

# ASSERTING ECONOMIC FREEDOM IN UKRAINE

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# ASSERTING ECONOMIC FREEDOM IN UKRAINE

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**In February 2022, Ukraine turned another page in the history of mankind, quickly emerging as one of the leading actors after long playing a minor role in global politics and economy. This was primarily due to the Ukrainian people's heroic resistance to full-scale Russian aggression. At the same time, Ukraine's fight reflected the peculiarities and contradictions of the modern globalised world in a new way, inspiring the search for a renewed, acceptable world order. It was not the «end of history» or the «end of civilisation», but rather the beginning of a new civilisational order largely shaped by two world poles – liberal democratic and autocratic.**

## GEOECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The economic environment both around the world and in Ukraine in early 2022 was characterised by a combination of global challenges triggered by the continued coronavirus crisis and the dominance of internal and external contradictions of political and economic nature.<sup>1</sup> This significantly weakened economic dynamics and limited opportunities for accelerated post-coronavirus recovery. Moreover, this intertwining of multidirectional factors disturbed the liberal foundations of development,<sup>2</sup> especially for emerging economies, including Ukraine.

Although an unprecedented episode in modern human history, the Russia-Ukraine war has economic similarities with the global financial crisis and the coronavirus crisis. Each of these crises divided the global community and complicated the search for mutually acceptable solutions: the global financial crisis demonstrated the classic North-South divide, while the migration (European) crisis caused an East-West split. The pandemic has once again exacerbated

the North-South confrontation, with coronavirus diplomacy being actively used for political gain.

On the other hand, the initial stage of Russia war has been associated with multiple, multi-level rifts between former or potential allies, due to both the new fragmentation of economic blocs and groups and the reassessment of democratic and humanitarian values. Even within such institutionally defined environments as the European Union and its individual members, both large and small:<sup>3</sup>

- ✓ countries struggled to decide on measures to counter the rapid increase in energy costs provoked by Russian aggression, primarily for gas and oil, and the inflationary shock in consumer markets, especially food, which only prolonged and deepened the negative impacts;
- ✓ the war posed significant challenges for political environments in most European countries, in particular, Germany, whose

<sup>1</sup> Geopolitical and geoeconomic changes shaped by Russian aggression and renewal of the place of Ukraine in the world – Razumkov Centre, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Economic freedom to strengthen Ukraine's social and economic development in the context of global transformations – Razumkov Centre, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Kratsev I. The Ukraine War: A Resilience Test for the European Union? – <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/analysis/ukraine-war-resilience-test-european-union>.

strength rested on three «pillars» – the US-backed security and defence complex, competitiveness based on cheap Russian gas,<sup>4</sup> and favourable trade arrangements with «cheap» China.<sup>5</sup> With the invasion, the potency of two of the three «pillars» has virtually evaporated;

- ✓ the war further unearthed hidden contradictions both between the «old» and «new» EU members, such as hesitancy of the former and readiness of the latter to counteract in the face of the Russian threat, and among the «new» members, such as significant division between Hungary and Poland on the issue of the Russia-Ukraine war and assistance to Ukraine.

It should be acknowledged, however, that the EU countries – although not without the US and UK's «assistance» – have almost unanimously condemned the aggression, decided on their main allies, and launched extensive programmes of military, economic, social and humanitarian support for Ukraine. This had another geostrategic consequence of increasingly wary attitude to China's economic expansion in Europe, given this country's conformist stance on Russian aggression.

Returning to crisis developments, another common thing for them, apart from economic losses, is an evident deterioration in the global state of respect for democracy and democratic principles. In 2020-2021, the Global Democracy Index fell to its lowest level since 2006 (when it was introduced), with deterioration observed in almost 70% of surveyed countries,<sup>6</sup> largely due to the closure of countries and severe restrictions, including

on human rights. Moreover, humanitarian restrictions in some cases were imposed under the pretext of countering the spread of risks and crisis processes, although in reality they were intended to strengthen autocracy or control over citizens.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, governments that are prone to authoritarianism or intend to tighten control over their citizens, first, can easily introduce measures, given the high centralisation of ruling party politics and public administration, and second, can «extend» restrictive periods, even when the danger has subsided significantly, in order to ban opposition or protest activities under this pretext. Moreover, seeking to legitimise harsh and often anti-democratic measures, such governments may even introduce criminal liability for violation of various requirements – curfews, bans on assemblies, and the like.

Given the precedents of authoritarianism in historical retrospect, such risks should also be taken into account in the upcoming post-war recovery of Ukraine. Of course, these risks cannot be ignored by a civil society that wants to build a free country, which is fully applicable to Ukraine.

These manifestations and brief anti-democratic trends pose a challenge for Ukraine, which has to develop an ideology and strategy for accelerated post-war recovery. In particular, supporters of authoritarian approaches can use the myth of the pandemic that thanks to quick voluntaristic decisions that were mostly restrictive,<sup>8</sup> including for human rights and civil liberties, authoritarian states have allegedly achieved much better results and efficiency than countries that, despite the difficulties, tried to minimise any restrictions on

<sup>4</sup> Nord Stream projects have played a key role in increasing Berlin's dependence on cheap Russian natural gas from a supposedly «reliable energy supplier».

<sup>5</sup> Over the past decade (2011-2021), European (read mostly German) exports to China grew by three quarters, while imports increased by almost 90%, making mutual markets almost the largest for global partners.

<sup>6</sup> Today, the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen is down to the levels last registered in 1989, meaning that democratic advances following the end of the Cold War have been eradicated– Autocratization Changing Nature?, [https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr\\_2022.pdf](https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Democracy Index 2020. In sickness and in health? – <https://www.eiu.com/public/>

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, since the onset of the coronavirus attack, China has essentially closed the country pursuing a so-called zero-COVID policy, both for its own citizens regarding international and even in-country travel, and for foreigners to visit China, which has led to social tensions. It was only in autumn 2022 that the country opened its borders to foreigners for the first time in three years of the pandemic, effectively cancelling its zero-COVID policy. None of democracies around the world could have allowed such severe restrictions.



human freedoms and made decisions mainly through democratic means.<sup>9</sup> The «coronavirus episode» produced a **politicised generalisation** stating that in the modern world, it is autocratic regimes that are better positioned to tackle various global problems and threats in all areas, which makes them more attractive and «viable» for most (at least emerging) countries.<sup>10</sup>

However, Ukrainians will hardly «buy» such an apology for authoritarianism. First, the pandemic experience in Ukraine suggests that excessive coronavirus restrictions, like other identified weaknesses of domestic public administration, were harshly criticised by society (as in any democracy), which ultimately had a healing effect.

Second, from day one of the Russian invasion, Ukrainians demonstrated their natural conscious and voluntary consolidation, subordinating all political and economic interests to a single goal – fighting for freedom and independence in the most effective way, which eased the pressure of many accumulated mistakes of the past. In addition, the fight for freedom of their country and for their personal freedom has greatly enhanced its value for citizens, significantly strengthening their resistance and intransigence to any autocratic manifestations.<sup>11</sup>

Third, the «subjective» factor of global orientation is important and eloquent for Ukrainians, namely which countries have supported their fight against Russian aggression, including through diplomatic, political, and military means, and how, and which ones remained neutral and indifferent to the events in faraway Europe and mostly abstained from voting in the UN and other international institutions on decisions supporting Ukraine and condemning aggression. As indicated, the leading developed nations clearly support the

country's struggle for independence, which ultimately determines who Ukraine should focus on.

In this context, one can observe an interesting pattern that can be clarified by the existence of two entities – a group of leading nations known as the G7 (the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, and Japan), and a group of large emerging economies called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). The countries in the first group are democratic, economically free, law-abiding, and intolerant of corruption, with some reservations about Italy (Table «Assessments and rankings of countries in selected global classifications»<sup>12</sup>).

The countries of the second group tend to be economically and democratically closed, have mediocre success in combating corruption, etc. Before the war, Ukraine leaned towards the second group in terms of its socio-economic and socio-political indicators, and its place in the economic freedom ranking was particularly disappointing, as the country remains «mostly unfree».<sup>13</sup> However, given the comprehensive assistance provided by developed countries, Ukraine has incentives to direct its policies and practices towards the first group.

It is true that many myths about the benefits of autocracy fell on «fertile ground» – better economic dynamics of emerging economies, some of which openly practice an autocratic style of governance. Moreover, the autocratic countries' economic success, especially that of China, was followed by demands for the formation and establishment of a new world order – first economic and then political. However, so far, contradictions between large autocratic countries have weakened the possibility of developing common solutions.

<sup>9</sup> Control needs were also used to justify the introduction of digitalised tools for monitoring people's behaviour and private lives, which, of course, was seen as a serious violation of human rights and democracy and could not be widespread in Western liberal democracies – Economic freedom to strengthen Ukraine's social and economic development in the context of global transformations – Razumkov Centre, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Ambrosetti E. Authoritarianism and the Pandemic: An Overview. – <https://www.ispionline.it/it/publicazione/authoritarianism-and-pandemic-overview-31074>.

<sup>11</sup> See below for more detail.

<sup>12</sup> The data presented in the table mainly relate to the 2021 ranking, as Ukraine is not represented in 2022. However, this is not a significant limitation, as international rankings are characterised by significant inertia in assessments.

<sup>13</sup> The ranking has five positions: «Free», «Mostly Free», «Moderately Free», «Mostly Unfree» and «Repressed».

ASSESSMENTS AND RANKINGS OF COUNTRIES IN SELECTED GLOBAL CLASSIFICATIONS				
	Democracy Index (ranking) <sup>14</sup>	Index of Economic Freedom (ranking) <sup>15</sup>	Rule of Law (assessment <sup>**</sup> ) <sup>16</sup>	Control of Corruption (assessment) <sup>17</sup>
United States	26	25	88.9	83.7
Canada	12	15	92.3	92.3
United Kingdom	18	24	89.4	93.3
Germany	15	16	91.8	95.7
France	22	52	87.5	87.0
Italy	31	57	59.6	69.2
Japan	17	35	91.4	90.9
Brazil	47	133	42.3	34.6
Russia	124*	113	20.2	19.7
India	46	131	51.9	46.6
China	148*	158	53.9	58.2
South Africa	44	112	56.3	55.8
Ukraine	86	130	26.4	24.5

\* Russia and China are classified as autocracies.

\*\* higher score means better ranking.

## EMERGING EXPANSION

The last two decades are noted for rapid economic growth and development in emerging countries, especially the largest ones – China and India. At the same time, the economic dynamics of developed countries has naturally been much lower. Although developed economies continue to account for the majority of global GDP, the importance of emerging ones is growing rapidly (Figure «GDP of the G7 and BRICS countries»). While in the early 2000s the total GDP of the BRICS countries accounted for only 10-15% of the G7 countries, it already reached 60% in 2021 (Figure «GDP ratio of the BRICS and G7 countries»).

Other areas of economic activity show similar situation, but catching up with developed countries in international markets is not easy. Although emerging economies have often tried to use export-oriented growth models, mainly focusing on raw materials or goods with relatively low added value, their exports have largely depended on the developed

countries' purchasing power (Figure «World exports of goods and services and the ratio of BRICS and G7 volumes»). Although export volumes have also been growing rapidly, they are still inferior to those of developed countries, whose products are often high value-added goods and services.

Outward direct investment (FDI) flows are the area where emerging economies are still unable to compete with developed countries. In fact, the former have been actively attracting FDI, but have not yet accumulated reliable capital stocks, so the exports (outflows) of investment capital from emerging economies are significantly lower than those from developed economies (Figure «World FDI exports and the ratio of BRICS and G7 volumes»), including due to restrictions on capital exports. Therefore, one can hardly expect China or any other emerging economy to finance a «risky» Ukraine, despite declaring such intentions. Instead, developed countries, even if the Marshall Plan is delayed, are likely to invest heavily in Ukraine's recovery.

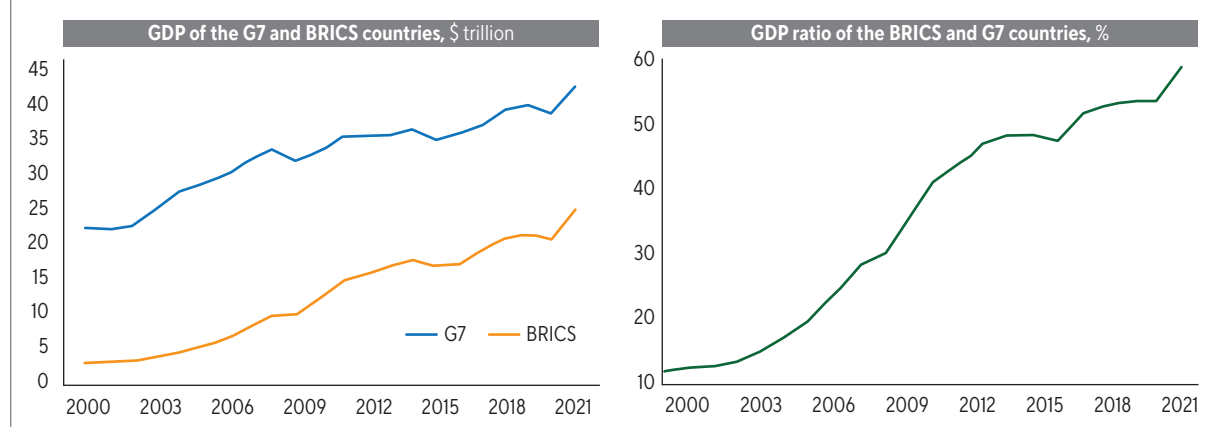
<sup>14</sup> Democracy Index 2021: Check Countries & Overall Score. – <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/democracy-index-2021-1644567197-1>.

<sup>15</sup> Index of Economic Freedom. – [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Index\\_of\\_Economic\\_Freedom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Index_of_Economic_Freedom).

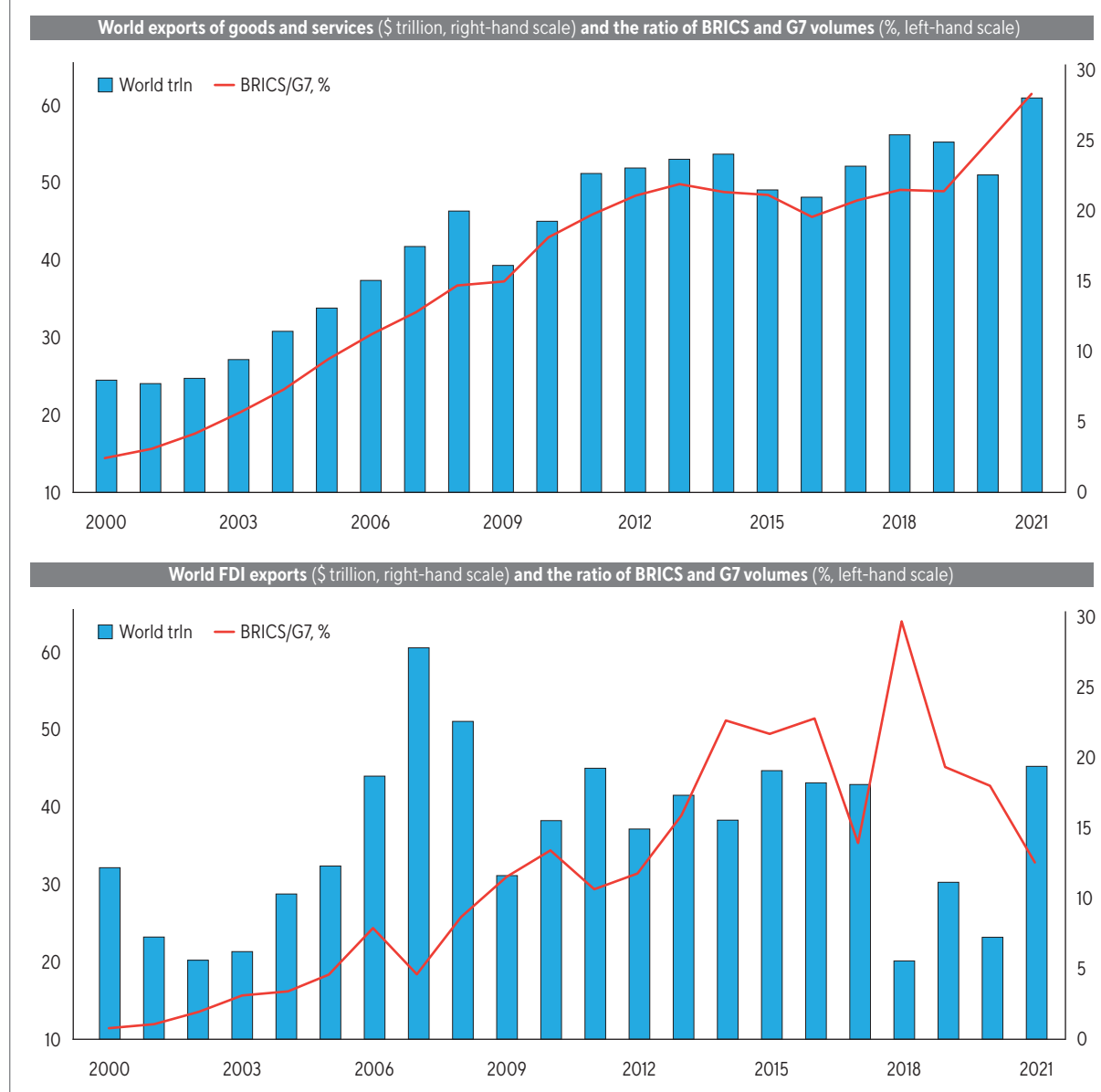
<sup>16</sup> Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI). – <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

### GDP RATIO OF THE BRICS AND G7 COUNTRIES



### WORLD FDI EXPORTS AND THE RATIO OF BRICS AND G7 VOLUMES



Consequently, the situation in international economic relations has deteriorated since the outbreak of war in 2022 for obvious reasons. Losses and even **breakdowns in value chains** in 2020-2021 have highlighted the need for their renovation in the post-pandemic period. However, given the significant changes driven by the search for new partnerships and attempts to establish new production chains, it has become clear that most old chains will hardly remain as economically viable as before, or there will be no need to restore them, as no one will change new links once again. Moreover, the Russian aggression almost negated the possibility of integration expansion, as it became clear that the accumulated political risk factors would outweigh the potential benefits of economic efficiency and effectiveness. In other words, both governments and corporations must increasingly recognise the expansion of socio-political risks, although this may significantly increase production costs.<sup>18</sup>

To a large extent, this is the reason why the developed countries, within their new economic policies, undertake massive attempts to «bring back» industrial production from emerging economies, where they were previously withdrawn as foreign direct investment (reshoring), to reduce economic contacts with opponent countries and expand cooperation with partner countries (friend-shoring), to step up cooperation within the integration and institutional formations, which, in addition to partner countries, involve countries that can become reliable economic and political partners (fragmentegration). All this should result in the creation of new value chains resilient to external shocks.

The growing economic might of large emerging economies adds another global systemic challenge. Since these countries largely reject the values and practices of liberal democracy and often gravitate towards an autocratic format of governance,<sup>19</sup>

this encourages the spread of ideas and embodiments of autocracy. In other words, large emerging economies accompanied by autocratic systems of governance is a sign of modern times.

Autocratic regimes, such as China's, have been quite successful in demonstrating their economic and technological progress to convince other emerging nations of the «development without democracy» model. As a result, the retreat of democracy leads to the expansion of not only authoritarians, but also of aggressive populists.<sup>20</sup>

As traditional global institutions, such as the UN, WTO, World Bank, ILO and others, lose their ability to respond to threats to humanity in a consolidated manner, the initiative is seized by «regional» entities, with the global axis of power shifting from the Atlantic-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, as this region is increasingly demonstrating leadership in the economy.<sup>21</sup> Since the vast majority of countries in the region are emerging economies striving to get rid of this status as soon as possible, they easily search for economic (and thus political) partners.

Of course, contradictions associated with growth goals or simply the search for «rent» from partnerships with competing leading countries are almost unavoidable here, often causing or intensifying the existing confrontations.<sup>22</sup> However, this is not a big problem for emerging economies that are ready to implement autocratic levers of governance.

These processes have another side. Oddly enough, the establishment of independence of emerging economies in the last decade has seen the growth of national consciousness and strengthening of national identification (and thus nationalism in general) around the world, which was initially perceived as further displacement of liberal sentiments and

<sup>18</sup> Ferguson R.W.Jr. Economy: The New Shortage? – ISPI, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/economy-new-shortage-32627>.

<sup>19</sup> ... and China and Russia, as indicated, are generally classified as autocratic countries.

<sup>20</sup> Aron H., Holland E. Beyond the «End of History»: Nationalism, Liberalism and the War in Ukraine. – IAI, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/beyond-end-history-nationalism-liberalism-and-war-ukraine>.

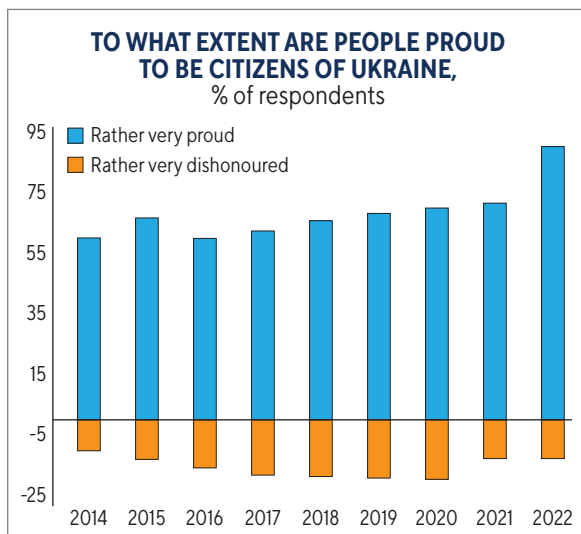
<sup>21</sup> Madhav R. New Order with a Blend of Western Liberalism and Eastern Civilizational Nationalism. – Institut Montaigne, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/analysis/new-order-blend-western-liberalism-and-eastern-civilizational-nationalism>.

<sup>22</sup> One of such the newly formed alliances (14 July 2022) is the so-called I2U2 Group, consisting of the United States, the UAE, India and Israel, whose interests are focused on the Indo-Asian region. At the same time, Saudi Arabia, which together with the UAE is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, is strengthening ties with China and even floating the idea of petroyuan as a tool for global de-dollarisation. In such circumstances, the deterioration of relations between the UAE and Saudi Arabia is only a matter of time.



weakening of liberal democracies. At the same time, another ideological dimension, in which nationalism and the national consciousness are primarily aimed at gaining independence, usually from a centre that tries to dictate its terms in any conditions (exactly what Russia has been doing throughout the years of Ukraine's independence), was effectively ignored. In other words, the goals of strengthening national identification correlate with the main tenets of liberal democracy – freedom and liberation of human potential.

Although shaping of a common national identity in Ukraine is far from over, recent sociological surveys by the Razumkov Centre show that the fight against the Russian aggressor has significantly accelerated the formation of the Ukrainian political nation and strengthened its national foundations. For example, even before the war, more than 72% of respondents said they were proud of their Ukrainian citizenship. In August 2022, their share already exceeded 90% (Figure «To what extent are people proud to be citizens of Ukraine»):<sup>23</sup>



So, the war has strengthened the Ukrainian national identity, which is inherently opposed to the anti-liberal and anti-democratic Russian

identity and rests on the values of liberal democracy, which must be defended by a sovereign and independent Ukrainian state.<sup>24</sup>

And as long as there is a significant Russian threat, the ideas of national identity may continue to be those liberal democratic forces, which also serve as a good basis for the irreversibility of Ukraine's choice of an updated system of coordinates.

## **SOCIAL BASIS OF ECONOMIC FREEDOMS IN UKRAINE**

While strengthening of national identity is the ideological and political basis for Ukraine's recovery, the economic basis is yet to be determined, as the idea of liberalising the economic space has rather limited acceptance and support.

To a large extent, this non-acceptance is due to restrictive way of thinking of previous Ukrainian governments. Instead of freeing economic decisions from political and politicised pressure, supporting and assisting businesses in the protection of their resources, and helping households and individuals to freely use their capabilities, skills and qualifications, the «caring» government has always tried to interfere in economic decision-making, limit both production and social activity, and thus increase the citizens' dependence of citizens on political decisions.

As long as the country's socio-political and socio-economic policy is implemented within a «restrictive framework», Ukraine risks to stay among the European «underdogs». On the other hand, the Ukrainians' fight for freedom against Russian aggressors has changed the situation, which is reflected in the growing value of freedom for citizens and a better perception of liberal values in general.

In particular, Ukrainian citizens attach much greater value to freedom. When asked to choose what is more important – freedom or

<sup>23</sup> Based on the results of a sociological survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre's sociological service in cooperation with the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation from 5 to 12 August 2022. 2,024 respondents aged 18+ were interviewed. The theoretical sampling error does not exceed 2.3%. Additional systematic sample deviations may be caused by the consequences of Russian aggression, in particular, the forced evacuation of millions of citizens. – <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/den-nezalezhnosti-ukrainy-serpen-2022p>.

<sup>24</sup> Aron H., Holland E. Beyond the «End of History»: Nationalism, Liberalism and the War in Ukraine. – <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/beyond-end-history-nationalism-liberalism-and-war-ukraine>.

equality, 71% of respondents choose freedom (64% in 2020).<sup>25</sup> In recent years, the public preferred «living in a society where everything is regulated by the state, but with no excessive social inequality» (from 2014 to 2021, this view was shared by 48% to 55% of respondents). But the most recent survey showed a decrease in this figure to 40%.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, if the alternative view that «it is better to live in society of individual freedom with everyone bearing personal responsibility and fending for oneself» resonated with 26% to 36% of respondents in 2014-2021, then the last survey showed their increase to 42%. Now the shares of those who share these two viewpoints are not statistically different.

Similarly, Ukrainians have become more appreciative of democracy. Compared to 2010-2021, when the share of respondents who considered democracy as the most desirable type of government was in the range of 48-56%, and those who preferred an authoritarian rule were in the range of 18-24%, the situation changed dramatically in 2022. According to a survey conducted in September-October 2022, the share of democracy supporters increased to 68%, while the share of authoritarianism supporters plunged to 11.5%. Notably, the share of democracy supporters has increased in all regions of Ukraine.

Attitudes towards the role of the state in the economy are also changing. In matters of economic policy, Ukrainians still favour state regulation mechanisms over market instruments. At the same time, while in 2018 the majority (59%) of respondents supported an active role of the state in managing economic processes and controlling prices, now they represent only a relative majority (46%). The share of those who want the state not to intervene in economic processes and control prices (that is, market should decide everything) increased from 11% to 22.5%. Also, in 2018, as many as 46% of Ukrainians approved expanding the public sector of the economy and returning previously privatised enterprises

to state ownership, while only 15% were in favour of privatising state-owned enterprises and prioritising the development of the private sector. In 2022, the ratio of supporters of these two positions was 36% to 27%. In other words, support of the public sector of still prevails, but it is no longer dominant. All the more important is the fact that liberal views are more common among younger voters.

The war has significantly weakened the administrative and fiscal control over the businesses that remained in the country. Moreover, this weakening allowed some of them to remain afloat. The approaching victorious end of the war is already triggering the search for new tax extractions (allegedly to improve the public finance situation and to meet the IMF recommendations) along with the cancellation of benefits and allowances. In other words, the risks of stronger post-war expansion of fiscalisation of the country's economic environment are clearly increasing.

Therefore, no matter how much the authorities are tempted to resume «tightening the screws», they must take into account the growing public commitment to freedom, including in the economic sphere. Therefore, certain economic measures introduced during the war should continue in peacetime:

- ✓ reduced taxation, rent and social payments for those businesses that have suffered the most from the aggression but continue to operate;
- ✓ increased special funding and financial support for enterprises that produce and supply military and defence products, as well as medical and protective equipment;
- ✓ targeted financial and monetary support for small and micro enterprises, the introduction of wider credit lines, and deferred loan repayments for those enterprises that continued to operate during the war.

<sup>25</sup> Political and ideological orientations of Ukrainian citizens in the face of Russian aggression – National Security and Defence, No 3-4, 2022, [https://razumkov.org.ua/images/journal/NSD189-190\\_2022\\_ukr.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/images/journal/NSD189-190_2022_ukr.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## A REASON FOR OPTIMISM?<sup>27</sup>

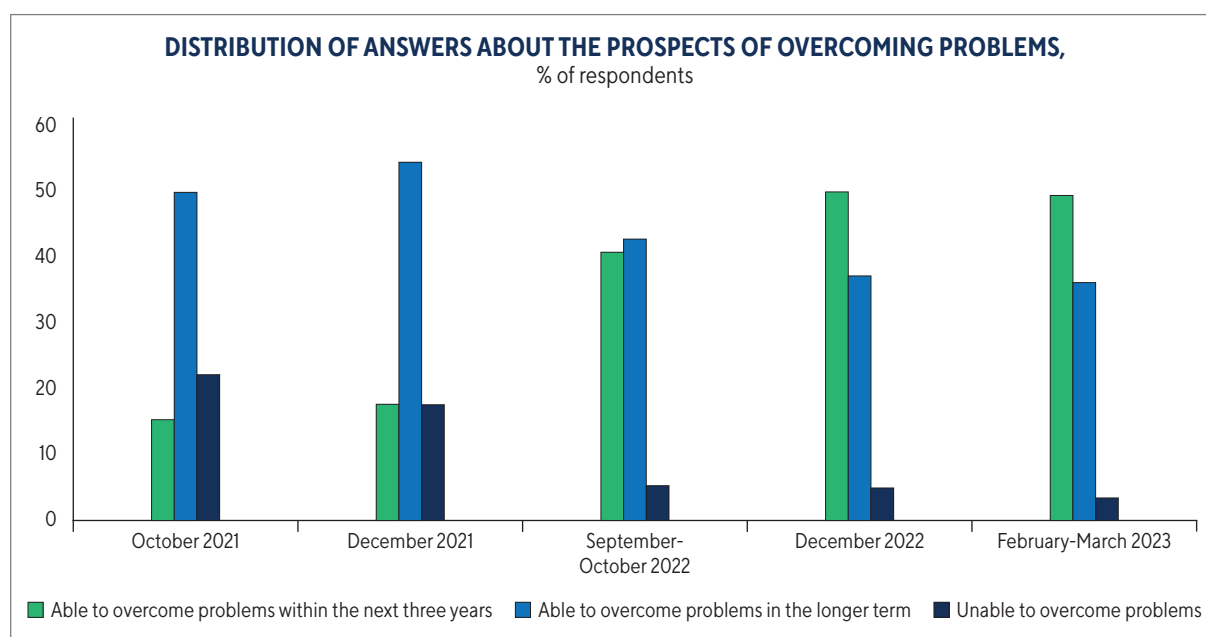
Although rebuilding the country is difficult and long process, the victorious end of the war will provide a positive impetus for decisive transformations. The problem of corruption is an important caveat, but most Ukrainians haven't noticed an increase in corruption since the onset of the war, and one in five even noted a decrease in corruption.

<b>ASSESSMENT OF CORRUPTION IN UKRAINE,</b> % of respondents	
The level of corruption is now lower than before 24 February 2022	20.8
The level of corruption is now higher than before 24 February 2022	32.9
The level of corruption is now the same as before 24 February 2022	29.7
Hard to say	16.6

This indicates that the current level of the problem will at least remain the same, and the chances to address it will be increasing with the prospects of Ukraine's victory and the

return to civilian life of thousands of Ukrainians who will be particularly unforgiving of corrupt officials. One can assume that being a corrupt official in a victorious post-war Ukraine will not only be economically unprofitable but also extremely risky. International practice also confirms that the expansion of economic freedoms and the reduction of the role of the state in the economy inversely form a solid basis for curbing corruption.

Finally, Ukrainians have become much more confident. More specifically, almost half of our compatriots are convinced that Ukraine will be able to overcome existing problems and difficulties in the next three years, although only 15-20% shared this view at the end of the «quiet» 2021 (Figure «*Distribution of answers about the prospects of overcoming problems*»). And when talking about the country's future, more than 72% believe that «Ukraine will be a highly developed, democratic, and influential European country». This confidence is based on people's belief in their own strength, the rightness of their struggle, and their commitment to the European choice and the values of freedom and democracy.



<sup>27</sup> Based on the results of a sociological survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre's sociological service from 22 February to 1 March 2023.