logic. Under conditions of existential threat, the country has demonstrated strategic competence, military innovation, and operational discipline that exceed those of several long-standing member states. The Ukrainian Armed Forces have successfully absorbed and institutionalised NATO principles – from interoperability and decentralised command to battlefield logistics – under the most extreme conditions imaginable.

Ukraine's battlefield has become a real-world environment for understanding the dynamics of modern warfare. These experiences are already informing doctrinal updates within NATO and shaping the alliance's long-term adaptation strategy. In this sense, Ukraine is no longer merely aspiring to join Western defence structures – it is already contributing to their strategic relevance and evolution.

Equally significant is Ukraine's function as a *normative actor*. In contrast to authoritarian regimes that exploit state power to suppress dissent, Ukraine has sustained democratic practices, rule of law, transparency, and respect for civil liberties even under martial law. Its wartime governance – including initiatives in digital governance, civil society coordination, and international legal advocacy – reflects a resilient value ecosystem aligned with the foundational principles of the European Union.

Ukraine's appeals to international law, human rights conventions, and multilateral institutions are not instrumental or selective; they are rule-based and consistent. Whether through its engagement with the International Criminal Court or advocacy at the United Nations General Assembly, Ukraine has demonstrated that it is not merely aligning with European values – it is actively reinvigorating them.

This moral consistency is particularly evident in Ukraine's rejection of coerced peace. Despite mounting international pressure for compromise, Ukraine continues to uphold its right to just resistance. The missile strike on the Okhmatdyt children's hospital in Kyiv (July 2024) and the double attack on civilians in Sumy (April 2025) are just two among many examples that, despite widespread international condemnation, failed to stop Russia's aggression and further underscore the existential nature of Ukraine's struggle. Its refusal to appease mirrors the failures of past attempts to pacify authoritarian expansionism and affirms the moral clarity of Ukraine's position.

Ukraine's contribution to European security and its principled commitment to shared values demand a corresponding shift in integration policy. While the EU and NATO traditionally apply the principle of conditionality to accession, the current context necessitates a more flexible, partnership-based approach. Ukraine's reconstruction provides a unique opportunity to embed reforms into European frameworks from the ground up, creating a model of synchronised, accelerated integration.

Delaying Ukraine's institutional anchoring risks not only strategic fragmentation but also moral incoherence. Europe's long-term stability depends on locking Ukraine into its security and political architecture – not only to reward resilience but to consolidate deterrence against future aggression.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has become a critical juncture in the evolution of the international security system, triggering multidimensional transformations far beyond the battlefield. This war has revealed the limits of existing institutional mechanisms, exposed vulnerabilities in economic and energy interdependence, and challenged the normative coherence of the global order. At the same time, it has elevated Ukraine from the position of a peripheral security recipient to that of a central actor – both strategic and normative – in shaping Europe's response to authoritarian aggression.

Ukraine's wartime experience has fundamentally altered its status within the Euro-Atlantic community. Its ability to maintain institutional resilience, civil mobilisation, and legal coherence under conditions of existential threat has demonstrated a level of democratic maturity and strategic competence that exceeds the expectations typically placed on aspirant states. The country's economy, though severely damaged, has continued to function, supported by international partnerships and domestic innovation. Its agricultural sector, once a pillar of global food security, has adapted under fire to resume critical exports, while the Ukrainian diaspora has mobilised extensive humanitarian and logistical assistance across continents.

Equally transformative is Ukraine's role in accelerating Europe's energy transition. As a country resisting energy blackmail and promoting energy diversification, Ukraine has not only defended its own sovereignty but also helped redefine the continent's energy architecture. In doing so, it has challenged the geopolitical logic of dependency and reinforced the normative imperative of democratic resilience over resource authoritarianism.

The environmental and humanitarian dimensions of the war – ranging from ecocide and nuclear risk to mass displacement and cultural destruction – have further underlined the systemic consequences of Russia's aggression. These effects are not limited to Ukraine's territory but threaten regional stability, global health, and ecological balance. Ukraine's response, grounded

in appeals to international law and sustained civic engagement, has reaffirmed its commitment to the very norms that form the foundation of European and global governance.

Perhaps most significantly, Ukraine has assumed a new identity – not as a passive object of geopolitical contestation, but as an active defender and co-shaper of the European project. Its strategic adaptation on the battlefield has already informed NATO doctrine, while its morally grounded insistence on justice and accountability has strengthened the legitimacy of international legal institutions. In this sense, Ukraine has become not only a shield in the physical sense, but a normative compass, confronting the erosion of democratic values and reinforcing the moral coherence of the West.

In light of these developments, Ukraine's integration into the European and transatlantic institutional system should no longer be treated as a distant objective but as a necessary condition for continental security and democratic consolidation. The war has made clear that the future of Europe's defence, stability, and values depends not only on formal treaties, but on the inclusion of those who have demonstrated – through action, sacrifice, and conviction – their unwavering commitment to the principles that unite democratic nations. Ukraine's presence at the core of this architecture is not a symbolic gesture; it is a strategic and ethical imperative.

Conclusions

The analysis undertaken in this chapter demonstrates that Ukraine's European trajectory, which began in the early years of independence, has evolved from a cautious search for political and economic orientation into a deeply embedded strategic and identity-based choice. Over the past three decades, the country has moved through a sequence of interconnected stages that, while differing in their immediate context and intensity, form a coherent process of transformation aimed at aligning Ukraine's political, legal, and societal order with the European model.

The initial period of engagement with the European Union established the legal and institutional foundations for cooperation, marking Ukraine's gradual shift from a post-Soviet foreign policy framework to a European vector anchored in political association and economic integration. This incremental rapprochement was not limited to formal agreements; it also introduced a new normative vocabulary into Ukrainian political discourse, framing governance, rights, and accountability in terms compatible with EU standards.

The Revolution of Dignity represented a decisive moment in this evolution, transforming European integration from an abstract geopolitical aspiration into a concrete societal demand. The mass mobilisation in defence of democracy, the rule of law, and human dignity signalled the consolidation of a civic consensus that Ukraine's future lay within the European political and cultural space. The events of 2013–2014 thus served as both a rejection of authoritarian regression and an affirmation of a value-based political order, accelerating institutional reforms and embedding the European choice as a matter of national self-determination.

The subsequent phase, marked by hybrid warfare, underscored the inseparability of security and democratic resilience. Confronted with a combination of military aggression, information warfare, economic pressure, and political subversion, Ukraine was compelled to defend not only its territorial integrity but also the very possibility of sustaining its chosen path of European integration. In this environment, democratic legitimacy, public trust, and institutional accountability became as vital to survival as military capability. The experience revealed that integration is not merely a diplomatic process, but a strategic framework for safeguarding sovereignty and political identity under sustained external threat.

In the current context of full-scale war, Ukraine's role has expanded beyond that of an aspiring member of the EU to that of a strategic and normative shield for Europe as a whole. By resisting an authoritarian revisionist power, Ukraine is effectively defending the principles of

democracy, the rule of law, and human rights that form the EU's normative foundation. This reciprocal dynamic has elevated Ukraine from a recipient of European norms to an active co-shaper of the continent's security and value architecture.

Taken together, these developments confirm that the European model of integration can serve as a powerful framework for countries undergoing democratic transition, provided that formal legislative approximation is accompanied by a deep internalisation of democratic norms and societal commitment to shared values. The Ukrainian case illustrates both the transformative potential of the EU's normative power and the limits of its effectiveness in the absence of sustained domestic reform momentum. While the Association Agreement, the Copenhagen criteria, and political conditionality mechanisms have proven instrumental in guiding reform, their impact ultimately depends on political will, institutional capacity, and societal readiness to embed new governance practices into the national fabric.

Paradoxically, the existential crisis of war has reinforced rather than undermined Ukraine's European choice. What began as a strategic orientation has matured into an ethical imperative, fusing the defence of statehood with the defence of a shared value order. This convergence of national and European interests underscores the fact that integration is as much about safeguarding democratic identity under pressure as it is about institutional convergence.

In this light, the Ukrainian experience stands as a critical test of the European Union's resilience as a normative power. It reveals that, under conditions of extreme geopolitical stress, the EU's transformative capacity is maximised when external support is matched by internal societal mobilisation. It also highlights the importance of adaptability within the integration model, ensuring that it remains relevant in an environment where security, democracy, and values are inextricably linked. Ultimately, Ukraine's path demonstrates that the success of European integration depends not only on legal approximation and institutional reform, but on the ability to translate shared principles into a living political reality – one that can endure, evolve, and prevail even in the face of profound historical upheaval.

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