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# **UKRAINE'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: CURRENT STATE, CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS**

Expert opinions and positions

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(Expert opinions and positions)

The expert survey conducted in April 2025 by the Razumkov Centre and the Public Council at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine with the support of the Hanns Seidel Stiftung focuses on the trends, features and priorities of Ukraine's European integration in the face of large-scale Russian aggression.<sup>1</sup> This study is a follow-up to the previous joint project on Ukraine's foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

The European track in Kyiv's foreign policy is currently taking a priority, strategically important role for many reasons. In particular, with Donald Trump's coming to power, US foreign policy, including towards Ukraine, has changed dramatically. Today, the United States' political and diplomatic solidarity and support for Ukraine, as well as its military and financial assistance, are in jeopardy. In such settings, Europe is de facto becoming Ukraine's key ally in countering Russian intervention. At the same time, Kyiv has reached the final stretch of European integration, with the opening of negotiations on Ukraine's EU accession in the first half of 2025 during Poland's EU presidency.

As part of this survey, members of the expert community assessed the Ukrainian government's European integration policy, outlined the problems on the way to the EU, and described the assistance of European countries in confronting the aggressor. In this regard, expert opinions on the effectiveness of the negotiation process to end the war in Ukraine deserve special attention. Also quite interesting are the expert opinions and foresights on the future prospects of Ukraine joining the European community.

The results of the expert survey give grounds for the following generalisations and conclusions.

## UKRAINE'S MOVEMENT TOWARDS THE EU: PECULIARITIES, PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

European integration is a priority of Ukraine's foreign policy. As noted above, given the controversial transformation of Washington's foreign policy and complicated geopolitical situation, it is crucial for Ukraine to secure political solidarity and military and financial support from the EU and European countries in the context of a full-scale war. The strategic significance of EU membership is growing, in particular, the opening of practical negotiations on EU accession in the first half of 2025.

**Most experts (83.7%) are positive or rather positive about the Ukrainian government's European integration policy.** And there are good reasons for such an opinion, as Ukraine continues pro-European reforms in various areas despite the war, adapts national legislation to European standards, deepens sectoral cooperation with Brussels, and implements the provisions of the Association Agreement. When assessing Kyiv's activities on the European integration front, one should note the following important circumstances. **First**, compared to the previous period, the intensity and level of EU-Ukraine contacts have changed qualitatively during the large-scale aggression, and there is a new quality

<sup>1</sup> The expert survey was carried out from 31 March through 9 April 2025 within the framework of the project «Expert and analytical support to the MFA of Ukraine and public diplomacy development in the context of European integration» with the support of the Hanns Seidel Stiftung Ukraine. 86 experts from different regions of Ukraine and Kyiv city, including MPs, representatives of ministries, regional authorities, governmental and non-governmental research institutions, university professors, independent experts, and scholars were surveyed.

<sup>2</sup> Ukrainian Diplomacy's Peculiarities and Priorities in Times of War (expert opinions and positions), December 2024, Razumkov Centre, <https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2024/12/25/2024-ZP-3-ENGL.pdf>.

of relations between Brussels and Kyiv. Regular talks and consultations, mutual visits and joint events have become a common political practice. For example, in just two days, on 16-17 January, Ukraine welcomed the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Minister of Defence of Italy, a delegation of the Slovak MPs, and the foreign ministers of the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, North Macedonia, Turkey, and Montenegro. In February, the government of Ukraine and the European Commission held a joint meeting in Kyiv. In March, Ukraine took part in two European Council meetings dedicated to the Ukrainian issue; a series of talks between politicians and the military were held within the the Coalition of the Willing; and on 31 March, the heads of parliaments of 17 European countries visited Kyiv as part of the Bucha 2025 summit. Furthermore, Ukraine continued consultations at various levels, interagency talks and other contacts. In general, Brussels and Kyiv have created a solidarity atmosphere of trusting dialogue and friendly personal contacts.

**Second**, the Ukrainian government's progress in the European direction includes the fact that since June 2022 (after receiving the EU candidate status and a package of recommendations from the European Commission), Ukraine has launched the «turbo mode» of pro-European reforms. In recent years, several major steps have been taken in this direction, including the renewal and reboot of the highest judicial bodies and anti-corruption institutions, and the adoption of basic laws adapting national legislation to European standards in various areas. In particular, in 2025, the President of Ukraine signed a European integration law establishing a Specialised District Administrative Court and a Specialised Administrative Court of Appeal. The Verkhovna Rada supported government bills introducing European norms in the field of market surveillance and accreditation of conformity assessment bodies and technical regulation into Ukrainian legislation. The parliament also passed a law to improve the current legislation on greenhouse gas emissions, while the Cabinet

approved the National Waste Management Plan until 2033.

Furthermore, Kyiv and Brussels agreed on joint plans for Ukraine's further European integration, in particular, the EU expects to open all internal commodity markets to Ukraine by the summer of 2026, and to fully integrate the Ukrainian electricity market into the European market by April 2027. It is also planned to speed up the conclusion of the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA), and to connect Ukraine to the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA).

**Third**, active preparations are underway to ensure that conditions are in place for the opening of practical negotiations on EU accession. Several screening sessions have already taken place, covering various thematic chapters of the upcoming negotiations (discussed below). At the same time, in preparation for accession, Ukraine has elaborated three roadmaps in the areas of the rule of law, public administration reform and the functioning of democratic institutions. As for the effectiveness of Ukraine's progress towards the EU, following the joint meeting of the government of Ukraine and the European Commission in February 2025, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen said: «I am deeply impressed by the high quality and speed with which Ukraine is moving forward... If they continue at that speed and at that quality, perhaps they could be earlier than 2030».<sup>3</sup>

In a broader sense, expert opinions and assessments point to the existing consolidation of the government and civil society on Ukraine's EU accession. There is national consensus, with leading political forces, NGOs, the expert community, the media, and society as a whole supporting the country's movement towards the EU, and there is no visible anti-European sentiment in the public discourse. It can be stated that the war unleashed by the Russian empire accelerated Ukraine's European integration processes, contributed to the pro-European unification of the nation, and entrenched the idea that

<sup>3</sup> European Commission President suggests Ukraine may join the EU before 2030. Radio Liberty, 25 February 2025. – <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-fo-der-leyen-ukraina-vstup-es/33326526.html> (in Ukrainian)



there is no alternative to the irreversible movement towards the EU.

At the same time, it is clear that the final stage of EU accession negotiations will not be easy or problem-free. What are the external and internal factors hindering Ukraine's progress towards Europe?

Therefore, **according to 80.2% of experts, Ukraine's progress towards the European community is primarily slowed down by internal problems** (insufficient pace of reforms, unsatisfactory fight against corruption, etc.) It should be noted, however, that there have been some positive developments recently, particularly in the fight against corruption. The system of anti-corruption institutions has been updated and rebooted, along with the approval of the state anti-corruption programme. From 2013 to 2023, Ukraine, albeit slowly, managed to rise in the Corruption Perceptions Index by 11 points and was ranked 104<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries.

At the same time, it is of concern that in 2024, Ukraine lost some ground in the fight against corruption and, scoring 35 out of 100 points, ranks 105<sup>th</sup> alongside Serbia.<sup>4</sup> This decline is probably connected to public conflicts, such as Defence Ministry procurement scandals, procurement of energy equipment, exposed abuses in the system of medical and social commissions, fictitious disability of some local prosecutors, etc.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the problem of corruption, while remaining high on the agenda, has particularly exacerbated in the time of war and requires concentrated efforts of the state and society. The insufficient pace of reforming the judiciary can also be added to the list of problems. Unfortunately, it is quite alarming that, according to the Razumkov Centre's sociological research, citizens generally do not trust the state apparatus, prosecutors, courts, anti-corruption bodies, etc.<sup>6</sup>

As for the external factors hampering European integration, **67.4% of the surveyed experts name Russia's large-scale aggression**, the occupation of certain territories, and Ukraine's large socio-economic and human losses. It is clear that Russian intervention is not only a threat to Ukrainian statehood and a dangerous factor affecting Kyiv's European integration efforts, but also a challenge to the security of Europe as a whole. The war has had negative implications on the pace of reforms in various areas. Kyiv is forced to channel huge political, diplomatic, financial, economic, and human resources to counter Russian intervention. In particular, the lion's share of the budget is allocated to defence needs. Moreover, the war has, on the one hand, made Ukraine a recipient of international donor assistance, and on the other hand, limited the interest of European business partners in developing contacts with the warring country due to investment risks. Unfortunately, against the ongoing «war of attrition», European integration has to be implemented on a limited scale.

Furthermore, **34.9% of experts point to the inhibition of Ukraine's European integration by the Hungarian leadership**. The official Budapest pursues an openly unfriendly or even hostile policy towards Ukraine and its European integration, consistently blocks the EU's military and financial assistance to Kyiv, abusing its veto power and the consensus principle in the EU's decision-making. As the negotiations on Ukraine's EU accession draw closer, the «Hungarian factor» is becoming increasingly problematic. The Hungarian government blocks the opening of negotiations within the first cluster by hyping the artificial problem of protecting the rights of the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia. Recently, Viktor Orbán has been issuing ultimatums to the EU and publicly denying the possibility of Ukraine's membership in the European Union. In early summer, the Hungarian authorities are

<sup>4</sup> Anti-Corruption on Hold (Ukraine in the Corruption Perception Index 2024.) – <https://cpi.ti-ukraine.org/en/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Citizens' assessment of the situation in the country. Trust in social institutes, politicians, officials and public figures. Attitude towards elections during the war, faith in victory (February-March 2025) – <https://razumkov.org.ua/napiamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia>. (in Ukrainian)

planning a «public opinion poll» on Ukraine's EU membership, and the documents for the poll contain false, distorted narratives about Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> Hungary's destructive, pro-russian policy is not only dangerous for Ukraine, but also threatens the unity of the EU. The Hungarian factor weakens the European community's position globally and makes it vulnerable.

Other problems noted by experts can hardly be considered secondary to Ukraine's European integration. **Thus, 33.7% of respondents note the adverse impact of geopolitical and geo-economic trends in the world.** This primarily refers to massive transformations in US foreign policy, which have led to turbulent, contradictory processes in the geopolitical sphere and in global financial and economic markets. According to reputable financial institutions, Donald Trump's tariff policy will have negative socio-economic consequences of a global scale. By forcibly advancing its interests in relation to partner countries and international organisations, the US leadership is trying to form a new US-centric system of international relations. Both the political and ideological unity of the collective West aimed at promoting freedom and democracy is being destroyed, and so is the Euro-Atlantic partnership. In the meantime, restrictions and complications in financial and economic contacts between the US and the EU will affect the situation in Europe and influence both European assistance to Ukraine in countering russian aggression and Kyiv's European integration in general.

As for other issues, 29.1% of experts point to the negative impact of complications in the internal socio-economic situation in the EU, while 23.3% mention the lack of experienced professionals in the field of European integration.

## EU AND EUROPEAN ASSISTANCE IN COUNTERING RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

According to the survey on EU support for Ukraine, experts are generally positive about the EU's activities in Ukraine, although the effectiveness of assistance in specific areas is assessed differently. **Political solidarity and support on international platforms received the highest score (4.5 points).**<sup>8</sup> This includes the EU's diplomatic activity, promotion of resolutions and statements in defence of Ukraine, and participation in international coalitions against russian aggression. Political solidarity and consolidation of the EU countries is noted as a positive aspect of support.

**The respondents also highly appreciated (4.4 points) the assistance to Ukrainian refugees** in European countries that have introduced relevant social programmes, provided temporary shelter and systemic protection, implemented integration measures and material support to Ukrainians.

**The EU's financial assistance scored 4.1 points,** which indicates the significance of macro-financial support instruments for the Ukrainian economy. In particular, this includes funding under the multi-year Ukraine Facility plan (under which Ukraine received another tranche of EUR 3.5 billion in March) and assistance through the G7 ERA initiative. The European share of funding for Ukraine's budget is critical. This includes assistance to the Ukrainian energy sector, humanitarian support and targeted tranches from EU countries.

**The overall assessment of European support for Ukrainian reforms is positive (3.8 points).** This score indicates the value of the EU's role in transforming and reforming Ukraine's domestic policy in various areas.

<sup>7</sup> Orban's government launches poll of Hungarians on Ukraine's EU membership. Interfax-Ukraine, 30 March 2025. – <https://interfax.com.ua/news/political/1059886.html>. (in Ukrainian)

<sup>8</sup> Assessed on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where «1» means that the assistance is totally ineffective, and «5» – very effective.

It can be assumed that such expert assessments are, on the one hand, a kind of anticipation of Ukraine's accession negotiations, and on the other hand, they indicate an awareness of the need to improve the pace of reforms and ensure their effective implementation in practice.

**Respondents rated military assistance at 3.5 points.** This score generally suggests that the pace and volume of arms supplies are insufficient. However, it is clear that experts are more likely to associate military assistance with NATO and the Ramstein Group. The current uncertainty over US military support should also be borne in mind. Respondents probably expect and rely on more decisive assistance from the EU, especially given the current needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

**Meanwhile, European assistance in restoring the destroyed facilities (3.4 points) and imposing sanctions against the aggressor (3.2) are assessed more moderately.** These relatively low scores indicate that the results of assistance in rebuilding Ukraine have not yet been tangible or large-scale enough. On the other hand, the EU's sanctions policy needs to be expanded and improved.

**Which European countries are helping Ukraine the most in countering Russian aggression?** Experts primarily mention the United Kingdom (95.3%), Lithuania (83.7%) and Germany (82.6%). Therefore, the support of these countries, especially military, political, and humanitarian, is viewed as significant and meaningful. In particular, London has recently been increasing its military and technical assistance, including with new types of weapons, and Berlin's support in the security sector is the largest in absolute terms among all European countries. This list also includes France (75.6%), which initiated the Coalition of the Willing, and Poland (75.6%), which serves as a key transport hub and Ukraine's proactive ally in diplomacy. Latvia (64%), Estonia (62.8%), Czechia (59.3%), Denmark (58.1%) and the Netherlands (58.1%) help the Ukrainian Armed Forces, receive Ukrainian refugees, participate in the sanctions policy against the aggressor, etc. Experts also appreciate the support and assistance to

Ukraine by the Nordic countries – Sweden (48.8%), Norway (38.4%) and Finland (23.3%).

Summing up these expert opinions, two important points should be borne in mind. First, the assessments are mainly illustrative and do not fully reflect the scale, nature and specifics of assistance to Ukraine from European countries, as the list includes a rather short list of countries. Second, external support and assistance in various areas is quite dynamic, and the situation tends to change.

**The vast majority of the surveyed experts (94.2%) more or less agree that European integration contributes to countering Russian aggression.** When commenting on this position, it can be assumed that in a broad sense, this refers to the impact of European integration on Ukraine's ability to resist, and movement towards the EU helps Ukraine preserve its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. In practical terms, European integration leads to consolidation of military, financial, political support and assistance to Ukraine. At the same time, the process of joining the European Union means rolling out a large package of reforms in various areas, which will help modernise governance and the legal framework, further democratise, and thus strengthen national unity and immunity from the influence of the Russian world. In general, European integration is one of the key tools for enhancing the country's defence capability, diplomatic support and economic stability.

Clearly, European integration is gaining in importance for Ukraine in view of the complication of the overall geopolitical situation. At present, Washington's further military and political support for Ukraine raises reasonable doubts, so the question on the agenda of Ukrainian diplomacy is whether the EU and European countries will be able to compensate for the lack of US assistance to Ukraine in the short term (1-2 years).

When answering this question, **most experts (58.1%) agree that Europe will hardly be able to fully compensate for the lack of US military aid** (weapons, ammunition, military equipment) in the short term.

This is due to the limitations of European production capacities, political cautiousness of some governments, and the lack of a broad nomenclature of military assistance similar to the US. Obviously, this situation requires that Ukraine intensify its policy towards the United States, possibly by turning military-technical partnership with the US into a commercial one, and by using alternative sources of military supplies.

**Similarly, experts are unsure whether Europeans can replace the United States in providing intelligence.** In particular, 47.7% of them believe that the European countries' services are able to do so to some extent, while 50% of respondents have the opposite opinion. It can be assumed that experts are fully aware of the United States' role as a leader in technological intelligence. Europe can partially compensate for this assistance but is perceived as a less powerful player in the field of military intelligence and satellite surveillance.

**When assessing other European capabilities, most respondents (77.9%) believe that the EU and other European countries will be able to compensate for the absence of the US share of external budget support for Ukraine.** Only one in five experts share the opposite opinion. Of course, this is an important area of assistance that provides financial and economic stability to Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression. **Also, almost all experts (96.5%) believe that Europe can completely replace the United States in providing humanitarian aid.**

**Furthermore, 89.5% of experts tend to believe that Europe is able to compensate for the lack of American support for Ukraine in the political and diplomatic sphere on international platforms.** By the way, this is exactly what is happening today, when the US leadership's foreign policy rhetoric and activities are becoming «neutral and peacekeeping». This is hardly a proud moment in the history of American diplomacy.

Therefore, the most difficult areas, according to experts, include military assistance and intelligence, where the United States

remains a critical ally, whose assistance is difficult to fully replace in the short term.

## **NEGOTIATIONS TO END THE WAR IN UKRAINE: STATUS AND RESULTS**

Separate rounds of US-initiated negotiations with Kyiv and Moscow to end the war in Ukraine were quite important. The Americans held a series of bilateral higher and highest-level consultations with representatives of opposing sides. It is important to note that the US shuttle diplomacy between Ukraine and Russia occurred amidst major transformations in American foreign policy. Unfortunately, the nature of said negotiations shows that the American «peace through strength» formula was fully implemented in relation to the victim of aggression, while concessions and unjustified public advances were made in relation to the aggressor.

How do Ukrainian experts view this process? **The respondents are clearly pessimistic about the effectiveness of these negotiations.** Most of the negotiating options, including «ending the shelling of energy facilities», «introducing a temporary, 30-day ceasefire along the entire frontline», and «concluding a full-scale peace agreement» scored less than 2 points on a 5-point scale, and only one option – «ensuring the safety of navigation in the Black Sea» – scored 2.1 points.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, in the eyes of experts, the results of US diplomatic efforts look unsatisfactory, to put it mildly. There are at least three reasons for this scepticism.

**First,** years of negative experience of negotiations with Russia show that the aggressor violates the agreements reached and uses unfair negotiating practices. **Second,** Russia is constantly dragging out the negotiations, putting forward additional unreasonable, unacceptable ultimatum demands. **Third,** the escalation of Russian aggression continues, with constant attacks on energy infrastructure (including in violation of the energy truce declared by the Russian dictator) and missile attacks on Ukrainian civilians.

<sup>9</sup> Assessed on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where «1» means that the result will not be achieved at all, and «5» means that the result will be fully achieved.

Speaking about the state and prospects of negotiations to end the war in Ukraine, it is impossible to overlook the role and involvement of Europe in the peace process, as it is the territory of the ongoing hostilities.

**Ukrainian experts are almost unanimous in their opinion that the EU should be involved in the negotiation process to end the war in Ukraine** – 95% of experts supported this idea (82.6% answered «yes», and 12.8% – «rather yes»). It is noteworthy that not a single expert gave a negative answer to this question.

It is safe to say that Ukrainian experts view the EU as Ukraine's strategic political and military ally. The EU can be a reliable partner in negotiations with Russia, capable of balancing Russia's aggressive policy against the American «mediation». It is worth recalling that Washington now views the war in Ukraine as Europe's «area of responsibility». Ukrainian experts are aware of the need for the EU to participate in the peace talks, while some other issues, such as lifting sanctions against Russia or deployment of a peacekeeping contingent in Ukraine, cannot be resolved without participation of a united Europe.

In this context, the expert opinions on the UK and France's initiative to create the Coalition of the Willing and assemble a peacekeeping contingent to maintain peace in Ukraine are very interesting. **The overwhelming majority of respondents are «positive» (64%) and «rather positive» (24.4%) about this initiative.** In the eyes of Ukrainian experts, such a step by European states looks absolutely natural and reasonable, especially with President Trump acting as a mediator between Ukraine and the aggressor. Therefore, it is the united Europe that can replace the United States as Ukraine's main ally in its fight against Russia. Another reason for such an initiative

by European partners is their understanding that Europe may be the next target of Russia's aggressive policy.

## PROSPECTS FOR EU MEMBERSHIP

**Most experts (54.6%) are cautiously optimistic about the possibility of opening the Fundamentals Cluster in Ukraine's EU accession negotiations in the first half of 2025**, answering «yes» (8.1%) and «rather yes» (46.5%) to the relevant question. Instead, 33.7% were sceptical about it. According to EU rules, this cluster is the first to open and the last to close. Notably, the Ukrainian side has prepared an extensive structure of relevant working groups for the negotiation process. In particular, the involvement of Ukrainian government agencies and civil society institutions in negotiations is very broad: as of January 2025, more than 100 state institutions (almost 1,000 people), 100 MPs and the Verkhovna Rada staff, 292 representatives of the public and business, 43 academics, etc. are involved in the 36 national negotiating groups.<sup>10</sup>

June 2024 saw the launch of an official screening of the compliance of Ukrainian legislation with EU. In January 2025, relevant procedures were completed for the first cluster. Screening for the chapters of Cluster 2 (Internal Market) and Cluster 3 (Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth) have recently been completed; screening under Cluster 6 (External Relations) is also underway.

On 24 January 2025, the European Commission submitted to the European Council the first final report on the results of the screening of Ukrainian legislation under Cluster 1. Following the EU's internal procedures and a consensus decision, an Intergovernmental Conference is to be organised, where the parties officially open negotiations on this cluster.

<sup>10</sup> Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine and Minister of Justice Olha Stefanishyna: 'Cyber war will continue as long as we have a war with Russia.' – Ukrinform, 14 January 2025 – <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/3948279-vicepremerministerka-ministerka-usticii-ukraini-olga-stefanishyna.html> (in Ukrainian)



For Ukraine, the opening of the negotiation process is crucial for many reasons, including the dynamics of geopolitical processes. On the other hand, the materialisation of prospects of joining the EU is a powerful moral and psychological stimulus and additional motivation for Ukrainians, especially amid the prolonged war.

In March–April 2025, Polish Minister for European Union Affairs Adam Szlappa and Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski publicly stated that the European Commission and the Polish presidency of the EU were ready to open the Fundamentals Cluster, but this process was unfortunately being blocked by Hungary.<sup>11</sup>

As noted, in 2025, Budapest made a series of anti-Ukrainian statements and demands to the EU to block the negotiation process with Ukraine. In particular, in March 2025, Viktor Orbán put forward ultimatum demands, including the impossibility of Ukraine's membership in the EU.<sup>12</sup> Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto once again falsely accused Ukraine of infringing the rights of the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia. In the meantime, the Hungarian ruling regime took openly anti-European steps by announcing the country's withdrawal from the International Criminal Court and planning to liquidate foreign-funded media and NGOs.<sup>13</sup>

The Ukrainian side has repeatedly drawn the EU's attention to Hungary's destructive position. In his speech at a meeting of the European Council on 20 March, President Zelenskyy noted that «it is simply anti-European when one person blocks decisions that are important for the entire continent or that have already been agreed upon. Ukraine fulfilled the requirements, but right

now, there are serious difficulties in opening Ukraine's first and other negotiation clusters for EU accession... Europe must have a way to prevent individual actors from blocking what's necessary for all».<sup>14</sup>

In the EU countries, there is a growing negativity towards the Hungarian leadership's position, and the political isolation of the country's PM, who is increasingly becoming toxic and odious figure. Meanwhile, EU's chronic problem of expanding the scope of important decision-making, including in foreign policy, by a qualified majority rather than by consensus is becoming increasingly serious.

How challenging will it be for Ukraine to implement European legal norms within Cluster 1 Fundamentals, which contains eight negotiating chapters? Obviously, the level of «complexity» of a particular chapter largely depends on the current situation in the relevant area and the scope of necessary reforms.

**No wonder that experts primarily note the complex «Judiciary and Fundamental Rights» chapter**, which envisages a pro-European transformation of the judiciary, the fight against corruption, the implementation of EU conventions, protocols, charters and declarations in the field of democracy and human rights. Experts rate the complexity of this chapter at 4 on a five-point scale.<sup>15</sup>

For respondents, the chapter «Justice, Freedom and Security» is also quite complex (3.6 points), as it includes a wide range of issues, such as creating conditions for the free movement of citizens, the fight against organised crime, visa regime, asylum, management of the EU's external borders, etc.

<sup>11</sup> EU says it cannot open negotiation clusters with Ukraine without Hungary's consent – Ukrainska Pravda, 18 March 2025 – <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/03/18/7503433/>.

<sup>12</sup> «Union without Ukraine»: Hungarian PM posts list of demands for Brussels. – Ukrainska Pravda, 15 March 2025 – <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/03/15/7503036/>

<sup>13</sup> Orbán promises to wipe out foreign-funded media and NGOs «like bedbugs». – European Pravda, 15 March 2025 – <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2025/03/15/7207283/>. (in Ukrainian)

<sup>14</sup> Europe needs speed in making decisions and clear tools to protect itself from unnecessary blockages – Speech by the President of Ukraine at the Meeting of the European Council. 20 March 2025 – <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/yevropi-potribna-shvidkist-v-uhvalenni-rishen-i-chitki-instr-96761>

<sup>15</sup> Assessed on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where «1» means that the chapter will cause no difficulties at all, and «5» – very difficult.

The chapter «Economic Criteria» received 3.5 points, and the chapters «Public Administration Reform» and «Financial Control» each scored 3.4 points. In this regard, one cannot but agree with respondents on the significance of public administration reform, which is described by some as «the mother of all reforms». It is clear that with no modern, efficient, professional and corruption-free governance, all other transformations will be doomed. Therefore, improving and optimising public administration is one of the key priorities of pro-European reforms.

Describing the complexity of Cluster 1, respondents also mention «Functioning of Democratic Institutions» chapter. It is about ensuring stability and favourable legal conditions for the development of civil society organisations, and in a broader sense, ensuring fundamental rights and freedoms, which is especially important for Ukraine in times of war. Moreover, the development of civil society should be seen as a factor in ensuring strong national immunity from the aggressor's long-term hybrid influence, which will continue even if the war ends.

Summing up the above, the implementation of European norms set out in Cluster 1, which includes fundamental rights and freedoms, into national legislation is vital for Ukraine in the settings of a lasting martial law regime. The war *de facto* and *de jure* makes it impossible to hold elections; there is a forced temporary derogation from some international obligations in the field of democracy; the system of public administration is being centralised, etc. Therefore, strong democratic principles in public life, sustainability of democratic institutions, and the rule of law are particularly relevant during martial law.

**Quite interesting are the expert estimates of the timeframe for Ukraine's EU accession.** 3.5% of experts are quite optimistic, believing that Ukraine will join the EU within 1-3 years. 29.1% point to somewhat longer perspective of 3-5 years. However, most experts (51.2%) are convinced that Ukraine will join the EU in 5-10 years. For 8.1%, the most realistic timeframe is 10-20 years. A statistically insignificant proportion (1.2%) tend to think that this will never happen.

The practice of European integration during a large-scale war is unprecedented in the history of the European Union, so it is hardly worth looking at the experience of other European countries' accession negotiations.

Nonetheless, when talking about the timing of Ukraine's EU accession, the following important considerations should be borne in mind. **First**, one should not forget that during the war, Ukraine is paying a high price for its movement towards the EU, and this necessitates a more intensive negotiation process. Ukraine objectively has no time for slow, extended negotiations similar to the Balkan scenario or for a multiyear period of opening all negotiating chapters.

**Second**, Ukraine has become a battleground for global powers on the European continent, so Europe and EU's further development will largely depend on the situation on the Ukrainian-Russian front. In particular, the slowdown of Ukraine's European integration will have serious implications for Moldova, because pro-Russian revenge in the upcoming parliamentary elections in this country will, in fact, open a «second front» against Ukraine and the EU. This and many other things essentially determine the exclusivity and geopolitical weight of Ukraine's European integration. In other words, Ukraine joining the European community should be seen as a joint opposition to Russian hybrid expansion in Europe and in the broader context of the global confrontation between Western democracy and the camp of authoritarian countries.

In view of these circumstances, the EU enlargement process should acquire new dynamics. At the same time, when outlining the timeframe for Ukraine's EU accession, one should carefully consider the following factors as having a major impact on the duration of the negotiation process: the Russian war against Ukraine; success in resolving internal problems and effective progress on the path of European reforms; the ability of the parties to compromise in various areas (including overcoming the resistance of the Hungarian leadership); political, social and economic trends in the EU, etc.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Ukraine's European integration is taking place in the face of full-scale Russian aggression and under the influence of multidirectional global and regional processes. On the one hand, the new US foreign policy has increased turbulence in global markets and provoked changes in the geopolitical landscape, including the devaluation of Euro-Atlantic solidarity and the aggravation of Washington's relations with Brussels. On the other hand, there is growing instability and escalation across the world, and the international community continues to be divided, as democratic countries and an alliance of authoritarian states confront each other. The political, social and economic situation in the EU is getting more complicated. These trends cannot but affect relations between Brussels and Kyiv and, accordingly, Ukraine's integration into the European community.

Ukraine's circumstances are unique in the history of EU enlargement. It is clear that this study cannot cover all the peculiarities and specifics of Ukraine's movement towards the EU, but some findings of this expert survey are of interest and deserve attention.

**It is clear that, given the current US foreign policy, Europe's consolidated political, military and financial support is becoming vital for Ukraine, and accelerated and effective integration into the EU is becoming even more important.**

Members of the expert community are positive about the Ukrainian government's European integration policy. Despite being at war, Ukraine is actively implementing pro-European reforms in various areas, improving national legislation, deepening sectoral cooperation with Brussels. At the same time, the movement towards the European community is primarily hampered by internal problems; Russian large-scale aggression; the Hungarian leadership's obstruction; negative global trends, etc.

When assessing European assistance to Ukraine, experts primarily note political support, assistance to Ukrainian refugees,

financial assistance, etc., while Europe's military aid is perceived less enthusiastically. This area obviously requires increased joint efforts, including both intensification of arms supplies and greater integration of the Ukrainian defence complex into the European defence industry, as well as strengthening cooperation between arms manufacturers. According to experts, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Baltic States, Poland, the Nordic countries, Czechia, Denmark, the Netherlands, and others are the most helpful in countering Russian aggression. In this context, support of other European nations, their political solidarity and promotion of Ukraine's interests globally is also of great value to Ukraine.

The vast majority of experts are confident that European integration contributes to countering Russian intervention, and this obviously includes military, financial, humanitarian assistance, and support for internal reforms in Ukraine, etc.

Expert assessments of Europe's ability to compensate Ukraine in the short term for the lack of US assistance are also worthy of note. Most respondents believe that Europe is generally capable of providing relevant budgetary support, humanitarian aid, and political and diplomatic support with no US involvement. However, experts have doubts about military assistance and intelligence. Such views indicate the importance of optimising and strengthening dialogue with the current American leadership, making efforts to maintain some form of military-technical partnership with the US, providing Ukraine with the necessary intelligence, etc.

Furthermore, members of the Ukrainian expert community support and welcome the initiative of the British and French leaders to launch the Coalition of the Willing and assemble a peacekeeping contingent to maintain peace in Ukraine. This broad expert support for the idea of deploying the European troops to Ukraine can be explained, in part, by their scepticism about the effectiveness of the US-initiated negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. The aggressor's unwillingness to make any compromises, delays in negotiations and increased intensity of hostilities are quite obvious, as is

the US pressure on Ukraine for it to accept unacceptable terms of the truce. In view of this, the experts' almost unanimous position that the EU should be actively involved in the peace negotiation process is perfectly understandable and logical.

Security issues are directly related to Ukraine's EU integration, which is a means and a tool of countering Russian aggression. This is why it is vital for Ukraine to launch practical talks on EU accession. Most experts believe that it will be possible to open negotiations on Cluster 1 Fundamentals in the first half of 2025. However, about one-third of respondents express reasonable doubts due to the destructive, unfriendly position of the Hungarian leadership, which blocks the negotiation process by making speculative demands and false accusations against Ukraine. Against the backdrop of complex and unfavourable geopolitical trends, the Hungarian factor is gaining weight and strategic importance for both Ukraine and the EU as a whole. The EU should use all available financial, political, administrative, and legal levers to overcome Budapest's resistance and open all negotiating clusters with Ukraine in 2025.

It is clear that negotiations on Ukraine's EU accession will be neither light nor easy. According to experts, several negotiating chapters in Cluster 1 will require particularly active efforts by Ukraine. These include chapters that provide for the pro-European transformation of the public administration

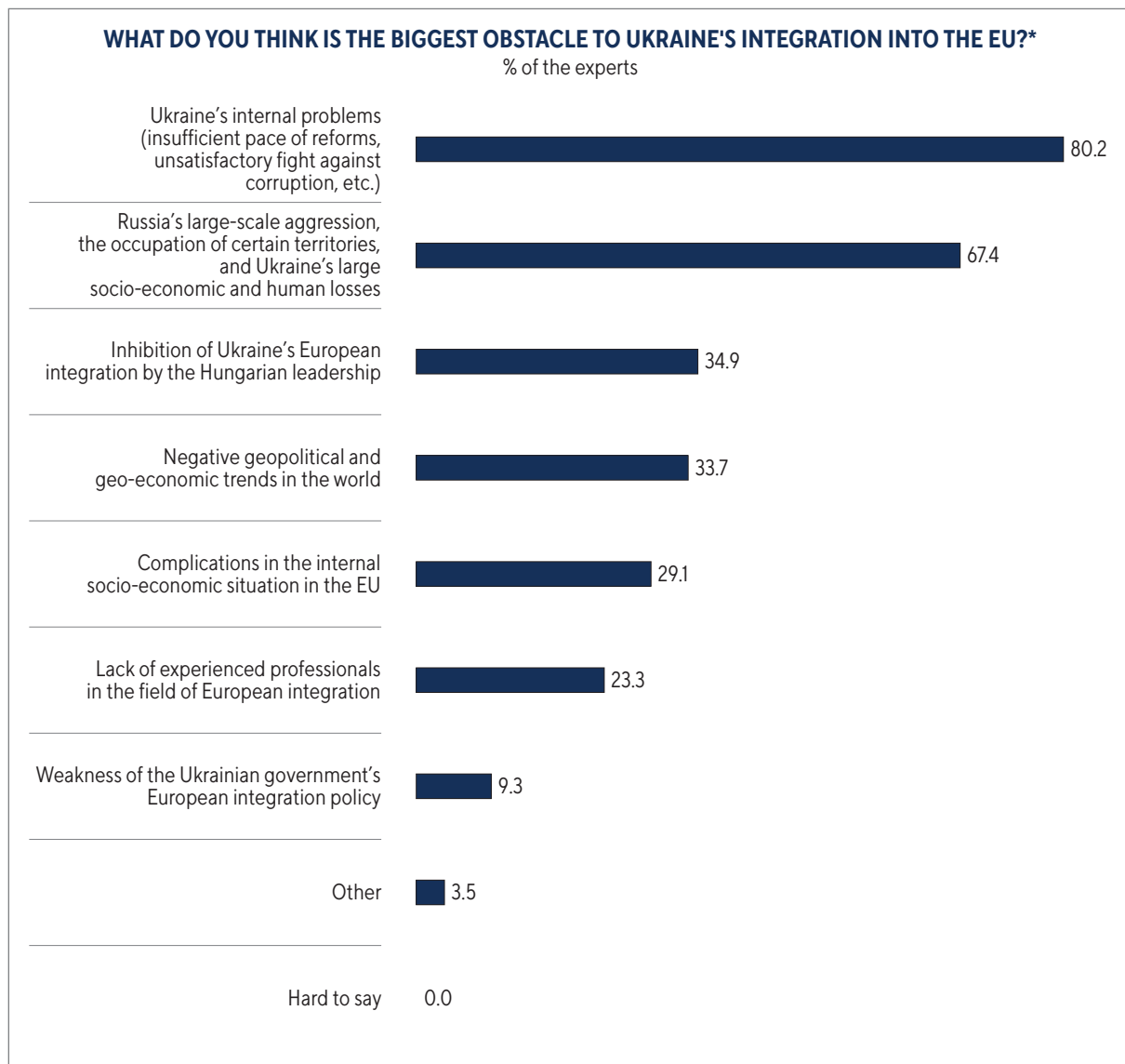
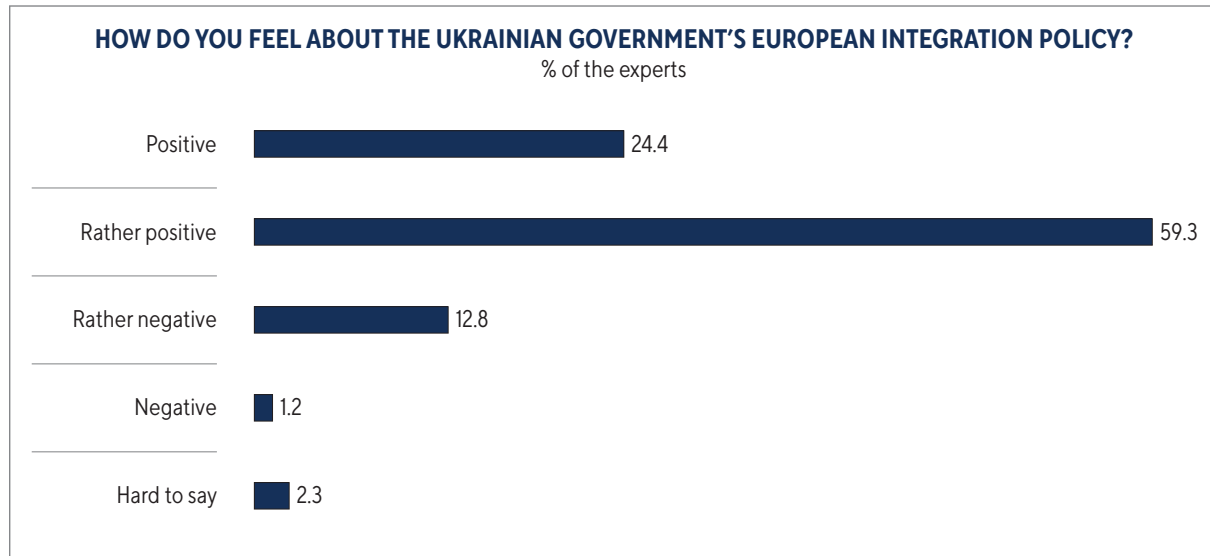
system, judicial reform, the fight against corruption, the implementation of European human rights standards in the national legal system, etc.

An important finding is that Ukrainian experts perceive EU accession as a fairly realistic, medium-term prospect. According to most experts, Ukraine will join the EU within 5-10 years.

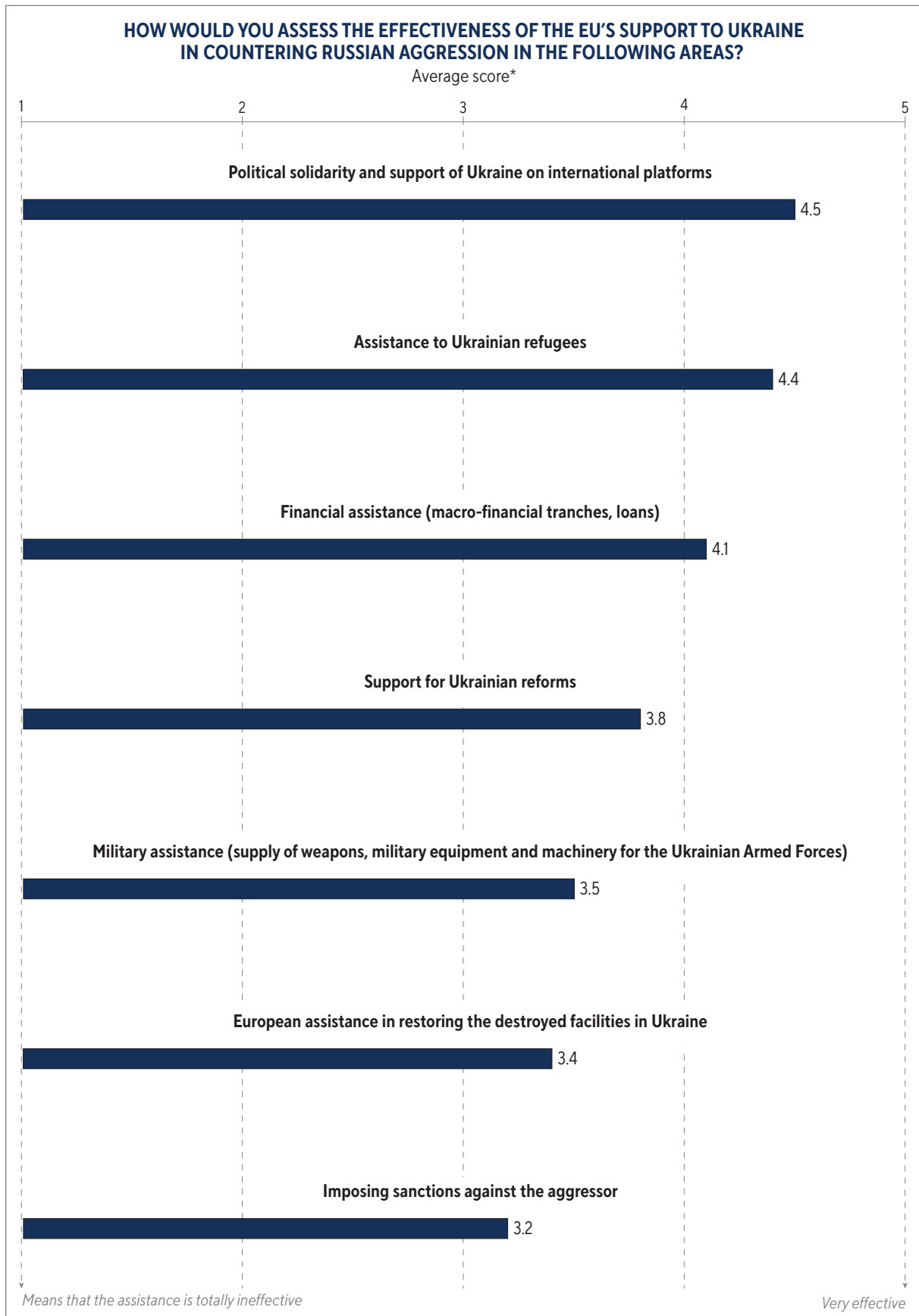
**Summing up the expert opinions, it is important to note that today, in the face of unfavourable transformations in US foreign policy, the role of the EU as Ukraine's strategic ally is becoming increasingly relevant. Meanwhile, it is clear that Kyiv, with the help of partners, should try to restore a productive dialogue with Washington, taking into account the specifics of the new US policy.**

**In turn, accelerated and effective integration into the EU is becoming even more important. In particular, Ukraine's key task is to open six thematic clusters in 2025 and to start a dialogue with Europe on all negotiating chapters. With this in mind, Ukraine, together with its European partners, should focus on addressing existing problems and obstacles. A factor in Ukraine's successful progress towards the European community is strengthening of internal unity and resilience, implementing effective pro-European reforms, and building defence capabilities to counter Russian intervention.**

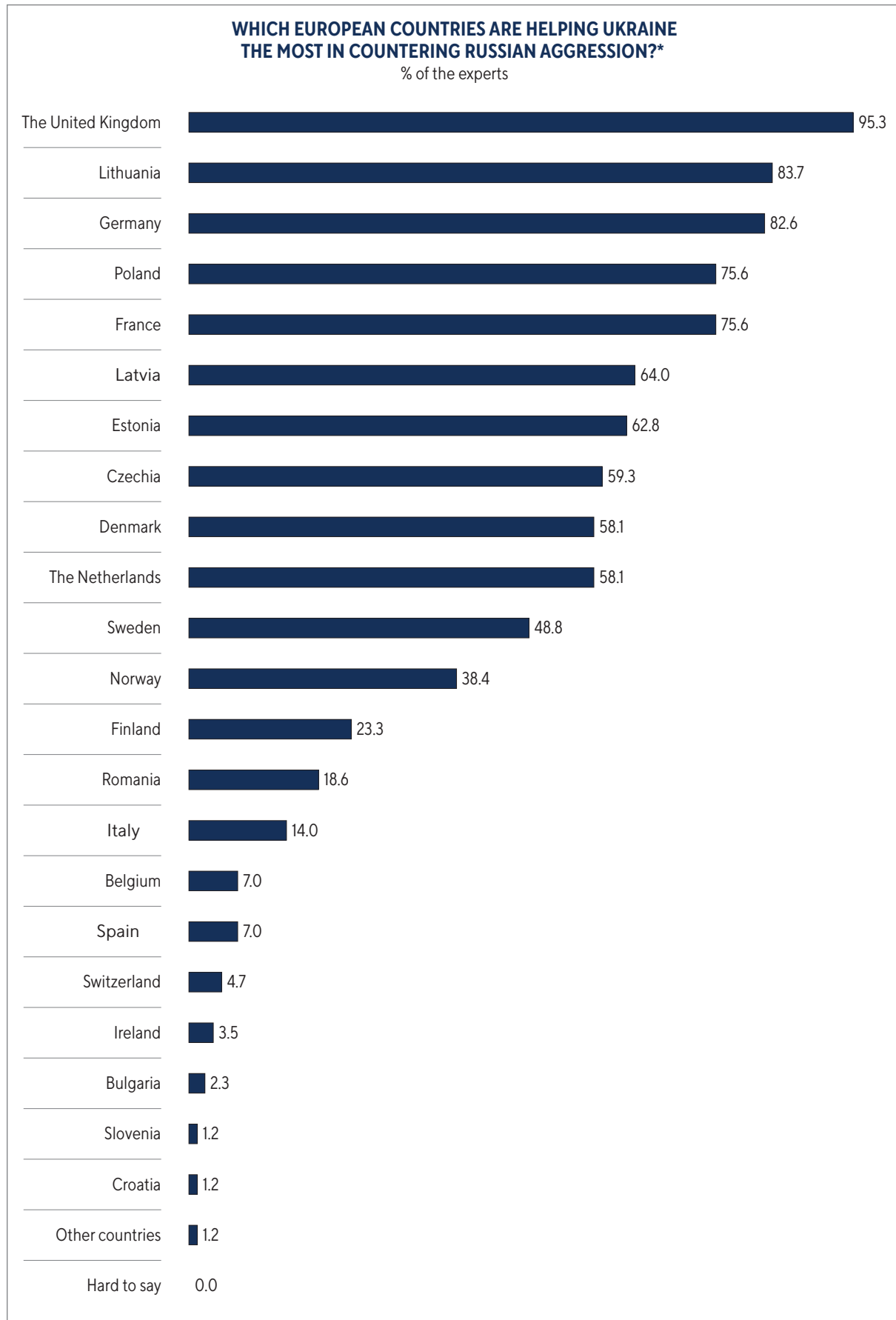




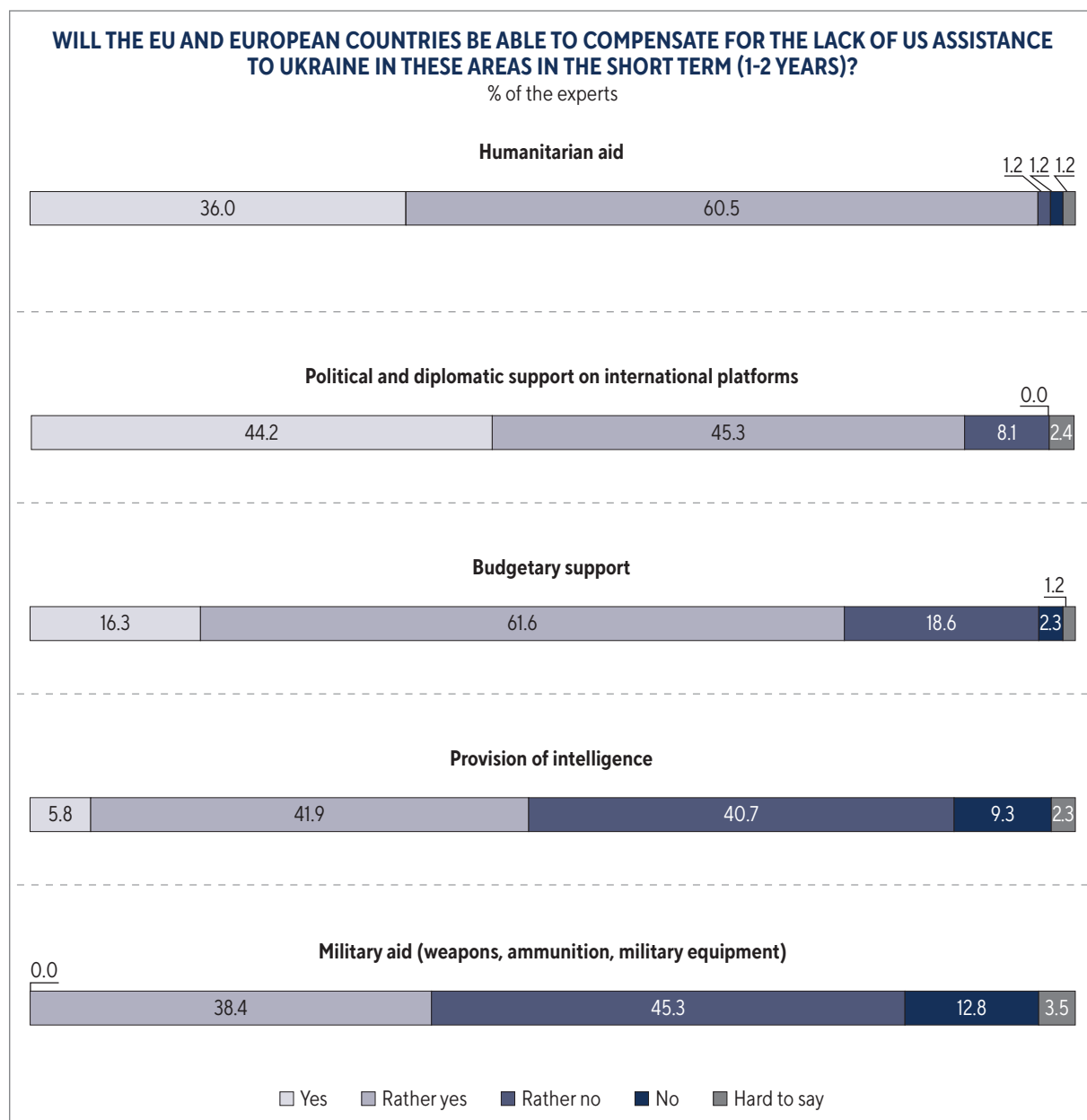
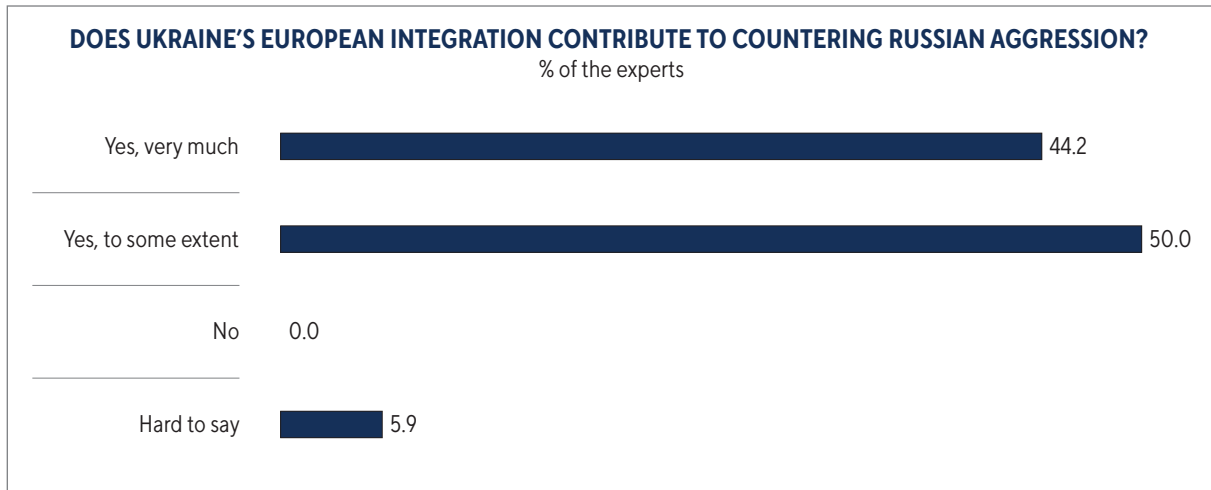
\* No more than three options.



\* Please rate each statement on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where «1» means that the assistance is totally ineffective, and «5» – very effective.



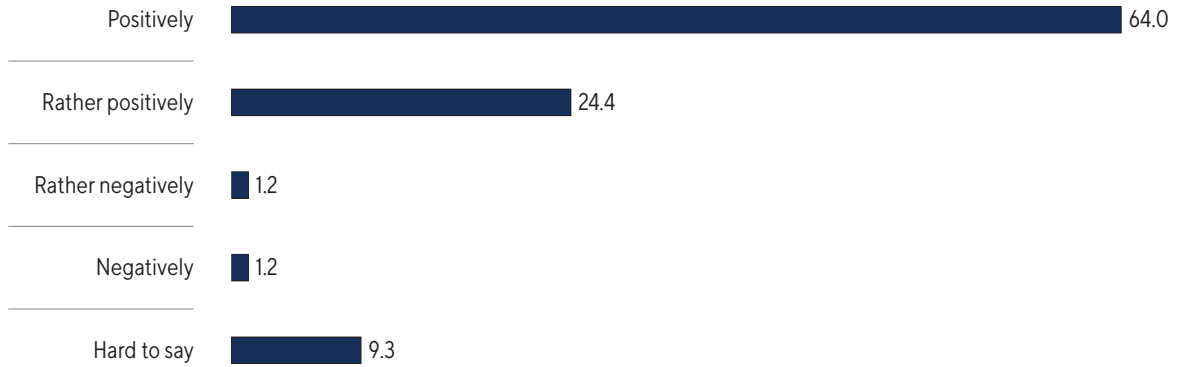
\* No more than ten countries in the list.





**HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE INITIATIVE OF THE BRITISH AND FRENCH LEADERS TO CREATE A COALITION OF THE WILLING AND ASSEMBLE A PEACEKEEPING CONTINGENT TO SUPPORT PEACE IN UKRAINE?\***

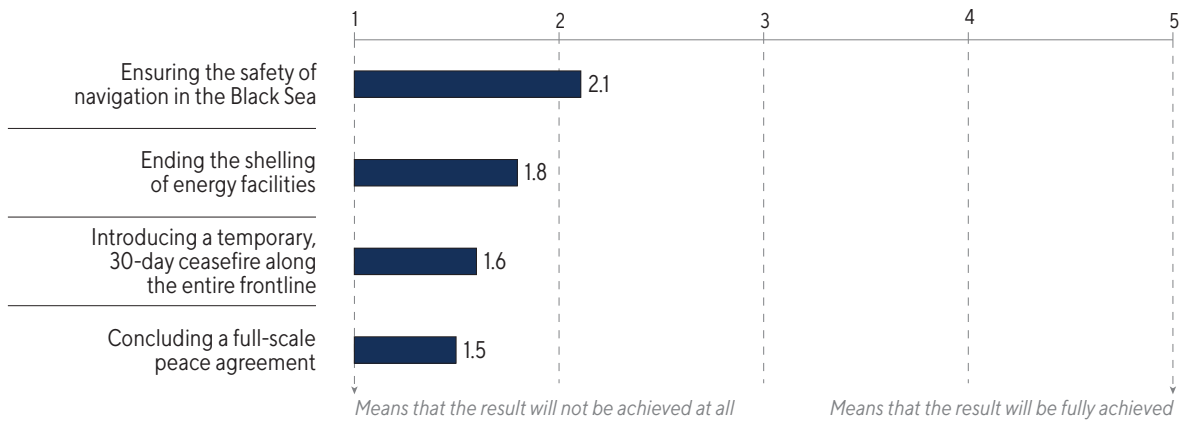
% of the experts



\* One answer only.

**HOW DO YOU ASSESS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE US-INITIATED NEGOTIATION PROCESS TO END THE WAR IN UKRAINE?**

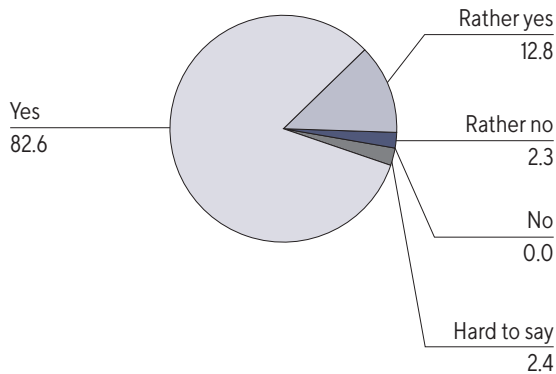
Average score\*



\* Please rate each statement on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where «1» means that the result will not be achieved at all, and «5» means that the result will be fully achieved.

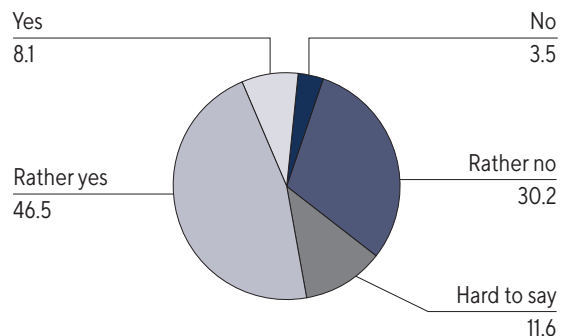
**SHOULD THE EU BE INVOLVED IN THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS TO END THE WAR IN UKRAINE?**

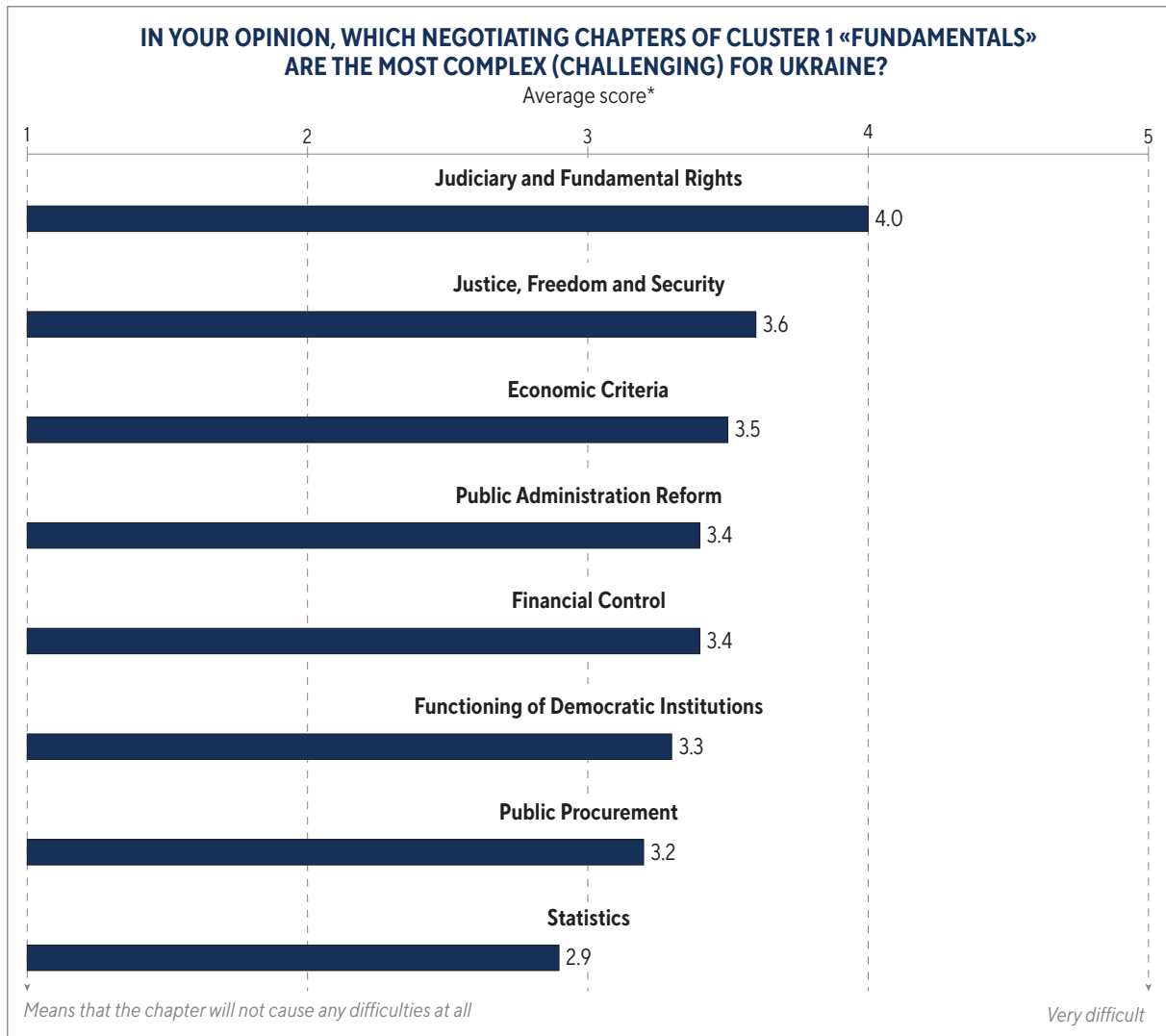
% of the experts



**IN YOUR OPINION, WILL IT BE POSSIBLE TO OPEN THE CLUSTER 1 «FUNDAMENTALS» IN UKRAINE'S EU ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2025 DURING POLAND'S EU PRESIDENCY?**

% of the experts





\* Please rate each statement on a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where «1» means that the chapter will not cause any difficulties at all, and «5» – very difficult.

