



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



building  
local  
promise.



**Razumkov**  
centre

# UKRAINE'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOPOLITICAL PROCESSES

February 2024



This publication was conducted by Razumkov Centre as part of its project implemented under the USAID/ENGAGE activity, which is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Pact. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Pact and its implementing partners and do not necessary reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

# UKRAINE'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOPOLITICAL PROCESSES

Mykhailo PASHKOV,  
Co-Director, Foreign Relations and International Security Programmes of the Razumkov Centre

**Ukrainian diplomacy operates against the backdrop and under the influence of external events and fast-paced global and regional processes that present both opportunities and challenges for our country. In particular, the world faces deepening polarisation, confrontations between global powers, explosive conflicts in various regions, internal political processes in the United States and the European Union, and so on.**

**Despite these challenges, Ukrainian diplomacy has shown initiative and innovative approaches in promoting national interests, particularly during Russian aggression. Significant achievements include the European Council's decision in December 2023 to open Ukraine's EU membership negotiations, the launch of long-term security cooperation agreements with allied countries, etc. At the same time, involvement in a long and exhausting confrontation with the aggressor accumulates «political and economic fatigue» from the Ukraine war, reshapes the geopolitical landscape, exacerbates old and creates new threats.**

**Therefore, foreign policy must adapt to new geopolitical realities and crises, taking into account the positions and interests of allied countries. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse and forecast external trends and develop preventive countermeasures in various areas.**

## **GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PROCESSES AND TRENDS**

In general terms, the dynamic picture of multilevel external processes that directly or indirectly affect Ukraine is as follows:

- ✓ global conflict between the democratic world and the camp of authoritarian countries;
- ✓ devaluation of international security structures;
- ✓ US–China confrontation;
- ✓ internal political processes in the United States;
- ✓ escalation of the Middle East war;
- ✓ elections in partner countries and international institutions;
- ✓ a number of regional events and conflicts.

Such gradation is obviously conditional, since these processes are interconnected

by their nature, cause and effect. In particular, the degradation of international security institutions, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and the US–China confrontation are all «geopolitical puzzles» in the larger global picture of the polarisation between democracy and authoritarianism. The Middle East war is also identified as a cause of local conflict within the European Union.

### **The global conflict between the democratic world and the camp of authoritarian countries**

The escalation of multiple threats and crises, such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine, has further deepened the divide – ideological, political, and economic – between the Western democratic world (the United States, European Union, and NATO) and the camp of countries dominated by authoritarian / totalitarian tendencies, the cult of personality, and the disregard for human rights (Russia, China, North Korea, Belarus, Iran, and Syria). These opposing centres of power are competing for influence in different regions around the world,

including Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Two opposing movements are currently developing in the geopolitical arena.

On the one hand, there is solidarity and political and economic consolidation of the collective West and other democracies – a coalition of countries sharing the idea of protecting human rights, universal

<b>TRENDS AND PROCESSES OF GLOBAL COMMUNITY'S POLARISATION</b>	
Consolidation of countries of the democratic world	Unification of countries of the authoritarian camp
<p>In January 2023, the EU and NATO signed a new declaration on strengthening the strategic partnership and jointly addressing modern threats and challenges of geopolitical rivalry.<sup>1</sup></p> <p>In March 2023, the US and EU leaders issued a joint statement declaring the deepening of global cooperation between the parties and countering Russian expansion in Europe.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>In March 2023, Canada launched a quadripartite partnership initiative with Japan, South Korea and the US to jointly counter Chinese and Russian influence.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>On 28–30 March 2023, the second global Summit for Democracy 2023 was held, attended by leaders of 120 countries. The purpose was to consolidate the civilised world, promote democracy in different regions, oppose authoritarianism, etc.<sup>4</sup> The final Declaration was signed by 73 countries.</p> <p>Democratic forces continue to consolidate on international platforms such as the UN General Assembly, OSCE, Council of Europe, G7, etc.</p> <p>On 12 July 2023, as part of the NATO Summit in Vilnius, the G7 countries adopted a Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> As of January 2024, 32 countries have joined this act. The declaration became a significant additional incentive for the collective West's unity.</p> <p>On 5 October 2023, the third summit of the European Political Community took place.</p> <p>2023 saw regular meetings of the Ramstein Contact Group, which brings together representatives of 54 partner countries.</p> <p>On 20 October 2023, a joint statement of the US–EU summit was adopted, outlining the directions, means and tools for coordinating Washington and Brussels' foreign policy around the world, and declaring joint resistance to challenges and threats.</p> <p>On 6 December 2023, the G7 adopted a joint strategic statement to coordinate member states' actions to support Ukraine, counter China's global expansion, strengthen economic security, etc.</p>	<p>In 2023, Russia and Iran have significantly stepped up their political and military cooperation, with Iran supplying attack drones to be used in the war against Ukraine.</p> <p>In March 2023, the navies of Russia, China and Iran held joint exercises Security Belt–2023 in the Gulf of Oman.<sup>6</sup></p> <p>In 2023, contacts between the countries of this camp intensified. This included the visit of Belarus's Lukashenka to Beijing (2 March) and Iran (13 March) and the signing of strategic documents.<sup>7</sup></p> <p>On 15 March 2023, Bashar al – Assad and Vladimir Putin met in Moscow.</p> <p>On 21–22 March 2023, leaders of Russia and China signed a package of 14 bilateral statements and agreements during the latter's visit to Russia.</p> <p>In September 2023, the leaders of Russia and North Korea met to strengthen their military and political cooperation.</p> <p>On 17 October 2023, Putin attended the One Belt, One Road Forum and held talks with China's Xi Jinping.</p> <p>In October 2023, Iranian officials and a Hamas delegation visited Moscow for talks.</p> <p>On 6 December 2023, Putin visited Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and on 7 December, the leaders of Russia and Iran met in Moscow to strengthen cooperation in the military–technical sphere, nuclear energy, etc. In December, Alyaksandr Lukashenka visited some African countries.</p> <p>In early 2024, political and security cooperation between authoritarian countries increased, with Russia holding intensive negotiations with Iran, North Korea Belarus. In January 2024, Lukashenka paid a visit to Moscow, while Putin is set to visit North Korea.</p> <p>In January 2024, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Ethiopia joined the BRICS (Argentina refused to join). The BRICS expansion can be seen as an attempt by its leaders, China and Russia, to form a powerful geopolitical counterweight to the collective West.</p>

<sup>1</sup> NATO and the EU signed a new declaration on cooperation taking into account the risks from Russia. UNIAN, 10 January 2023, <https://www.unian.ua/world/nato-i-yes-pidpisali-novu-deklaraciyu-pro-spivpracyu-vrahuvani-riziki-z-boku-rf-12104637.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>2</sup> In a joint statement, the leaders of the United States and the European Union reaffirmed their intention to continue supporting Ukraine. 2023, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-bayden-ssha-yevrosoyuz-pidtrymka-ukrayiny/32313192.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>3</sup> Canada to initiate a quadripartite partnership with Japan, South Korea and the United States vs China and Russia. Interfax–Ukraine, 20 March 2023, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/political/898567.htm> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>4</sup> Democracy needs to win now, this year - Zelenskyy at the Summit for Democracy – Voice of America, 29 March 2023, <https://ukrainian.voanews.com/a/samite-za-demokratiu-baiden-zelensky/7027419.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>5</sup> Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine - Official website of the President of Ukraine, 12 July 2023, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/spilna-deklaraciya-pro-pidtrimku-ukrayini-84277>.

<sup>6</sup> China, Russia and Iran launch military exercises in the Gulf of Oman – Deutsche Welle, 15 March 2023, <https://www.dw.com/uk/knr-rf-ta-iran-pocali-vijskovi-navcanna-v-omanskij-zatoci/a-64996157> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>7</sup> In particular, on 1 March 2023, Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Xi Jinping signed the Joint Statement on the Further Developing the All-weather Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Belarus in the New Era – Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, 1 March 2023 p., [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/rus/zxxx/202303/t20230302\\_11033905.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/rus/zxxx/202303/t20230302_11033905.html).

values, international norms of coexistence, etc. On the other hand, there is a recent trend of increasing military and political cooperation and coordination among a group of authoritarian states. These are illustrated in the table «Trends and processes of global community's polarisation».

This global community's polarisation is gradually gaining momentum and emerging as a major geopolitical trend. The aforementioned Summit for Democracy and the West's unification around the G7 Vilnius Declaration, on the one hand, and the concurrent expansion of the BRICS and strengthening of Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea partnership, on the other, are signs of the escalation between democratic and authoritarian groups, and the globalisation of their struggle for influence around the world. This struggle is increasingly evident in different spheres of the global economy, also affecting the activities of international organisations.

There are reasons to believe that the escalation of this «democracy–authoritarianism» confrontation will shape the peculiarities and dynamics of global trends in the near future. Moreover, it is the political and security factor that is becoming the key in further demarcation of the modern world.

Ukraine's foreign policy is being implemented in the light of these global polarisation processes, taking into account the positions of our country's democratic allies.

### **Devaluation of global and regional security structures**

The following important factors and trends should be noted when describing the role of international institutions, including security structures, in the context of the large-scale war in Europe unleashed by Russia.

On the one hand, international organisations have demonstrated political solidarity and

support for Ukraine and condemned Russian aggression. From February 2014 to February 2024, international bodies such as the PACE, OSCE, EU, G7, NATO, and the UN General Assembly adopted multiple resolutions, statements, and declarations demanding that Russia stop its intervention, withdraw its occupation forces, and ensure Ukraine's territorial integrity. Other international organisations, from the WHO to GUAM, also demonstrated solidarity with Ukraine.

The process of political and diplomatic isolation of the aggressor and large-scale restrictions on its participation in international structures intensified since 2022. Russia was stripped of its membership in the UN Human Rights Council, expelled from the Council of Europe, the UN World Tourism Organisation, the governing board of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), and deprived of the chairmanship of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. Furthermore, in December 2023, Russia was not included in the governing bodies of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the International Maritime Organisation, while the Danube Commission revoked the aggressor's membership. Russia's participation in the International Federation of Journalists and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was suspended.

The process of Russia's political and legal qualification as a terrorist country has spread worldwide. The PACE, the European Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly declared Russia a state sponsor of terrorism. In particular, the European Parliament in its November 2022 resolution recognised Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism, called on EU member states to comprehensively isolate Russia, supported the investigation of its crimes and the establishment of a special international tribunal.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, the Ukraine war has regrettably exposed the inability of global and regional security institutions to prevent and tackle modern conflicts and challenges

<sup>8</sup> Resolution of the European Parliament of 23 November 2022 on Recognising the Russian Federation as a state sponsor of terrorism, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0405\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0405_EN.html).

globally, in particular, to respond adequately to Russia's aggression and stop its crimes in Ukraine.

The key security structure, the UN Security Council, has been effectively blocked by the aggressor in the Ukrainian direction. Russia has turned the UNSC into a «discussion platform», a tribune for spreading manipulation, fakes, outright lies and absurd statements (for example, at a UNSC meeting on 28 October 2022, Russia's UN rep Vasily Nebenzya claimed that «combat mosquitoes» were allegedly grown in «biolabs» in Ukraine).<sup>9</sup>

This institution's ineffectiveness is further illustrated by its inability to reach a single joint decision in October 2023, after Hamas's attack on Israel. Despite multiple attempts, both the United States' resolution and the resolution promoted by China and Russia were blocked.<sup>10</sup> It was only on 15 November 2023, that the UN Security Council finally adopted a resolution calling for humanitarian pauses in the Gaza Strip.

This highlights the crisis faced by the United Nations as a whole, as its main security institution is paralysed by the veto power of the aggressor country, and the UN General Assembly decisions are not legally binding.

Furthermore, UN humanitarian missions are unable to access to the occupied territories, such as the one established to investigate the massacre of Ukrainian POWs in Olenivka (Donetsk region, 29 July 2022), which was ultimately dissolved without any results.<sup>11</sup> The UN's efforts to address

the illegal mass deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia have also proven to be ineffective.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, At the same time, the UN International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine found no signs of genocide by the Russian Federation against the Ukrainian nation.<sup>13</sup>

In his speech at the UN Security Council meeting on 20 September 2023, the President of Ukraine emphasised: «We should acknowledge that the Organisation finds itself in a deadlock on the issue of aggression. Humankind no longer pins its hopes on the UN... Veto power in the hands of the aggressor is what has pushed the UN into a dead end». <sup>14</sup> President Zelenskyy proposed three steps to reform the UN. First, the UN General Assembly should be given a real power to override the veto of a UNSC permanent member. Second, the circle of permanent members of the Security Council should be expanded to include countries from Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, etc. Third, a system to prevent aggression through early response to actions violating territorial integrity and sovereignty of states should be put in place.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the UN's devaluated influence and authority also affects its highest judicial instance – the International Court of Justice, whose weight and significance are negated by the duration of decision-making and the lack of enforcement mechanisms, including due to the UN Security Council crisis. In particular, as early as 16 March 2022, the ICJ ordered Russia to stop hostilities in Ukraine. The next day, the Russian side stated its disagreement with this decision

<sup>9</sup> Nebenzya at the UN claims Ukraine has been breeding «combat mosquitoes» in Kherson oblast: the Internet reacted. Video. Oboz. ua, 28 October 2022, <https://news.obozrevatel.com/ukr/russia/hebenzya-v-oon-zayaviv-scho-ukraina-vivodila-u-hersonskij-oblasti-bojovih-komariv-v-merezhi-vidreaguvali-video.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Israel and the UN. Why the Secretary-General and the Resolution sparked outrage. Deutsche Welle, 31 October 2023, <https://www.dw.com/uk/izrail-ta-oon-comu-rezolucia-genasamblei-ta-promova-genseka-viklikali-oburennja/a-67259547> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>11</sup> Ukraine identified most soldiers killed in Russian prison camp in Olenivka – Ukraine's Human Rights Commissioner, Ukrainska Pravda, 7 July 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/07/7/7410365/>.

<sup>12</sup> Office of the Ukrainian Ombudsman is yet to receive a response from the UN on the list of children deported by Russia – Interfax-Ukraine, 7 September 2023, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/933556.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>13</sup> The International Commission held a new meeting and stated that there was not sufficient evidence of «perpetrators' intention», UNIAN, 4 September 2023, <https://www.unian.ua/war/v-oon-znovu-nedobachili-chi-vchinila-ri-genocid-proti-ukrajinciv-12381984.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>14</sup> The use of veto power requires reform, and this can be a key reform in the UN – address by the President of Ukraine at the UN Security Council meeting – Official website of the President of Ukraine, 20 September 2023, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zastosuvannya-prava-veto-potrebuye-reformuvannya-i-ce-mozhe-85745>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

and refused to take it into account.<sup>16</sup> On 23 January 2024, the ICJ announced an interim decision on the Middle East war, according to which Israel had to take measures to avoid actions that would amount to genocide. This verdict, however, did not reduce the confrontation in the region and became the subject of political speculation.

The OSCE is also in crisis. As in the case of UNSC, its efforts to stop the war on the European continent are paralysed by the aggressor. Russia uses its OSCE membership to stage information attacks, justify aggression, undermine this organisation's effectiveness and destroy it from within. Relevant examples are numerous: a) in October 2023, Russia blocked a meeting of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation; b) being isolated at the OSCE Permanent Council meetings, Russia obstructed the adoption of important organisational, personnel and budgetary decisions;<sup>17</sup> c) the participation of the Russian delegation caused a major conflict during the OSCE PA winter session in Vienna in February 2023.

Despite Russia's destructive and openly arrogant position, the OSCE leadership was forced to compromise with the aggressor, and at the OSCE Summit in December 2023, it managed to adopt a palliative decision to extend the mandates of the Secretary General, ODIHR Director, and Commissioner on National Minorities for 9 months and confirm Malta's chairmanship for 2024.<sup>18</sup>

The OSCE is trying to counter Russia's influence through various means, including establishing a donor field mission to Ukraine and monitoring crimes of Russian aggression, such as forced deportations of Ukrainian children to Russia.

A politically significant development was the OSCE PA resolution in July 2023, recognising Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism.<sup>19</sup>

However, Russia's ongoing membership and its use of the veto power is leading the OSCE into a deadlock. In October 2023 during a joint press conference with OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Bujar Osmani, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba stated: «... if we want to save the OSCE... we need to kick Russia out of the OSCE's door».<sup>20</sup> The issue of participation of the aggressor's delegation has long been on the agenda of the OSCE PA's Standing Committee. The pressure on Russia has been increasing recently, until Moscow finally announced the suspension of its membership in the Parliamentary Assembly in February 2024.<sup>21</sup>

When assessing the overall effectiveness of international institutions, one should admit that in the context of large-scale wars, increasing crises, growing confrontation between the democratic world and authoritarian countries, the consensus decision-making mechanism within the UN Security Council, the EU, NATO, OSCE, and other organisations has become ineffective, or even dangerous.

The current mechanism is a chronic, complex problem that slows down and impedes important decisions of international institutions, as member states have differing positions caused by domestic politics, geopolitical orientations, external influences, individual leaders' ambitions, etc. Turkey and Hungary, for example, have consistently blocked Sweden's accession to NATO, while Budapest engaged in speculation and blackmail over EU financial assistance to Ukraine.

<sup>16</sup> Russia will not accept the decision of the International Court of Justice to stop aggression in Ukraine, Kremlin says - Interfax-Ukraine, 17 March 2022, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/814848.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>17</sup> Russia is fully isolated in the OSCE, also trying to disrupt its work - Carpenter - Ukrinform, 16 November 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3787441-rosia-povnistu-izolovana-v-obse-toz-namagaetsa-zirvati-ii-robotu-karpenter.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>18</sup> OSCE reaches interim agreement on personnel decisions, Russia lifts veto - Ukrainska Pravda, 1 December 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/12/1/7431245/>.

<sup>19</sup> OSCE PA recognises Russia as a sponsor of terrorism and the Wagnerites as terrorists - UNIAN, 4 July 2023, <https://www.unian.ua/world/pa-obsye-viznala-rf-sponsorom-terorizmu-a-naymanciv-pvk-vagnera-teroristami-12317565.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>20</sup> To save the OSCE, Russia should be kicked out of the door - Kuleba - Ukrinform, 16 October 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3774612-dla-poratunku-obse-treba-vistaviti-rosiu-za-dveri-kuleba.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>21</sup> Russia says it will leave the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly by 21 February - NV.UA website, 13 February 2024, <https://nv.ua/ukr/world/geopolitics/pa-obsye-rosiya-pokine-parlamentsku-asambleyu-do-21-lyutogo-50392418.html> (in Ukrainian).

There are two important points to consider. First, the consensus principle and, accordingly, the veto power make democratic countries vulnerable and weaker compared to mobilised and centralised authoritarian regimes in the current polarised global reality. Second, consensus leads international organisations to inefficiency and inability to adequately respond to current challenges and threats. Unfortunately, the prospects for reforming the current decision-making model now look rather questionable.

### **The US–China confrontation**

The confrontation between the world's two major players – the United States and China – is escalating on political, diplomatic, financial and economic fronts. Several stages of this confrontation are worth recalling. First, the creation of AUKUS alliance in September 2021, comprising Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, was initiated to counter China in the Indo–Pacific region. The subsequent visit of Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, to Taiwan in August 2022, has turned up the heat. Second, the new US National Security Strategy of October 2022 identified China as the greatest threat and the only global power with «the intention, and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order». According to the document, Beijing seeks to «make the world more dependent on the PRC».<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, in February 2023, the US Congress launched a new Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and Chinese Communist Party. Third, China leaders' anti-American rhetoric has been increasing against the

backdrop of China's active militarisation, such as a 7.5% increase in military spending in the 2023 budget compared to 2022.<sup>23</sup> Beijing is stepping up its military presence in the Taiwan Strait, while the United States is providing military and financial support to Taipei.<sup>24</sup> The situation was further complicated by the presidential elections in Taiwan on 13 January 2024, in which the «undesirable» candidate from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Lai Ching-te, emerged as the winner.

Further escalation over Taiwan obviously poses a risk of a violent US–China conflict with unpredictable consequences.

A meeting between the US and Chinese leaders on the side-lines of the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco in November 2023 was certainly a positive development. According to Joe Biden, «important progress» was made in drug control, military dialogue, cooperation in the field of artificial intelligence, etc.<sup>25</sup> However, these talks did not lead to a «breakthrough» in US–China relations and failed to reduce tensions.

In general, the conflict between China and the US has global implications, with various countries of Southeast and Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America increasingly becoming arenas for sharp political and economic confrontation between the two powers.<sup>26</sup>

Ukraine, having strategic partnerships with both the United States and China (as enshrined in Ukraine's current Foreign Policy Strategy),<sup>27</sup> finds itself in a challenging position. The US is Ukraine's important ally and the initiator

<sup>22</sup> The United States' new security strategy: how 2022 forced the White House to reassess risks – European Pravda, 20 October 2022, <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/10/20/7149016/> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>23</sup> Preparing to confront the US: China has sharply increased its military budget – UNIAN, 5 March 2023, <https://www.unian.ua/world/kitay-aktivno-ozbrojuyetsya-gotuyuchis-do-viyini-za-tayvan-12167790.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>24</sup> «The US is quietly arming Taiwan to the teeth – BBC, 6 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67282107>.

<sup>25</sup> Biden named three important achievements in talks with Xi – Ukrinform, 16 November 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3787440-bajden-nazvav-tri-vazlivi-dosagnenna-na-peregovorah-iz-si.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>26</sup> For more detail, see Ukraine's Role and Place in the Future European and Euro-Atlantic Security Systems – Razumkov Centre, Kyiv, 2022, p. 4–9, [https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2022/11/16/2022\\_SUNGUROVSKY\\_01.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2022/11/16/2022_SUNGUROVSKY_01.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Strategies of foreign policy activities of Ukraine – Official website of the President of Ukraine, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4482021-40017> (in Ukrainian).



of sanctions against the aggressor. In the meantime, the war revealed China's obvious inconsistency with the principles and format of strategic partnership. In particular, China: a) maintains a neutral position on the war, putting forward declarative peacekeeping initiatives and calling the war a «Ukrainian crisis»;<sup>28</sup> b) upholds and develops strategic relations with the aggressor, strengthening political and diplomatic dialogue and promoting financial and economic cooperation with Russia; c) avoids contacts at the high and highest levels with Kyiv and does not support Ukrainian initiatives and pro-Ukrainian resolutions in the G20, UNGA and the Security Council.

These circumstances encourage Ukrainian diplomacy to align with US interests and needs against China's global expansion, but they also lead to different approaches in Ukraine's policy and the level of interstate relations with the US and China.

### War in the Middle East

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict experienced a new outbreak of escalation following a massive attack by Hamas militants on Israel on 7 October 2023. In response, the Israeli army, the IDF, launched a military operation in the Gaza Strip to dismantle terrorist infrastructure.<sup>29</sup> The escalation caused a wide global outcry, but the reactions of individual countries and global players varied. In particular, the EU and the US condemned the Hamas terrorist attack. On 19 October 2023, Joe Biden addressed the nation with a speech in which he compared Hamas and Putin, noting that «they share this in common: they both want to annihilate a neighbouring democracy».<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, the Turkish leader expressed solidarity with the Palestinian Authority and called Israel a «terrorist state».<sup>31</sup>

The UN General Assembly and the Security Council called for a ceasefire and humanitarian pauses in the Gaza Strip.

In early 2024, there was a new round of escalation in the Middle East. After fruitless appeals and warnings to Yemen, the Western Coalition (the US, the UK, Canada, and others) launched on 12 January a large-scale military operation against Houthi militants who attacked merchant ships in the Red Sea. The EU plans to organise a naval mission to protect shipping in the region. Meanwhile, local hostilities have intensified in Syria, Yemen, and Jordan, posing a potential risk for further expansion of the conflict.

The Iran–initiated war in the Middle East has a geopolitical dimension and has dangerous implications for Ukraine. **First**, the large-scale Middle East conflict is a de facto «second front», diverting the attention and resources of Ukraine's strategic partners – the US, EU, and NATO. Despite the numerous statements by Washington and Brussels that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict will not affect support for Ukraine, it is clear that it has become a major topic in the global discourse and is de facto a priority political, diplomatic, military and financial problem for the collective West.

**Second**, the war has increased political instability and conflict in the EU. In November 2023, mass demonstrations in support of Palestine took place in the UK, France, Ireland, Belgium, and Italy.<sup>32</sup> The reaction of local authorities varied. The European Commission issued a statement stating a dangerous surge in anti-Semitism in many European countries, condemning extremist actions and expressing support for Jewish

<sup>28</sup> China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis – Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 24 February 2023, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/gjhdq\\_665435/3265\\_665445/3250\\_664382/3251\\_664384/202302/t20230224\\_11030713.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/3265_665445/3250_664382/3251_664384/202302/t20230224_11030713.html).

<sup>29</sup> Hamas member says they will repeat attacks until Israel is destroyed – Ukrainska Pravda, 2 November 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/11/2/7426818/>.

<sup>30</sup> Both Hamas and Putin share common goal to destroy neighbouring democracy – Biden – Ukrainska Pravda, 20 October 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/10/20/7424922/>.

<sup>31</sup> Erdogan calls Israel a terrorist state in connection with the Gaza events – Interfax, 15 November 2023, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/political/947798.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>32</sup> Many countries held rallies in support of Palestinians on 11 November – Radio Liberty, 12 November 2023, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/vo-mnogih-stranah-mira-11-noyabrya-proshli-aktsii-v-podderzhku-palestintsev/32680844.html> (in Russian).

communities in the EU.<sup>33</sup> This situation could potentially lead to increased activity by Islamic fundamentalists and terrorist attacks in Europe. In particular, in November 2023, the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) issued a statement about the growing threat of terrorist attacks in the country amid the Middle East war.<sup>34</sup>

**Third**, the Middle East conflict war has sparked disagreements among countries worldwide, in particularly those in the Global South, which Ukraine relies on for support in holding the Global Peace Formula Summit. American assistance to Israel is ambiguously and often negatively perceived by some Arab and African countries, creating a favourable background for Russian propaganda and its «American imperialism» theme. This may indirectly affect some countries' attitudes to the war in Ukraine.

### Internal processes in the United States

In late 2023 and early 2024, the situation with the US President's proposed \$60 billion financial support for Ukraine is an alarming signal for Kyiv. The Republican-controlled House of Representatives, led by Trumpist Mike Johnson, has long blocked military aid to Ukraine. The Republicans, having linked the adoption of support for Kyiv to migration policy reform, essentially turned the «Ukrainian issue» into a means of pressuring the president and for their election campaign purposes. The White House's calls to Congressional Republicans and Joe Biden's negotiations with the Congressional leadership produced no result. On 13 February 2024, the US Senate finally passed a separate bipartisan on military and financial assistance

to Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan, but it was ignored by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, who instead announced a recess until the end of February, which seems to be a clear demarche.

In the meantime, Donald Trump called on the Congress to refuse to help other countries at all. In his words: «no money in the form of foreign aid should be given to any country unless it is done as a loan...».<sup>35</sup>

Given the difficult situation, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller had to announce in early January 2024 that military aid to Ukraine might be cut: «We will continue to support Ukraine... that does not mean that we are going to support them at the same level of military funding that we did in 2022 and 2023».<sup>36</sup>

The conflict over the Ukrainian issue had both local resonance and longer-term consequences, especially in view of the upcoming US presidential election. While Donald Trump is confidently winning the primaries among Republican candidates, he also has a higher support rating than Joe Biden, according to the January 2024 surveys.<sup>37</sup> Given Mr Trump's unpredictability, US congressmen have rightly introduced provisions to the National Defence Act to prevent any US president from withdrawing from NATO without Congressional approval.<sup>38</sup>

Despite public declarations of support, the US state and political establishment is cautiously sceptical about the prospects of war in Ukraine. According to unofficial sources, the US leadership is developing a defensive strategy to assist Ukraine, which

<sup>33</sup> The European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement\\_23\\_5527](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_5527).

<sup>34</sup> Germany warns of increased risk of terrorist attacks due to war in the Middle East - European Pravda, 29 November 2023, <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2023/11/29/7174571/> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>35</sup> Trump urges Republicans not to support foreign aid package in the Senate - Ukrinform, 11 February 2024, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3825570-trump-zaklikav-respublikanciv-ne-pidtrimuvati-paket-zovnisnoi-dopomogi-v-senati.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>36</sup> Suspilne. News. 4 January 2024, <https://suspilne.media/654372-ssa-ne-pidtrimuvatimut-vijskove-finansuvanna-ukraini-na-minulomu-rivni-adze-v-comu-nemae-potrebi-miller/> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>37</sup> Reuters poll: Trump widens gap with Biden - European pravda, 25 January 2024, <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2024/01/25/7178235/> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>38</sup> Congress bans any president from unilaterally «withdrawing» the United States from NATO - UNIAN, 15 December 2023, <https://www.unian.ua/world/kongres-zaboroniv-bud-yakomu-prezidentu-v-odnostoronnomu-poryadku-vivoditi-ssa-z-nato-12484566.html> (in Ukrainian).

will focus on repelling Russian offensives and strengthening the country's armed forces and economy, rather than liberating its occupied territories.<sup>39</sup>

In general, the dynamics of internal processes in the United States pose challenges both directly for Ukraine and in a wider context, as the prospects of limiting US support create an unfavourable background for negotiations on the Security Cooperation Agreement and send a negative signal to other partners, in particular, members of the Ramstein group. At the same time, the complications with assistance to Kyiv embolden the aggressor, which hopes for the «fatigue» among Ukraine's allies in the war of attrition and for possible changes in the US foreign policy after the presidential election (more on this below).

For Kyiv, maintaining political partnership and military and financial assistance from the United States is a priority and an important prerequisite for a consolidated international opposition to the aggressor.

### **Electoral processes in partner countries and international institutions**

In 2024, parliamentary and presidential elections are scheduled in more than 70 countries, including the United States, India, the United Kingdom, a number of countries in Europe, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, etc.<sup>40</sup> The massive rotation of state and political establishment globally will, one way or another, affect both the geopolitical situation in general and Ukraine's bilateral relations with partners. One should note the following important points. First, the so-called «elections» in countries like Russia, Belarus,

Iran, and North Korea are neither free nor democratic and competitive due to the totalitarian repressive regimes in power. Rather, the countries hold formal plebiscites in support of their current governments, with known results and without qualified international observation. Such «elections» further deepen the watershed between the democratic and authoritarian worlds. Second, the election results in some countries are unlikely to have a significant impact on their foreign policy and bilateral relations with Ukraine. These include India, some African and Latin American countries, and the like. Third, given the struggle between the democratic and authoritarian worlds, there is a concern about interference and information aggression by authoritarian states, particularly Russia, in election campaigns in different regions. This risk has been accentuated by the US and EU leadership.<sup>41</sup> In October 2023, the United States released an intelligence report stating that in 2020–2022, Russia directly interfered in the electoral processes in nine countries, and another 17 states were targeted by manipulation and information special ops.<sup>42</sup>

Many of the upcoming election campaigns in various countries are obviously of importance and interest to Ukraine, but the following should be mentioned as the most important.

**The US presidential election** in November 2024 has significant implications for both Ukraine and global politics. For Ukraine, the election is crucial as the United States provided the main military and financial assistance, and Washington serves as the hub of international opposition against Russian aggression in Ukraine. In this regard, concerns arise from Donald Trump's populist and contradictory

<sup>39</sup> U.S. war plans for Ukraine don't foresee retaking lost territory. January 26, 2024. – The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2024/01/26/ukraine-war-plan-biden-defense/>.

<sup>40</sup> 2024 is the year of elections in the world. Which ones are crucial for Ukraine? – BBC Ukraine, 13 January 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cj5ggj2z8jo> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>41</sup> Borrel: 2024 is the year of elections in the world. They will be a target for Russia and its disinformation – Liga.net, 24 January 2024, <https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/news/borrel-2024-rik-rik-vyboriv-u-sviti-vony-stanut-mishenniu-dlia-rosii-ta-ii-dezinformatsii> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>42</sup> The United States told more than 100 countries about Russia's interference in elections around the world – European Pravda, 21 October 2023, <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2023/10/21/7171888/> (in Ukrainian).

statements about ending the war within a day. The Biden administration, amidst the ongoing blocking of military and financial aid to Ukraine, is trying to hold Republicans responsible for Russia's local victories on the battlefield. In response, Trump's team accuses the White House of «indecision» regarding Ukraine. As the election approaches, the situation in the US concerning Ukraine is expected to become even more complex, including the risk of active use of the Ukrainian issue and assistance to Kyiv in the US election campaign.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, the European establishment predicts negative consequences if Mr Trump is re-elected, such as potential destabilisation of the Euro-Atlantic alliance, self-isolation of the United States, Washington's distancing from European events, etc. Trump's recent election statement about encouraging Russia to attack NATO countries with insufficient defence contributions<sup>44</sup> generated a wide negative response.

**The European Parliament elections** in June 2024 will be a challenge and a test of the EU's unity. The ongoing war in Europe and complex political, social and economic processes within the EU will set the stage for these elections. Additionally, there is a high likelihood of Russia interfering and attempting to disorient public opinion and increase distrust in EU institutions. Preliminary estimates suggest that the coalition of centrist forces, including the European People's Party, Socialists and Democrats will retain the leading position.<sup>45</sup> However, the right-wing Identity and Democracy (ID) alliance is projected to gain influence. In their January 2024 study, the experts of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) predict a significant increase in the representation of right-wing «anti-European populist parties» and a noticeable «righting» of the European Parliament as a whole.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, the European elections pose challenges for Kyiv, as there is a risk of unfriendly forces to Ukraine strengthening in the European Parliament and potentially blocking support for

our country. On the other hand, the change in composition and leadership of the European Commission during the negotiation process presents both an opportunity and a problem for Ukraine. In this context, the election of the new President of the European Council in June 2024 deserves special attention.

Elections in selected European countries. There are reasons to believe that the upcoming elections in the UK, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Romania, Iceland, and North Macedonia will not pose any threats or challenges to relations with Ukraine. The likely change of government in the UK is not expected to lead to a revision of London's policy towards Ukraine. On the other hand, the results of the Slovak presidential election in March 2024 are unlikely to dramatically affect the position of the current head of government, Robert Fico.

The most problematic elections for both Ukraine and the EU as a whole may be the parliamentary elections in Austria and Belgium. The latest polls suggest that the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) is gaining popularity and advocating anti-Ukrainian positions. They also oppose Ukraine's accession to the EU, consider sanctions against Russia unnecessary and support national isolationism. In Belgium, the socio-economic situation, migration burden, regional national and cultural differences create favourable conditions for the rise of right-wing radical Eurosceptic and separatist forces, such as the Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang) party.

**Moldova.** The country is facing internal challenges due to socio-economic problems, substantial pro-Russian sentiments in society, and the destabilising «factor of Transnistria and Gagauz autonomy». Russia is actively attempting to destabilise the country through political and economic pressure, provocations and public protests by marginal political groups. According to Moldova's Security and Intelligence Service, Russia has recently spent

<sup>43</sup> In particular, in December 2023, the US House of Representatives authorised an investigation into the impeachment of Joe Biden linked to the allegations that he improperly benefited from his son Hunter Biden's business activities abroad, including in Ukraine.

<sup>44</sup> Trump would «encourage» Russia to attack NATO countries that pay little for defence - Ukrinform, 11 February 2024, [https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3825655-tramp-zaohocuvav-bi-rosiu-do-napadu-na-kraini-nato-aki-malo-platat-u-bilomu-domi-vidreaguvali.html](https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3825655-trump-zaohocuvav-bi-rosiu-do-napadu-na-kraini-nato-aki-malo-platat-u-bilomu-domi-vidreaguvali.html) (in Ukrainian).

<sup>45</sup> Right wing set for big gains in 2024 EU election, polling shows - Politico. UNIAN, 9 August 2023, <https://www.unian.ua/world/vibori-do-yevroparlamentu-2024-opituvannya-prorokuyut-uspoh-pravomu-krilu-12355581.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>46</sup> A sharp right turn: A forecast for the 2014 European Parliament elections - Eureporter, 25 January 2024, <https://www.eureporter.co/politics/european-parliament-2/2024/01/25/a-sharp-right-turn-a-forecast-for-the-2024-european-parliament-elections>.

more than \$55 million to disrupt the situation in the country.<sup>47</sup>

The upcoming presidential elections in autumn 2024, along with a referendum on Moldova's EU accession, are crucial for the country's future. Moscow is expected to make significant efforts to remove President Maia Sandu, organise a pro-Russian revenge with Igor Dodon's Socialist Party, and hinder the country's pro-European course. The stability of Moldova and its alignment with European integration are strategically important for Ukraine, as it prevents Russia from opening a «second front» against Ukraine in Moldova.

**Georgia.** The country is going through a period of internal instability and gradual erosion of democratic rights and freedoms. The ruling party, Georgian Dream, has been accused of usurping power and pursuing policies unfriendly towards Ukraine. The situation is further complicated by the influence of pro-Russian oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, who once again took over the ruling party in late December 2023, and the country's slow progress towards European integration. In an effort to counter Georgia's pro-Russian drift and support the pro-European sentiments among the Georgian population, the EU has granted Georgia the membership candidate status. The future trajectory of the country will be determined by the upcoming parliamentary elections on 26 October 2024. The main contest will be between Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream and opposition parties. The outcome of these elections is significant as the new parliament, along with regional representatives, will elect the next President of Georgia.

### Regional problems and challenges

Regional processes vary in terms of their scale and significance for Ukraine, thus having different impacts on its foreign policy. Obviously, it

is impossible to outline all external developments related to Ukraine one way or another, but it is worth highlighting some of them that are most noticeable on the Ukrainian track and are meaningful for Kyiv.

**The European Union.** Current problems in the EU that have a direct impact on Ukraine include the following:

✓ **Growth of political instability in the EU countries, public distrust of traditional democratic institutions and the rise of right-wing radical forces,** are due to economic difficulties caused by the war, social stratification, internal ethnic and demographic factors, as well as migration pressure, including a large influx of refugees from Ukraine (more than 4 million have been granted temporary protection in Europe). Socio-economic issues, such as gradual accumulation of «resource fatigue» in the EU economy from the prolonged war and the growing critical attitudes towards the influx of refugees are identified as key drivers of populism, political turbulence, Eurosceptic and xenophobic sentiments. These factors create a public demand for «strong government» and fuel complications and crises in the European community.

✓ **Local revenge of right-wing radical forces** is a problem for the EU and a challenge for Kyiv. This trend is due to the above-mentioned political, social and economic problems and fully applies to Slovakia, which saw the election of a right-wing populist government led by Robert Fico in October 2023.<sup>48</sup> Fortunately, Mr Fico's radicalism was later tampered through engagement with EU leaders and a productive dialogue with Kyiv. Similarly, in the Dutch parliamentary elections in November 2023, the far-right Party for Freedom (PVV), led by Geert Wilders, emerged victorious, opposing further arms transfers to Ukraine, EU enlargement, and welcoming Viktor Orban's policies that go against EU foreign policy.

<sup>47</sup> Russia spent more than \$55 million on destabilisation in Moldova - Head of SIS - Suspilne. News, 3 November 2023, <https://suspilne.media/609199-rt-vitratila-ponad-55-mln-na-destabilizaciu-v-moldovi-glava-sib/> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>48</sup> Nationalists in the Slovak government criticise Fico for allegedly supporting Ukraine at the EU summit - European Pravda, 6 November 2023, <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2023/11/6/7172893/> (in Ukrainian).

The above-mentioned ECFR study reveals that right-wing populist parties hold prominent positions in several EU countries, including Austria, Belgium, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Slovakia.<sup>49</sup> However, the awareness of potential dangers of right-wing populism is growing in Europeans, as evidenced by the lasting mass protests across Germany against AfD (Alternative for Germany) in late January 2024.<sup>50</sup>

So, the rise of destructive right-wing forces undermines European unity, threatening to exacerbate EU's internal problems and block assistance to Ukraine in countering Russian aggression and Kyiv's overall movement towards EU membership.

✓ **The dangerous trend of Ukraine's strained relations with individual EU countries due to local problems and conflicts** is complicating Kyiv's movement towards the EU. In the summer of 2023, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria imposed restrictions on the export of four agricultural products from Ukraine, which are still in place. This move is unfriendly and goes against a) the EU Regulation on temporary liberalisation of trade with Ukraine; b) the provisions of the EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area; c) the European Commission's decision to lift the embargo.

However, in early January 2024, the new Polish Minister of Agriculture Czesław Sekerski said that the Polish embargo on Ukrainian products would be indefinite. On 5 January 2024, European Commissioner for Agriculture Janusz Wojciechowski

initiated further restrictions on Ukrainian products when the EU regulation on trade liberalisation with Ukraine is extended in 2024.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, the Ministers of Agriculture of Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary have also requested the European Commission to impose import duties on Ukrainian grain.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, in early November 2023, Polish carriers blocked checkpoints on the border with Ukraine, demanding the reinstatement of the old system of permits for Ukrainian carriers to work in the EU, which is unacceptable to Ukraine.<sup>53</sup> Slovakian and Hungarian carriers later joined the blockade.

In February 2024, Polish farmers initiated another round of blockades on the Ukrainian-Polish border, causing economic losses for both sides,<sup>54</sup> and further straining relations between Warsaw and Kyiv, as the problem of freight traffic across Ukraine's western borders exacerbated.

These unfriendly actions by Ukraine's neighbours, combined with the Russian transport blockade, restrictions on external financial and economic assistance, and intensified fighting at the front, have created a dangerous situation. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs even suggested that Ukraine could not dream of joining the EU without exhuming the Polish remains on the territory of Ukraine.<sup>55</sup>

Speaking about mainly economic problems in relations with some Eastern European countries, current leadership of Hungary has taken a particularly hostile approach towards Ukraine, aiming

<sup>49</sup> A sharp right turn: A forecast for the 2014 European Parliament elections – Eureporter, 25 January 2024, <https://www.eureporter.co/politics/european-parliament-2/2024/01/25/a-sharp-right-turn-a-forecast-for-the-2024-european-parliament-elections>.

<sup>50</sup> In Germany, tens of thousands of people once again protested against the far right – Radio Svoboda, 21 January 2024, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-nimechchyna-protesty-proty-pravykh/32785637.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>51</sup> Polish Commissioner initiates restrictions on imports of Ukrainian sugar and poultry meat to the EU – Ukrinform, 5 January 2024, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-economy/3809627-polskij-evrokomisar-inicijue-obmezenna-importu-u-es-ukrainskogo-cukru-ta-masa-ptici.html> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>52</sup> Five Eastern EU countries once again ask European Commission to bring back import tax on Ukrainian grain – Ukrainska Pravda, 15 January 2024, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2024/01/15/7437362/>.

<sup>53</sup> Ukraine calls on Polish carriers to end border blockade – European Pravda, 6 November 2023, <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/news/2023/11/6/7172943/>.

<sup>54</sup> Border blockade: Ukrainian economy has already suffered €400 million in losses – Association – Economic Pravda, 22 November 2023, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2023/11/22/706882/> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>55</sup> Poland claims Ukraine «can only dream» about EU accession without agreements on exhumation – European Pravda, 7 November 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/11/7/7427705/>.

to discredit and block Kyiv's European integration while maintaining relations with the aggressor.

Given the approaching EU membership talks, Kyiv is forced to avoid any aggravation of relations with its neighbours, seeking compromise solutions to existing problems and intensifying negotiations with Slovakia and Hungary. In late January 2024, the heads of governments of Ukraine and Slovakia held talks, which resulted in a joint statement in support of Ukraine's European integration.<sup>56</sup> Also, consultations were held at the level of foreign ministers of Ukraine and Hungary.

However, one can expect partners putting forward the above demands and claims to Ukraine during the EU membership talks, including in order to resolve problems in bilateral relations in their favour and minimise Ukraine's competitive impact on EU markets, especially in the agricultural and transport sectors.

✓ ***The current mechanism of consensus decision-making is EU's dangerous chronic problem*** and a factor inhibiting Ukraine's European integration. As outlined above in the context of the effectiveness of international institutions, this problem directly affects the future prospects of Ukraine's path to Europe. Some member states use their veto power to blackmail official Brussels and serve their own short-term interests. In the annual State of the Union address, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, just like her predecessors, has emphasised the need to change the voting system in the EU and adjust relevant EU documents, such as the Lisbon Treaty,<sup>57</sup> to transition to a qualified majority principle. However, this issue has long been on the EU's agenda and given the current realities, is unlikely to be resolved soon. Although the European Council has managed to overcome Hungary's resistance twice to make important decisions concerning

negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU and allocating €50 billion in macro-financial aid, this is only a situational, tactical victory, which, unfortunately, does not address the fundamental issue of blackmail by individual member states.

**Balkans.** The situation in the Balkan region remains complicated, with internal political instability, worsening social problems, and permanent ethnic conflicts. The confrontation between Serbia and Kosovo continues despite efforts from Brussels. Serbia shows pro-Russian sentiments and aims to maintain a partnership with the aggressor, which runs counter the EU's foreign policy. The victory of the pro-government Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) in the early parliamentary elections in December 2023 has further complicated the internal situation and intensified the confrontation between the government and the opposition.

In general, the region is problematic for the EU, including due to slow and contradictory European integration processes in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. At the same time, the Balkans are targeted by Russia's hybrid aggression, which is trying to cultivate pro-Russian sentiment, increase internal political confrontation, provoke interethnic conflicts and support radical separatists. In an effort to counter Russian influence, the EU granted Bosnia and Herzegovina candidate status for EU membership in December 2023.

**Belarus.** Aggressive and unpredictable regime of the self-proclaimed dictator Alyaksandr Lukashenka remains a threat to Europe and Ukraine, as it transformed Belarus into Russia's satellite and a springboard for Russian westward expansion. The arrival of the Wagner PMC units and the decision to deploy Russian tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus heighten the danger. The country's leadership, while expressively declaring solidarity and support for Russia, still avoids

<sup>56</sup> Slovakia expressed support for Ukraine's European integration and Zelenskyy's Peace Formula – joint statement by Shmyhal and Fico – Interfax-Ukraine, 24 January 2024, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/political/962614.html> (in Ukrainian)

<sup>57</sup> Time for war, and not only with Russia. Ursula von der Leyen's EU priorities for 2023 – European Pravda, 15 September 2022, <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/09/15/7146813> (in Ukrainian).

direct involvement in the war in Ukraine. Yet, given the military and political situation, Ukraine is forced to treat Belarus as a potential bridgehead for an armed invasion. Lukashenka's regime is also a source of provocations and sabotage on the border with the EU.

**The Middle East.** This region of the clashing interests of the United States, China, and Russia is known for multidirectional and conflictogenic processes. Lately Ukraine has been trying to increase its political and diplomatic presence by engaging with countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE. This is important for Kyiv in terms of politics, trade, economy, and energy, as well as gaining support for its international initiatives, including promotion of the Peace Formula, the grain deal and the like. Ukraine also wants to limit the influence of Russia and its ally, Iran, in the region. It seeks cooperation with Turkey, the regional leader and Ukraine's formal strategic partner. Ankara, however, while declaring peacekeeping position, maintains contacts and economic cooperation with both Kyiv and Moscow, reaping dividends from the Ukraine war. The unresolved conflict in Syria poses a continuous threat of escalation. The main destabilising factor in the region is the aggressive Iranian regime, which increases military–technical cooperation with Russia and secretly participates in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which indirectly affects Ukraine.

### EXTERNAL PROCESSES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR UKRAINE<sup>58</sup>

External events and trends, both regional and global, present opportunities and challenges for Ukraine. On the one hand, Ukraine's heroic resistance to Russian intervention and the defence of Europe's eastern flank from the Kremlin has accelerated its **entry into the global democratic space, the European and Euro–Atlantic community.** Ukraine's strategic

partnerships with the leading nations – the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the EU countries – acquired a new quality and dynamism, and so did allied relations with Japan, South Korea, Australia and other countries. Ukraine's international standing in the world has grown and its image has improved. At the same time, the war saw the nation uniting under the pro–European flags, reinforcing democratic values in public consciousness and sharing the idea of the unavoidable and irreversible movement towards the EU and NATO. Moreover, the fight against the aggressor has rendered any prospects for Ukraine's eastern integration impossible.<sup>59</sup>

The European Council's historic decision of 14 December 2023 to open negotiations with Ukraine on its EU accession was strategically important in political, security, socio–cultural, and moral terms. This marks the beginning of the final stage of European integration, ensuring a new level of Brussels–Kyiv relations.<sup>60</sup> In addition, Ukraine entering long–term security cooperation agreements with the world's leading nations within the G7 Vilnius Declaration is an excellent opportunity for further integration into the Western democratic world. This process, which began on 12 January 2024 with the signing of the Security Cooperation Agreement with the UK, followed by agreements with Germany, France, Denmark, Italy, and Canada, was supported by about 30 countries. Active negotiations with some of them are currently underway. Overall, this represents an extensive process of formalising Ukraine's bilateral strategic security partnerships with western states institutionally and legally.

**On the other hand, geopolitical dynamics indicate an escalation of threats and challenges,** so Ukrainian diplomacy has to operate in a more complex and adverse external environment, as described in detail above. This prompts Kyiv to adapt its foreign policy to new difficult realities, possible problems and complications. In view of

<sup>58</sup> This section uses some of the suggestions and recommendations from previous studies that have not lost their relevance and deserve attention. In particular, see: Strategic Partners of Ukraine (realities and priorities in war). National Security and Defence journal, No. 3–4, 2023, pp. 66–72 [https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2023/10/11/NSD193–194\\_2023\\_ukr\\_all.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2023/10/11/NSD193–194_2023_ukr_all.pdf) (in Ukrainian). For summary version in English, go to [https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2023/10/04/NSD193–194\\_2022\\_eng.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2023/10/04/NSD193–194_2022_eng.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> For more details, see: Ukraine on the Way to the EU: Realities and Prospects. National Security and Defence journal, No. 1–2, 2022, pp. 9–12, [https://razumkov.org.ua/images/journal/NSD187–188\\_2022\\_ukr\\_full.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/images/journal/NSD187–188_2022_ukr_full.pdf) (in Ukrainian). For summary version in English, go to [https://razumkov.org.ua/images/journal/NSD187–188\\_2022\\_eng.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/images/journal/NSD187–188_2022_eng.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> European Council passed a decision to start negotiations on Ukraine and Moldova's EU accession – Interfax–Ukraine, 14 December 2023, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/political/954224.html> (in Ukrainian).



this, Ukrainian diplomacy should focus on the following strategic directions.

**First**, maintaining and preserving solidarity and consolidated military and financial support of the allied countries, promoting the technological level of weapons provided to Ukraine, developing the national defence industry with partners' help, and increasing the resilience of Ukraine's economy as a whole. **Second**, maximising the unity of the collective West in confronting threats and challenges at various levels, including Russian intervention in Europe, centrifugal processes in the EU and NATO, and aggressive authoritarian regimes provoking instability across the world.

**It is also important to ensure predictability and preventive action on the world stage.**

This involves analysing external processes in order to map existing and potential problems and challenges at the global and regional levels, and to identify a set of measures to overcome/minimise them. This should include both coordination of actions of state institutions at the parliamentary, governmental and local levels and increased involvement of civil society and non-governmental think tanks.

**As part of decentralisation of foreign policy activities, it would be efficient to enhance public diplomacy and involve a wider range of actors.** In particular, it seems appropriate for the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to develop a targeted programme to coordinate efforts of Ukraine's diplomatic missions and diaspora organisations (such as the Ukrainian World Congress) and work systematically with Ukrainian refugees to facilitate the implementation of Ukraine's foreign policy objectives. In the complex foreign policy situation and with growing war fatigue, public diplomacy is particularly important. The effective use of the potential of the Ukrainian diaspora, both «old and new», around the world is crucial.

The main priorities for Ukrainian diplomacy are integration into the EU and NATO. **In relations with the EU**, the obvious priority is to create the necessary conditions for launching EU membership negotiations. To this end, it is necessary to:

- ✓ Speed up the process of clarifying and agreeing with the European Commission on the legal and technical parameters of the negotiations (the «negotiation framework»).

- ✓ Complete the implementation of the European Commission's main recommendations, including adoption of a new law on lobbying. Ensure the realisation of the February 2024 government plan designed to implement other Commission's practical recommendations on all sections contained in the relevant report on the EU enlargement package. Step up the implementation of reforms in the most «sensitive» areas for the EU, such as a package of laws to improve the work of anti-corruption bodies, the Constitutional Court reform and the process of qualification assessment of judges.

- ✓ Approve and start implementing the National Programme for the Adaptation of Ukrainian Legislation to EU Law, based on the self-screening conducted by the government.

- ✓ In preparation for negotiations, focus efforts on the following: a) ensure further institutional and HR development of government bodies responsible for European integration – the Service of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the Government Office for Coordination of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. It is also advisable to intensify partnerships between government agencies and specialised non-governmental think tanks dealing with European integration issues, that is, to involve the public in the negotiation process; b) set up professional, motivated negotiation teams in different areas, prioritise and coordinate their work; c) develop measures to ensure maximum transparency and publicity of the negotiation process, including via publication of regular interim governmental reports.

- ✓ Together with the EU allies and institutions, take measures to minimise the anti-Ukrainian policy of the Hungarian leadership aimed at blocking Ukraine's movement towards the EU. In line with the roadmap prepared by Ukraine, accelerate negotiations with Budapest on the Hungarian

minority in Zakarpattia. Push for the establishment of a Ukraine–Hungary high–level dialogue.

✓ Continue to work, both bilaterally and with the European Commission's involvement, to resolve conflicts over restrictions on Ukrainian agricultural products imposed by some EU countries, as well as blockades on Ukrainian carriers at the borders of neighbouring countries. To this end, it is important to develop and implement a targeted and flexible regional policy that minimises and addresses existing and potential contradictions, especially in relations with Eastern European neighbours (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria and others), including during the EU membership negotiations;

✓ Accelerate the implementation of the provisions of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement in the most problematic areas – transport, financial cooperation and anti–fraud, consumer protection, etc.

***In the area of Euro–Atlantic integration,*** the focus should be on the following areas. First, actively using the NATO–Ukraine Council mechanism to better coordinate actions on the global stage, outlining internal reform priorities for Ukraine and jointly monitoring their implementation. Second, ensuring the implementation of an adapted annual NATO integration programme, taking into account the tasks outlined in the G7 Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine. Third, expediting negotiations with a group of NATO member states to conclude bilateral intergovernmental agreements on long–term security cooperation. The obvious priority is to sign such a document with the United States and continue the practice of including a provision supporting Ukraine's accession to NATO in the text of agreements. Fourth, initiating a systematic lobbying campaign to promote Ukraine's NATO membership on the eve of the Washington Summit in July 2024. This campaign should involve various branches of the Ukrainian government,

political parties, public institutions, media, and the like.

***On the American track,*** the priority is to preserve Washington's solidarity and pro–Ukrainian policy and assistance. Facing the ongoing Russian aggression, Ukraine needs to secure bipartisan support in the US Congress and the American establishment as a whole. Considering the dynamics of internal processes in the United States, Ukraine must accelerate the process of finalising a security cooperation agreement with the US, which would ensure long–term and regular military and economic support to Ukraine. Additionally, Ukraine should strengthen military and technical cooperation with other allied countries like Australia, Japan, and South Korea to step up the development of its own defence industry. Ukraine should also resist any attempts to get involved in the US election campaign but maintain regular dialogue with representatives of both parties.

One of Ukraine's foreign policy goals is to ***ensure conditions for the Global Peace Formula Summit.*** This requires a) more active involvement of Switzerland, the host of the summit, and Ukraine's allies in the organisation of the event; b) intensive political and diplomatic dialogue at the level of political advisers, using various international platforms; c) comprehensive use of the existing public diplomacy tools to promote and popularise the Peace Formula, especially in problematic areas, such as Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, the Indo–Pacific region.

***To effectively counter the current challenges and threats at the current stage of the war, Ukraine has to rely on uninterrupted and increasing long–term assistance and support from allied states and international institutions, as well as unity among democratic countries, to which Ukraine belongs. At the same time, Ukraine must strengthen its internal stability and defence capabilities, involve the potential of its society more actively, and implement successful reforms, including improving its foreign policy system, which is particularly important amidst the prolonged war.***