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UKRAINIAN DIPLOMACY'S PECULIARITIES AND PRIORITIES IN TIMES OF WAR

Expert options and positions

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In October and November 2024, the Razumkov Centre and the Public Council at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, with the support of the Hanns Seidel Stiftung, conducted two expert surveys on Ukraine's foreign policy.¹ These studies focused on the accomplishments and challenges of national diplomacy in 2024, as well as the priorities and tasks on the country's foreign policy.

During the surveys, experts assessed the nature and impact of global trends, the effectiveness of foreign aid, and the efficiency of Ukraine promoting its interests and initiatives internationally. Additionally, respondents assessed the significance of certain foreign policy events for Ukraine, identified the specifics of Ukraine's foreign policy in times of war, and the factors affecting government activities on the global stage. Quite interesting are the expert opinions on the state and problems of Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Based on survey findings, on 6 December 2024, the Razumkov Centre and the Public Council held a final expert discussion «Year in Review: Achievements, Challenges and Priorities of Ukrainian Diplomacy». The event focused on three topics: foreign policy results of the year – challenges and opportunities for Ukraine; tasks and priorities of national diplomacy in 2025; and the current state and prospects of Ukraine's EU and NATO integration. The discussion was attended by members of governmental and non-governmental research institutions, university professors, independent experts, and scholars.

Speaking about the national diplomacy, it is important to note that it operates in difficult environment of large-scale Russian intervention. Ukraine is suffering enormous human, financial and economic losses, while facing the policy of genocide and the risk of nation's physical destruction. Every day, Russia terrorises Ukraine, destroying its housing, utility and energy infrastructure, health and educational institutions, and historical monuments. Ukrainian diplomats have to focus their efforts on securing external

military, financial and economic assistance to resist the aggressor. This happens against numerous challenges and threats, unfavourable trends and phenomena of a regional and global nature.

On the other hand, the war has given a new quality, activity and offensiveness to the country's foreign policy. Its achievements include numerous successful events, effective promotion of national interests globally, development of cooperation with partner countries and strengthening of political and diplomatic presence around the world. Despite a large-scale war, Ukraine is implementing pro-European reforms and making progress towards European integration. Kyiv expects that accession negotiations will begin in early 2025, including the opening of the key cluster «Fundamentals of the EU Accession Process».

While summarising expert opinions and assessments, this publication obviously cannot cover all areas and spheres of the country's foreign policy. At the same time, the research results and the subsequent expert discussion give an idea of the specifics of Ukraine's war

¹ Expert surveys were conducted from 30 September through 10 October 2024 and on 11-15 November 2024 within the project «Expert and analytical support to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in the context of developing public diplomacy and promoting the dialogue between government and society», supported by the Hanns Seidel Stiftung. A total of 69 experts from different regions of Ukraine and Kyiv were interviewed during both surveys, including MPs, representatives of ministries, regional authorities, governmental and non-governmental think tanks, university professors, independent experts, and scholars.

diplomacy, priorities and objectives of its foreign policy.²

GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE. THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL PROCESSES AND TRENDS

Ukrainian diplomacy in war operates under the influence of dynamic external events and fast-moving processes at the global and regional levels presenting both threats and opportunities for the country. In particular, dangerous polarisation of the global community continues to grow, with conflicts around the world intensifying. This is happening against the destruction of the international legal system and the devaluation of security institutions.

Summarising the opinions and positions of experts, it is possible to identify some of the most visible trends and processes that, to varying degrees, affect Ukraine's foreign policy and its position in the world.³

Expert opinions

Among the external factors with the greatest negative impact on Ukraine's foreign policy, Ukrainian experts note failure of global and regional security structures to stop Russian aggression (4.4 points);⁴ Russia's hybrid aggression in the world, information expansion in different regions (4.3); lack of determination and political will of some allies (4.2); growing military and political integration of authoritarian states (4.1); uncertainty of the newly elected US President's foreign policy, particularly on the Ukrainian direction (4.0). Other unfavourable external factors include Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine, growing «war fatigue» in Europe, escalation of conflicts in different regions of the world, etc.

Outlining external factors of influence, experts noted that the large-scale war in Ukraine proved the **global and regional security institutions' inability to adequately respond**

to the Kremlin's aggression and stop the crimes of the Russian occupiers. Unfortunately, the UN Security Council's work in the Ukrainian direction is blocked by the aggressor. By using its veto power, Russia has turned the UNCS into a platform for futile discussions and a platform for manipulation. Recall that in his speech at the UNCS meeting on 20 September 2023, President Zelenskyy proposed a number of steps to reform the UN,⁵ but this and other similar initiatives have never been implemented. The UN and ICRC humanitarian missions have no access to the occupied territories. Moreover, Red Cross officials assume an attitude that is unacceptable to Ukraine regarding the aggressor and its crimes.⁶

Similarly, the OSCE's efforts to stop the war on the continent are also paralysed, as Russia uses its OSCE membership to carry out information sabotage, justify aggression, and destroy the organisation from within. Suffice it to recall the scandalous participation of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov at a meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in December 2024 in Malta.

Speaking about the effectiveness of the system of international institutions in general, it should be noted that in the context of escalating crises in different regions of the world, the growing confrontation between the democratic world and authoritarian countries, the consensus mechanism in making important decisions has proved to be ineffective. Thus, the veto devalues and paralyses the activities of international institutions, not only the UN Security Council and the OSCE. This also applies to the EU and NATO.

The overall assessment of the system of international institutions has shown that in the context of large-scale wars, escalating crises around the world, growing confrontation

² This report summarises the results of two expert surveys published on the Razumkov Centre's website – Ukraine's Foreign Policy: Current State, Trends, Prospects (October 2024) – <https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2024/10/25/2024-PASHKOV-ZP-6.pdf> (in Ukrainian); Ukraine's Foreign Policy: Achievements, Challenges, Priorities (November 2024) – <https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2024/12/10/2024-SOCIO-ZP-ENGL-1.pdf>

³ Ukraine's Foreign Policy in the Context of Geopolitical Processes (February 2024), Razumkov Centre – <https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2024/04/12/2024-PAKT-5.pdf>.

⁴ Negative influence was assessed on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where «1» means that there is no impact, and «5» means very strong impact.

⁵ 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, 20 September 2023, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zastosuvannya-prava-veto-potrebuye-reformuvannya-i-ce-mozhe-85745>.

⁶ International Red Cross has turned into advocate for Russia – Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner. Ukrainska Pravda, 27 April 2024 – <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2024/04/27/7453305/>

between the democratic world and authoritarian countries, the consensus-based decision-making mechanism has proven to be dysfunctional. The veto power devaluates and hampers international organisations' activities, and this concerns not only the UNSC and the OSCE, but also the EU and NATO.

Another important trend affecting Ukraine's foreign policy is the **polarisation of the international community with the deepening global divide** – ideological, political, economic – between the democratic world (the US, EU, NATO) and the camp of countries with authoritarian / totalitarian drift, the cult of personality, and disregard for human rights (Russia, China, North Korea, Belarus, Iran, Syria). These global centres of gravity are fighting for influence in the world, especially in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East. This fight is increasingly evident in various sectors of the global economy and has a critical impact on the activities of international organisations.

Military-political integration of the alliance of authoritarian states has intensified recently. In particular, the 16th BRICS summit in October 2024 showed the consolidation of aggressive autocracies, their growing expansion in different regions and increased activity on the world stage. This is further underscored by North Korea's involvement in the Ukraine war and its armed provocations on the South Korean border, China's increasingly militaristic rhetoric, etc. Moreover, these states continue to strengthen the legal framework for integration. After ratifying a bilateral agreement with North Korea on a comprehensive strategic partnership in November 2024, Russia plans to conclude a similar document with Iran.

This polarisation of the world community is gaining momentum and is turning into a leading geopolitical trend. There are reasons to believe that the escalation along the «democracy-authoritarianism» line will determine the peculiarities and dynamics of global developments in the near future.

In this regard, against this intensification of the authoritarian camp's aggressive policy, the collective West, weakened by internal

problems and contradictions, has exposed its vulnerability (discussed below).

The ongoing political, financial and economic **confrontation between the world's major players – the United States and China**⁷ – is an important fragment of said global «democracy-authoritarianism» clash. It includes Chinese leadership's strong anti-American rhetoric against the backdrop of China's active militarisation and increased military presence in the Taiwan Strait, while Washington continues to provide its military and financial support to Taipei. Further escalation of the conflict over Taiwan potentially poses a risk of a violent US-China conflict with unpredictable consequences. In general, the geopolitical confrontation between these two nations has signs of a systemic global crisis, as individual countries and entire regions, including Southeast and Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, become increasingly involved in this political and economic confrontation. While it is hard to predict the newly elected US President's strategy on China, but one can easily assume further intensification of economic competition between these global players.

What is clear is that external circumstances, one way or another, encourage Ukrainian diplomacy to act in relations with China with due consideration of Beijing's position on the Russia-Ukraine war and American interests. On the other hand, current circumstances imply different models of Kyiv's policy and the level of interstate relations on the American and Chinese tracks.

During the surveys, experts particularly noted the **«American factor»**. No doubt that the US presidential election results and Donald Trump's victory are strategically important both for Ukraine and for world politics in general. For Ukraine, it is crucial because Washington delivers a significant share of military and financial assistance, while serving an integrating centre of the international opposition to Russian aggression in Ukraine and a moderator of international sanctions policy. As of December 2024, the foreign strategy of the newly elected US president, including on the Ukrainian direction, is still being formed, and the current

⁷ In this context, the military-political alliance of Australia, United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS) was initiated in September 2021 to counter China in the Indo-Pacific region.

political discourse is full of various forecasts and assumptions about possible changes and transformations in Washington's foreign policy in 2025. Therefore, the focus is on pragmatizing US foreign policy, promoting American business interests globally, and countering China. In view of this, the European discourse has revived discussions on the EU's strategic autonomy and defence self-sufficiency.

Meanwhile, given Donald Trump's previous statements and declarations, it can be assumed that he, as a politician and businessman, will be quite tough in pressing his demands both on Russia and Ukraine, using the «Peace Through Strength» formula.

Under these circumstances, it is vital for Ukraine to establish a constructive dialogue with the new White House administration and to convey its position on achieving a stable and just peace for Ukraine in a convincing and reasoned manner. The maximum task of Ukrainian diplomats is to make sure that official Washington continues its pro-Ukrainian course, maintains bipartisan support for Kyiv and provides the necessary military and financial assistance to counter Russian aggression.

According to experts, **Russian empire's aggressive foreign policy** is already a strategic threat to Europe and the world. Ukraine is suffering enormous human, financial and economic losses, as over the past 2.5 years, Russia has fired about 10,000 missiles of various types, more than 33,000 guided aerial bombs, and 14,000 attack drones at Ukraine, hitting 11,879 objects, including 6,203 civilian targets.⁸ In the face of war, Kyiv has to devote enormous political, diplomatic, financial, economic, and human resources to countering Russian intervention. In fact, half of the country's budget is spent on defence, while these resources could be effectively used to implement domestic reforms. The interest of European and global business partners in developing contacts with the warring country has diminished due to the risks and dangers to prospective investments and business. The war has turned Ukraine into a recipient of international donor aid.

The Kremlin is deploying hybrid aggression in the world and steps up its information expansion in various regions, seeking to justify its aggression and discredit Ukraine and its foreign policy. The components of such hybrid expansion on the continent include provocations on the EU's borders; interference in domestic political processes (including elections in Moldova, Georgia, Romania); massive cyberattacks; exports of corruption; instigation of migration crises; bribery of politicians and MPs; provocations and sabotage at military facilities; disorientation of public opinion and inspiring disagreements between European states; discrediting EU institutions; support for right-wing radical and nationalist movements; espionage, sabotage and subversion, etc. Thus, a totalitarian police state with a repressive domestic and aggressive foreign policy uses the entire arsenal of hybrid influence against European countries.

Outlining the external factors that affect Ukraine, experts particularly note **the lack of determination and political will of some allied countries**, including on military assistance to Ukraine and its accession to NATO. This continuing indecision cost Ukraine huge losses at the frontline and among civilians. Unfortunately, even today, the reluctance of these countries to intervene in the conflict with Russia has negative implications on the pace and volume of military assistance to Ukraine. Key issues here include the following:

- ✓ metered and slow deliveries of weapons to the Ukrainian Armed Forces (AFU);
- ✓ a lasting ban on the use of Western long-range weapons against the aggressor (in November 2024, the US president has finally lifted this ban);
- ✓ refusal to help destroy Russian missiles and drones over western Ukraine;
- ✓ Hungary's blocking of military and financial support to Ukraine;
- ✓ refusal of some EU countries to allow training of Ukrainian military within the EU military mission (EUMAM Ukraine) on the Ukrainian territory;

⁸ Russia has used 10,000 missiles and 33,000 glide bombs against Ukraine. Deutsche Welle, 25 August 2024 – <https://www.dw.com/uk/rf-zastosuvava-proti-ukraini-10-tisac-raket-ta-33-tisaci-kabiv/a-70042434>

- ✓ the still unresolved issue of confiscation of russian frozen assets;
- ✓ indecision on the establishment of an international tribunal to bring russia to justice for its crimes against Ukraine;
- ✓ unwillingness to offer Ukraine NATO membership.

The reasons for that may be the allies' fear of getting involved in a conflict with an unpredictable and aggressive nuclear empire, uncertainty about the foreign policy of the new US president, illusions about the possibility of pacifying the aggressor, socio-economic difficulties, fatigue from the long war, the intensification of right-wing populists in Europe, etc.

When assessing external trends, experts also point to the **complication of the political, social and economic situation in Europe, the growing «fatigue» from the war in Ukraine, and the activation of right-wing forces**. These negative trends are caused by various internal and external factors, such as economic problems caused by the Ukraine war, social stratification, complex internal political processes, and migration pressure, including a massive inflow of refugees from Ukraine.

Socio-economic issues in Europe (namely the gradual accumulation of «resource fatigue» in the EU economy and the migration factor) led to a surge in populism and political turbulence, aggravating complications in the European community. In this context, one can recall the strengthening of populist, pro-Russian governments in Slovakia and Hungary, the victory of right-wing forces in the Netherlands, the success of the far-right pro-Russian Calin Georgescu in the first round of the presidential elections in Romania (although the Constitutional Court subsequently cancelled these elections results), and the entry of the Dawn of Nemunas party, headed by the odious politician Remigijus Žemaitaitis, into the Lithuanian parliament. The recent collapse of the

ruling coalition in Germany can also be added to this alarming trend.

After the October presidential elections in Moldova, the political, social and economic situation remains difficult due to the activity of the «fifth column» and the escalation of russian influence. The civil conflict is deepening in Georgia, with the opposition and the government confronting each other over the pro-Russian policy of the Georgian Dream party, which has refused to negotiate with the EU. This has complicated the internal situation and triggered mass protests. The situation in the Balkan region is also challenging, with internal political instability, worsening social problems, and permanent exacerbation of ethnic conflicts.

Speaking about other external factors, experts also point to the **escalation of conflicts around the world**. This primarily refers to the ongoing war in the Middle East. Despite signing the US-orchestrated agreement between Israel and Lebanon on a permanent cessation of hostilities at the end of November 2024, the tense situation in the region remains. The problem with supplying and distributing humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip has become critical. There are hardly any grounds for immediate prospects of reconciliation between Israel and Iran. This prolonged war is diverting the attention and resources of the collective West, as powerful US and EU naval contingents are deployed in the region. On the other hand, the capture of Damascus by the armed opposition and the rapid collapse of the Assad regime in Syria are destroying russia's and Iran's geopolitical ambitions in the region.

Assessing the influence of various external factors, experts note the **emergence in global discourse of pseudo-peacekeeping plans to end the Ukraine war** that do not meet Kyiv's interests. Unfortunately, there have been many peace initiatives recently, with some reminding a smokescreen to get dividends from the war in Ukraine. Some high-profile statements and proposals were mostly opportunistic and populist in nature.⁹ In particular, in May 2024,

⁹ See Peace Summit: Geopolitical Context and Strategic Outlook (June 2024). Razumkov Centre – <https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2024/06/08/2024-PAKT-10-ENGL.pdf>.

the so-called Chinese–Brazilian peace initiative emerged as a plan to resolve the «crisis in Ukraine», containing 6 general points.¹⁰ In essence, it was a new interpretation of China’s abstract plan supported by Moscow. As expected, Beijing refused to participate in the Peace Summit. It was obviously due to its agreement with the Kremlin, ambitions to act as a «main peacemaker» and, above all, its own financial and economic benefits from the Ukraine war, including monopoly influence on Russian markets, trade preferences, etc.

While declaring strategic partnership with Russia and not condemning Russian aggression, China also tries to avoid conflict with the West by proclaiming abstract peace initiatives.

Of course, this list of external challenges and threats affecting Ukrainian diplomacy and the country’s foreign policy position is not exhaustive. Other factors include the unfavourable global political and economic situation, unfriendly policies of some EU countries, distancing of some states from the war in Ukraine, to name a few. At the same time, one should not forget that external trends and processes are dynamic, the geopolitical landscape is changing rapidly and acquiring new features that contain both challenges and opportunities for Ukraine.

SPECIFICS AND PECULIARITIES OF KYIV’S WAR DIPLOMACY

Ukraine’s policy on the world stage is influenced by the above external factors and is carried out against the backdrop of internal events and trends. Ukrainian diplomacy is forced to operate in a more complex and hostile environment. At the same time, the large-scale war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine has changed the essence of activities of the Ukrainian state and society in general and its foreign policy in particular. Russian aggression has accelerated the transformation of Ukraine’s foreign policy, changed its goals and objectives, strategic priorities on the world stage, and enhanced the tools of Ukrainian diplomacy.

¹⁰ These are: 1) adherence to de-escalation principles; 2) dialogue and negotiations are the only way to resolve the «Ukrainian crisis»; 3) a comprehensive ceasefire; 4) increased humanitarian aid to «relevant regions»; 5) inadmissibility of the use of weapons of mass destruction and attacks on nuclear power plants; 6) opposition to «dividing the world into isolated political or economic groups».

¹¹ Policy effectiveness was assessed on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where «1» means that the policy is totally ineffective, and «5» means that it is very effective.

¹² Speech by the President at the Meeting of Heads of Ukraine’s Foreign Diplomatic Missions «Wartime Diplomacy: Resilience, Weapons, Victory», 19 August 2024 – <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/videos/vid-nashoyi-spilnoyi-roboti-zalezhit-yakozbroya-v-rukah-u-n-6833>.

Expert opinions

Most respondents (65%) positively assess Ukraine’s foreign policy, while 26% are critical about it. Half of surveyed experts (51%) believe that it is consistent and balanced. Also, 51% consider it effective. At the same time, experts are more critical of foreign policy’s transparency and openness, its clarity to the public, and its strategic nature. In general, experts are mostly positive about the effectiveness of Ukraine’s foreign policy in securing external support to resist Russian aggression (3.6 points),¹¹ integration into the EU (3.5), promoting initiatives on international platforms and strengthening relations with countries around the world (3.3 points each). Experts are somewhat more reserved in assessments of the government’s effectiveness in expanding the circle of allied countries, disseminating objective information about the war, and improving Ukraine’s international image.

Describing the specifics and peculiarities of Ukraine’s foreign policy in war, the following important aspects should be noted.

First, the main tasks of Kyiv’s war diplomacy are focused on security and resistance to Russian aggression. During the war and especially in the large-scale aggression, the priorities and direction of government actions in the world have transformed substantially. The updated foreign policy goals and objectives were formulated in statements, speeches and decisions for the domestic audience and at international platforms (UNGA, EU-Ukraine summits, G7 meetings, etc.). Given the dynamics of external processes, the Ukrainian authorities improved and supplemented the system of external priorities.

In particular, on 19 August 2024, at a meeting of Ukrainian ambassadors, President Zelenskyy outlined five areas of action in the foreign arena.¹² First, seek the lifting of restrictions from our allies on the use of Western-made weapons on the Russian territory (this issue was later partially resolved). Second, promote the strengthening and expansion of sanctions against the aggressor. Third, ensure timely military and financial assistance, increase

investment in the Ukrainian economy. Fourth, consolidate and unite the international community of Ukrainians around the defence of Ukraine. And fifth, organise the second Peace Summit in 2024 (this task will be postponed until next year).¹³

As events unfold and the situation changes, the foreign agenda is also updated. In the current situation, Kyiv's priorities include establishing a constructive dialogue with the new White House administration, maintaining and strengthening consolidated assistance from allied countries in Europe and other regions of the world, further promoting its own initiatives globally, accelerating European and Euro-Atlantic integration, etc.

Second, Ukrainian diplomacy has become active and proactive. In wartime, the intensity of external processes and events has increased, as has the number of challenges requiring a prompt response, particularly in the area of political and diplomatic battles with the aggressor and its cronies, both directly and in different regions and on international platforms. Official Kyiv launched a number of important international initiatives and events that were supported by the international community. The annual Crimea Platform summit has become part of the global agenda; about 100 countries and international institutions have attended the inaugural Peace Summit; the Ukrainian humanitarian initiative Grain from Ukraine to purchase food for Africa and Asia has gained wide global resonance; Kyiv is actively promoting its Victory Plan among partners; an international group is working to return Ukrainian children; and the Ukrainian side held an international defence industry forum in autumn 2024.

It is also crucial that Ukraine side speaks to the international community with one voice. The war has aligned the positions of government agencies, pro-government and opposition parties, NGOs, and the media. Ukraine's

current foreign policy course, aimed at resisting Russian aggression and accelerating the country's movement towards the EU and NATO, is supported by vast majority of Ukrainians. In general, it is a unified consolidated position of Ukraine on the world stage.

Third, the intensity and level of Ukraine's international contacts has increased. The war created a new political and diplomatic situation, where high-level contacts with the leading countries and reputable international organisations became an everyday practice. Since the beginning of invasion, there has been a consistently high level and intensity of political dialogue with partner states. In particular, in November 2024 alone, Ukraine held high-level talks and consultations with the newly elected President of the United States, the Presidents of Moldova, France, Poland, Finland, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the NATO Secretary General, the Chancellor of Germany, the Prime Minister of Canada, and others. Prime Minister of Denmark Mette Frederiksen visited Ukraine.¹⁴ Ukraine continued its regular dialogue with the EU leadership. Such contacts, on the one hand, strengthen and expand political, economic, military, technical and humanitarian cooperation with partners; on the other hand, they help improve the atmosphere of trust and friendly personal interactions with country leaders and reputable politicians.

Fourth, new instruments of public diplomacy have been introduced. The widespread use of direct public addresses by the Ukrainian leaders to parliamentarians from around the world, as well as to the public – political circles, academics, cultural figures, businesspeople, students, etc. have become an effective innovation. In particular, on 15 November 2024, on the eve of International Students' Day, President Zelenskyy held an online chat with students and professors at Colombian universities. At the same time, Ukraine stepped up its participation in international events, conferences, and summits.

¹³ At the same meeting with diplomats, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal listed the main areas of economic diplomacy: a) accumulating macro-financial assistance from partners; b) receiving assistance for the reconstruction of the country; c) strengthening sanctions against the aggressor; d) stimulating foreign investment; and e) promoting Ukrainian goods on world markets.

¹⁴ For more detail, see Ukraine: From War to Peace and Recovery. Analytical assessments (November 2024) – <https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2024/12/10/2024-PAKT-November-RC.pdf>

Fifth, attempts are made to expand and improve Ukraine's political and diplomatic presence in «problematic» regions of the world. In 2022-2024, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry developed and began implementing new African, Asian and Latin American strategies. During the war, the intensity of contacts and negotiations with African and Latin American countries increased significantly. In particular, on 30 November 2024, Kyiv hosted a meeting with MPs from Latin America. Furthermore, the aforementioned Ukrainian initiative to supply humanitarian aid to Africa under the Grain from Ukraine programme had a positive response.

Expert opinions

When assessing the internal factors that adversely affect the effectiveness of Ukrainian diplomacy, experts primarily point to insufficient pace of reforms, inadequate fight against corruption, etc. (4.1 points),¹⁵ as well as problems of personnel policy in the diplomatic sphere and the shortage of professional staff (4.1). Experts also pointed to poor coordination of government actions on the world stage (3.9), excessive centralisation of functions and powers in the foreign policy sphere (3.9), limited budgetary funding for foreign policy activities (3.8), etc.

Sixth, there are trends towards centralisation of foreign policy. It is about concentrating key foreign policy vectors at the presidential level. A review of official Kyiv's political and diplomatic in wartime suggests that decision-making, initiatives and other processes in foreign policy are largely concentrated in the Presidential Office. In particular, the presidential team carries out the main communication with Ukraine's strategic partners – the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Turkey, Japan, the leading EU countries, etc. The Presidential Office also oversees European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes and maintains contacts with leading international institutions.

At the same time, one should not ignore the significant role and contribution of the Verkhovna Rada to the foreign policy implementation. This includes the intensification of interparliamentary contacts both bilaterally

and on international platforms (European Parliament, PACE, OSCE PA, etc.). Moreover, the Ukrainian parliament's significance will increase with the opening of the EU membership talks, as it involves an extensive adaptation of national legislation to the EU rules and regulations. At the governmental level, relevant ministries and agencies are involved in multilevel international activities to obtain resources both to resist intervention, maintain internal stability and develop trade, economic, socio-cultural cooperation with partner countries and international institutions.

Seventh, personnel transformations are underway. Switching the Ukrainian MFA and its network of diplomatic missions on «war footing» is one of elements of resisting external aggression. However, it should be admitted that amidst the war and intensified diplomatic contacts, the traditional Foreign Ministry's problem of qualified personnel has aggravated. Because of the shortage of specialists, ambassadorial positions in a number of important countries were vacant for a long time. It was precisely because of the staff shortage that in March 2023, for the first time in the history of Ukrainian diplomacy, the Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba announced an open competitive recruitment of ambassadors to 20 countries.

Today, the problem persists; moreover, some personnel decisions have been rather controversial, such as the appointment of a new ambassador to Bulgaria. In early September 2024, the Ukrainian foreign ministry underwent personnel changes, with Andrii Sybiha taking charge. The new minister announced and partially implemented personnel updates in embassies and the central apparatus. At the same time, the President's address to the Verkhovna Rada on 19 November 2024 emphasised the «reboot restart of the diplomatic service» and changes in the Ukrainian ambassador corps (including in the G7 countries). Therefore, urgent personnel issues are on the Ukrainian diplomacy's agenda. Moreover, the procedure for appointing heads of diplomatic missions needs to be upgraded, including by involving the relevant

¹⁵ Negative influence was assessed on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where «1» means that there is no impact, and «5» means very strong impact.

Verkhovna Rada committees in the process of appointing Ukraine's ambassadors.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ASPECT OF UKRAINE'S FOREIGN POLICY

The ongoing war in Ukraine has a number of components and diverse consequences, including in the context of European integration. On the one hand, Russian aggression has caused colossal casualties and destruction, negatively affected internal processes, forced Ukraine to focus its financial and human resources on defence, thus limiting the country's ability to join the European community. Unfortunately, in the context of long war of attrition and limited domestic resources, European integration is implemented on a reduced scale.

On the other hand, Russian aggression has de facto accelerated Ukraine's European integration processes and contributed to the nation's pro-European unification. The war has entrenched in Ukrainian society the idea that there is no alternative to the EU. The current stage of European integration is noted for the new quality of EU-Ukraine relations, which is due to the official launch of the accession negotiations with the unprecedented intensity of contacts between Kyiv and Brussels at various levels, the high level of trust, the liberalisation of trade and economic relations, and the joint opposition to Russian expansion.

With the onset of the large-scale aggression, official Brussels has stepped up its policy of lobbying and defending Ukraine's interests on international platforms, condemned the aggression, supported political isolation of Russia, and imposed sanctions against the aggressor. It is the political and diplomatic support, military, technical, financial, economic and humanitarian assistance of the EU countries that is vital for Ukraine in times of war. Moreover, this EU assistance is especially relevant against the expected transformations in US foreign policy with Donald Trump's coming to power.

In these settings it becomes clear that Brussels' foreign policy and the EU enlargement process will increasingly be determined by political and security factors that are becoming crucial for Europe and the world. This means that the integration of new countries into the EU is a tool to counter the continental expansion of the totalitarian Russian empire.

Despite the war, Ukraine is persistently pursuing pro-European transformations in various areas. In recent years, the country has introduced a number of pro-European reforms and measures, such as adapting national legislation to European norms, developing sectoral partnerships with the EU, effectively implementing the European Commission's package of recommendations, implementing the provisions of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, to name the few. In June 2024, strategic negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU were officially launched.

The most noteworthy steps in the European direction include the following:

- ✓ adopting a number of basic laws (on national minorities, on media, on the Constitutional Court), packages of laws on adaptation of national legislation in various areas;
- ✓ renewing and rebooting of the highest judicial bodies and anti-corruption institutions (reconstruction of the Bureau of Economic Security, granting the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office an independent status);
- ✓ approving the state anti-corruption programme and strategy for reforming law enforcement agencies; conducting a large-scale self-audit of national legislation for compliance with EU standards;
- ✓ ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in August 2024. Preparations of roadmaps for public administration and rule of law reform are currently underway.

Expert opinions

The vast majority of experts (83%) are generally positive about the Ukrainian government's European integration policy. However, the progress towards the European community is complicated by a number of factors, among which 77% of the surveyed experts note internal problems (insufficient pace of reforms, inadequate fight against corruption, etc.) 65% of experts mention Russia's large-scale aggression. 61% of experts note that Ukraine's European integration is being hampered by some EU countries. Assessing the timeframe for Ukraine's EU accession, 59% of respondents believe that Ukraine will join the EU in 5-10 years, while 14.5% believe that EU accession is more realistic in 10-20 years.

Speaking about the European integration prospects, Ukraine's progress towards the EU is currently determined by a set of multi-vector factors, challenges and threats, both external and internal. These include the turbulent global political and economic processes, the accumulation of crises in the EU, as well as unfriendly attitudes of some EU member states, such as continued blocking of military aid by the current Hungarian leadership and unacceptable statements of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico. In the meantime, addressing Ukraine's internal problems is becoming increasingly important, especially at times of war. These include ensuring effective governance, strengthening the fight against corruption, reforming the public administration and judiciary, etc.

But despite external challenges and internal problems, Ukraine's European integration continues. In the second half of 2024, Kyiv was actively preparing to ensure the opening of EU accession negotiations.¹⁶ In particular, the working bodies for the negotiations were formed. Ukraine and the EU have completed the official screening process within the Fundamentals cluster, which is key to the entire negotiation process. In the second half of November, the official screening of legislation related to cluster 2, Internal Market, began.

¹⁶ For more detail, see Ukraine: From War to Peace and Recovery. Analytical assessments (November 2024) – <https://razumkov.org.ua/vydannia/shchorichni-analitychni-pidsumky-i-prohnozy>.

¹⁷ The main recommendations and proposals for further improvement of Ukraine's foreign policy in priority areas are contained in the previous report «Ukraine's Foreign Policy: Achievements, Challenges, Priorities» (November 2024), prepared by the Razumkov Centre and the Public Council under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. These proposals have not lost their relevance. <https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2024/12/10/2024-SOCIO-ZP-ENGL-1.pdf>.

The European Commission's positive assessment of Ukrainian reforms and indicators and its approval of the next tranche under the Ukraine Facility programme was another important milestone in Brussels-Kyiv relations. Furthermore, the EU Council decided to extend the mandate of the EU military mission EUMAM Ukraine until November 2026.

SOME CONCLUSIONS¹⁷

Kyiv's war diplomacy is carried out in the settings of large-scale Russian aggression, under the influence of external trends and global and regional processes. On the one hand, the Ukraine war continues amidst the dangerous devaluation of the role of global and regional security structures and their inability to adequately respond to the Kremlin's aggression. On the other hand, there is growing instability and conflicts around the world, and the international community faces the deepening divide caused by the confrontation between the democratic world and the alliance of authoritarian states. Against the intensification of the authoritarian camp's aggressive policy, the collective West, weakened by internal problems and contradictions, has exposed its vulnerability. Very dangerous is the lack of determination and political will of the collective West to confront Russian intervention due to the fear of conflict with the aggressive Putin regime and fatigue from the long war. Another negative factor is the aggravating political, social and economic situation in Europe, and the rise of right-wing forces. Against this background, some countries come up with pseudo-peacekeeping initiatives aimed at freezing the war in Ukraine in the interests of the aggressor.

Speaking of the external factors, Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election is important for both Ukraine and world politics in general. Therefore, Kyiv's current priority is to establish a constructive dialogue with the new White House

administration and to convey its position to the newly elected US president and his entourage on achieving a stable and just peace for Ukraine in a convincing and reasoned manner.

Obviously, the war has changed the content and nature of Ukraine's foreign policy, altered its goals and strategic priorities on the world stage, and transformed the tools of Ukrainian diplomacy. Kyiv's war diplomacy is focused today on security issues and resistance to Russian aggression.

During the war, national diplomacy has become active and proactive, with increasing intensity and level of international relations. Ukraine also introduced new instruments of public diplomacy. High-level contacts with leading countries and reputable international organisations became regular. Meanwhile, Ukraine is trying to expand and boost its political and diplomatic presence in different regions of the world, but the effectiveness of its foreign policy is limited by internal problems, such as chronic shortage of qualified personnel for the MFA system.

Ukraine's heroic resistance to Russian aggression and the defence of Europe's eastern flank from the Kremlin's continental expansion has accelerated its entry into the global democratic space, the European and Euro-Atlantic communities. Thanks to the national diplomacy, 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 unification of the nation and embracing the idea that there is no alternative to joining the EU and NATO. The decision to open negotiations on EU accession was strategically important for Ukraine in political, security, socio-cultural, and moral terms. This marks the beginning of the final stage of European integration. In addition, Ukraine signing long-term security cooperation agreements with the world's leading nations is an excellent opportunity for further integration into the Western democratic world.

Given the current realities, it is important for both Ukrainian diplomacy and the allied countries that the collective West consolidates its positions and bolsters efforts in addressing internal problems and disagreements, actively counteracts the aggressive tactics of authoritarian states and expands comprehensive assistance to Kyiv in countering Russian intervention.

Ukraine's priorities also include preserving and expanding the alliance of friends, putting its plan to achieve a stable and just peace on the global agenda, accelerating its EU and NATO integration, strengthening defence capabilities, internal unity and resilience in times of war, and ensuring effective implementation of domestic reforms.