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UKRAINE – EU: PATH TO POLITICAL ASSOCIATION

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CONTENTS

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Political association with the EU and solidarity in the world arena have an ever higher significance considering the turbulent political landscape, new challenges and threats on the continent of Europe. At the same time, the rapprochement of Kyiv and Brussels in the political sphere, European principles and norms taking root in Ukraine's domestic practices, the world-view and sociocultural identification with the European community are basic elements of Eurointegration and are the major prerequisite for successful implementation of internal reforms. In this respect, an important resource for the Ukrainian authorities, as well as an argument in the dialogue with the EU is stable, dominant support for the idea of Eurointegration in Ukraine's civil society, leading political forces, representatives of expert milieu, etc.

The Association Agreement is a signpost of domestic transformations and the benchmark of efficiency of Ukraine's Eurointegration process. Political association and economic integration are «the ideological nucleus» of this document. Fundamental democratic principles are the foundation of the political association, not only being a world-view component of the Agreement but also playing the role of the main driving force of moving towards the EU. At the same time, as a societal phenomenon, the political association with the EU poses as a platform for cooperation between the signatories to the Agreement, first of all, in the political-and-legal sphere.

However, movement towards the EU is not a linear process, it is being slowed down by many factors: the rising conflict atmosphere in the geopolitical arena, complicated and dangerous tendencies within the EU, the continuing Russian aggression, etc. This is, however, first of all, Ukraine's domestic problems linked to the state of the reform of judiciary, fight against corruption, public governance efficiency, etc. In this context, attention should be paid also to the scale of Ukraine's «home task» that the Agreement contains, and to the respective institutional capacities of state structure. Another thing is also clear, however: the volume and depth of the transformations planned for in the Agreement have to be generally comparable to the level of participation and assistance from the EU's side. Eurointegration is a two-way traffic route.

Undoubtedly, the decisive factor of progressing along this path is the political will of the country's leaders, readiness for real pro-European reforms and the capacity of converting the declared pro-European course into practical results to be felt by Ukrainians in their everyday life.

At the same time, while speaking of the implementation of reforms stipulated by the Agreement, one should note that this document now requires not just pinpointed, fragmentary updating but also a more comprehensive systemic upgrading. In particular, against the background of new threats and challenges, Chapter II of the Agreement, dedicated to the political-and-security sphere, requires updating. In general, this political part has a declaratory, framework character. It does not contain clear-cut plans for implementation and, regrettably, no longer meets modern realities or urgent needs of securing a new quality of partnership between Kyiv and Brussels in political and security directions.

In the nearer perspective, moderate progress in the Ukraine-EU relations may be expected. Mostly routine, daily but doubtlessly important for Ukraine work will continue for implementing the Agreement, focusing on liberalizing economic cooperation, gradual removal of barriers in mutual trade, Ukraine's integration into the EU's markets (energy, digital, agrarian, etc.), introduction of «the industrial visa-free regime», etc. It is clear that successful sectoral integration is a foundation and a favourable factor for deepening political relations, strengthening mutual trust, and accelerating the rates of Eurointegration.

On the other hand, while some formal signs of political associations are there (in particular, in the foreign-policy sphere), absence of full-fledged membership does not allow to

influence the adoption of the EU's important decisions. The official Kyiv, when joining the EU's foreign-policy statements, moves mostly along the Brussels fairway. Also, the rights of the Association Council to change the Agreement's basic text are extremely limited, as the procedures of upgrading/updating it are extremely complicated.

Generally speaking, the differences in the vision of Kyiv and Brussels of their future relations cannot but impact on the atmosphere and the character of their cooperation. This strategic lack of clarity in the prospects of Ukraine's Eurointegration should be seen as a certain «transitionary period of integration without membership».

It is clear that this period should be efficiently used, in the first place, for the practical realization of opportunities provided for by the Agreement, its maximum updating, modernization, and deepening of its components, enhancing cooperation in the most promising directions which have to become «locomotives» of integration and produce fast and tangible results.

Secondly, it is extremely important for Ukraine to retain both support and solidarity of the EU in opposing the Russian hybrid aggression, and the policy of sanctions against the aggressor. In this context, strengthening the security component of the Ukraine-EU partnership is important, as well as the search for joint answers to modern challenges and threats in the sphere of security (including the use of synergy of joint efforts within the framework of «the Associated Trio» of the Eastern Partnership). In parallel, it is necessary to gradually and consistently broaden, among the EU countries, the range of support of the idea of Ukraine joining the EU.

Another thing is also clear, though: the future format of relations between Kyiv and Brussels will depend to a significant extent, on tendencies and directions of the development of the EU itself, on upgrading its institutional architecture. Thus. Ukraine has to be an active participant in the European dialogue on the future of the European Union.

The sets of problems outlined above are studied in **the analytical paper composed of four chapters**:

CHAPTER 1 outlines concisely major stages of the development of the partnership of Kyiv and Brussels, the dynamics and tendencies of cooperation. Efficiency of the institutional support of their relations is studied, the contents and priorities of the Ukraine-EU political dialogue are considered.

CHAPTER 2 defines challenges and threats to Eurointegration, with attention focused on the issues most urgent for Ukraine: security and conducting domestic reforms in the spheres most «sensuous» for the EU. Influence of political-and-security factors on economic contacts with the EU is studies.

CHAPTER 3 considers legal foundations of political association, problems and prerequisites of rapprochement with the EU in political sphere, and defines the role and the place of Ukraine in the EU's external policy system. Prospects of political association are outlined.

CHAPTER 4 contains concise conclusions and a number of proposals aimed at upgrading the quality of political partnership and securing conditions for Ukraine to join the EU.

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1.
UKRAINE-EU: SOME SPECIAL FEATURES OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE

This Chapter presents a concise outlook of major stages of the development of relations between Kyiv and Brussels in the political sphere, in particular, the formation of the normative-and-legislative basis of these relations: from the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1994) to the current Association Agreement (2014). The current Agreement with the EU is the road map and the program for domestic reforms in Ukraine, the basis of the political association and economic integration of Kyiv and Brussels. However, it is evident at the same time that this document requires updating and adaptation to the current reality

It is clear that the development of political contacts, the character and the atmosphere of the dialogue between the sides depend on many factors of external and internal nature. What is meant here is both political and security, as well as social-and-economic processes in Europe and the world, EU's internal problematics, and the efficiency of Ukrainian reforms in different spheres.

So, the sum total of these factors influences Ukraine-EU relations to a significant extent, as well as the contents and priorities of the political dialog. This dialogue, doubtlessly, covers a lot of spheres and directions of bilateral partnership. This Chapter considers some of the most important topics outlined in Chapter II of the Association Agreement: foreign policy and security policy, Ukraine's domestic policy and problems of reforms.

1.1. Dynamics and tendencies of the development of political relations between Kyiv and Brussels

Special features of the evolution of Ukraine-EU cooperation[1]**.** Ukraine's road to the EU is a natural phenomenon based on civilizational reasons. However, Eurointegration is not a linear process: the complex evolution of relations contains «slowing-down stages», attempts to fold down the Eurointegration course, as well as successes, problems, and dramatic events.

[1] See: The Razumkov Centre's Analytical Paper. Ukraine's European Integration: The Russian Factor. – National Security and Defence Journal, No. 1-2. 2020, pp. 3-6, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD181-182_2020_ukr.pdf*.

Generally speaking, relations between Kyiv and Brussels may be conditionally divided into two stages.

- **The cooperation and partnership stage (1991-2014). This period of time is characterized by setting up a systemic political dialog, creating a set of partnership relations in different spheres, forming the agreements-and-legislation tenets of the cooperation, and the gradual establishment of Ukraine's Eurointegration course.**

Political-and-diplomatic contacts between Kyiv and Brussels, launched in December 1991, had developed under complicated circumstances of the establishment of Ukraine's statehood, geopolitical re-formatting of the post-Soviet space. While making its first steps on the international arena, Ukraine saw the construction of relations with the EU, based on the principles of full-scale integration. Gradually, the legislative-and-legal basis for the integration with the EU was implemented.

First. The Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada «On Main Directions of Ukraine's Foreign Policy» of 2 July 1993 stressed «the restoration of long-standing political, economic, cultural, spiritual connections of Ukraine with the European civilization... integrating its economy into the common European... economic space».[2]

Second. The President's Decree of 11 June 1998 endorsed «Ukraine's Strategy of Integration into the European Union» which proclaimed the strategic goal of «the state entering the European political (including the sphere of foreign policy and security policy), information, economic, and legal space».[3] The document declared: «Ukraine's national interests require Ukraine's establishment as an influential European state, a full-fledged member of the EU».[4]

Third. Ukraine's strategic intentions in the European direction were reflected in the Law «On the Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policy» of 1 July 2010.[5]

In parallel, this period also saw the treaty-and-legal principles of the Ukraine-EU partnership taking shape. On 14 June 1994, the EU and Ukraine had concluded ***The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement*** (hereafter, the PCA)[6]. This document, valid for 10 years, provided for a large-scale internal transformation of Ukraine in political, economic, and trade spheres. However, in contrast to similar association agreements concluded by the EU with Central European and Baltic countries in 1991-1996, the PCA had not contained prospects of EU membership. Its goals were of tactical character and were limited to providing for the political dialog, development of political relations, promotion of mutual trade, and support for domestic reforms in Ukraine, The PCA comprised 10 Chapters (109 Articles and five Appendixes) and covered Ukraine's cooperation with the EU in the spheres of energy. trade and investment, justice and internal affairs, adapting Ukraine's legislation to the EU norms, environmental protection, transport, science, outer space, cross-border cooperation, etc.[7]

The next step in developing relations between Kyiv and Brussels was the approval, in December 1999, of ***The EU Common Strategy on Ukraine***[8]. This document contained a number of important clauses: a) strategic partnership was being set up between the EU and Ukraine, based on common values and interests; b) Ukraine was called a defining «actor in the region», and its independence and stability was put among the major achievements of the new Europe[9];) (в) Євросоюз визнав європейські прагнення the European Union recognizes Ukraine's European aspirations and welcomes Ukraine's pro-European choice; d) the EU's readiness to maintain political and economic transformations in Ukraine with the aim of the sides' further rapprochement was stated; e) cooperation between Kyiv and Brussels has to be implemented along the clearly defined vectors:

2 Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine «On the Main Directions of the Foreign Policy of Ukraine» No.3360 of 2 July 1993.

3 Decree of the President of Ukraine «On Approving of the Strategy of Ukraine's Integration into the European Union» No.615 of 11 June 1998.

4 Ibid.

5 In particular, Article 11 of this Law provides for «securing Ukraine's integration into the European political, economic, legal space with the aim of acquiring membership in the European Union».

6 The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine had ratified the APC on 10 November 1996. The document came into force on 1 March 1998 after the completion of the process of its ratification by all EU member states.

7 Ukraine-EU Relations. MFA of Ukraine, – *https://mfa.gov.ua/ua/about-ukraine/european-integration/ua-eu-relations.*

8 The EU Common Strategy on Ukraine, Approved by the European Council on 11 December 1999. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, – *https://zakon. rada.gov.ua/cgi-bin/laws/main.cgi?nreg=994_492.*

9 Ibid.

strengthening of democracy, the rule of law in Ukraine; support for the process of economic transformations in Ukraine; cooperation for the sake of strengthening stability and security in Europe, partnership in the spheres of environment, energy, nuclear safety, justice and internal affairs, regional and cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries, etc.[10]

Ukraine's participation in the foreign-policy initiative of the European Union, ***The European Neighbourhood Policy*** (ENP) had not, generally speaking, brought added value to relations between Kyiv and Brussels. The document had a goal of creating a zone of stability, peace, and well-being to the South and East of the boundaries of the enlarged EU, by establishing close long-term relations with the neighbouring countries. However, the ENP had an unjustifiably broad span, on the one hand (Ukraine, Israel, Jordan, Moldova, Morocco, Tunisia, et al.). On the other hand, the EU neighbours were faced with requirements similar to candidate member states with no guarantee for prospects of full-fledged European Union membership.[11]

On 21 February 2005, ***The Ukraine-EU Action Plan*** was signed within the ENP, scheduled for three years.[12] This document was a short-term and intermittent framework program and had not, in general, corresponded to Ukraine's strategic interests. The Action Plan stipulated the activization of political, economic, cultural relations, joint responsibility in conflict aversion and settlement. The document established possibility of Ukraine's participation in key aspects of policies and programs of the European Union. Also, the deepening of political cooperation was stipulated, mutual opening of economies and lowering trade barriers, and a possibility of concluding a new reinforced agreement.

However, the Action Plan uncovered the problems of chronic character, even then. On the one hand, there was a certain progress on the path of Eurointegration: in particular, political dialogue was intensified, and a number of important agreements were concluded in the trade-and-economic and energy spheres, in the justice sphere, in migration policy. But on the other hand, the state of the Plan's implementation cannot be called satisfactory.[13] Most of the clauses of the document were at different stages of realization, among them the ones traditionally problematic for Ukraine: judiciary and anti-corruption spheres.

Over this period, a number of other important events took place in the Ukraine-EU relations. See: «Some Important Events in the Ukraine-EU Relations», p. 8

When assessing the content and specific features of this stage of Ukraine-EU relations, it should be noted that during the establishment and development of the partnership between Kyiv and Brussels, the legal basis for the partnership was improved, the spheres of cooperation were broadened and deepened. But this process was limited to and slowed down by a set of internal and external factors, with the following that can be singled out.

First. Complicated political, socio-economic situation in Ukraine, weakness of democratic institutes, resistance on the part of the former nomenclature elite, the inertia of post-Soviet psychology, competitive interests of oligarchic groups. Despite the proclamation of the course for integration with the EU, the official Kyiv in practice engaged in the policy of manoeuvring between Brussels and Moscow.

Second. Lack of preparedness and desire of the EU's leader countries for the full-scale Eurointegration of Ukraine. Beset by internal problems (including the ones after new waves of enlargement in 2004-2007), the European Union treated rolling out prospects of EU membership for Kyiv in a rather sceptical way, aiming at concluding partnership agreements looking de-facto like «homework», with their completion not guaranteeing further rapprochement with the EU.

Third. The influence of the Russian factor, gradually growing since V. Putin came to power. Russia had not abandoned its attempts to bring

[10] Ibid.

[11] Communication from the Commission «European Neighbourhood Policy. Strategy Paper». – Commission of the European Communities, pp.2-5, – *https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2004_communication_from_the_commission_-_european_neighbourhood_policy_-_strategy_paper.pdf.*

[12] «Ukraine-EU» Action Plan». – The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, – *https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/994_693.*

[13] In 2008, a consortium of Ukrainian experts was analyzing results of fulfilling the Action Plan over 2005-2008. According to their assessment, out of 73 clauses of the Action Plan, over the three-year period 11 had been fulfilled completely, 61 partly, one had not been fulfilled. See: «Ukraine-EU» Action Plan: Results and Prospects. – National Security and Defence Journal, 2008., No.6, pp.2-6, – *http://razumkov.org.ua/ uploads/journal/ukr/NSD100_2008_ukr.pdf.*

SOME IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE UKRAINE-EU RELATIONS

- *July 2005.* Ukraine had unilaterally cancelled visas for citizens of EU member states and Switzerland.[14]
- *December 2005.* At the 9th Ukraine-EU Summit, the decision on giving Ukraine the status of a country with market economy was adopted, the strengthening of cooperation with the EU in the sphere of joint foreign policy and security policy (JFPSP) was adopted, the Memorandum on mutual understanding in cooperation in the energy sector was signed.[15]
- *January 2006.* Ukraine joined the Group of countries against corruption of the Council of Europe (GRECO).[16]
- *June 2007.* Ukraine and the EU concluded agreements on simplifying the visa regime and re-admission.[17]
- *February 2008.* Kyiv signed the Protocol on joining the WTO.[18]
- *May 2009.* At the initiative of Poland and Sweden, the EU has launched a new foreign-policy initiative, the Eastern Partnership, with the participation of Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The new format suggested cooperation at both bilateral and multilateral levels, and concluding new agreements with the participating countries.[19]
- *March 2012.* The initiating of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement took place.[20]

the former Soviet republics back to the zone of its own «privileged» interests and was imposing the alternative of Eurasian integration on them, in the form of the Single Economic Space, the Customs Union, and later, the Eurasian Economic Community, the Eurasian Economic Union. Moscow implemented its «integration» policy by exerting political-and-diplomatic pressure, using financial-and-economic and energy leverage, blackmail, threats, bribery, information pressure, etc. A real alternative to moving towards the EU emerged: Eurasian integration along the lines of Moscow's scenario. Kremlin's hybrid pressure was strengthening and covered all spheres of bilateral relations, later transforming into military aggression.

➢ **The second stage, «political association and economic integration», began in 2014 and is still ongoing. This period is marked by acquiring a new quality of the Ukraine-EU partnership within the framework of the Association Agreement, by joint opposition to the Russian aggression, and the ultimate consolidation and normative-and-legislative stipulation of the irreversibility of Ukraine's Eurointegration course.**

This has been a complicated, controversial and dramatic period of relations between Kyiv and Brussels, with its character resulting from a set of influential factors. There are three major of those to be singled out:

- In 2014, the large-scale armed aggression of Russia against Ukraine began: Crimea was annexed, and territories in the East of Ukraine were occupied. This has cardinally changed the state of relations in the admitted «triangle» Ukraine-EU-RF, as well as the situation in Europe in general;

- «The Revolution of Dignity» had changed the political regime in Ukraine. One of the reasons was that at the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit on 29 November 2013, Ukraine's President V. Yanukovych refused to sign the Agreement on Association with the EU.[21] The revolution reaffirmed the European choice of the country. However, rather powerful

[14] Ukraine has cancelled visas for citizens of EU countries, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Canada. – Correspondent, 26 July 2005, – *https://ua.korrespondent.net/ ukraine/259263-ukrayina-skasuvala-vizi-dlya-gromadyan-krayin-es-shvejcariyi-lihtenshtejnu-i-kanadi.*

[15] EU-Ukraine Summit, Kyiv, 1 December 2005. – European Commission, – *https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_05_337.*

[16] Ukraine became the 40th member of the GRECO. – The Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, – *https://minjust.gov.ua/news/ministry/ukrainastala-sorokovim-chlenom-grupi-derjav-radi-evropi-proti-koruptsii-greko-6134.*

[17] The Agreement between Ukraine and the European Community on simplifying the processing of visas. – The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, – https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/994_850; The Agreement between Ukraine and the European Community on readmission of people. – The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, – *https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/994_851.*

[18] Yushchenko has signed the protocol on Ukraine's joining the WTO. – UNIAN, 5 February 2000, – *https://www.unian.ua/politics/94299-yuschenko-pidpisav-protokolpro-vstup-ukrajini-do-sot.html.*

[19] Eastern Partnership. – The Government Portal, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/diyalnist/yevropejska-integraciya/shidne-partnerstvo.*

[20] The negotiations on the new enhanced agreement between Ukraine and the EU started in March 2007. The negotiations came to completion in December 2011. The Government Portal, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/diyalnist/yevropejska-integraciya/ugoda-pro-asociacyu.*

[21] Yanukovych has not signed the Association Agreement at the summit in Vilnius. – Dzerkalo Tyzhnya, 29 November 2013, – *https://dt.ua/POLITICS/ukrayina-nepidpisala-ugodu-pro-asociaciyu-na-samiti-u-vilnyusi-132821_.html.*

pro-Russian political forces have remained there on Ukraine's political arena;

- An acute aggravation of the situation within the EU took place: the peak of the large-scale migration crisis (2015), the launch of the process of Great Britain's exit from the EU, terrorism in Europe becoming more active: all this could not but leave its mark on the Ukraine-EU relations as a whole.

Speaking of qualitative changes in the Ukraine-EU system of relations within the specified period, it is necessary to remember a number of important events of strategic significance. Thus, on 11 June 2017, the ***visa-free regime*** for Ukraine's citizens travel to the countries of the European Union came into force.[22] This was preceded by Ukraine's fulfilment of all the requirements within the framework of the Action Plan on visa liberalization completed in December 2015.[23]

Another important step by Ukraine was ***the confirmation of the irreversibility of its European course***. In June 2017, the Verkhovna Rada approved amendments to the Law «On the principles of domestic and foreign policy», stipulating Ukraine's course aimed at joining the NATO.[24] In 2018, President P. Poroshenko put forward the initiative on affirming the course towards the EU and NATO in the Constitution, and on 7 February 2019, the Verkhovna Rada approved the amendments to the Basic Law on the state's strategic course for acquiring full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the EU and NATO.[25]

At the same time, in May 2018, the official Kyiv has abandoned any integration processes in the post-Soviet space, having cancelled Ukraine's participation in the CIS statutory bodies.[26] In parallel, in December 2018, the Verkhovna Rada had approved the Law on stopping the action of the Big Treaty with the RF.[27]

While describing this period in the relations between Kyiv and Brussels, it is also necessary to point out that after the change of power in Ukraine, continuity and sustainability of the Eurointegration course have been observed. The new President's team have been trying to implement in practice the course for deepening integration with the EU while declaring rather ambitious intentions.

The current authorities managed to retain previous gains and positive tendencies in the Ukraine-EU relations. These are, in particular: (a) modernization of the normative-and-legislative basis of the partnership; (b) development of trade-and-economic cooperation; (c) maintaining political-and-diplomatic solidarity and economic support in opposing the Russian aggression.

At the same time, the policy of the current authorities in the European direction has lately clearly revealed efforts, at the official level, to formalize and clearly define the prospects of membership in the EU. In 2021, the practice of adopting declarations with individual countries, of support for the prospect of Ukraine joining the EU became widespread. The first step in this direction was concluding such documents with the leaders of Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland (March-May 2021). In particular, the Declaration signed by V.Zelenskyy and A.Duda, stresses that «The Presidents of Ukraine and Poland have noted Ukraine's intention to submit application for membership in the EU in the future, after the clauses of the Association Agreement are implemented on condition that Copenhagen criteria are observed, and agreed that Poland will support Ukraine on this path».[28] These are rather ambitious plans of Ukraine's top officials with regard to the fact that there are different positions on Ukraine's EU membership prospects.

[22] As of today, the decision on introducing the visa-free regime of Ukraine with the EU came into force. – UNIAN, 11 June 2017, – *https://www.unian.ua/politics/1968736-vidsogodni-nabulo-chinnosti-rishennyapro-zaprovadjennya-bezvizovogo-rejimu-ukrajini-z-es.html.*

[23] On developing the visa-free dialogue between Ukraine and the EU. – Mission of Ukraine to the European Union, – *https://ukraine-eu.mfa.gov.ua/ua/ukraineeu/justice/visa-liberalization.*

[24] Ukraine 2018-2019: Cautious Optimism On the Eve of Elections. – The Razumkov Centre, 2018, pp. 8-9. – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2019_Pidsumky_2018.pdf.*

[25] Ibid.

[26] On 19 May the Decree of the President of Ukraine «On the Resolution of the National Security and Defense Council of 2 May 2018 'On stopping the action for Ukraine of some international treaties concluded within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States' No.139 cancelling Ukraine's participation in the work of the statutory bodies of the CIS.

[27] 27Ukraine 2018-2019: Cautious Optimism On the Eve Of Elections. – The Razumkov Centre, 2018, pp. 8-9, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2019_Pidsumky_2018.pdf.*

[28] The signing of the Declaration on Ukraine's European perspective brings closer the full-fledged integration into the European Union. – Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The website of the President of Ukraine, 4 May 2021, – *https://www.president.gov.ua/news/pidpisannya-deklaraciyi-pro-yevropejsku-perspektivu-ukrayini-68257.*

Expert opinion

71% of experts polled on Ukraine's EU membership said that the issue of Ukraine's membership should be put on the agenda of official negotiations with the EU (in 2020, 65 % of the polled experts supported this message). At the same time, 15 % of those polled have supported this idea, while 14 % do not agree with this and 15 % are hesitating with their answer.[29]

The basic component of Ukraine-EU relations at this stage is the Association Agreement which is the program of Ukraine's reforms in different sectors and spheres, while the level of its implementation is the indicator of efficiency of Ukraine's Eurointegration course.[30] The Agreement is the most elaborate legally binding bilateral treaty in the entire history of the Ukraine-EU relations. It contains 486 articles, grouped in seven chapters, 44 appendixes, and three protocols, being the Agreement's inseparable components. The Europarliament and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine have simultaneously ratified the Agreement on 16 September 2016. On 1 September 2017, the Agreement has officially come into force.[31]

The Ukrainian authorities, at the start of the Agreement's implementation, made several steps for organizing joint work of the executive and legislative branches of power in adopting Eurointegration laws, and in explaining the advantages of Eurointegration to the public. In 2017-2018, in particular, the Government had approved of the Action Plan to fulfil the Association Agreement and the procedure of its fulfilment, the Plan for translating the EU legal acts for 2017-2018, and the Strategy for the communication of the Agreement. The Roadmap for fulfilment of the Agreement and the Action Plan for realizing the Eurointegration Communication Strategy had been adopted.[32]

However, the dynamics of implementation of the Agreement in recent years indicates the need to intensify the pace of European integration, especially in the most problematic spheres. In particular, according to the last Government report on the implementation of the Agreement for 2015-2020, the overall progress was estimated by 54%. Yet in 2015 the level of implementation of the planned tasks was 90%, it gradually decreased to 65% in 2018, and to 34% in 2020, respectively.[33]

The problems with fulfilling the tasks defined in the Agreement are explained by many factors. On the one hand, these are Ukraine's domestic problems: complicated social-and-economic situation, improper quality of the system of governance, lack of efficiency of the fight against corruption, slow pace of the reform of judiciary, imperfect Eurointegration policy of the authorities, etc. In addition, specific factors should be mentioned: the quality of actions of authorities on the Eurointegration direction, the level of coordination of authorities' actions, the efficiency of planning and of the management of enterprises, etc.

On the other hand, disadvantageous external factors influence the realization of the Agreement: the rise in the geopolitical turbulence in the world, the ongoing Russian aggression, complication of the situation on the continent of Europe, dangerous centrifugal processes within the EU. The common critical factor should be taken into account as well: the world *COVID-19* pandemics which has drastically changed the social-and-economic situation in Europe and the agenda of European institutions, and has influenced the issues and intensity of the Ukraine-EU dialogue.

It is clear that this combination of internal and external factors does influence the character, the atmosphere, as well as the efficiency of the political dialog, as well as the state of Ukraine-EU political relations in general.[34]

[29] See: «The EU-Ukraine political relations through experts' eyes» in this publication.

[30] The Agreement on Association between Ukraine, on the one hand, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, on the other), – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/diyalnist/yevropejska-integraciya/ugoda-pro-asociacyu.*

[31] The Association Agreement was signed in two stages: on 21 March 2014 the political component was signed, while the economic component was signed on 27 June 2014. On 16 September 2014 the Verkhovna Rada ratified the Agreement simultaneously with the European Parliament. Because of the importunate pressure by Russia, the provisional application of the economic component of the Agreement (DCFTA) was postponed until 1 January 2016. Starting from 1 January 2016, the provisional application of the free trade zone between Ukraine and the EU has begun. The Agreement came into force officially on 1 September 2017.

[32] Later, the Coordination Council on communicating Eurointegration started its work. By the end of 2018, information campaigns were launched, aimed at explaining advantages of EU and NATO membership to the public.

[33] Reports on fulfillment of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. – The website of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/diyalnist/yevropejska-integraciya/vikonannya-ugodi-pro-asociaciyu/zviti-pro-vikonannya-ugodi-pro-asociaciyu.* The data for 2020 are published on the Government's «The Agreement's Pulse» website, – *https://pulse.kmu.gov.ua/ua/a/year.*

When assessing the overall state and prospects of Ukraine-EU relations at the current stage, there are grounds to say that a number of problems of the preceding stage have acquired chronical character and remain on the agenda of relations between Kyiv and Brussels. These problems include the problems of corruption, of the reform of state governance and of judiciary, and slow rates of reforms in other spheres, as well as improper observance by Ukraine of her obligations, etc. ***In this respect, it is important that the declared Eurointegration course, regrettably, has not been so far converted into positive political and social-and-economic changes tangible for the public.*** At the same time, in domestic policy, the authorities had not got rid of using means and methods different from European principles and standards. On the whole, this weakens the European idea within the country and causes EU's «fatigue» of Ukraine.

Expert opinion

Over the period under study (2006-2021), the rate of Ukraine's integration into the EU has been assessed by experts, mostly, in a critical way. Most frequently, the respondents characterize the rates as «low». The maximum index of 81 % had been given in February 2010. At the same time, compared to the preceding period (2006-2012), experts assess the rates of Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU somewhat better over the last three years (2019-2021). Thus, if in April 2012 the proportion of assessments «medium», «low», and «zero» was 18 to 65 to 14%, in March 2021 it was 40 to 50 to 8%.

The team now in power, while continuing the Eurointegration course, are trying to make the dialogue with the EU more active, to deepen sectoral integration, to provide for the updating of the Association Agreement, to liberalize trade-and-economic contacts with the European Union, etc. The agenda includes Ukraine entering the energy and digital markets of the EU, joining the European «Green Deal», the introduction of «the industrial visa-free regime», etc. This means that routine, everyday work will continue, sometimes unnoticeable, on the implementation of the Association Agreement. This is evident, however, that this work is important for Ukraine.

At the same time, it is important to state that after the conclusion of the Association Agreement and the introduction of the visa-free regime, a lack of common strategic goals is observed in relations between Brussels and Kyiv. On the one hand, the vision of the future of Ukraine-EU relations is focused solely on the fulfilment of the Agreement and its updating, this being, in essence, a tactical prospect, despite its great significance for Kyiv. On the other hand, an evident priority for Kyiv is opposing the Russian expansion, political-and-economic solidarity and the economic assistance of the EU.

In this context, one of the key directions is strengthening and deepening of political relations with the EU, making contacts more active, meaning moving towards the political association with the EU. It should be stressed that Kyiv and Brussels, within the framework of the Association Agreement, have developed and introduced a rather versatile set of instruments of Ukraine-EU political dialog, with participation of state officials, experts, representatives of the public, etc.

1.2. Institutional Support for Political Dialogue

The Association Agreement is a challenge for Ukraine considering the scale of the planned reforms, including the need to adapt the national legislation to acquis, providing for its unified interpretation and application.[35] This is why, in order to assist in the fulfilment of their obligations by the parties, the Agreement establishes a deepened multilevel institutional structure in the form of joint bodies, with the main political dialogue taking place on their platform. In particular, there is a well-branched system of the bodies of the Association Council. (Chart 1, *«Institutional Structure of Bilateral Bodies of the Ukraine-EU Association»,* pp. 20-23).

The Agreement also provides for other formats of political dialogue between the partners: a) regular sessions of representatives at the level of political directors, the Committee on policy and security issues, experts; b) diplomatic and military channels, including corresponding contacts within the UN, OSCE and other international platforms; c) regular sessions of high-level officials and of experts of military institutions; d) any other method. This list of procedures and mechanisms, including unscheduled consultations, can be enlarged by the parties with mutual consent.[36]

[34] Chapter 3 tells about this in more detail.

[35] Lazowski A. Enhanced Multilateralism and Enhanced Bilateralism: Integration without Membership in the European Union. – Common Market Law Review, Volume 45, Issue 2, 2008; Van der Loo G., Van Elsuwege P., Petrov R. The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement: Assessment of an Innovative Legal Instrument. – EUI Working Paper, LAW 2014/09, 2014.

[36] The Association Agreement, Article 5.

Thus, the Agreement does not limit the forms of political dialogue to the institutions it names, and leaves space to make it wider.

In general, the number of contacts over recent years matches the privileged character of relations between Ukraine and the EU. The global pandemic did limit relations at personal level but had not critically impacted on the intensity and efficiency of the dialogue between the sides. Transition to remote work in the online format while there are no trips abroad allowed to maintain the efficiency of communication with the partners at the necessary level, though it is clear that this format cannot fully replace personal meetings.

Speaking of the top-level political dialogue, **the 12th Ukraine-EU Summit** (6 October 2020), was the first bilateral summit held physically in Brussels since the pandemic had begun. This testifies both to the demonstration of special attention to Ukraine on the part of the EU leaders and to the desire to discuss important aspects of interaction head-to-head with President V. Zelenskyy. It is necessary to note that compared to the preceding summit which was «fact-finding» for the newly elected President of Ukraine (July 2019), the 2020 summit turned out to be much more productive and ambitious in defining new aspects of cooperation.[37]

When analysing joint declarations resulting from the summits, the last two summits had not strayed from the basic positions concerning the sides' cooperation: namely, they had fully reaffirmed the intention to fully use the Agreement's potential, recognized and welcomed ***Ukraine's European aspirations***, paid attention to common values (democracy, rule of law, respect to the international law and human rights), confirmed the importance of ***support of Ukraine's macroeconomic stability***, having emphasized the necessity to observe obligations to the IMF, etc.[38] Also, a block of its own is always ***condemnation of the violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine*** resulting from Russia's aggression. In this respect, the statement on the results of the last summit approves Ukraine's efforts for a diplomatic settlement of the conflict in the East.[39] It is joint summits that are an important place for declaring political-and-diplomatic solidarity with Ukraine on the part of the EU. Of course, the above list is not exhaustive, and the emphasis of joint statements differs depending on internal challenges in Ukraine and the situation on the international arena at the time of a summit (for instance, the 2020 joint statement underlines ***the importance of carrying out the reform of judiciary*** *and states the necessity of joint* ***fight against the COVID-18 pandemic*** and its aftereffects).

Also important is that during the last summit the sides agreed on conducting ***the comprehensive review of the achievement of the Agreement's goals in 2021*** and further strengthening of economic integration and regulatory rapprochement within the Agreement's framework, in particular, in such directions as digital transformation, environmental protection, fighting climate change (including Ukraine's role in the *Green Deal* policy), and cooperation in the sphere of finance.

An important component of the attained results is the preliminary work within the Association Council and its working bodies. In particular, during the Association Council's session on 28 January 2020, Ukraine managed to move from a standstill the topic of receiving «the industrial visa-free regime» (***ACAA***, or Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Goods) and to agree on sending a special assessment mission to Ukraine. Also, the joint statement contains recognition of Ukraine's ambition to join the European green agreement, *Green Deal*.[40]

This result was preceded by active work of:

- **The Association Committee**, which, in November 2020, at its 5th session, agreed

[37] It is worth remembering that the 2019 summit took place on the eve of changing the entire leadership of the EU, while the President of Ukraine still had not the support in the shape of the parliamentary «monomajority» of his own and had to work together with the government headed by V. Groisman. this is why it would be out of place to expect any breakthrough agreements of the 21st Summit.

[38] For more details, see the article by O. Davymuka in the following publication: Joint statement following the 22nd EU-Ukraine Summit. – European Council, 6 October 2020, – *https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/10/06/joint-statement-following-the-22nd-eu-ukraine-summit-6-octobre-2020/*; Advancing mutual commitment: joint statement following the 21nd EU-Ukraine Summit. – European Council, 8 July 2019, – *https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/40278/eu-ua-joint-statement-final.pdf*.

[39] From the visa-free regime to Donbas: What has been agreed by Zelenskyy and the EU leaders at the Summit. – Yevropeyska Pravda, 6 October 2020, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2020/10/6/7115072/*.

[40] Joint press statement following the 6th Association Council meeting between the EU and Ukraine. – European Council, 28 January 2020, – *https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/01/28/joint-press-statement-following-the-6th-association -council-meeting-between-the-eu-and-ukraine/*.

priority directions of sectoral integration (strengthening of cooperation in the sphere of justice, freedom, security, integration to the EU's digital and energy markets, simplifying customs procedures in trade with the EU), as well as noted Ukraine's desire to launch informal negotiations process on revising the Association Agreement with the view to liberalize tariff and non-tariff measures in the sphere of trade;

- **The Association Committee in Trade Configuration**, which, during its 4th session (November 2019) agreed further steps aimed at giving the sides the regime of domestic market in a number of spheres and initiated the updating of certain supplements to the Agreement;

- **The Subcommittee on issues of freedom, security and justice**, which had agreed the New Agenda which would make the Agreement's Chapter III more concrete, becoming an appendix to it.[41]

The work of these bodies of the Association in 2020 allowed Ukraine to move farther along its Eurointegration agenda. In particular, at the latest **Association Council** (11 February 2021, off-line) the following important issues were agreed.

First, the partners confirmed their intention, prior to the next Ukraine-EU summit, to conduct the all-embracing review of the achievement of the goals of the Association Agreement, with Ukraine given the opportunity to use the results of this review in the future for a more large-scale updating of the Agreement.[42] *Second*, an agreement was documented on the launching of consultations on possible further liberalization of trade in goods.

It is also important that in 2021 Ukraine's desire to bring its policy and legislation closer to the European Green Deal began to acquire its concrete embodiment: a special «kick-off» meeting took place between EC Vice President F.Timmermans and Ukraine's Prime Minister D.Shmyhal, and the topics of mutual interest to the sides were identified.[43] Also, 2021 saw the launching of the assessment mission on Ukraine's readiness for *ASAA* (planned at the Council's session in 2020), and steps were taken on the implementation of telecommunications clauses of the Agreement and on the adoption of the joint working plan in the sphere of electronic proxy services.[44]

Thus, preserving institutional memory within Ukrainian governmental structures and being consistent in developing policies and in defending them vis-a-vis the European side are a necessary condition for broadening and deepening integration with the EU. It is, however, worth noting that the Association Council in 2021 paid significantly less attention to the issues of justice, freedom, security, not mentioning the New Agenda in this sphere, presented by Ukraine last year. However, the Council welcomed Ukraine's interest in working together with the EU on the basis of the future New Pact on migration and asylum. At the same time, a specific emphasis was put on the reform of judiciary as a vitally important reform.

Of course, the political dialogue at the top and high levels between Ukraine and the EU is going on in other formats, too. Thus, Ukraine's President participates in the ***Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit*** taking place, as a rule, once every two years with the participation of Presidents and heads of governments of EU member states and six partner countries. In 2020, the pandemic stood in the way of the regular summit, so a video conference was held instead, while the full-scale meeting was rescheduled for 2021. Also, within the framework of the EaP the ***annual session of ministers of foreign affairs of the EU and of Eastern European partners takes place***, where Ukraine is represented by the head of the Foreign Ministry (in 2020, the meeting also was held in the format of video conference).

[41] Zaychenko Yu, Ivasyk S., Kozlov O. Ukraine and EU: What is new in the sphere of justice, freedom and security. – Ukrinform, 23 April 2019, – *https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/2687558-ukraina-ta-es-so-novogo-u-sferi-usticii-svobodi-ta-bezpeki.html.*

[42] Such revision is stipulated by Article 481 of the Agreement.

[43] Emerson M., Movchan V. A new level of relations: What the revision of the Association Agreement will change for Ukraine and EU. – Yevropeyska Pravda, 23 February 2021, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/experts/2021/02/23/7119998/.*

[44] Joint press statement following the 7th Association Council meeting between the EU and Ukraine. – European Council, 11 February 2021, – *https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/press/press-releases/2021/02/11/joint-press-statement-following-the-7th-association-council-meeting-between-the-eu-and-ukraine/.*

Ukraine's leaders' visits to the EU and, especially, visits of helmsmen of Euroinstitutions to Ukraine have important significance and political weight. Thus, V.Zelenskyy paid his first foreign visit as the President to Brussels, and his next visits were to Berlin and Paris. Among the latest visits of EU officials, the first visit by J. Borrel should be singled out, the EU's High Representative on foreign affairs and security, which took place, although significantly late because of the pandemic, on 22 September 2020. Fight against corruption, the situation with the public service reform and public procurement were among the important topics that were discussed.[45] J. Borrel had not neglected the aggression of Russia against Ukraine,[46] in particular, he held a special meeting at the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine.

Lately, active Ukraine-EU contacts at different levels were noticeable. In particular, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, began his first visit to Ukraine by visiting Donbas (2-3 March 2021). Later, aggravation of the situation close to Ukraine's borders prompted the EU to invite the Ukrainian Foreign Minister, D. Kuleba, to the online Council of Foreign Ministers (19 April 2021) where he informed the partners on the security situation in Ukraine and called upon them to introduce sectoral sanctions against the RF. On 15 April 2021, Ukraine's Defence Minister, A. Taran, spoke at the session of the European Parliament's committee on security and defence issues.

Expert opinion

Among different components of political dialog, experts give priority (62%) to visits and negotiations at high and top levels. Then, the respondents mark out annual Ukraine-EU summits (48%), dialogue within the framework of EU missions (programs) in Ukraine (44%), contacts at the level of ministries and departments (37%), cooperation within the framework of the Association's working bodies (32%), etc.

An additional instrument of the dialogue is ***informal ministerial meeting on trade issues***, taking place every year from 2018 between the EU (the Trade Commissioner) and Ministers of economy and/or trade of three associated countries (Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova). They serve as a platform to discuss progress and challenges along the path of implementing deep and all-embracing free-trade zones, as well as to exchange information and experience.[47]

Another important channel is ***the European Commission's Support Group for Ukraine,*** with the task of involving corresponding specialists from the EU member states in helping Ukraine's Government with the implementation of the Agreement and improving coordination between different donors and international financial institutions. Now, it consists of seven specialized groups along the priority directions of reforms,[48] with its work constantly involving 26 officials of the European Commission, including Deputy Director General of the General Directorate on the issues of neighbourhood and enlargement negotiations, who is the acting head of the Group.

A productive mechanism of political dialogue is the inter-parliamentary track, in particular, within the framework of the ***Association's Parliamentary Committee***. It serves as a platform for discussing, between Ukrainian MPs and MEPs, of progress in implementing reforms according to the Agreement, and of the problems emerging at the level of legislative process. During these meetings, a rather broad range of issues can be discussed: from reviewing and analysing situations in neighbouring countries to the exchange of opinions on the future of the EaP. Representatives of other branches of power and EU officials can be among the participants in these meetings. At the latest, 11th session, in December 2020, one of the items on the agenda was the discussion of political situation in Belarus and of its impact on the EU and Ukraine.

Another site for inter-parliamentary cooperation, albeit within the framework of the EaP, is the ***EU-Eastern Neighbours Parliamentary Assembly (EURONEST PA)***, convened annually. It is chaired by two elected co-presidents: one from the EU, another from

[45] Sydorenko S. The visit with a hint at the visa-free regime: What the EU diplomacy chief said and what he kept silent about in Kyiv. Yevropeyska Pravda, 23 September 2020, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2020/09/23/7114603/*.

[46] Borrel J. Oligarchs, corruption, and *COVID-19*: What I talked with President Zelenskyy about. – Yevropeyska Pravda, 25 September 2020, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2020/09/25/7114712/*.

[47] The first meeting took place on 20 September 2018 in Brussels, the second, on 21 May 2019 in Kyiv; however, the third meeting, planned for 2020 in Tbilisi, was postponed.

[48] The list of the groups is on the website of the Mission of Ukraine to the European Union, – *https://ukraine-eu.mfa.gov.ua/posolstvo/politika-yes-shchodo-ukrayini/grupa-pidtrimki-ukrayini*.

the EaP countries, with the latter being a Ukraine's representative. 10 MPs from Ukraine are its members,[49] and the work is conducted in four standing committees and three working groups. In particular, one of those groups was set up at the initiative of the Ukrainian side and works with the issues of association agreements, this being an element of a differentiated approach to partner countries.[50] Also, ***«Jean Monnet Dialogues for Peace and Democracy»*** are taking place between the Verkhovna Rada and the European Parliament, these dialogs being a form of parliamentary support in the issues of reforming the Parliament along the lines of European democratic standards.

Not less important aspect of political dialogue is the cooperation of civil society, taking place at the bilateral level, mainly, within the framework of ***the Ukraine-EU Civil Society Platform (CSP)***. The process of establishment of the Ukrainian component of the CSP in 2014-2015 was controversial and complicated.[51] In spite of this, over recent years, representatives of different groups of stakeholders have proved that they are capable of working together and uphold a joint position within the CSP framework. This is testified to by joint declarations of the CSP where they try to take into account positions of every side on the necessity of Eurointegration reforms in relevant spheres.

Thus, in 2019, the activity of the CSP was taking place around several specific issues: the transport component of the Agreement, integration into the Common Digital Market of the EU, food security, union and employers' rights.[52] The Declaration of the 9th session (2020), in addition to already traditional spheres (reform of judiciary, human rights, energy sector and environmental protection, regional policy, etc.) pays attention to the necessity of involving the public in the process of updating the Agreement and to the importance of overcoming the pandemic's impact. In 2021, the newly elected composition of the Ukrainian component of the CSP defined the following themes of priority of its work: The European Green Deal, the impact of *COVID-19* on Ukraine, revising the Association Agreement, reform of the judiciary. It should be noted that of late the interest towards the work of the CSP on the part of European civil society organizations has grown.[53]

The work of the Ukrainian component of the CSP frequently intertwines with the work of ***the Ukrainian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership's Civil Society Forum***, this being a multinational platform of public organizations of the EaP, EU, European and international networks. As of April 2021, the Ukrainian component includes 145 organizations acting within five working groups: 1) democracy, human rights, proper governance and stability; 2) economic integration and compliance to EU policies; 3) environment, climate change, and energy security; 4) people-to-people contacts; 4) social-and-labour policy and social dialog.

Members of Ukrainian platforms periodically publish joint statements on important political events. For instance, during the Presidential and Parliamentary election campaigns of 2019, the platforms addressed main candidates and parties with a call to confirm the priority of European integration in their future policies.

A no less important component of their current activity is their advocacy of a special **EU+3 format** aimed at providing a deeper European integration of the three associated

[49] All in all, 110 delegates: 60 from the EU, and 50 from the EaP countries, excluding Belarus.

[50] Maksak H. The work of the Interparliamentary Assembly: Recommendations on improving the parliamentary dimension. – «Ukrayinska Pryzma» Council for Foreign Policy, 23 March 2021, – *http://prismua.org/eap-euronest/#_ftn2*.

[51] Representatives of public organizations did not agree to the proposal to create the Ukrainian component of the CSP along the lines of the structure of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) which, in addition to the public sector, provides for the representation of trade unions and business associations (employers) in equal proportions. In the opponents' opinion, this concept did not correspond to the realities of civil society in the country, thus the experience of the EU and the EESC was not worth an automatic transfer to the EU's relations with the associated countries. However, this criticism had not been crowned with success, and at present the CSP UC is functioning in a modified format close to the one suggested by the EESC. See: Sushko O., Bochi A., Kuzio M., Povoroznyk V., Khorolsky R., Chernikov D., Fedorenko K. The Ukraine-EU Association Agreement: Prospects and mechanisms of implementation. – The Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, pp. 42-44, – *http://www.ieac.org.ua/public/item/6-uhoda-pro-asotsiatsiiu-ukrainayes-perspektyvy-ta-mekhanizmy-implementatsii*.

[52] Joint Declaration and topical reports of the 7th session of the Ukraine-EU Civil Society Platform. – CSP UC, – *https://eu-ua-csp.org.ua/csp-docs/226-spilna-deklaraciya-ta-tematichni-dopovidi-somogo-zasidannya-platformi/*; Joint Declaration and topical reports of the 8th session of the Ukraine-EU Civil Society Platform. – CSP UC, – *https://eu-ua-csp.org.ua/csp-docs/233-spilna-deklaraciya-ta-tematichni-dopovidi-8-go-zasidannya/*.

[53] While in 2018 the EU side had only 11 members of the 15 possible (only 2 of the 6 permanent observers position were filled), the next composition of 2021 saw all the quotas used.

countries. Thus, in November 2019, Ukraine's representatives, together with corresponding organizations of Georgia and Moldova, put forward a joint declaration about the necessity of institutilising this format of relations between the EU and the three partner states.[54]

Another place for dialogue, stipulated by the Agreement, is ***the Ukraine-EU Advisory Group on Trade and Sustainable Development Issues***, called upon to monitor the fulfilment of the Agreement's corresponding chapters. While the EU Advisory Group had held its first session in 2016, the Ukrainian group began to function only in the beginning of 2019. Since then, the two groups had held four joint sessions. Though it is still early to speak about efficiency of these groups in the case of Ukraine, other countries' experience tells that it is not too high because of the difficulty of dialogue between representatives of business and other participants, as well as because of improper level of interaction on the part of governmental structures which often do not take into account recommendations by advisory groups.[55] It can be presumed that the latter problem is there for many public organizations and their associations working the sphere of Eurointegration and can face lack of positive feedback from representatives of authorities.

The institutional basis for political dialogue, outlined above, does in general correspond to the spirit of the Association Agreement and allows to conduct communication between Ukraine and the EU at different levels, from expert to parliamentary and presidential. Important here is that political dialogue continues not only within the framework of the bodies specified by the Agreement but can also happen in other forms and at different platforms acceptable for both parties. This opens up opportunities to further intensify the contacts and broaden topics of mutual interest for the partners.

However, the deepening of the dialogue and potential growth of the number of formats has to be accompanied by strengthening of institutional capability and coordination between different bodies and branches of power, as well as by securing institutional memory and by observing the established priority directions of the integration into the EU. A necessary condition is political will of both sides, progress in fulfilling the Agreement, and conducting the necessary reforms.

1.3. Contents and priorities of the Ukraine-EU political dialogue

Chapter II of the Association Agreement concerning political dialogue and its priorities demonstrates to what extent the practical needs and priorities of this dialogue evolved in reality after 2014. On the one hand, the Agreement's text, agreed in 2007-2011 and initialled in 2012, had in no way in no way presumed a sharp change in the political and security situation on the European continent resulting from the Russian aggression. Thus, Paragraph 1 of Chapter 4 says that political dialogue «will help gradual convergence on foreign policy and security issues for the ever deeper involvement of Ukraine to the European security area», and six out of the seven goals of this dialogue, stipulated by Paragraph 2 (85%), pertain to namely the foreign-policy cooperation for the sake of stability, peace, inviolability of borders, averting crises, etc.

On the other hand, only one goal of the political dialogue concerns the general requirement to observe rights and freedoms and stipulates (without detailing it) «a contribution to consolidating domestic political reforms». Ukraine's domestic policy is mentioned in passing in the brief Article 6 under the title «Dialogue and cooperation on the issues of domestic reforms» saying only that the sides' domestic policy should be based on common principles like «stability and efficiency of democratic institutions, the rule of law and respect towards human rights and basic freedoms». The text of Chapter II does not require any specific reforms at all.[56]

A certain obsolescence as of 2021, of the goals of political dialogue named in the Agreement is pointed to by the poll of experts conducted by the Razumkov Centre.

It may be presumed that such a pessimism of the experts about the contents of the political dialogue defined by the Association Agreement is explained, among other things, by the disconnection of the named goals from the current agenda.

[54] Joint Declaration of Georgian, Moldovan, Ukrainian Civil Society Platforms on Cooperation in Striving for European Integration. – Civic Synergy Project, 2019, – *https://www.civic-synergy.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Joint-Declaration-of-Georgian-Moldovan-Ukrainian-Civil-Society-Platforms-on-Cooperation-in-Striving-for-European-Integration.pdf.*

[55] Martens D., Potjomkina D., Orbie J. Domestic advisory groups in EU trade agreements: stuck at the bottom or moving up the ladder? – Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, November 2020, – *http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/17135.pdf.*

[56] Chapter 3 of the paper tells of this in more detail.

Although at present the discussions on the need to update the Agreement mostly concern sectoral integration, it is evident that the part concerning the political dialogue also dialogue also requires re-thinking.

Expert opinion

Experts are sceptical in assessing the level of achieving the goals of the political dialog. Thus, on four of the seven goals, defined in the Agreement, the total of responses «no» and «rather no» is higher than the sum of «yes» and «rather yes» responses. In particular, on the goals of «promoting international stability and security...» and «acceleration of practical cooperation between the Parties for achieving peace, security and stability...», the difference is almost twofold (63% against 28%, and 62% against 28%, correspondingly).

Opinions on the fulfilment of the goal «deepening of the political association and strengthening of the political-and-security convergence and efficiency» have divided in halves (47% each), and almost in halves on the goal of «development of the dialogue and deepening cooperation between the Parties in the sphere of security and defence» (48% and 45%). The only goal where the total positive assessment is significantly higher than the negative, is «promoting the principles of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders» (39% and 55%).

So, further on, in assessing the contents and priorities of the political dialogue between Ukraine and EU in foreign and domestic policy, attention should be focused on how its real content had evolved compared to what was there in the text of the Association Agreement, what are the effects of it for future relations between Ukraine and the EU, what conflicts does this content cause, and what new opportunities it offers.

Political dialogue on the issues of foreign policy and security policy

The goals and priorities of the political dialogue in the sphere of foreign policy and security policy, outlined in the Association Agreement, had logically emanated from the previous practice of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in these spheres. In fact, since the beginning of the implementation of the Common EU Policy on Security and Defence, Ukraine took part in policing and naval missions, in forming combat and tactical EU groups, and after receiving the right, in 2005, to join statements and decisions of the Common Foreign Policy and Security Policy, has been extraordinarily active in using this right (Ukraine has joined almost 80 percent of such decisions in recent years).

At that time, Ukraine was perceived as a partner and a contributor to international and regional security, while the vector of cooperation was defined by the needs of convergence of Ukraine and the EU in the sphere of foreign and security policy, aversion of conflicts, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, disarmament and arms control, fighting terrorism, as was written in the Agreement's text.

This agenda cannot be considered out of date as cooperation in these directions is continuing. The latest priorities of security cooperation, defined in the Association's Agenda, emphasized, among other things, strengthening of convergence, continuation of dialogue on implementing the European Security Strategy, on continuing Ukraine's participation in the CPSD, on cooperation in the cause of crisis settlement.[57]

This also concerns participation in military exercises, raising mutual compatibility with the military of the EU member states, participation of Ukrainian units in combat tactical groups, strengthening of cooperation in the 5+2 format for the settlement of the Transdnistrian conflict, cooperation on border issues, with the help of the EUBAM mission, in particular. Other components of cooperation in this sphere are the strengthening of cooperation with the European Defence Agency, the EU Security Studies Institute, the EU Satellite Centre, and the European Security and Defence College. Joint actions have been detailed in counteracting common security threats, including fight against terrorism, non-proliferation of WMD, illegal arms export, etc.[58]

However, with the beginning of the Russian aggression, this entire set of relations has gone to the background: from 2014, Ukraine has significantly lessened her participation in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations of the EU: an officer was recalled from the headquarters of «Atlanta» naval operation; the country abandoned the planned participation in the training mission in Mali, and performing combat duty within the framework of the

[57] The agenda of the Ukraine-EU Association for preparing and assisting the implementation of the Association Agreement. – The website of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/imported_content/news/doc_248012532/UA_15-1%20final.pdf.*

[58] The old task of the political dialogue remains unresolved: Ukraine's ratification and implementation of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

HELBROC was stopped.[59] Instead, the urgent need to provide for its own security moved to the forefront of Ukraine's needs.

The security and foreign policy dialogue began to focus on the issues of the Russian aggression, in particular, on consultations on applying and prolonging sanctions, on fulfilling the Minsk Agreements, attracting the OSCE missions, etc. For instance, the joint statement resulting from the latest Ukraine-EU summit of 6 October 2020, this summit being the highest form of political dialog, according to the Association Agreement, focuses, in its paragraphs 12-15, on condemning the actions of the RF, on supporting efforts in the Normandy format, on the need to resolve humanitarian impact of the conflict, and on bringing to responsibility those guilty of shooting down the *MH17* flight.[60]

The EU, however, does not directly participate in resolving the conflict, having passed the diplomatic initiative on to France and Germany, and is trying to distance itself even from indirect support of military efforts (there is no talk about an armed EU mission in Donbas within the framework of the CSDP, or of broader cooperation, or training for the structures directly involved in the ATO/JFO). Instead, the EU, in additions to sanctions, has focused on indirect instruments of support in the security sphere, in particular, on consultative, advisory, and material-and-technical assistance, educating the military, training specialists on CSDP, on treatment and rehabilitation of the wounded, etc. An important innovation has been the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine (*EUAM*), providing advisory assistance in the reform of the civil security sector.

However, if to disregard the urgent needs of counteraction of the Russian aggression, the challenge to the political dialogue of Ukraine with the EU on the issues of foreign policy and security policy at the conceptual level are the different levels of ambitions in the security cooperation of the two sides and of the general vision of Ukraine's place in Europe's security system. Ukraine is trying to strengthen its security by using every possible format of cooperation with the EU. in particular, defining as one of its priorities joining one of the newest initiatives on European security cooperation, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (*PESCO*), and to use to the maximum the opportunities for institutional cooperation with European agencies.[61]

Meanwhile, the internal European discussions on «strategic autonomy», or strengthening the essentially European dimension of security on the continent practically do not consider Ukraine's involvement in new formats of cooperation or even in the new European architecture of security. The current EU Global Strategy of 2016 is aimed first of all at stabilization and not at integration of the neighbourhood countries, while the lack of European enthusiasm about further enlargement caused diplomatic arguments around recognition of «European prospects» of Ukraine during a number of Ukraine-EU summits of recent years. Also, caution may be added here, with the view to the aggressive Russian policy and apprehensions about internal non-preparedness of Ukraine to a full security integration.

Thus, the political dialogue on both directions, defined in the Association Agreement and added as a result of the Russian aggression, are characterized with the asymmetry of Ukraine's high ambitions against the background of relatively low capability on the one hand and EU's cautious attitude to security cooperation with Ukraine against the background of essential help in neutral dimensions.

Political dialogue on internal policy issues

Despite the fact that in the text of the Association Agreement the agenda of political dialogue on internal policy issues is outlined more than fleetingly, it has changed into maybe its main component after the Euromaidan. Beginning with the Association's Agenda formed on 16 March 2015, ***the political dialogue goes beyond the narrow boundaries of the letter of the Association Agreement and***

[59] After 2016, participation in these and similar formats was gradually restored. In 2020, Ukraine undertook combat duty within the framework of «HelBRoC» and joined the EU «ALTEA» peacekeeping operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[60] Joint statement following the 22nd EU-Ukraine Summit, 6 October 2020. – The official website of the President of Ukraine, – *https://www.president.gov.ua/news/spilna-zayava-za-pidsumkami-22-go-samitu-ukrayina-yes-6432*.

[61] Cooperation in military and political and military-technological spheres. – Mission of Ukraine to the European Union. 15 April 2021, – *https://ukraine-eu.mfa.gov.ua/posolstvo/spivpracya-ukrayina-yes-u-sferi-zovnishnoyi-politiki-i-bezpeki/spivpracya-ukrayina-yes-u-ramkah-spilnoyi-politiki-bezpeki-i-oboroni*.

focuses in detail on the issue of Ukraine's implementation of basic reforms.

The reason for this is in the fact that implementing such large-scale transformations and rapprochement with the EU, required by the Association Agreement, looks too complicated in the context of weakness of the state and its institutions on the one hand, and of the lack of direct incentive in the form of guaranteeing future membership on the other hand. So the policy of European integration and association in the case of Ukraine has changed into the policy of building up the capability of the state and its apparatus with active help and involvement of the EU in financial, consultative, and organizational aspects.[62]

The domination of the reform agenda in the perception of European integration is also testified to by the results of the expert survey by the Razumkov Centre, where the respondents consider «a set of internal Ukrainian problems» the most important barrier on the path of political dialogue.

Expert opinion

According to the experts' assessments, a set of internal Ukrainian problems stands in the way of the Ukraine-EU political relations to the greatest extent (4.1 points), then goes the inadequate efficiency of the work of the bodies of power of Ukraine in the European direction, the lack of professional personnel (3.7 points). The third slot is occupied by the Russian factor: Kremlin's hybrid aggression, attempts to disrupt Ukraine's Eurointegration progress (3.6 points).[63]

At the same time, among the measures that will help the strengthening of political relations between Ukraine and the EU to the greatest extent, the experts name, first of all, implementation of real reforms on approaching EU norms and rules (78%).

Thus, both in the Association's Agenda. at the sessions of the Association's Council. and in the annual assessment of Ukraine's achievements on the way to the European integration by the European Commission the dialogue focuses around details and drawbacks of adopting and implementing key reforms. This is, in the first turn, the constitutional reform, electoral reform, aversion of and fight against corruption, reform of judiciary, reform in the sphere of public governance, deregulation, reform in the sphere of public procurement, taxation reform, reform of the energy sector, etc.

In this context, the EU, as noted above, put forward the initiative of creating new coordination formats like the Support Group for Ukraine (*SGUA*), forming the Strategic Advisory Group (*SAGSUR*), and of conceptualizing the Ukrainian Reform Architecture (*URA*).

Thus, the agenda of political dialogue goes beyond the narrow boundaries of just implementing the Association Agreement and focuses on building up the state and its institutional capability. This direction of the political dialogue possesses both positive and negative characteristics. The course towards building the institutionally updated and more capable state being able to implement the ambitious goals of the maximum rapprochement with the EU, with bigger opportunities for citizens, with more efficient observance of rights and freedoms, including those for most versatile minorities, can be classified among the clearly evident positive characteristics.

On the other hand, practice has shown that so far a majority of these reforms have been implemented only partly and are very vulnerable to possible regress, considering resistance of some political and economic groups on the one hand, the lack of massive support from citizens, and sometimes also the problem of adaptability of recipes suggested by European partners to Ukrainian reality.

The problem of determining the perspective remains conceptual: what amount and which quality of reforms will be considered sufficient considering that Ukraine continues to set itself the task of direct membership while the EU, at least as of today, can be satisfied with a more stable neighbouring state, also more integrated in European markets.

So, overcoming strategic differences regarding the future of Ukraine in relations with the EU may be considered the longest-term challenge for political relations, while diligence and irreversibility of pro-European reforms on the part of Ukraine can be considered the most urgent for short- and medium-term dimensions of the political dialogue

[62] Kataryna Wolczuk (2019): State building and European integration in Ukraine, Eurasian Geography and Economics.

[63] The marks given by the experts by the 6-point scale where «0» means «not an obstacle at all», and «5» means «a maximum-level obstacle».

INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF BILATERAL BODIES OF THE UKRAINE-EU ASSOCIATION [64]	
Body	**Functions and specific features**
Ukraine-EU Summit	✓ Platform for overall control of the Agreement's implementation, as well as for discussing bilateral or international issues of mutual interest. ✓ Involves participation of the President of Ukraine, the President of the European Council, and the President of the European Commission. ✓ Held in turns in Ukraine and the EU at least **once a year**. In contrast to Georgia and Moldova, **this is stipulated in the Agreement between Ukraine and the EU**.
Association Council	✓ The forum to control and monitor the application and implementation of the Agreement, as well as to periodically review the functioning of the Agreement in the light of its goals. ✓ Adopts **decisions obligatory for fulfillment by the parties,** and also issues recommendations. ✓ Introduces amendments to the Agreement's appendixes. ✓ Issues authority to special bodies created along the lines of the Agreement to act on its behalf; delegates its rights to the Association Committee. ✓ Involves participation of members of the government of Ukraine, members of the EU Council and members of the European Commission on the part of the EU. ✓ Chairing the Council takes place at rotation basis. ✓ Held in the EU at least once a year.
Association Committee	✓ An auxiliary body of the Association Council. ✓ Composed of representatives of both sides, mostly at the level of top executive officials (deputy ministers and deputy heads of other central bodies of executive power on the Ukrainian side). ✓ Chairing takes place in turns (12 months for each side). ✓ Held at least once a year. ✓ Receives assistance from **subcommittees**. • **Subcommittee on issues of freedom, security and justice** • **Subcommittee on issues of economy and other sectoral cooperation, composed of 6 clusters:** 1. Macroeconomic cooperation, public finance management (budget policy, internal control and external audit, statistics, accounting and audit, fight against fraud). 2. Industrial and entrepreneur policy, mining and metallurgy, tourism, outer space, legislation on companies and corporate governance, protection of consumer rights, taxation. 3. Cooperation in the energy sector. including nuclear issues, environment, including climate change, civil defence, transport. 4. Cooperation in the sphere of science and technologies, information society, audio-visual policy, education, training and youth, culture, cooperation in the sphere of sports and physical culture. 5. • Agriculture and development of rural areas, fishing and maritime policy, the Danube region, cross-border and regional cooperation. 6. Cooperation in the sphere of employment, social policy and equal opportunities, public health.

[64] The Association Agreement between Ukraine, on the one hand, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, on the other, Article 4, Article 74, Article 83, Article 211, Article 252(3), Articles 299-300, Articles 460-470, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/diyalnist/yevropejska-integraciya/ugoda-pro-asociacyu*; European and Euroatlantic integration: Transition book. – The Government Office for coordination of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, p. 17, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/17-prezentation-2019/8.2019/transition-book-final-stisnuto.pdf*;

Remizov A., Shulga D., Lytvynenko Y., Mishchuk Z. Implementation of Association Agreements in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine: a comparative overview. – Civic Synergy Project, Kyiv, 2019, – *https://www.civic-synergy.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Implementation-of-Association-Agreements-in-Georgia-Moldova-and-Ukraine_a-Comparative-Overview.pdf*.

INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF BILATERAL BODIES OF THE UKRAINE-EU ASSOCIATION (*continued*)

Body	Functions and specific features
Association Committee in Trade Configuration	✓ Resolving all issues connected to **Chapter IV (Trade and issues related to trade) of the Agreement**. ✓ Held at least once a year. ✓ Receives help from **subcommittees** • **Subcommittee on geographical indications** • **Subcommittee on managing sanitary and phytosanitary measures** • **Subcommittee on customs cooperation** • **Subcommittee on trade and sustainable development** • **Dialogue on intellectual property rights**
Dialogue on human rights	✓ Platform for detailed exchange of opinions on the situation with human rights in Ukraine and on the obligation of the country to achieve stable progress in this sphere, in particular, on the absolute observance of international law terms in the sphere of human rights. ✓ As a rule, the EU delegation is led by Head of the unit on the issues of bilateral relations with the countries of Eastern Partnership of the European Foreign Activity Service while the Ukrainian delegation is headed by Deputy Minister of Justice on the issues of Eurointegration. ✓ Prior to the Dialog's session, the EU conducts consultations with representatives of civil society and international organizations. ✓ Held at least once a year.
Parliamentary Committee of the Association (PCA)	✓ Platform for political dialogue at the parliamentary level. ✓ Composed of members of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada and MEPs. ✓ Has the right to request information from the Association Council on implementation of the Agreement's principles; has to be informed by the Council's bodies on its decisions and recommendations. ✓ May issue recommendations to the Association Council. ✓ May form subcommittees. ✓ Chaired in turns by heads of parliamentary delegations. ✓ Held, as a rule, twice a year, in Ukraine and the EU in turns.
Civil Society Platform (CSP)	✓ Platform for interaction and informing the civil society on the progress in fulfilling the Agreement. ✓ Provides consultations in response to requests from the Association Council or from the Association's Committee, also **provides recommendations at own initiative**. ✓ Has to be informed on decisions and recommendations of the Association Council. ✓ The Association Committee and the PCA have to regularly connect to the CSP representatives of the CSP in order to know their opinion about achieving the Agreement's goals. ✓ Chaired in turns by representatives of the sides. ✓ Held, as a rule, twice a year in turns in Ukraine and the EU. ✓ Composed of maximum **30 people (15 representatives of each side)** who have to represent **three sectors**: trade unions, employers, and other civil society organizations ✓ The composition is updated **every 2.5 years**.

INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF BILATERAL BODIES OF THE UKRAINE-EU ASSOCIATION (*continued*)

<table>
<tr><th>Body</th><th colspan="2">Functions and specific features</th></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Composition of the EU side
• 9 members of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC),
• 6 permanent observers, representatives of leading European organizations representing civil society.</td><td>Composition of the Ukrainian side (US SCP)
✓ 3 representatives of public associations,
✓ 3 representatives of trade unions of national level,
✓ 3 representatives of employers' organizations of national level,
✓ 6 coordinators of standing working groups:
• WG 1 «Political dialog, foreign and security policy».
• WG 2 «Freedom, justice, human rights.
• WG 3 «Economic cooperation, free trade zone, cross-border cooperation».
• WG 4 «Employment, social policy, equal opportunities, health».
• WG 5 «Energy, transport, environment and climate change».
• WG 6 «Science and technologies, information society training and youth, culture and sports».
✓ US CSP is chaired at the rotation basis every ten months to ensure representation of every sector.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ukraine-EU Advisory Group on trade issues and sustainable development</td><td colspan="2">✓ Composed of Ukrainian and European advisory groups which must include representatives of public, trade unions, and employers' associations and other stakeholders on equal proportional basis.
✓ The groups voice their positions and provide recommendations on the issues related to the fulfilment of Chapter 13 of the Agreement «Trade and sustainable development»:
• The EU Advisory Group provides recommendations to the European Commission, the Association Committee, the Subcommittee on trade and sustainable development, to the joint meeting of Advisory groups. the Expert Group;
• The Ukrainian Advisory Group provides recommendations to the Subcommittee on issues of trade and sustainable development, to the Council on the issues of trade and sustainable development, and to the Expert Group.[65]
• Joint meetings of the Advisory Groups are held, as a rule, once a year in connection to sessions of the Subcommittee on trade and sustainable development.[66]</td></tr>
</table>

[65] According to Article 301 of the Agreement, the Expert Group may be convened at the request of one of the Sides if there was no success in resolving the issue during intergovernmental consultations within the subcommittee.

[66] The consultative-and-advisory body of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, formed in 2018 at the initiative of the Ministry for Economic Development for organizing the work of the Advisory Group.

2.
POLITICAL AND SECURITY ASPECTS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN KYIV AND BRUSSELS

Political relations between Ukraine and the EU embrace many important spheres and directions. In particular, in the Association Agenda, the «Political Dialogue» chapter outlines a huge set of topics connected to domestic and foreign policy, security, justice, etc.[1] The current chapter and this paper in general focus attention, primarily, on the issues most topical for Ukraine: security and implementation of domestic reforms in some priority spheres, the most «sensuous» for the EU, in particular, courts, fight against corruption, democracy and the rule of law, public governance, etc.

It is evident that the issues of domestic reforms and security define, to a significant extent, the content and nature of the Ukraine-EU political relations, it is on them that the attention of Kyiv and Brussels is focused today. So, on the one hand, the aggravation of political-and-security situation in Europe and the world, in particular, the Russian hybrid expansion, are fundamental challenges and threats for Ukraine and the EU. On the other hand, the efficiency of implementing internal transformations in Ukraine within the framework of the implementation of the Association Agreement is one of the basic conditions of developing the Ukraine-EU political relations and of moving towards political association.

This chapter outlines, concisely, global and regional factors in the security sphere, analyzes the political and the security components of relations between Kyiv and Brussels, including singling out the factor of the Russian aggression which influences Ukraine's Eurointegration process. Also, some economic aspects are touched upon.

2.1. Ukraine-EU: External threats and internal challenges

External threats

The security situation in its global and regional dimensions influences the agenda of political dialogue and the Ukraine-EU relations as a whole. Against the background of centrifugal global trends and the pandemic, geopolitical turbulence and confrontation are strengthening, economic inequality is deepening, desire for national self-isolation is rising, as well as populism, neglect of the norms of the international law. Conflicts between global players become sharper, in particular, at the Russia-West axis,

[1] The agenda of the association between Ukraine and the EU for helping the implementation of the Association Agreement. – The website of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/imported_content/news/doc_248012532/UA_15-1%20final.pdf*.

between China and the USA, etc. According to forecasts of the External Intelligence Service of Ukraine, such geopolitical processes against the background of strengthening militarization, will contain threats of the spread of the practice of the use of force and of the escalation of current and the emergence of new conflicts[2].

The world *COVID-19* pandemic is a global challenge, having significantly changed the global agenda, it has caused the large-scale economic crisis, provoked the wave of «vaccine egoism», strengthened radical moods in Europe and the world. The pandemic has directly affected Ukraine and the EU, and impacted on the pace of Eurointegration and the content of the political dialogue.

Against this geopolitical background, the USA-Russia confrontation has become sharper. On the one hand, the coming to power in the USA of J.Biden has helped strengthen the Euro-Atlantic partnership within the NATO framework and the improvement of the USA-EU relations. However, on the other hand, the clear-cut and consistent American stand on resisting the Russian expansionist policy in Europe and the world has sharpened and deepened the opposition between Washington and Moscow. Lately, the USA has introduced a number of sanctions against the RF. This means limiting the export of a number of Russian companies. Sanctions have been introduced against 32 legal and natural persons, as well as against seven Russian top officials[3]. The conflict has become deeper because of reciprocal expulsion of diplomats and of a number of sharp statements on the highest and high levels. The USA-Russia opposition has also been strengthened by a dangerous cyberattack on the *Colonial Pipeline* energy transportation company (May 2021) which, in Biden's opinion, had been carried out by Russian hackers.[4]

The beginning of 2021 saw a new unprecedented wave of confrontation between the EU and Russia. In March, the EU introduced new sanctions against a group of the Russian law enforcers for the imprisonment of the opposition politician, A. Navalny. The official dialogue between Moscow and Brussels has become sharper. The visit of the EU High Representative J. Borrel to Moscow in February 2021 turned out to be humiliating and a failure, when the Russian side announced the expulsion of three European diplomats.[5] The EU-RF political-and-diplomatic relations have reached their lowest. On 23 March 2021 the head of the RF's Foreign Ministry S. Lavrov stated on relations of Russia and the EU: «Europe has disrupted these relations, having ruined all the mechanisms that were being created for years... I emphasize that there are no relations with the EU as an organization. The entire infrastructure has been destroyed by single-handed decisions of Brussels».[6]

Later, the confrontation became stronger because the Czech Republic had accused the Russian side of organizing the explosion in October 2014 at munition depots in the Eastern Czech lands. This was accompanied by new political-and-diplomatic demarches, by massive expulsions of diplomats. In April 2021, Russia announced a number of European official persona non-grata, including the European Commission's Vice President, V.Jurova, and the Chair of the European Parliament, D.Sassoli.[7]

At the same time, in April 2021, a critical tension in Europe was caused by the amassment of Russian troops at Ukraine's borders, which led to a sharp reaction of «the collective West»: EU, NATO, G-7, other countries of the world. In the end of April, the European Parliament had adopted a resolution calling upon the EU to be prepared, in case Russia invades Ukraine, to introduce strict sanctions, in particular, to

2 White Paper 2021. – The External Intelligence Service of Ukraine. Kyiv. 2021, pp. 10-14, – *https://szru.gov.ua/white-book/bila-knyha-sluzhby-zovnishnoi-rozvidky-ukrainy*.

3 USA introduced new sanctions against Russia and is expelling its diplomats. – Ukrayinska Pravda, 15 April 2021, – *https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2021/04/15/7290330*.

4 Biden: The US biggest gas pipeline was attacked by hackers from the RF. – Ukrayinska Pravda, 13 May 2021, – *https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2021/05/13/7293442*.

5 Trap and humiliation: How they scolded Borrel in the European Parliament for the visit to Moscow. – DW, 10 February 2021, – *https://www.dw.com/uk/pastka-i-prynyzhennia-yak-u-yevroparlamenti-svaryly-borrelia-za-vizyt-do-moskvy/a-56517870*.

6 Speech and answers to questions from media by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.Lavrov during joint press conference with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the PRC Wang Yi. Site of the RF's MFA, 23 March 2021, – *https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4647898*.

7 RF announced the Vice President of European Commission and head of European Parliament persona non-grata. – Ukrayinska Pravda, 30 April 2021, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2021/04/30/7122781*.

disconnect Russia from the SWIFT system, to freeze assets of oligarchs close to the Kremlin.[8]

Meanwhile, Europe faced new threats. Since August 2020, a profound conflict in Belarus has been continuing: the massive citizen protest against fraudulent elections and the bankrupt authoritarian regime of A. Lukashenko. This is a challenge for both Brussels and Kyiv which have not recognized the elections' results and have frozen contacts with Minsk at the official level and introduced sanctions against Belarus authorities. In May 2021, the international isolation around Belarus has become stronger. The EU and Ukraine have introduced further restrictive measures against Belarus authorities because of the forced seizure of a *Ryanair* flight and arrest of an opposition figure, R.Protasevich.[9] At the same time, Russia, while carrying out economic, political, military support of A.Lukashenko's regime, is making dependence on Moscow deeper, and de-facto transforms Belarus into non-independent, satellite state, a political-and-military launching grounds for the Russian expansion in Europe.

In its turn, the situational activation of «frozen» conflicts on post-Soviet territory is dangerous. The end of «the hot phase» of the fast-going war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh (November 2020) has left the region potentially unstable.

The situation in Moldova has changed. The electoral victory of a pro-European politician, M. Sandu, has caused a sharp political confrontation within the triangle «President-Parliament-Constitutional Court» between pro-European (M. Sandu) and pro-Russian (I. Dodon) forces. So, the parliamentary elections scheduled for July 2021 will become a decisive phase for the republic. At the same time, the situation in Moldova makes topical the complex problem of Transnistria where Ukraine and the EU are participants in the negotiations process.

In 2021, a dangerous situation emerged also in Georgia when the authorities resorted to force in their actions against opponents. The escalation of the conflict between pro-authorities forces and the opposition has destabilized the internal situation and made the EU interfere.[10] However, the latent tension is there.

It has also to be added that in May 2021 combat actions had flared in the Middle East. The escalation of the armed conflict between Israel and Palestine caused numerous casualties among the region's peaceful population and made the EU and USA exert political and diplomatic efforts to minimize the conflict.

In its turn, the situation in the zone of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Crimea, Donbas) contains a danger of escalation. Russia continues its military, political, economic, energy, and information aggression against Ukraine. Low-intensity combat is continuing in Donbas, while efforts of international diplomacy for stopping the war in the East of Ukraine bring no result. The issue of the occupied Crimea is in the «frozen» state and has become a long-term «delayed» problem. The situation in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov remains explosive as a result of the blocking of the Kerch Straits by Russia.

Thus, the European political landscape contains many «conflict zones» and dangerous tendencies. This cannot but influence both determining the hierarchy of external priorities for the EU, and the content and prospects of political relations between Kyiv and Brussels.

Internal challenges for the EU

It is evident that the state of political relations of the EU with Ukraine is also influenced (directly or indirectly) by dangerous centrifugal processes in the EU which are slowing down the partnership with Ukraine, pushing the Ukrainian topics to the background, making the issue of the prospects of Ukraine's integration in the EU less topical.

Among the most dangerous challenges for the EU, attention should be paid to the following:

- ***Weakening and erosion of the traditional democratic institutions and growth of public mistrust in them.*** The reasons for this are social stratification, complicated economic processes on the territory of the EU, a set of external factors and internal ethnic-and-demographic factors, etc. It is worth reminding that EU institutions have more than once launched court cases for deviation from common European norms of democracy, in particular, against Hungary, and

[8] European Parliament adopts resolution recommending EU to be prepared to make Russia pay high price in case it invades Ukraine. – Interfax-Ukraine, 29 April 2021, – *https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/741078.html.*

[9] Resolution of the EU summit on Belarus: No sanctions, Belavia ban, and other things. – Yevrointegratsiyna Pravda, 24 May 2021, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2021/05/24/7123570.*

[10] Political crisis in Georgia comes to an end. – The Voice of America. 19 April 2021, – *https://www.golosameriki.com/a/georgia-political-crisis-mediation/5858758.html.*

Poland. This tendency is being reinforced by the world pandemic provoking «the lockdown anarchism», national isolationism. Another threat corresponds to the above: the lessening of trust to the traditional party institutions against the background of rising populist, Eurosceptical moods, the strengthening of right-wing radical movements. One of the examples is the unprecedented decrease in the popularity of CDU/CSU prior to the autumn 2021 parliamentary elections in Germany.[11]

- ***Aftereffects of the migration crisis.*** Massive migration flow into Europe began in 2011 («the Arab Spring») and reached its peak in 2015.[12] The European multiculturalism policy had not provided for efficient integration of migration groups to local societies. The refugee crisis has created extraordinary problems for the EU and its basic values and caused conflicts among member states and neighboring states.[13]

First, migration communities in EU countries form ethnic parallel societies, being sources of crime. *Second*, conflicts characteristic of the countries of origin of immigrants are being transferred to the territory of EU countries to an ever greater extent. In May 2021, during the aggravation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, massive anti-Israeli events took place in a number of European.[14] *Third*, the migration crisis has significantly strengthened the terrorism threat to Europe. Its peak coincided in time with the peak of terrorist attacks, commenced with the resonating terrorist acts in Madrid and London.[15] *Fourth*, radicalization of Muslim diasporas in EU countries is dangerous, and involving local youth in the radicals' milieu.

Mass migration is destabilizing internal situation in EU countries, complicates socioeconomic situation, causes deterioration of EU citizens' attitudes to refugees. Simultaneously, nationalist, radical movements are becoming more active, becoming influential actors of political life of EU countries.

- ***Lack of EU strategy in the Eastern direction.*** At present, the EU lacks clear action program and strategy in relation both to Russia and to the Eastern Partnership countries. As of May 2021, the discussion about relations with Russia is ongoing at the EU's highest level. For a long time, the EU has been oriented at a package of five principles of behavior towards Russia. The package was approved in 2016, it has a framework nature, it is based on the «service for service» principle and is no longer adequate for current realities. However, at the recent EU summit (25 May 2021), the leaders of member states had again endorsed this package of principles and gave J.Borrel the task of preparing a paper on possible actions of the EU in the Russian direction.[16] An indicative testimony to differences among European leaders on the line of action in the Russian direction was the statement by E.Macron at the press conference on the summit's results. The President of France had said that in what concerns Russia, strengthening sanctions in response to 'frozen» conflicts was no longer an efficient policy[17]. Thus, there is no unity within the European establishment about policy towards Russia. In particular, positions of the leaders of France, Italy, Hungary, the Czech Republic differ significantly from those of the leaders of Poland, the Baltic countries, etc.

In its turn, the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement, with its text agreed finally in 2011, does not correspond to modern realities and needs essential, not fragmentary, updating for which the EU is not ready.

[11] In May 2021 the CDU/CSU popularity fell to 23 %, this being the lowest mark over the entire history. See: Rating of governing CDU/CSU governing block has fallen to the historical minimum. – Yevropeyska Pravda, 9 May 2021, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2021/05/9/7122954*.

[12] Then, 1.3 million to 1.8 million migrants came to Europe, the overwhelming majority of them coming from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya.

[13] In 2020, almost 3.7 million refugees were on the territory of Turkey, mostly originating from Syria where combat is still continuing, this having caused a conflict with the EU.

[14] Thousands of people are holding rallies in Europe in support of Palestinians. – Ukrayinska Pravda, 16 May 2021,1 – *https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2021/05/16/7293682*.

[15] In 2015, 103 terrorist attacks were documented in Great Britain, with 72 in France, and 25 in Spain. In total, during 2004-2017, more than 600 people in nine EU countries died at the hands of Islamist terrorists. It was possible to avert 211 planned terrorist acts in six EU countries (Great Britain, Greece, Denmark, Spain, Italy, France). See: Patsek P. Terrorism in Europe as a factor of development of security threats. Nauka I Technika Povitryanykh Syl Zbroynykh Syl Ukrayiny, 2018, No.3, p.89 (88-95), – *http://www.hups.mil.gov.ua/periodic-app/article/18891/nitps_2018_3_14.pdf*.

[16] The EU summit tried to prove that the European Union is not a «paper tiger». – Komsomolska Pravda v Ukrayini, 26 May 2021, – *https://kp.ua/politics/696700-sammyt-es-pytalsia-dokazat-chto-evrosouiz-ne-bumazhnyi-tyhr*.

[17] Strengthening sanctions against the RF for «frozen» conflicts is no loger an efficient method: Macron. – Interfax-Ukraine, 25 May 2021, – *https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/political/746275.html*.

Also, lack of a defined EU position is growing on the prospects of the «Eastern Partnership» project which, under present conditions, can with ever more difficulties unite countries with cardinally different geopolitical orientations, different political systems, and different attitudes towards European values. De facto, the Eastern Partnership is becoming a «reservation» of sorts for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia aspiring to the EU membership. Thus, the European neighborhood policy requires re-thinking and updating.

- ***Tendencies of historical revanchism.*** A combination of economic problems, sociocultural challenges, and threats for security is strengthening the tendencies of ethnic nationalism, xenophobia, and historical revanchism, posing a real threat to European unity. This applies, to the greatest extent to the new EU member states, and there are historical reasons for this.[18]

There are political forces in the new EU member states who want to restore the status of their countries as «great» and issue territorial claims to neighboring countries.[19]

There are controversies on treatment of various events and figures in national histories. Thus, Poland has controversies with Belarus, Lithuania, Germany, Ukraine; Slovenia has them with Croatia. Lately, the ethnic conflict between Bulgaria and Northern Macedonia has aggravated. The chronic opposition between Budapest and Kyiv on the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia has territorial subtext.

The main initiator of tendencies of historical revanchism is Russia whose policy has the goal of restoring «imperial greatness». The RF's ideology is oriented at distorting historical events, revising the post-war world order and gathering «ages-long Russian territories», restoring a new Soviet Union. This is the motive and the reason for the existence in the post-Soviet area of dangerous conflict zones (Northern Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria, Crimea, Donbas).

- ***The consensus mechanism of adopting foreign-policy decisions*** is the EU's chronic problem slowing down and often making void the European Union's important decisions. The reason for difficulty of consensus is differences in positions of EU member states because of internal political competition, geopolitical orientations, external influences, etc.

Examples of blocking decision of the EU by individual member states because of purely opportunistic considerations are many. In 2017, the EU failed to make a statement on human rights in China because Greece refused to do this. In 2019, Italy had blocked a compromise EU proposal on recognizing J.Guaido as President of Venezuela. This problem has manifested itself most clearly in September 2020, when Cyprus had for a long time blocked introduction of sanctions against Belarus, demanding that the EU interferes in the conflict of Cyprus with Turkey.

The EC's head, Ursula von der Leyen, in her annual address to the European Parliament, «On the State of the EU», on 16 September 2020, has asked, why even simple statements of the EU are being delayed, becoming void or becoming hostages of other motives? She then suggested that the EU switches to voting by qualified majority, at least on the issues of observing human rights and of implementation of sanctions.[20]

This problem's topicality is caused, on the one hand, by the fact that the EU lacks capability for quick reaction against the background of fast-moving geopolitical processes. On the other hand, the EU is lagging behind and losing to the world players, China, Russia, and the USA, with the greatest danger of consensus decisions of the EU being in the Russian direction.

2.2. Political component of relations between Kyiv and Brussels

The Association Agreement gives Ukraine an opportunity to meaningfully conduct the dialogue with the EU on many spheres

[18] While shaping their new identities, a number of post-socialist states addressed their national histories and the affirming of their national singularity. This was the subsoil for emergence of conservative, national-patriotic and nationalist political movements and parties, reacting in a sickly way to the risks of cultural unification and loss of national-ethnic specific features of their societies. Among those were the Bulgarian National Movement (1991), the Latvia's Way (1993), the National «Motherland» Party (Estonia, 1992), the «great Romania» Party (1991), the Polish National Community (1990), the Slovak National Party (1989), The Slovene National Party (1991), the Croatian Pure Law Party (1992.) et al.

[19] Thus, the Slovene National Party demanded to hand over to Slovenia some areas of Croatia; the Bulgarian National Movement VMRO and the «Attack» Party were stressing the creation of Great Bulgaria which would include Macedonia; the «Great Romania» Party advocates restoring the territory of Romania within the 1940 borders. The Jobbik Party puts forward slogans of restoring Great Hungary.

[20] EU President suggests scrapping consensus in voting for sanctions. – Ukrayinska Pravda, 16 September 2020, – *https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2020/09/16/7266569*.

and policies, providing for multidimensional European integration. Over recent years, Kyiv, despite complicated internal problems and external challenges mentioned above, generally managed to preserve continuity and stability of political relations with the EU and even to intensify the dialogue in certain spheres, as well as initiate the dialogue's deepening in other spheres.[21] Among the government's main priorities now are the review and updating of the Agreement, further liberalization of trade in goods, securing Ukraine's integration into the EU's digital and energy markets, as well as strengthening cooperation in the infrastructure, industrial (ASAA) and economic and environmental (taking part in the European Green Deal) sectors.[22] This «sectoral» track of cooperation with the EU requires constant routine work, with its result that may seem too technical for general public, being, however, important for the development of the state's economy.

In general, there are grounds to talk about positive dynamics and deepening of political relations between Kyiv and Brussels. However, another thing is evident, too: These relations are a complex, non-singular, and multileveled system where national interests, economic competition, subjective factors, etc. are components.

Political relations, on the one hand, are limited and complicated by geopolitical circumstances and problems within the EU mentioned above. On the other hand, these relations are of asymmetric character because: a) the EU is a donor for Ukraine which aspires to join the Union and, respectively, fulfills «the home task» in the form of the Association Agreement; b) Ukraine's policy on the continent of Europe is oriented, to a significant extent, to the official Brussels position. Thus, in 2020, Ukraine joined almost 90 percent of foreign-policy statements and decisions by the EU; c) Ukraine and the EU are in different «weight categories» considering political-and-economic, as well as scientific-and-technological potentials of the sides, their positions and influence in the world arena.

Expert opinion

When giving characteristic of the political Ukraine-EU relations, experts most frequently (55%) mark these relations as transparent and open.[23] TAlso most frequently (49%) respondents emphasize that contacts between Kyiv and Brussels have a tendency towards developing and strengthening. On the other hand, a majority (68%) of specialists do not consider the Ukraine-EU relations equal and being of parity. Meanwhile, 61% of respondents' voice doubts about their efficiency. In their turn, 53% of those polled are not sure that these relations have strategic prospects.

Both public opinion and expert opinion give grounds to say that the priority issue of the agenda of the partnership between Kyiv and Brussels is solving internal Ukrainian problems which were outlined in previous research by the Razumkov Centre and which, regrettably, have acquired chronic character.[24]

In this context, a meaningful resolution of the European Parliament should be reminded of, dedicated to the fulfillment of the Association Agreement (February 2021)[25], containing a detailed analysis of Ukraine's domestic problems. In particular, it tells of slowing down the court reform, improper fight against corruption, the dangerous oligarchization of the country, drawbacks in the electoral system, problems of legislative activity, of protection of human rights and freedoms, of the freedom of media, etc.[26] From among the problems outlined in the resolution, some should be singled out, the most topical and important for the development of political relations between Ukraine and the EU.

Acute concern on the part of the EU is caused by the court reform in Ukraine the necessity of which is overripe. For the Ukrainian

[21] See: «Ukraine's sectoral integration in the EU: Pre-requisits, prospects, challenges». – The Razumkov Centre, 2020,– *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_sektor_eu_ukr.pdf.*

[22] More details on the Government's priorities are in the interview of the Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, O.Stefanishyna and Ukraine's ex-representative at the EU M.Tochytsky, published in this publication.

[23] Responses «yes» and «rather yes» and «no» and «rather no» are summed up here.

[24] For more details, see: Ukraine's European integration. The Russian factor. – National Security and Defence Journal, 2020, No.1-2, p.19, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD181-182_2020_ukr.pdf.* Ukraine's sectoral integration to the EU: Prerequisites, prospects, challenges. – The Razumkov Centre, Kyiv, 2020. pp. 75-76, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_sektor_eu_ukr.pdf.*

[25] The document is composed of the Preamble (61 clauses) and 9 Chapter containing 137 clauses.

[26] European Parliament resolution of 11 February 2021 on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine (2019/2202(INI), – *https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0050_EN.html?fbclid=IwAR1nceZXmqcv0fe8nj9aKn31rApuFIq-24trD7ojbDEP04-aKIdO2Ma3CBI.*

authorities and for the EU institution,[27] a confirmation of the critical need for changes in the court system was the resonant ruling of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine (CCU) of 27 October 2020 on recognizing as non-Constitutional some clauses of anti-corruption legislation and a number of rights of the National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NAZK). [28]

The annual report of the EU of 1 December 2020 on the implementation of the Association Agreement emphasizes that «this ruling of the CCU has put under doubt the reforms demanded by Ukrainian pro-reform forces after the Maidan, and by the international community...»[29]

The main unresolved issues are still «the reloading» of the High Council of Justice (HCJ), including the introduction of the procedure of checking candidates for the HCJ and its members for integrity, as well as forming an independent High Qualification Commission of Judges of Ukraine (NKKS) with the participation of international experts. It is important that at the request of authorities, international partners, in particular the Venice Commission and the group of Ambassadors of G7 are taking an active part in developing concrete recommendations which would allow to move the reform from the standstill.[30] By ignoring this advice on implementing the court reform, which, according to J.Borrel is «the mother of all reforms»[31] and by delays of the process of its implementation, Ukraine's leadership creates risks for the Eurointegration course of the state.

The problem of corruption remains a chronic irritant in the Ukraine-EU relations. This is being traditionally emphasized in resolutions, statements, and declarations of the European side.[32] In particular, the above-mentioned Resolution of the European Parliament (February 2021) emphasizes that «despite significant progress, widespread corruption continues to slow down the process of reforms in Ukraine».[33]

In this context, the tendencies for «rocking» the anti-corruption infrastructure of the country is dangerous. In particular, the Constitutional Court, in August 2020, ruled unconstitutional the appointment of A.Sytnyk the Director of the National Anti-corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU), followed in September by ruling unconstitutional the norms of the law according to which he was appointed.[34] Such actions of the CCU damage the system of anti-corruption bodies, made the EU remind Ukraine of its obligations connected to the visa-free regime, and create additional obstacles on the path of Ukraine to receive the second installment of the EU's macrofinancial assistance (€600 mln).

[27] See: The statement of the EU spokesperson on foreign and security policy issues, P,Stano, emphasizes that Ukraine should immediately restore the anti-corruption structure as this is a condition for granting financial assistance and the visa-free regime with the EU. Anti-corruption structure should be quickly restored this is the condition for the visa-free regime and financial help). – Yevropeyska Pravda, 3 November 2020, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2020/11/3/7116079*.

[28] The decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine in the case by the constitutional submission of 47 people's deputies regarding the constitutionality of certain provisions of the Law «On Prevention of Corruption", Criminal Code of Ukraine No. 13 (October 27, 2020), CCU, – *https://ccu.gov.ua/docs/3260*.

[29] Joint Staff Working Document – Association Implementation Report on Ukraine. – EEAS, December 1, 2020, – *https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89622/joint-staff-working-document-association-implementation-report-ukraine_en*.

[30] See the roadmap for the court reform presented by the G7 countries in January 2021, – *https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vRKC1mbwXaFSBLHgrYGdsg74nlv8JYk4FvEWw0cSOgI1ATc08CRRvzc8mATq3-9YQ/pub*; as well as conclusions of the Venice Commission on Draft Law No.3711 (9 October 2020), – *https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2020)022-e*, and No.5068 (5 May 2021): *https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-PI(2021)004-e*.

[31] See: The court reform remains key for the success of democracy in Ukraine: Borrel. – Ukrinform, 11 February 2021, – *https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/3189145-sudova-reforma-zalisaetsa-klucovou-dla-uspihu-demokratii-v-ukraini-borrel.html*.

[32] On 12 December 2019, the European Commission had published its annual report on Ukraine's implementation of the Association Agreement. It emphasizes the need to continue reforms in the sphere of fight against corruption. –Association Implementation Report on Ukraine. – European Commission, – *https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/swd_2019_433_f1_joint_ staff_working_paper_en_v4_p1_1056243.pdf* In March 2020, GRECO had critically assessed the state of fighting corruption in Ukraine. Of its recommendations issued in 2017, Kyiv has implemented 5, implemented partly 15 recommendations, and 11 had not been implemented. – DW, 26 March 2020, – *https://www.dw.com/uk*.

[33] The European Parliament had pointed out to Ukraine the need to complete reforms in the sphere of the rule of law and fighting corruption). Interfax-Ukraine, 11 Debruary 2021, – https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/political/722789.html.

[34] CCU ruled the appointment of Sytnyk to the position of the head of NABU unconstitutional. – Ukrinform, 28 August 2020, – *https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/3089553-ksu-viznav-nekonstitucijnim-priznacenna-sitnika-na-posadu-glavi-nabu.html*; CCU has ruled unconstitutional a number of clauses of the Law on NABU. – DW, 16 September 2020, – *https://www.dw.com/uk/ks-vyznav-nekonstytutsiinymy-nyzku-polozhen-zakonu-pro-nabu/a-54954579*.

Beside the situation with the NABU and the NAZK (the rights of these bodies have been given back to them later), significant criticism on the part of representatives of civil sector and European partners had been caused by the Parliament's selection of members of the commission to elect head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Procurator's Office (SAP). The EU representatives had marked that their further support for Ukraine will depend on transparency of the procedure of the election of the SAP's head.[35]

Regrettably, by international assessment, in the sphere of fighting corruption, Ukraine had not shown noticeable progress lately. According to *Transparency International*, in 2020 in the Corruption Perceptions Index (*CPI*) Ukraine occupied 117th slot of 180, next to Egypt, Nepal, Zambia. This, in fact, equals the 2018 indicator.[36]

Intensity of dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels and prospects of its further deepening ***depend on adhering to basic values, in particular, democracy and the rule of law.*** The issues of observing relevant standards and conducting reforms in these spheres have always been an important point of the agenda of relations between Ukraine and the EU, and were raised with different intensity by the European side depending on the current state of affairs in Ukraine. Thus, negative tendencies became sharper of late in a number of adjacent spheres, producing lack of definition and being a serious irritant in relations with European partners.

The topic of the efficiency of the system of public governance remains urgent. The EU's concern was caused by cancellation in September 2019 of open competitions for public servant positions for the duration of the quarantine, as well as broadening possibility

for dismissing officials of Category «A» (including state secretaries). At the meeting of representatives of the Government and the European Commission in April 2020, the priority task of the reform was declared to be the strengthening of stability of public service and improving the competition procedure which would be efficient under conditions of social distancing and would not contradict European principles.[37] It was only recently, after an interval of a year and a half, that the process of bringing competitions back has begun.[38]

An important point of the agenda of relations between Kyiv and Brussels is securing irreversibility of reforms in the banking sector, in particular, in connection to the nationalization of Privatbank, and delivering justice to people responsible for large-scale fraud in the bank, and returning of the assets.[39] With reinforced attention, the EU also monitors the situation in the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU) in the light of the dismissal of its Head in July 2020 (called by the EU foreign policy spokesperson «an

[35] Western creditors have warned Ukraine about problems with the procedure of replacing Kholodnitskiy. – Yevropeyska Pravda, 3 September 2020, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2020/09/3/7113916/*; Threats in the European Parliament to cancel the visa-free regime for some Ukrainian oligarchs and politicians. – Yevropeyska Pravda, 5 October 2020, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2020/10/5/7115019/*.

[36] At the beginning of 2020, «Transparency International Ukraine» issued five recommendations for improving the indicators for Ukraine in The Corruption Perceptions Index. Only two of them were implemented partly (to raise the efficiency of the systems of aversion of political corruption; to introduce open and reportable process of privatizing state property. The rest remained not implemented (to form independent and professional court authorities; to secure independence and capability of the bodies of the anti-corruption sphere; to deprive the Security service of Ukraine of its authority in the sphere of counteracting economic corruption crime). See: The Corruption Perceptions Index 2020, – *http://cpi.ti-ukraine.org/#/*.

[37] Participants in the Ukraine-EU political dialogue have outlined priorities of the reform of public governance for 2020. – The Government Portal, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/uchasniki-politichnogo-dialogu-ukrayina-yes-okreslili-prioriteti-reformi-derzhavnogo-upravlinnya-na-2020-rik*.

[38] The Law on restoring competitions for public service has come into force. – Ukrinform, 6 March 2021, – *https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/3203485-zakon-pro-ponovlenna-konkursiv-na-derzsluzbu-nabuv-cinnosti.html*.

[39] See: Joint statement for the press on results of the 6th session of the Council of Association begtween Ukraine and the European Union. – The website of the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, 28 January 2020, – *https://www.mof.gov.ua/uk/news/joint_press_statement_following_the_6th_association_council_meeting_between_the_eu_and_ukraine-2003*.

alarming signal»), and later, of some members of the NBU's Board.[40]

It should also be added that regress of the corporate management reform was a subject of criticism by the EU and other Western partners, caused by the Government's decision in April 2021 to stop the work of members of the Supervisory Board of «Naftohaz Ukrayiny» (National Joint-Stock Company, as well as of the Board's Chairperson).[41]

These and other problems are the subject of reproaches and criticism on the part of the EU, complicating development of the partnership between Kyiv and Brussels and slows down the movement towards the Ukraine-EU political association. In this context, some specific drawbacks and miscalculations in the policy of the Ukrainian authorities at the Eurointegration direction should be mentioned.

Expert opinion

Within the expert milieu, a critical attitude to the Eurointegration policy of the Ukrainian leadership generally prevails. Thus, most frequently (60%) experts characterize this policy as insufficiently understandable for the society. At the same time, 56% of respondents' voice doubts that this policy has a clear strategy for actions. 50% of respondents do not consider the authorities' policy in the European direction efficient while 47% do not consider it consistent and well-weighed.

A chronic problem is a deficit of strategic vision in the sphere of foreign policy. On 14 September 2020, the President's Decree approved the «The National Security Strategy»[42], and on 25 March 2021 «The Military Security Strategy» was approved,[43] зHowever, along with this, there is still no integral strategy of foreign policy of Ukraine, where the European integration should be a component.[44] At the same time, the basic law «On principles of domestic and foreign policy» requires updating, as it is outdated and does not meet modern realities.

Structural-and-personnel problems impact on the efficiency of the authorities' actions, including actions in the sphere of Eurointegration. In particular, November 2020 saw the aggravation of a conflict with the EU on the planned changes in the structure of the apparatus of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, as these changes, according to the European partners, «threaten to disrupt the reform of education,... will lead to decreasing capability of the Ministry in implementing joint projects with the EU».[45] Over 2020, three Vice Prime Ministers on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration were replaced. Meanwhile, since November 2019 the position of Director of the Government Office on coordination of European and Euro-Atlantic integration remains vacant.

The active legislative work of the authorities, while deserving a positive mark in general, does contain a number of problem moments.

First. «The Turboregime» while adopting the Eurointegration laws had affected the quality of legislative acts; in addition, the authorities' innovations on reforming the court system and the Security Service of Ukraine were met with criticism from the West.[46]

Second. The EU showed sharp non-acceptance of attempts to introduce protectionist measures contradicting the Association Agreement. What is meant here is the draft law on «localization» in public procurement, as well as attempts by some ministries to lobby revision of the schedule of introduction in the Ukrainian legislation of the

[40] EU: Dismissal of the NBU's Head, Yakiv Smoliy, is «an alarming signal. – DW, 7 July 2020, – *https://bit.ly/3hogJfQ; Joint Staff Working Document – Association Implementation Report on Ukraine, 2020.*

[41] Concern in Brussels over personnel replacements in Naftohaz». – DW, 30 April 2021, – *https://www.dw.com/uk/u-briusseli-zanepokoieni-kadrovymy-perestanovkamy-v-naftohazi/a-57391968*; G7 voiced their opinion on the situation with «Naftohaz». – UNIAN, 12 May 2020, – *https://www.unian.ua/economics/energetics/velika-simka-vislovilasya-z-privodu-situaciji-z-naftogazom-novini-sogodni-11417716.html.*

[42] Decree of the President of Ukraine No.392 «On the Resolution of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of 14 March 2020 «On the National Security Strategy of Ukraine». – *https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/3922020-35037.*

[43] Decree of the President of Ukraine No.121/2021 of 25 March 2021 «On the Resolution of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of 25 March 2021 «On the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine», – *https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1212021-37661.*

[44] The Decree of the President of Ukraine «On Urgent Measures for Conducting Reforms and Strengthening the State» No.837 of 8 November 2019 contains only too general outline of some directions of the authorities' actions in foreign policy.

[45] EU warns Ukraine for the second time because of attempts to ruin reforms in the Education Ministry. – Ukrayinska Pravda, 20 November 2020, – *https://www.pravda.com.ua/ news/2020/11/20/7274296.*

[46] See: Zelenskyy's court reform contains huge risks for judges' independence: Western Ambassadors. – Yevropeyska Pravda,1 17 October 2019, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2019/10/17/7101959*; EU criticizes the draft of the Security Service of Ukraine's reform: Bakanov retains unnecessary authority. – Ukrayinska Pravda, 17 December 2019, – *https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/12/17/7235131.*

norms of European law in the sphere of ecology, as well as introduction of the norm on the right of Ukraine to unilateral restriction of trade.[47] At that, the President and the Head of Government have to publicly recognize the problem nature of these initiatives of representatives of their team, this giving grounds for doubts about the consolidated nature of the authorities' position.[48]

It should be added that the unfavorable background for the Ukrainian Eurointegration is also being created by controversial statements of some representatives of the team in power. Thus, negative reaction was caused by the message of the head of the «Sluha Narodu» parliamentary faction, D. Arakhamiya, voiced at the Davos Forum (January 2020) that Ukraine should temporarily abandon the policy of harmonization of its legislation with the EU's law.[49] Another statement of his, that the danger of losing EU's macrofinancial assistance is just «rumors», prompted several MEPs to send a strict letter to the authorities on Ukraine's obligations in the sphere of counteracting corruption.[50]

So, in the generalized view, the vulnerable aspects of the Ukrainian side in relations with the EU is the lack of conceptual approaches, improper efficiency of the public governance system, drawbacks of coordination, weak personnel policy, deficit of communication with the society, controversies within the team in power, resistance from oligarchic clans, etc.

Understandably, this is not a complete list of problems. In particular, sharp confrontation in the camp of political parties sharing European values and supporting movement towards the EU may be added to it. Such public opposition in the camp of Eurointegrators weakens Ukraine's positions in the European direction and creates negative «gamut of voices» in the dialogue with the EU.

Of course, the political agenda of Kyiv and Brussels is not limited to the mentioned problem issues. European partners mark Ukraine's success in carrying out the reform of decentralization, in codifying electoral legislation, in organizing free and transparent election process, they welcome the launching and work of the High Anti-Corruption Court and proclaim their support of the work of the NABU. Although the EU publicly criticizes some draft laws in the Verkhovna Rada, it also marks Ukraine's successes in the legislative area (adoption of laws on banks, on domestic water transport, on intelligence, etc.).

However, «rolling back» reforms in some important spheres, inconsistent and non-unequivocal position of representatives of Ukrainian authorities on cooperation with the EU, often explained by the need «to protect national interests», can impact negatively on the following political directions:

First. Delays in internal transformations significantly weakens Kyiv's positions in negotiations with Brussels, especially on the future updating of the Agreement.

Second. Unfavorable internal tendencies may level out the initiative by President V.Zelenskyy on securing support of prospects for joining the European Union from EU member states, at the same time making it impossible to involve «problem» countries not within the circle of traditional «advocates» of Ukraine in the EU (the Baltic countries, some Central European and Scandinavian countries).

Third. Reforms' «standstill», especially in the sphere of the rule of law, adds arguments to representatives of European institutions and governments of member states to justify not going to meet Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia halfway on the issue of creating a special track for them

[47] Panchenko Yu. Contrary to the Association: What can block negotiations on updating the free trade zone with EU. – Yevropeyska Pravda, 10 September 2020, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2020/09/10/7114182/*.

[48] Shmyhal: Law on localization contradicts agreements with EU. It has to be amended). – Liga.net, 23 July 2020, – *https://ua-news.liga.net/economics/news/shmigal-zakon-pro-lokalizatsiyu-superechit-ugodam-z-es-yogo-treba-zminyuvati*; Zelenskyy calls not to approve the draft on localization which violates agreements with EU. – Yevropeyska Pravda, 21 January 2021, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2021/01/21/7118789/*.

[49] As a result, Vice Prime Minister on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, D.Kuleba, had to disprove this statement. See: Kuleba and Arakhamiya are already disporiving the statement on rejecting Eurointegration. – Yevropeyska Pravda, 22 January 2020, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2020/01/22/7105472*.

[50] Three MPs have written a strict letter to Arakhamiya. – DW, 5 October 2020, – *https://www.dw.com/uk/troie-deputativ-yevroparlamentu-napysaly-arakhamii-zhorstkoho-lysta/a-55162734*.

It should be noted that the European Parliament is more frank in criticizing actions of Ukrainian authorities and, at the same time, occupies a more favorable position on Ukraine's European aspirations, compared to other EU institutions and to some member states. See: The European Parliament's annual report of 9 February 2021 on the implementation of the Agreement by Ukraine, – *https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0219_EN.pdf*.

within the framework of Eastern Partnership with the aim of strengthening institutional cooperation and sectoral integration with the EU.[51] As a result, the Ukrainian government will face ever more difficulties in persuading European partners that there is a need to go beyond the limits of the formula, «first, the complete fulfillment of the Agreement, then, everything else».

2.3. Relations in the security sphere: agenda, special features, and prospects[52]

Starting from 2014, counteracting the Russian aggression has become a central issue for the security track of relations between Kyiv and Brussels. However, the vision and approaches of the European partners to the conflict's resolution are somewhat different from what the Ukrainian side expects. Despite the efforts to enhance possibilities and integration within the EU in security and military spheres, as well as the goal, declared by the European Commission, to become a more «geopolitical»[53] player and learn to speak «the language of force» on the international arena,[54] **in the case of Ukraine the EU continues to position itself, in the first turn, as a «*civilian power*», preferring to provide for the «*soft security*» rather than support components of the traditional «*hard security*».**

Such an approach by the EU to managing conflicts in the Eastern Partnership region is based on the priority of building up the so-called «**resilience**», meaning the capability of states and societies to reform, thus also being capable of endure and renovate after internal and external crises,[55] and. Along with this, to change and acquire new features as a result of the shock they go through.[56] It is indicative that the latest joint communication of the European Commission and the Foreign Activity European Commission on the future of the EaP after 2020, as well as the respective conclusions of the EU Council are hardly touching the problem of conflicts in the region, only mentioning dedication to their peaceful settlement and the EU's role as a mediator.[57]

In its official documents, the EU emphasizes cooperation in other spheres called upon to change the countries' «resilience»: starting from securing democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and finishing with gender equality and fight against organized crime.[58] Thus, in the opinion of the EU, building up efficient and reportable institutions and observing international norms and practices is a guarantee of stability and sustainability of states and societies, and thus of their security, too

At the same time, the EU offers to its Eastern partners security cooperation in such spheres as **counteracting terrorism, prevention of radicalization, counteracting hybrid threats, cyber security,** and also states its preparedness **to enhance dialogue ue on security and improve cooperation within the framework of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).**[59] At present, this set of policies is «the smallest common denominator» for member states on possible cooperation of the EU with Eastern neighbors in the security sphere, including Ukraine.

However, despite the intention of the official Brussels to rather focus its efforts on stabilizing conflict zones, the EU remains an important security actor for Ukraine.

If to talk about the official Brussels' direct involvement in the conflict's settlement, it is happening along several main directions: efforts to settle the conflict with the RF with the help of

[51] See: Joint letter of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on enhanced cooperation with the Associated Partners within the Eastern Partnership, Tbilisi, Chisinau, Kyiv, 1 February 2021, – *https://3dcftas.eu/library/documents/joint-letter-of-georgia-moldova-and-ukraine-on-enhanced-cooperation-with-the-associated-partners-within-the-eastern-partnership.*

[52] This chapter uses data of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Border Service, provided at the request of the Razumkov Centre.

[53] Bassot E. The Von Der Leyen Commission's Priorities For 2019-2024. – European Parliamentary Research Service Blog, January 29, 2020, – *https://epthinktank.eu/2020/01/29/the-von-der-leyen-commissions-priorities-for-2019-2024|*.

[54] What is meant by the EU's «power» is the entire set of tools and resources, both political, economic, technological, and military. See: Weiler J. Europe Must Learn Quickly to Speak the Language of Power: Part I. – EJIL: Talk! Blog of the European Journal of International Law, October 29, 2020, – *https://www.ejiltalk.org/europe-must-learn-quickly-to-speak-the-language-of-power-part-i/.*

[55] Shared Vision, Common Action. A stronger Europe: a global strategy for the European Union's foreign and security policy. – EEAS, Brussels, 2016, p.23, – *https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3eaae2cf-9ac5-11e6-868c-01aa75ed71a1.*

[56] Tocci N. Resilience and the role of the European Union in the world. – Contemporary Security Policy, Vol.41, Issue 2, 2019.

[57] Eastern Partnership Policy Beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all. – EC, EEAS, Brussels, March 18, 2020, – *http://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/1_en_act_part1_v6.pdf.*

[58] Council conclusions on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020. – Council of the EU, Brussels, Мая 11, 2020, – *https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43905/st07510-re01-en20.pdf.* Eastern Partnership Policy Beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all. – EC, EEAS, Brussels, March 18, 2020, – *http://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/1_en_act_part1_v6.pdf.*

[59] Council conclusions on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020.

diplomatic tools, implementation of sanctions with the aim of influencing the aggressor, and **providing support to Ukraine** in opposing the aggressor.

The basis for the diplomatic track is the negotiations process in the Normandy format, although the EU is not a direct participant in it, having «delegated» respective authority to Germany and France. Since the latest meeting of the leaders of the four countries in December 2019 (preceded a three-year interval) the intensity of the conflict in Donbas has somewhat decreased, however real progress on the issue of the conflict's completion has not been achieved.

The main topic of the discussion is still the *order in which the clauses of the Minsk Agreements are to be implemented* and the search for a new modality for their realization, like the so-called «clusters», suggested in March 2021 by Germany and France.[60] However, while Ukraine observes the principle, «security first», the Russian side does not demonstrate its preparedness to constructive negotiations and does not abandon attempts to legalize the so-called: LNR/DNR», imposing on Ukraine direct talks with their «representatives» within the framework of the Tripartite Contact Group on peaceful settlement in the East of Ukraine.

Another obstacle on the path to the conflict's settlement has been Russia's active **passport issuing** to the population of the territory in Donbas temporarily not controlled by Ukraine. This process was condemned by the European Council as contradicting the spirit and the goals of the Minsk agreements,[61] and also prompted the EC to issue special recommendations[62] for consulates of member states on treating visa applications of residents of these territories.

It is worth noting that the EU and member states make the biggest contribution (approximately two-thirds of the budget and of the personnel) into the functioning of t**he OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission (SMMU)** in the East of Ukraine. Also, the EU and its member states are the biggest donor of humanitarian help to Ukraine having provided more than Euro 420 million for the mitigation of humanitarian, social, and economic aftereffects of the Russian aggression in Donbas, with 23 million provided in 2020.[63]

An inseparable component of diplomatic pressure on the RF are **the EU sanctions** introduced in connection to the annexation of Crimea and with Russia's actions for destabilizing the situation in Ukraine. However, the recent escalation by Ukraine's borders in April 2021, caused by the buildup by the RF of its military presence in the East and in the South, has again demonstrated, **the EU's unpreparedness to broaden sectoral sanctions**[64] At the same time, because of the actions by Russia, the agreement of prolongation of sanctions by EU member states, lately, has been happening without additional discussions. It is worth mentioning also that the EU, in the person of High Representative J.Borrel, and President of the European Council, Ch.Michel, signaled its preparedness to join in the work of the Crimean Platform, initiated by Ukraine in order to bring to the fore the issue of Crimea and to help in its de-occupation.

As was already noted, the support by the European partners of the security sector of Ukraine does not generally relate to its military component but is focused on assisting to reform its civilian component. Thus, one of the main formats of security cooperation between Kyiv and Brussels is **the EU Advisory Mission (*EUAM*),** the civilian operation of the EU, deployed at Ukraine's request in 2015. EUAM sets the aim of building a transparent and efficient sector of civilian security enjoying public trust, by providing strategic advice on reforming the sector and by practical help to the respective institutions.[65]

[60] Zolkina M. Everything about Yermak's new plan: What they suggest in «Normandy» to update the Minsk agreements. – Yevropeyska Pravda, 25 March 2021, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2021/03/25/7121333/*.

[61] European Council meeting – Conclusions, 20 June 2019, – *https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39922/20-21-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf*.

[62] EU guidance on the handling of visa applications from residents of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions. – European Commission, 3 October 2019, – *https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_5975*.

[63] Ukraine: €10 million in humanitarian aid to withstand winter and coronavirus pandemic. – European Commission, 6 October 2020, – *https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1744*.

[64] Dmytro Kuleba on whether he saw EU's appetite for sectoral sanctions in relation to RF. – DW, 20 April 2021, – *https://www.dw.com/uk/dmytro-kuleba-rozpoviv-chy-pobachyv-u-yes-apetyt-do-sektoralnykh-sanktsii-shchodo-rf/a-57267089*.

[65] See: EUAM website: *https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/ua/*. As of January 2021, 341 people worked for the EUAM, representing 25 EU countries, Ukraine, and Canada. EUAM's major beneficiaries are the following state institutions: The Ministry of Justice, the Interior Ministry. The National Police, the Security Service of Ukraine, the Procurator Service, the State Investigation Bureau, the State Border Service, the State Fiscal Service.

It is important that in 2020 the Mission's work has spread to the East: the EUAM's office in Mariupol was added to regional offices in Kharkiv, Lviv, and Odessa. Another mission of the EU is **the Border Assistance Mission to Ukraine and Moldova (*EUBAM*)**, working since 2005 and engaged for making standards and procedures of border management, customs and trade compliant with those in force in U member states, with a special focus on assisting in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict.[66] In spite of *EUAM* and *EUBAM* playing an important role in supporting reforms and being an example of systemic, practical multilateral cooperation between the EU and Ukraine, their work does not directly impact on the prospects of resolving the conflict with Russia.

No less important dimension of the Eurointegration is deepening cooperation and intensifying the exchange of information between Ukrainian institutions and respective **European agencies and institutions** In particular, in 2020, the National Police took part in more than ten specialized law-enforcement operations under the Europol aegis (in particular, *MISMED, SALO, RETROVIRUS, SHIELD, RAD),* and the Working Agreement was signed between the Ministry of Interior and the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (*CEPOL*), opening the possibility of involving 27 representatives of Ukrainian agencies and state institutions in the *CEPOL* Exchange Program for 2020.[67]

Cooperation is developing between the State Border Service and **the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (*FRONTEX*)**. in 2020, a joint operation, «Coordinating Points. Avia» was held, the Agreement on cooperation and membership in the network of partner academies of the *FRONTEX* Agency was amended, implementation into the education process of the best European practices continues within the framework of joining the unified training program for medium-level border guards. Ukraine also wants to strengthen cooperation between its law-enforcement bodies and **the European Anti-Fraud Office (*OLAF*),** in particular, by updating Appendix 44 to the Agreement (aimed at the introduction of the EU's legislation on fighting fraud) and concluding administrative agreement on cooperation between *OLAF* and Ukrainian law-enforcement bodies. Such an agreement was already signed by the Prosecutor General's Office in February 2021, while the draft of the agreement with the Interior Ministry is being considered by European partners. Besides, the EU is assisting in building up institutional and technical capacity of law-enforcement bodies with the help of various **international technical assistance projects**.[68] It is important that European experts provide recommendations on legislative changes necessary for the **reform of the Security Service of Ukraine** currently at the stage of active work and being under the enhanced attention of international partners.[69]

In 2020, the necessity **to overcome *COVID-19* global pandemic**. became another addition to security issues. In order to provide for urgent needs in fighting the coronavirus, the EU allocated over 202 million Euro of assistance, and also approved the allocation of 1.2 billion Euros of macrofinancial assistance, with Ukraine receiving 600 million of these without any conditions. Also, Ukraine has to receive eight million doses of vaccine within the framework of the COVAX initiative, co-financed by the EU.[70]

Meanwhile, the EU's preference for supporting «soft security» does not at all mean that there is no cooperation of Ukraine with the European side in **military-political, military, and military-technological spheres**. The current cooperation in these spheres is determined by the Working Plan of cooperation between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the EU Council's Secretariat (in the CSDP sphere). This allows to regularly hold **meetings and consultations** of the leadership of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and the Armed Forces of Ukraine commandment with representatives of EU institutions and agencies,

[66] See: EUBAM website: *https://eubam.org/ua/.* Although the Mission is similar to other missions within the CSDP as to its goals, it is not the one, as it is being administered by the European Commission. In 2019, 396 personnel were involved in this Mission's activities.

[67] Because of the COVID restrictions, the CEPOL rescheduled these events for later.

[68] For example: «EU support for the integrated border management in Ukraine(EU4IBM)», «Together with the EU towards border security». «Support for migration and asylum management (IMMIS)», «Support for reforms on developing the rule of law (PRAVO-police)», «Assistance to the Interior Ministry in averting and fighting arms, munitions, and explosives trafficking», and «Support for the Administration of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine in fighting arms, munitions, and explosives trafficking», etc.

[69] Sydorenko S. Reduction for NATO's sake: How they advise Kyiv to reform the Security Service of Ukraine. – Yevropeyska Pravda, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2021/05/13/7123127/.*

[70] As of May 26, Ukraine received, within the framework of COVAX, 590,850 doses of Pfizer/BioNTech, and 367,200 doses of AstraZeneca-Oxford AZD1222 vaccines.

the EU Military Committee and the EU's Military Headquarters.[71]

In particular, 2019 saw the first visit to Ukraine of the Head of the EU Military Committee, and the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine had for the first time participated in the session of this body in Brussels. In 2021, apart from the participation of the Minister of Defence in the session of the Subcommittee of the European Parliament on security and defence, his deputy had a chance to discuss the issue of Russia's militarization of Crimea with the Ambassadors of the EU political-and-security Committee (in the video format). Also, during her visit to Brussels, the Vice Prime Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic integration took part in the offline session of the Committee. Discussion of the issues of cooperation in the CSDP sphere and of civilian defence take place also within the framework of the Multiparty **EaP platform** (Platform 1 «Democracy, good governance, and stability»).

Besides, expert dialogue takes place in the following formats» «Ukraine-EU Working Party on Conventional Arms Exports (*COARM*)», «Ukraine-EU Working Group on issues of global non-proliferation and disarmament (*CONOP/CODUN*)», and «Ukraine-EU Working Group on issues of the Council of Europe and OSCE (*COSCE*)». It is also worth mentioning that Ukraine will be the first EaP country with which the EU will start the **dialogue on cyber security**, with its first round scheduled for the first half of 2021.

After an interval, Ukraine's participation in **military operations of the EU** restarts: in the second half of 2021, an officer of the Armed Forces of Ukraine will be sent to the headquarters of the EU «ALTEA» operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Besides, in 2020 units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine were on operational duty in the **HELBROC EU battlegroup** (which is also planned for the first half of 2023 and the first half of 2026).[72] Although the EU as an institution does not take direct part in training missions for

Ukraine's military (only at the level of individual member states), in 2020, at the invite from the **European Defence Agency (EDA)**, personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine were involved in training in helicopter capability on the base of the Multinational Training Centre in the city of Sintra, Portugal. Also, within the framework of the Eastern Partnership initiative, Ukrainian attendees and military have an opportunity to receive professional training in the issues of security and defence: since 2017, on the basis of the Ivan Chernyakhovsky National Defence University of Ukraine (NDUU) the annual training course on the CSDP issues is held under the aegis of the **European Security and Defence College (ESDC)**[73] Thanks to the ESDC representatives of the Armed Forces of Ukraine also train at courses abroad.

At **the expert level**, the Ukrainian side also participated in multinational **EDA projects**, in particular, in working groups, «Material Standartization»[74] and «Single European Sky» (including participation in the sessions of the Military Aviation Council). In particular, in 2020 the EU adopted the devision on possibility of involving Ukrainian specialists in the work of the **European Defence Standartization Committee** and several expert groups.[75] Also, Ukraine wants full-scale participation in the work in other two directions stipulated by the

[71] Apart from the Association Agreement (Article 7), cooperation in this sphere is based on the Agreement on defining the general schedule of Ukraine's participation in the EU operations on crises settlement (2005), the Agreement on security procedures on exchange of classified information (2005, came into force on 1 February 2007), the Administrative Agreement on cooperation between the European Defence Agency (EDA) and Ukraine's Ministry of Defence (2015).

[72] The sates taking part in the EU HELBROC battlegroup are the Greek Republic, the Republic of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Romania, Ukraine, and the Republic of Serbia.

[73] In 2018, the NDUU had acquired the status of the associated partner of the ESDC, this opening an opportunity for participation in joint international programs, sessions of the European Coordination Council on Education, and in other projects.

[74] Participation in the following groups: EG No.25 «Range Interoperability», EG No.26 «BlastEffects», EG No.27 «Automatic identification technique», EG No.28 «Camouflage», EG No.29 «Military Clothes».

[75] EG No.10 «Ammunition», EG No.14 «Life Cycle Technical Documentation», EG No.15 «Quality of electric power supply/Portable electric power generators».

agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the EDA: «Logistics»[76] and «Training».

One of the priority directions of developing military-technological cooperation with the EU currently considered by Ukraine is the participation in the projects of the EU's **Permanent Structured Cooperation (*PESCO*)**. At the end of 2020, the EU Council defined general conditions according to which third countries may take part in some defence projects within the framework of this program, namely: 1) *political conditions* (share the EU values and principles, the CSDP goals, and also to assist in strengthening the CSDP and not to contradict security and defence interests of the EU); 2) *main conditions* (an essential additional contribution to the project and assistance in achieving its goals, in particular, by means of material-and-technical, financial, operational, expert opportunities; inability to hinder the progress or to avoid use of the acquired means and opportunities; 3) *legal condition* (an agreement with the EU on exchanging classified information, and of Administrative Agreement with the EDA in case of implementation of the project with the EDA's support).[77] It can be said that Ukraine meets all the requirements, in particular, the second set, as Ukraine has a valuable practical experience of opposing an enemy, recognized by the European side.[78]

After having analyzed 46 *PESCO* projects, the Ministry of Defence sent applications to four coordinator states in order to launch dialogue on Ukraine's participation in this initiative. While the potential participation in *PESCO* is interesting for Ukraine with the view to the prospect of improving national defence capabilities in correspondence to the best European practices and standards, it can be predicted that a decision on its participation will be adopted no earlier than another non-EU member state is involved in *PESCO,* Great Britain.

The EU's aspiration to «strategic autonomy», accompanied by livelier discussion within the community on the necessity to enhance its capabilities in the sphere of common security and defence, can open a certain window of opportunity for Ukraine's cooperation with the EU not only in the sphere of «civilian security», but in the traditional military security as well.

However, the prospects of such cooperation depend not only on producing positive consensus among the EU member countries but also on success in reforming the security sector of Ukraine, in particular in overcoming corruption, providing for democratic civilian control and making it impossible to exert political influence on institutions with the aim of servicing private interests. Also, for cooperation in the military sphere (especially for the potential cooperation within the framework of *PESCO*) there is an urgent need to secure interoperability of using forces and means of member countries and Ukraine.

2.4. Ukraine-EU: The Russian factor

As was already noted, one of the main components of Ukraine's relations with the EU in the sphere of security is opposing the Russian hybrid intervention, in particular, liberation of the occupied areas of the East of Ukraine and the annexed Crimea. Assessing the influence of the Russian factor on the European movement of Ukraine and on the Ukraine-EU relations in general, it is feasible to single out, on the one hand, *the aggression against Ukraine*, having as its aim blocking the Western drift of Ukraine with the help, among other means, of a direct military intervention; and on the other hand, *the Russian hybrid expansion within the EU area*, containing a threat to the EU's unity, political system, and its existence in general.[79]

Aggression against Ukraine. For the RF's leaders who consider the post-Soviet area the sphere of their own «privileged» interests, the independent Ukraine heading in the European direction is a challenge and a threat. Kyiv's successful Eurointegration is an incentive for other post-Soviet countries and means

[76] In 2020, European partners had agreed the possibility of the Ukrainian side's joining the work of the «Project Team Logistic Support».

[77] Questions & Answers: Third States' participation in PESCO projects. – EEAS, 11 November 2020, – *https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88179/questions-answers-third-states%E2%80%99-participation-pesco-projects_en.*

[78] In its report on the implementation of the Association Agreement (2021), the European Parliament recognized the uniqueness of Ukraine's experience and called to deepen cooperation within the framework of the EU CSDP and PESCO projects.1

[79] These topics are analyzed in detail in a number of studies of the Razumkov Centre. See: The Russian-Ukrainian conflict: current state, aftereffects, prospects of development of events. – The Razumkov Centre's analytical paper. – National Security and Defence Journal, 2014, No.5-6, pp.3-5, – *http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD148-149_2014_ukr.pdf.* Russia's hybrid war: The challenge and threat to Europe. National Security and Defence Journal, No.9-10. 2016, pp. 2-16, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD167-168_2016_ukr.pdf.* War in Donbas: Realities and prospects for settlement). – National Security and Defence Journal, No.1-2, 2019, pp. 3-12, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD177-178_2019_ukr.pdf.* Ukraine's European integration: The Russian factor. National Security and Defence Journal, No.1-2, 2020, pp. 55-66, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD181-182_2020_ukr.pdf.*

ruination for the reintegration of Eurasian space according to the Russian scenario. At the same time, Ukraine's movement towards the EU is a «sentence» to the authoritarian leadership of the RF and, generally, to the model of a totalitarian police state constructed in the present-day Russia.

This is why Putin's regime uses the entire arsenal of «hybrid war» to disrupt and make impossible Ukraine's Eurointegration: from political and diplomatic pressure. Economic blockade, information aggression to military intervention: occupation of Crimea and Donbas. In the opinion of Ukraine's public and experts in international relations, the motive and the goal of the Kremlin's policy in direction of Ukraine is the establishment of Russia's control and command over Ukraine and making impossible its movement towards the EU and NATO.[80]

Thus, the «forceful;» component of the RF's hybrid war against Ukraine is the military intervention» the unlawful annexation of Crimea and occupation of some areas of Donbas. At the same time, expansion in the information space is a key and dangerous factor of the war unleashed against Ukraine. The methods of Russia's enemy propaganda are open lies, distortion of facts, insinuations, false claims, information sabotage, distortion of historical events, etc. the RF's special services are conducting destabilization of domestic situation in Ukraine, using, among other means, actions of «the fifth column», agents of influence, the network of resident spies, etc. In parallel, separatist moods in some regions are being nourished, the factor of the pandemic is actively used to spread panic.

Kremlin also wages economic war in Ukraine's direction. What is meant here is broad introduction of various trade restrictions, attempts to push Ukraine out of markets of third countries. Russia actively uses «energy weapons» against Ukraine. Moscow's aggression in cyber space is dangerous. What is meant here in particular, is massive attacks pm web sites of bodies of power and of state-owned companies, cyber spying, war in social networks unleashed by the Russian «troll farms».

In this context, it is necessary to outline several factors of the Russian armed aggression that negatively influenced and slowed down Ukraine's European integration.

First. Tremendous human and financial-and-economic losses. Over the years of the war in Donbas (April 2014-January 2021), according to UN data, 13,300 people have died, 33,500 people were wounded.[81] Almost 1.5 residents of Donbas and Crimea became internally displaced persons. Still militarily occupied are: the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (26,081 sq km), the city of Sevastopol (864 sq km), parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (16,799 sq km), 43,744 sq km in total, amounting to 7.2 percent of Ukraine's territory.[82] The overall scale of economic losses, according to different experts' assessments, are quite different, depending on the time and method of the assessment: from $60-70 billion to $300 billion.[83]

388 state-owned enterprises, 4,500 properties owned by the state, and over 100 large enterprises of non-state ownership are in the occupied territories.[84] The energy infrastructure of Ukraine sustained enormous losses. The military occupation of Donbas caused ruining of the oil-and-gas infrastructure in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and because of the annexation of Crimea Ukraine has lost a number of objects of fuel-and-energy complex, as well as prospective territories for extracting carbon resources.

Such large-scale losses, on the one hand, have complicated and slowed down the pace of social-and-economic reforms, including those within the implementation of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement. On the other hand, they have lowered the interest and the level of activity of European partners to development of contact with a country at war.

Second. The Ukrainian side must concentrate enormous political-and-diplomatic, financial-and-economic, personnel resources on opposing the Kremlin's aggression in different directions.

[80] Ukraine's European integration: The Russian factor. – National Security and Defence Journal, No.1-2, 2020, pp. 85-125. – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD181-182_2020_ukr.pdf.*

[81] UN calculated the number of victims of combat in Donbas. – Radio Liberty. 19 February 2021, – *https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-oon-kst-gertv-boyovyh-donbas/31110937.html.*

[82] Ten facts about Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine. – Website of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, – *https://mfa.gov.ua/10-faktiv-pro-zbrojnu-agresiyu-rosiyi-proti-ukrayini.*

[83] In more detail, these calculations are presented in the Razumkov Centre's analytical paper, «War in Donbas: Realities and prospects of settlement». – National Security and Defence Journal, 2019, No.1-2,pp.42-43.

[84] Ibid.

Kyiv has to maintain a big military contingent in the East of Ukraine and at the administrative border in Crimea, and to constantly increase the defence expenditure. Thus, according to the latest CIPRI data (April 2021), in 2020 Ukraine's military spending amounted to 4.1 percent of the GDP ($5.9 billion). This is 11 percent more than in 2019, and 198 percent more than in 2011. At the same time, the average amount of defence spending in the world in 2020 was 2.4 percent of the GDP.[85] This is a burdensome load on the budget in the circumstances of a complicated economic situation during the pandemic. In fact, «exhaustion war» goes on, being the reason for the European integration getting what is left of resources.

Third. Political decisions and actions by the Ukrainian authorities, the attention of the public and the civil political discourse in general are focused mainly on the topic of the war in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea. The topic of European integration, the results of the implementation of the Association Agreement, sectoral cooperation with the EU have moved to the background. At the same time, the dominant topic now both for the EU and Ukraine is fighting *COVID-19*.

Fourth. In the geopolitical aspect, the Russian aggression, on the one hand, caused sharp opposition along the axis Russia-the West and introduction of anti-Russian sanction policy. On the other hand, Kremlin's intervention revealed both a limited preparedness of the EU countries to oppose the RF and strengthen the sanction pressure, and the growing tendencies of looking for a dialogue with the aggressor country and of renewing contacts with it in the *«business as usual»* format.

Thus, the hybrid was unleashed by Russia slows down Ukraine's Eurointegration process, distracts huge human and financial-and-economic resources that could be more efficiently used at the European direction. However, another thing is clear, too: Russia's aggression cannot be considered the universal justification for miscalculations and mistakes of the Ukrainian authorities at the Eurointegration direction.

Russian hybrid expansion in the EU area. Russia's aggression on the continent of Europe is a long-term threat for the EU, an irritant for the internal problems of the European Union. Kremlin is exerting large-scale hybrid influence with the aim to disintegrate the EU and to reformat the European political system according to Russia's own scenario.

The head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in her speech at the EU Summit in May 2021, said while speaking on the Russian interference in Ukraine, that Russia is also trying to «weaken the EU, undermine the countries that a members of the EU, by means of hybrid threats, sabotage, the «divide and rule» tactic, cyberattacks, and campaigns of disinformation, We see this scheme for many years, still it does not change and only becomes worse».[86]

The RF's tactical tasks are: destabilization of domestic situation in U countries, discrediting EU's governing bodies, eroding basic European values, disorienting public opinion, formation of an influential pro-Russian lobby within the European establishment, support for radical extremist movements, assisting in deepening differences between European states and EU institutions, etc.[87]

The situation is critically complicated by the fact that the Russian expansion is carried out against the background of total devaluation of global and regional security structures (the UN Security Council, OSCE, PACE, etc.) while the work of these bodies is being blocked by the Russian side.

Russia is using a broad and renewable set of tools of hybrid aggression.

- *Carrying out information subversive acts,* large-scale export of distorted, fake media produce. The East StratCom Task Force at the European External Action Service (EEAS) had listed more than 11,000 examples of Kremlin's disinformation from the end of 2015 to March 2021. In particular, 700 attacks with fakes were directed against Germany, 300 against France, 170 against Italy, more than

[85] SIPRI Report: Ukraine's military spending has grown despite the pandemic. 26 April 2021. – DW, – *https://www.dw.com/uk/zvit-sipri-viiskovi-vytraty-ukrainy-zrosly-nezvazhaiuchy-na-pandemiiu/a-57316652.*

[86] EU summit tried to prove that European Union is not a «paper tiger». – Komsomolska Pravda v Ukrayini, 26 May 2021, – *https://kp.ua/politics/696700-sammyt-es-pytalsia-dokazat-chto-evrosouiz-ne-bumazhnyi-tyhr.*

[87] The topic of the Russian aggression against the EU is analyzed in a number of analytical researches of the Razumkov Centre. See: The Razumkov Centre's website, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/.*

40 against Spain, etc. 4,100 such attacks were aimed at Ukraine. Experts also listed more than 800 cases of Russian disinformation on COVID-19 and vaccination.[88]

- *Interference in internal political processes,* including elections. American researchers have documented, starting from 2004, facts of Russian interference in domestic policy of 27 countries of the world, including EU countries.[89] Widely known became facts of the RF's interference in referenda in the Netherlands, Great Britain (*Brexit*), Catalonia, Macedonia, France, Montenegro, etc.[90] Russia's influence on election processes in Germany, France, Montenegro, etc., is also known. The European Commission's report of June 2019 underlines the RF's interference in elections to the European Parliament.[91]

- *Intelligence-and-spying, subversion-and-undermining activity.* Such facts were regularly found out by special services of the Baltic countries, Poland, Bulgaria, Sweden, Germany, the Czech Republic, and other EU countries. Widely resonant became the chemical subversive act in Salisbury; spying actions of the RF's special services against the chemical laboratory in the Swiss town of Spiez were uncovered, the laboratory of the World Anti-Dumping Agency (*WADA*); in 2019, in the French Alps, a powerful spying base of the GRU was discovered, carrying out operations all around Europe; the Russian act of sabotage at ammunition depots in the Czech Republic became internationally known, etc.

- The Russian arsenal of hybrid expansion contains *many other forms and means of influence*.[92] What is meant here is: the use of energy «weapons»; compromising state structures of the EU countries; exporting corruption; creating networks of «agents of influence». Supporting right-wing radical movements («National Front», «League», «Five Stars» et al.); carrying out massive cyberattacks against Internet resources of the bodies of power of EU countries; «forceful testing» of the system of defence of EU countries, etc.

The danger of the Russian expansion on the continent of Europe is caused by, on the one hand, the aggressive anti-Western foreign course of Russia and neglect of international norms; on the other hand, by the EU's vulnerability to this threat.

The Russian aggressive policy on the European continent in the strategic dimension threatens the EU's integrity and its existence in general. In the tactical dimension, it is a slowing factor to the progress of the influence of the EU in the post-Soviet area within the framework of implementation of the neighborhood policy. This directly relates to the development of partnership with Ukraine.

2.5. Impact of political-and-security factors on economic contacts with the EU

The level of realization of goals and tasks set in the political chapter (Chapter II) of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU influences to a great extent the progress in the realization of the trade-and-economic part of the Agreement. The state, character, and atmosphere of political relations influence greatly the shaping of the general climate of economic activity in the territory of Ukraine in the context of the security level and the existing risks, trust, the state of securing the rule of law and transparency of decisions adopted by the power structures of Ukraine.

It is known that the level of allowing this or that country to programs and the work of institutions of the integration commonwealth depend significantly on general perception of this country in the aspect of clear observance by this country of the adopted general system of societal values and political principles.

[88] See: EU vs Disinfo database, – *https://euvsdisinfo.eu/ru and https://euvsdisinfo.eu/villifying-germany-wooing-germany/.*

[89] 18 Alleged Russian political meddling documented in 27 countries since 2004. – USA TODAY, 7 September 2017, – *https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/ world/2017/09/07/alleged-russian-political-meddling-documented-27-countries-since-2004/619056001.*

[90] In particular, the «Manipulating information» paper (September 2018) prepared by the Centre for Analysis, Prognosis, and Strategy (CAPS) and the Military School Strategic Research Institute (IRSEM), informs on the Russian interference in referenda (The Netherlands, Brexit, Catalonia) and election processes (the USA, France, Germany). See: La Croix, – *https://paris-international.blogs.la-croix.com/les-futures-tendances-de-la-guerre-de-linformation-menee-par-la-russie/2018/09/10/.*

[91] European Commission: attempts to influence elections to the European Parliament made from Russia. – DW, 14 June 2019, – *https://www.dw.com/uk/.*

[92] Ukraine's European integration: The Russian factor. – National Security and Defence Journal, No.1-2. 2020, pp. 12-17, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD181-182_2020_ukr.pdf.*

In this aspect, special significance for the development of economic cooperation and progress of integration in different sectors of economy belongs to movement to the set goals: «convergence in external issues and security issues for ever deeper involvement of Ukraine in the European Security Area», «strengthening cooperation and dialogue between the Parties on the issues of international security and crisis management», securing «the rule of law and good governance, human rights and basic freedoms» (Articles 4 and 7 of the Association Agreement), «dialogue and cooperation on the issues of internal reforms» with the aim that «domestic policy is based on principles common for the Parties, in particular, on stability and efficiency of international institutions, the rule of law and respect to human rights and basic freedoms» (Article 6).

It should be noted, however, that real achievements on this way are not unequivocal as of today, this being caused by the problems of implementation of domestic reforms in Ukraine outlined above, and by the work of geopolitical factors. Chronic problems of corruption and problems with securing the rule of law in Ukraine, combined with enormous risks caused by externally induced factors, the aggressive and unpredictable actions of Russia, the prolonged character of combat in the East of Ukraine, all this significantly slows down investment processes necessary to adapt and raise the competitive capability of Ukraine's economy within the framework of integration into the EU's common market.

Several especially acute problems of Ukraine's economic development and economic integration can be singled out, impossible to efficiently resolve outside of the general political and security context.

First of all, attention should be paid to ***actual stagnation of European investment in Ukraine*** after the Association Agreement came into force. Statistical data on the amassed amounts of direct investments from the EU (Figure «*Dynamics of amassed amount of direct investments in Ukraine from EU*»),[93] points to the fact that actually positive dynamics is not observed (excluding 2019), while the «coronavirus» year 2020 has even marked a significant decrease in direct investments from the EU, with especially noticeable reduction of participation in joint-stock capital and its part compensation with debt tools (which in itself is not a very favourable indicator).

It is evident that for some European investors investing capital into the conflict zones is rather problematic, facing the danger of losing their investment as a result of unpredictable possibility of escalation of combat actions.

Lately, a new and rapidly growing factor connected to ***cybersecurity***. Bjoined these military-and-political risks for economic activity. It plays an especially important role in the circumstances of the rapidly growing digitalization of economy, stimulated by global changes taking place in the context of the *COVID-19* pandemic and the growing geopolitical rivalry of great powers.

In this aspect, as the data from the International Telecommunications Union (*ITU*), an authority in these issues, which calculates *the Global Cybersecurity Index* (*GCI*),[94] Ukraine has significant problems of falling behind.[95]

Thus, according to the cybersecurity index, Ukraine holds slot 32 in Europe and slot 54 in the world. And although the indicators of the state of cybersecurity of Ukraine look better than of some EU member states (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Romania, Greece, Malta), with a noticeable falling behind the leader countries in this sphere, the scale of cyber threats is incomparable to these countries: Ukraine holds slot 7 in the world among the countries which are the most frequent targets of cyberattacks that have large-scale aftereffects, being ahead, in this aspect, even of China, France, and Russia (Figure «*Number of significant cyberattacks in 2006-2020*»[96], p.42).

It should be specially emphasized that for Ukraine, one of the priority directions in the further economic integration in the

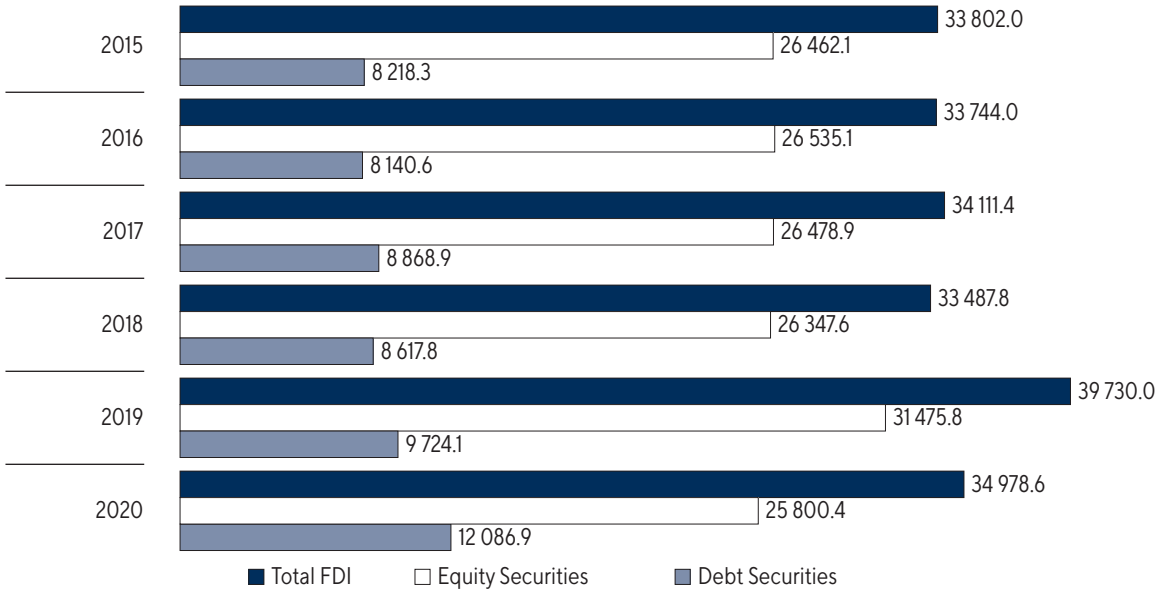
[93] NBU. Statistics of the external sector, – *https://bank.gov.ua/ua/statistic/sector-external/data-sector-external#5*.

[94] This Index measures the countries' affinity to cybersecurity at the global level on the basis of analysis of five «pillars»: (i) legal measures, (ii) technical measures, (iii) organizational measures, (iv) building up potential, and (v) level of cooperation, with forming on their basis of integral indicator.1

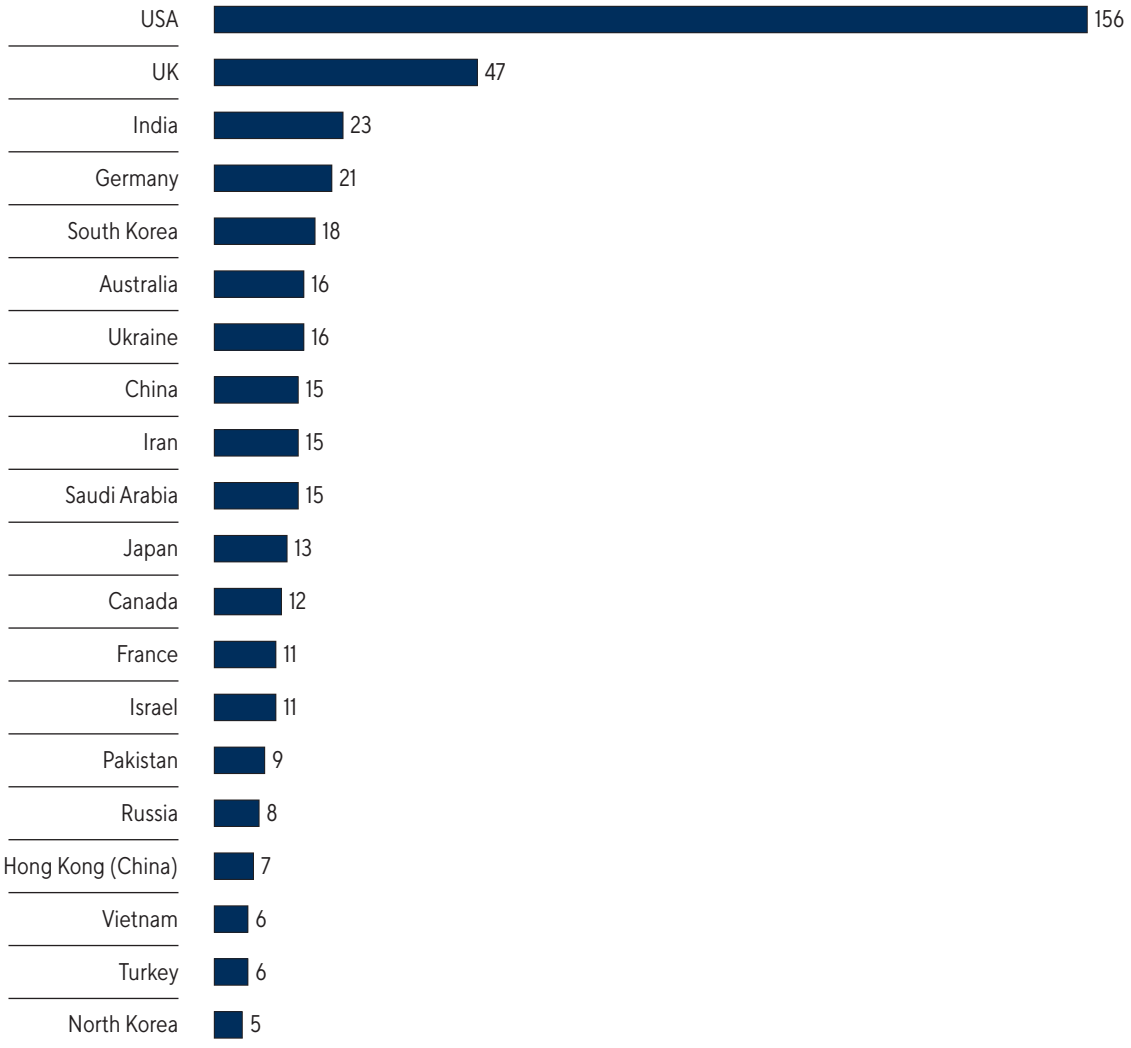
[95] Global Cybersecurity Index – 2018. ITU, – *https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-GCI.01-2018-PDF-E.pdf*.

[96] World Economic Forum. Global Risks Report 2021, figure 4.1., p. 54.

TOTAL AMOUNT OF DIRECT INVESTMENTS IN UKRAINE FROM THE EU,
million US $



NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT CYBERATTACKS IN 2006-2020



EU's single market is ***entering its Single Digital Market***. It is clear that this is hard to realize efficiently when there are significant problems in the cybersecurity regime limiting the reliability of commercial transactions in the digital space.

It should be kept in mind that such a state of things complicates for Ukraine prospects of participation in the single digital market as one of the key components of development in the circumstances of the Fourth industrial revolution unfolding in the world.

At the same time, as proven by the practical experience of Ukrainian organizations participation in the «Horizon 2020» scientific-and-technological program, general parameters of Ukraine's inclusion in these innovative processes, extremely important for the shaping of the future face of Ukraine's economy, look insignificant not only against the general background of this rather large-scale program but even when compared to other countries associated with the EU (Chart «*Some indicators of Ukraine's participation in the «Horizon 2020» EU program*»[97]).

Evidently, Ukraine's partners from the EU are not very disposed towards regarding Ukraine as an equally valuable partner in key prospect research and technological developments. There are grounds to believe that this is not as much a result of insufficiency of Ukraine's scientific-and-technological and innovation potential (various authoritative international rankings, as a matter of fact, testify to the contrary), as this points out to the presence of ***essential non-economic obstacles, barriers, and risks***, to be overcome.

It is evident that the contents and special features of political relations, cooperation in the security sphere, the Ukraine-EU Association's prospects generally depend on many factors of external and internal nature. Among them, dangerous geopolitical processes in Europe and the world, and complicated tendencies within the EU can be singled out, as well as the factor of the continuing Russian aggression which is the most dangerous challenge and threat to Ukraine and to the EU.

At the same time of great significance is a set of problems connected with internal transformations in Ukraine in the spheres most significant for European partners (the reform of judiciary, fight against corruption, improvement of the system of public governance, etc.). Progress in these issues is an important condition for the higher development of political relations between Kyiv and Brussels.

Also topical are the problems of Ukraine's internal institutional-and legal self-identification as a part of the European community, raising its similarity and identity with the EU in the dimension of reaffirming and observing common values, norms, and rules. While this is taking place, it is evident that the nature and atmosphere of political relations, as well as security factors directly influence trade-and-economic contacts and the rates of Ukraine's integration into the EU markets.

SOME INDICATORS OF UKRAINE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE «HORIZON 2020» EU PROGRAM

Indicator	Quantity	Proportion among associated countries of the EU %	Total for all participating countries	Proportion in general indicators of the Program %
Pure financial contribution of the EU	€43.95 mln	0.76	€33,99 bln	0.13
Number of grant agreements signed	220	2.91	33 660	0.65
Number of project participants	305	2.38	165 856	0.18
Success rate of approved projects compared to number of eligible proposals	9.47	13.52	12.03 (average indicator for all participating countries)	
Total number of applications submitted	2 744	3.42	969 649	0.28
Number of eligible proposals	2 133	3.92	281 395	0.76

[97] H2020 Contry Profile, – *https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dashboard/sense/app/a976d168-2023-41d8-acec-e77640154726/sheet/0c8af38b-b73c-4da2-ba41-73ea34ab7ac4/state/0.*

3.
PREREQUISITES AND PROSPECTS OF POLITICAL ASSOCIATION

With the view to their evolution, the current trends in relations between Kyiv and Brussels, and their legal foundations, political association looks as a process of the sides' rapprochement, of strengthening and improvement of cooperation in different spheres, aimed at the achievement of goals set in the Association Agreement.

It is clear that integration into the EU, including the political sphere, is an efficient tool of implementing the best European norms and practices in the Ukrainian political environment. This is both the strategic task and the basic prerequisite for successful movement towards the European Union.

This Chapter defines legal conditions for Ukraine's progress along the path towards political association with the EU, in particular, the nature and special features of conceptual principles of political rapprochement, contained in the Agreement's Chapter 2. Previous assessments and observations on the current tendencies, general state, and problems of Ukraine-EU political relations are concisely generalized. Also, the role and the place of Ukraine in the system of EU's external policy, and some prospects of cooperation are outlined.

3.1. Legal foundations for political association

The ratification of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU was undoubtedly an important event in the country's foreign policy, the legal establishment of the civilizational pro-European choice of the Ukrainian people. At the same time, this document is a roadmap and a comprehensive program of internal reforms, aimed at introducing European standards, norms, and rules.

The Agreement's importance was reinforced by the fact that it has not only changed previous agreements (the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the Ukraine of 1994[1]), but also launched the transition of relations between Kyiv and Brussels to another quality: from the long-term state of «partnership and cooperation» to «political association» and «economic integration». Perhaps the only exception in this situation was the qualifying clause in Part 2 of Article 1 of the Law on ratification, according to which «Ukraine's obligations emanating from Article

[1] On ratification of the Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between Ukraine and the European Communities and their member states. The Law of Ukraine, – *https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/main/index*.

8 of 'The Agreement on ratification of the Roman Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998' have to be fulfilled after respective amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine are made»[2].

On 1 September 2017, the Agreement has officially come into force. This is the most large-scale legally binding bilateral treaty in the entire history of Ukraine-EU relations It is also the biggest and most comprehensive of all the treaties concluded by Brussels with third countries.

As already stressed in Chapter 1 of this paper, the Ukrainian authorities, with the aim of legally securing the process of the Agreement's implementation, adopted a number of internal legal acts on setting up and coordinating the corresponding work of the legislative and executive branches of power, and explaining the advantages of European integration to the society.

Ukraine's political association with the EU, along with the economic integration, is the «heart», the «nucleus», the main objective of the Agreement as such. This is why «the political association» will directly depend «on Ukraine's achievements in securing respect to common values and progress in rapprochement with the EU in political, economic, and legal spheres».[3]

As a societal phenomenon, Ukraine's political association with the EU is a certain platform of cooperation of the signatories to the Agreement, first of all, in the political-and-legal sphere. Taking this into account, «political dialogue» is defined as the main form of «the deepening of the political association», and this dialogue must develop and strengthen in «all the spheres of common interest between the Parties». The objectives of the political dialogue, in particular, are advancing international stability and security on the basis of efficient multilateralism, strengthening cooperation with the aim of reacting to global and regional challenges and major threats, securing peace, security and stability on the European continent, strengthening respect to democratic principles, promoting principles of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, etc.

Noticeable, meanwhile, is the institualization of the dialogue's formats: the signatories to the Agreement undertook to hold their (joint) meetings (sessions) «regularly within the framework of the political dialogue at the summit level». At the same time, at other levels (ministerial, parliamentary, military, etc.) such political dialogs have to be held on the basis of mutual agreement, including within the framework of «the Association Council's sessions» (articles 4 and 5 of the Agreement).

At the same time, the basis for the political association of Ukraine with the EU as a legal phenomenon, contains such fundamental democratic principles as the rule of law, good governance, securing human rights and basic freedoms, respect to human dignity, guaranteeing the rights of ethnic minorities, etc. All these basic tenets (generally recognized democratic principles) are not only a special world-vision prerequisite of concluding the Agreement on Ukraine's association with the EU itself but also play the role of the major moving force and original reasons for this process.

It means that they emanate from the fact that the Ukrainian people are an inseparable part of the European community, a carrier of historical traditions of respect to the human being, dignity, rights and freedoms of this human being, respect for community and generally recognized rule of co-habiting it, tolerant treatment of strangers, etc.

Referentially. Thus, even more than a hundred years ago, when adopting the Constitution of the Ukrainian People's Republic (1918), the Ukrainian Central Rada had not only guaranteed on the territory of the UPR the entire (contemporary) range of human rights and freedoms (having especially noted at that that «birth, belief, ethnicity, education, property, taxation do not give any privileges...», Article 12 of the Constitution of the UPR) ***but had also for the first time in the history of European constitutionalism guaranteed the rights of ethnic minorities*** (Chapter IX. National Unions. The Constitution of the UPR)[4].

With the restoration of the state independence of Ukraine, the basic democratic principles become an inseparable part of the official state doctrine, having found their reflection in the clauses of the Concept of the new Constitution of Ukraine, the Declaration of Nationalities' rights, Ukraine's

[2] On ratification of the Agreement on Association between Ukraine, on the one side, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community, and their member states, on the other. The Law of Ukraine.

[3] The Agreement on Association between Ukraine, on the one side, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community, and their member states, on the other.

[4] The Constitution of the Ukrainian People's Republic (The Chapter on the UPR's state system, rights and freedoms. In: The Ukrainian Central Rada. Documents and materials. In two volumes. Volume 2. 19 December 1917. – 29 April 1918. Compiled by Verstyuk V.F. (lead.), Boyko O.D. et al. – Kyiv, Naukova Dumka, 1997, – pp.330-332.

laws «On freedom of conscience and religious organizations», «On the Citizenship of Ukraine», «On the Constitutional Court of Ukraine», the Constitutional Treaty between the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the President of Ukraine on the main principles of organization and functioning of state power and local self-government in Ukraine for the period before the new Constitution of Ukraine is adopted, and in other important documents.

The adoption by the Ukrainian parliament of the current Constitution of Ukraine on 28 June 1998 should be considered an important factor of the Ukraine-EU «political association». This is because, according to its clauses, Ukraine has been constitutionalized as a democratic, social, and legal (Article 1) state where a human being and this human being's life and health, honour and dignity, inviolability and security are considered the highest social value, while human rights and freedoms themselves and their guarantees must determine the contents and direction of its action (Article 3).

In Ukraine, according to the constitutional clauses, the principle of the rule of law works (Part 1, Article 8), the state power has to be effected based on its branching into legislative, executive, and judiciary (Part 1, Article 6), and, also, local self-government should be recognized and guaranteed (Article 7). All the people in Ukraine, according to the Constitution's clauses, are free in their dignity and rights (Article 21), and there should be no restrictions between them by characteristics of race, skin colour, political, religious or other persuasions, gender, ethnic and social origin, property status, place of residence, language, or other characteristics (Part 2, Article 24).

Such constitutional clauses (in this or that interpretation) are constitutionalized by the absolute majority of the countries of the European Union. Thus, it is logical that it is them (the generally recognized democratic values) that become defining when both giving reasons for the necessity of the Agreement on Association of Ukraine with the EU and when explaining the circumstances and motives for its conclusion (Paragraph 2 of the Preamble, Article 3 of the Agreement).[5]

The defining role in the cause of legal provision for the functioning of the Ukraine-EU «political association» was to be played by constitutional changes on the state's strategic course aimed at acquiring the full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2019).[6] In correspondence to the latter, the Preamble to the Constitution of Ukraine was appended with the clause according to which the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, on behalf of the Ukrainian people, adopts the Constitution, the Basic Law of Ukraine, including «confirming the European identity of the Ukrainian people and the irreversibility of Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic course» (Paragraph 5 of the Preamble).

In its turn, the authority of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine includes «determining the principles of domestic and foreign policy, realization of the strategic course of the state aimed at acquiring the full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization» (Clause 5, Part 1, Article 85), while the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine is entrusted with securing realization of the latter (Clause 1^{-1}, Article 116). The Head of State, President of Ukraine, is designated as the guarantor of the realization of the strategic course of the state aimed at acquiring the full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the EU and NATO according to the amendments to the Constitution.[7]

The 2019 Constitutional changes (on the state's strategic course at acquiring the full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the EU and NATO) need their further legal «detailing», in particular, at the level of Ukraine's laws. The latter could make significantly more active the functioning of the Ukraine-EU political association.[8]

When outlining legal foundations for the Ukraine-EU political association, attention should be paid to some problem aspects.

[5] The Agreement on Association between Ukraine, on the one side, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community, and their member states, on the other.

[6] On introducing amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine (on the state's strategic course at acquiring Ukraine's full-fledged membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization). The Law of Ukraine.

[7] The Constitution of Ukraine.

[8] All the «arguable» issues connected to the contents (essence) of Constitutional clauses on securing Ukraine's strategic course at acquiring the full-fledged membership in the EU and NATO, in the case they arise, can be resolved by way of providing an official interpretation, by the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, of the corresponding clauses of the Basic Law of the state.

First. Chapter II «Political dialogue and reforms, political association, cooperation and convergence in the sphere of international and security policy» does not contain a clear interpretation of the term «political association». Indirectly, the meaning and contents of this definition can be determined taking into account the six general goals of the association outlined in this chapter. In a maximally generalized form, this is about the sides' rapprochement (including the trade-and-economy sphere) on the basis of common values, and securing enhanced dialogue in order to assist internal Ukrainian reforms, stability, and peace on the continent and in the world.

According to Ukrainian experts' assessments, «While 'economic integration' is a set term, the term 'political association' is in no way explained in the text of the AA (the Association Agreement — ed.), it is unknown to the EU's law where the term 'association' exists, while 'political association' is encountered only in the AA and other EU documents with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, and in the Eastern Partnership documents and has not been studied in the academic literature».[9] Thus, there is no clear-cut legal definition of this term used in the Agreement as a component of the integration process.

Referentially. It should be noted that the relations of political association and economic integration, established between Ukraine and the EU after the Agreement's conclusion, are stipulated by the Lisbon Treaty.[10] Taking into account a rather vague definition in the EU's founding treaty, they were specified in the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Communities of 1987. According to this ruling, special privileged relations are set up with non-member states with the latter integrating into the EU to a certain extent as a result of this.

Second. Chapter II is purely declarative, it contains only general wordings like «strengthening political-and-security convergence», «promoting international stability and security on the basis of efficient multilateralism», «developing dialogue and deepening of cooperation between the sides in the sphere of security and defence», etc. Thus, in contrast to the «economic bloc», the Agreement's political component does not contain clear-cut obligations by the sides, concrete plans, time terms, and performance indicators. Thus, the assessment of its implementation is rather uncertain.

As was noted, political association in the broad sense is a platform for: a) the sides' rapprochement and the development of the Ukraine-EU partnership in different spheres, including at the international policy level; b) assisting internal reforms in Ukraine and enhancing the efficiency of its Eurointegration course.

Summing up, it should be noted that the current system of legal provision for Ukraine-EU relations is both the basis and the means of the sides' further association. At the same time, it requires further improvement and strengthening.

3.2. Problems and prerequisites of the political association

In the current circumstances of the growth of geopolitical turbulence, increase of crises zones, and large-scale threats to security on the European continent, of the unfolding of the Russian expansionism, preserving and strengthening solidarity and association with the EU as a tool for domestic reforms and the main means of opposing Russia's aggression is extremely important for Ukraine. At the same time, the multilevel process of political rapprochement (amalgamation) of Kyiv and Brussels has dynamics and special features of its own, contains a set of components, and depends on a number of external circumstances and internal factors.

Summing up the results of the study presented in the preceding chapters of the paper, it is possible to outline, in the general form, the state, special features, and problems of the Ukraine-EU political association, focusing attention on the following important aspects:

Institutional-and-legal securing of the association. Over 30 years of the evolution

[9] See: Integration within the framework of association: Dynamics of fulfillment of the Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. «Citizens' energy» Project, – The «Renaissance» International Foundation with the EU's assistance, December 2019, pp.16-19, – *https://www.civic-synergy.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Integratsiya-u-ramkah-asotsiatsiyidynamika-vykonannya-Ugody-mizh-Ukrayinoyu-i-YES-3-e-vydannya-1.pdf.*

[10] According to Article 217 of the Lisbon Treaty, «The Union may conclude with one or more third countries or international organisations agreements establishing an association involving reciprocal rights and obligations, common action and special procedure». For details, see: Consolidated versions of the Treaty on the European Union and the Treaty of the functioning of the European Union with protocols and declarations. – The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, – *https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/main/994_b06.*

of relations between Kyiv and Brussels, the branched-out and institutionally established system of multichannel dialogue was formed, from the top level (annual Ukraine-EU summits) to regular experts' contacts. Important components of this dialogue are interparliamentary cooperation and participation of public organizations.[11] The dialogue's frame is significantly broadened due to the Ukraine-EU contacts (and at the bilateral level with EU countries as well) on the platforms of many international organizations, standing forums, conferences, international centres, world financial institutions (in particular, the system of respective institutions of the UN, OSCE, PACE, NATO, CEI, EBRD, etc.). On the one hand, this reflects the privileged nature of the relations, and on the other, secures their transparency, openness, and public character. In general, there are no grounds to speak of behind-the-scenes, secret agreement, of non-public nature of relations between Kyiv and Brussels.

At the same time, some problem aspects should be mentioned. *First*, «the weak spot» of the Ukrainian side is the institutional capacity of the corresponding bodies of power, their stability, professionalism, and coordination of actions in the European direction. In particular, it is about drawbacks and miscalculations of personnel policy of the current leaders of the country, of not well-thought-out decisions on reorganizing some central bodies of executive power.

Second, political dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels is complicated because of the consensus nature of EU decisions. Thus, external-policy positions of EU countries are frequently influenced by internal competition. At the same time, the hybrid influence of Russia should be noted, aimed at discrediting and blocking Ukraine's Eurointegration course. In general, there are grounds to articulate differences in attitudes to the depth and prospects of Ukraine-EU relations between some EU countries.

The conceptual tenets of the political association are defined in the Agreement's second chapter. In difference to the document's other parts, this chapter is extraordinarily concise (5 pages and 10 Articles), has a framework nature and is presented in a general style. The chapter has no detailing or regulating appendixes and looks like a declaration of intentions. Thus, the criteria and degree of practical implementation of this part of the Agreement can be determined only tentatively. It is this, in particular, that explains sceptical assessments by experts of the level of achievement of the political association's objectives.

Expert opinion

Experts, in general, are reserved in their assessments of the level of achieving general objectives of the Ukraine-EU association, defined in the Agreement. In their opinion, the state of realization of four of the six objectives equals 3 by the 5-points scale.[12] These assessments relate, in particular, to: the sides' rapprochement and Ukraine's participation in the EU programs and agencies; securing the enhanced political dialog; introducing conditions for the deepening of trade-and-economic relations; developing cooperation in other spheres.

Somewhat lower marks were given by the experts to securing the rule of law (2.9 points), and to preserving peace and stability in the regional and global dimensions (2.7 points).

As was noted, the term «political association», is not clearly defined. When using it, it is understood that the association is based on political dialogue and on the obligation to observe and promote common values. However, when speaking of ideological tenets defined in the Agreement, it should be noted that this document requires a comprehensive updating with the view to: a) changes in Ukraine's domestic policy, the economy structure, and its international course; b) novelties in the legislative base of the EU; c) cardinal political-and-security changes on the European continent, in particular, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the events in Belarus, and the global *COVID-19* pandemic, in the final count.

The start to the process of updating the Agreement was given by the XXII Ukraine-EU Summit (2020): the sides will carry out a comprehensive review of achieving the Agreement's objectives, this being the basis for the process of its updating. But this process will relate to the applied economic issues: Ukraine's integration into the EU's internal market, in particular, updating the appendixes in order to deepen sectoral integration, technical regulation, trade in services, updating trade (tariff) parameters, etc.[13] Regrettably, the EU is not prepared to update the Agreement in a more meaningful way.

[11] The organizational structure of the Ukraine-EU political dialogue is characterized in Chapter I of this paper.

[12] «1» corresponds to the minimum level of achievement, while «5» means that the objective has been achieved.

[13] Eurointegration 2.0: What updating the Association Agreement with EU will give Ukraine. – Yevrointehratsiyna Pravda, 29 July 2020, – *https://www.eurointegration. com.ua/rus/experts/2020/07/29/7112658.*

Expert opinion

The majority of experts support the opinion, to this or that extent, that with consideration of modern realities, it is necessary to update and specify Chapter II of the Agreement on Association between Ukraine and the EU, dedicated to cooperation in the sphere of international and security policy. Thus, this idea is unreservedly supported by 50% of the respondents, while 39% rather support it. And no expert was against it.

Realities and rates of the political amalgamation between Ukraine and the EU. The majority (67%) of representatives of the expert milieu of Ukraine think that the Ukraine-EU political association does partly exist. Evidently, this «part nature» is based, on the one hand, on the status of Ukraine as a partner of the EU with an enormous amount of obligations within the framework of the Agreement and undefined prospects, and, on the other hand, the asymmetry of relations between Kyiv and Brussels explained by their geopolitical and financial-and-economic weight.

In general, there are grounds to articulate some existing elements of association (amalgamation). *First*. One of the forms of making political association operational is joining statements and decisions of the EU in the sphere of common international and security policy. In particular, according to annual government reports on the fulfilment of the Association Agreement, a high level of joining external-policy decisions by Brussels is observed. For example, the report for 2017 emphasizes that «Ukraine continues the practice of joining the EU statements and positions on topical international issues, including within the framework of international organizations. In 2017, Ukraine has joined 424 statements (of 504), while in total, starting from 2005, it joined 5344 statements (of 6486)».[14] The report for 2018 documents that «in 2018, Ukraine has joined 492 of 588 EU statements and declarations».[15] In 2020p, as was mentioned before, the general level of support was almost 90%.

Second. Ukraine actively supports the EU's sanctions policy. According to the paper by V.Szep and P.van Elsuwege, from May 2010 to April 2019, Ukraine had joined 43.3 percent of EU's sanctions regimes.[16] Later, in 2020-2021, Ukraine had joined a number of sanctions introduced by the EU against leaders of Belarus and leaders of Transnistria, as well as a number of sanctions against the RF and other countries of the world applied by Brussels within the framework of the new EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Mechanism.[17]

Third. The presence among the Agreement's main elements of such clauses as respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, and independence is a sign of privileged political relations, enhanced by much more significant obligations compared to usual agreements on cooperation is.[18]

However, another point should be made. The Association between Ukraine and the EU is «external», not «internal», similar to the observer status or the associated member status. This status and lack of full-fledged membership do not allow the associated countries to influence the decision-making within the EU, while Ukraine's participation in decision-shaping is also made minimal, only within the framework of the Association's common bodies. In fact, being not a member of the EU, Ukraine does not take part in shaping important external-policy decisions and rather moves forward following the EU policies.

The functioning of common institutions, in particular the Association Council, secures the association's further development, possible to be regarded as a dynamic process. However, their authority in relation to changing the main text of the Agreement and amending its clauses (for instance, by means of new appendixes containing new branches of law of the EU) is extremely limited.

Taking this into account, the procedure of upgrading the Agreement with the aim of taking into account the latest changes in the EU law may require a new round of ratification by the EU member states. This is why an alternative

[14] See: Reports on implementation of the Agreement on Association between Ukraine and the EU. – The Government Portal, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/diyalnist/yevropejska-integraciya/vikonannya-ugodi-pro-asociaciyu/zviti-pro-vikonannya-ugodi-pro-asociaciyu.*

[15] Ibid.

[16] Szép V., Van Elsuwege P. EU Sanctions Policy and the Alignment of Third Countries: Relevant Experiences for the UK? – The Routledge Handbook on the International Dimension of Brexit, edited by Vara J.S. and Wessel R., Routledge, 2020.

[17] Ukraine has joined the EU sanctions for violating human rights. – Ukrinform, 30 March 2021, – *https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/3218012-ukraina-priednalasa-do-sankcij-es-za-porusenna-prav-ludini.html.*

[18] Van Elsuwege P., Shamon M. The meaning of 'association' under EU law: A study on the law and practice of EU association agreements. – European Parliament. Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, February 2019, – *https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU%282019%29608861.*

mechanism of deepening the association and political dialogue is concluding specific sectoral agreements (like joining the Energy Community), of agreed action plans, of memorandums of understanding.

Generally speaking, the rates of Ukraine's progress along the European path cannot be considered optimal. According to the latest research by the Razumkov Centre (March 2021), Ukrainian citizens and experts most frequently assess the Eurointegration rates as low: 38% and 50%, respectively.[19] The indicator of the efficiency of the Eurointegration course of the Ukrainian authorities is the state of the implementation of the Association Agreement. As was already mentioned, the dynamics of the implementation of the Agreement needs to activate the pace of Eurointegration (Figure «*Results of implementing the Association Agreement in 2017-2020*»).

RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTING THE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT IN 2007-2020[20], %

	2017	2018	2019	2020
General state of implementing the Agreement	68%	65%	48%	34%
State of implementation of Chapter «Political dialogue, national security and defence»	73%	73%	100%	0%

According to the results of public monitoring (2014-2019), the general progress of fulfilling obligations within the framework of the Agreement is 41.6%.[21]

As of June 2021, by the assessment of the government website «The Agreement's Pulse», the following spheres looked most problematic: financial cooperation and fighting fraud, energy, public health, financial sector, consumer rights protection, etc.

The slow rate of the implementation the Agreement is explained by many factors of internal and external nature analysed earlier. Of late, the global pandemic has also influenced the Eurointegration rate. In particular, global quarantine measures have significantly restricted the activity of the Ukrainian public diplomacy, of promoting Ukraine's image in the world and, in particular, in the European direction. In 2020, within the state budget program, 42 planned events were held, with another 92 realized by Embassies for sponsor money. Compare this to the 326 image events held in 2019.[22]

The state of the implementation of the Agreement is being influenced by a set of individual specific factors directly linked to the implementation of this document. An evident problem is the enormous number and the scale of directions and tasks within the framework of the implementation of the Agreement. This explains, to a certain extent, the fact that the process of fulfilling tasks in individual directions is of different speed with account to their volumes. Rather large-scale is the agenda of the Ukraine-EU Association.[23] In its turn, the general Plan of the implementation of this document has 974 pages and contains 1943 tasks.[24] ***In this context, it is important to clearly determine priorities, to orient at key directions and spheres which can become «the locomotives» of Eurointegration and deliver a fast and tangible result.*** One may agree with opinions of Ukrainian and foreign experts that Ukraine's comprehensive obligations within the framework of the Agreement are higher than the capacity of state institutions and enterprises. This is why «it is important to focus on individual key priorities named in the plans for sectoral reforms».[25]

[19] See the results of sociological surveys in this publication.

[20] Report on fulfilment of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. – The website of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, – https://eu-ua.kmu.gov.ua/sites/default/files/inline/files/aa_implementation_report_2015-2020_ukr_final_0.pdf.

[21] Ukraine and the Association Agreement. Monitoring of implementation, – Kyiv 2020. p. 18.

[22] Ukraine 2020-2021: Unjustified expectations, unexpected challenges (analytical assessments)). – The Razumkov Centre. – Kyiv, 2021, p.18, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/other/2021-PIDSUMKI-PROGNOZI-UKR-ENG.pdf.*

[23] Agenda of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/imported_content/news/doc_248012532/UA_15-1%20final.pdf.*

[24] The action plan on implementing the Association Agreement between Ukraine, on the one side, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, on the other side, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/55-GOEEI/pz-ua-1106-final.pdf.*

[25] Cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. How to make the Association Agreement more efficient? – Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, – Kyiv, 2019. pp. 9-10, – *https://www.kas.de/uk/web/ukraine/einzeltitel/-/content/spivpraca-miz-es-ta-ukrainou-ak-zrobiti-ugodu-pro-asociaciu-bil-s-dievou.*

The situation with implementing the chapter «Political dialog, national security, and defence» is not unreservedly clear. According to the data of «The Agreement's Pulse», general progress of its implementation (starting from 2014) amounts to 89%, on the average. The dynamics, however, looks controversial: for instance, 100 percent of the tasks were implemented in 2019, while the figure for 2020 is 0 (zero)%. This is explained by the fact that for 2020, according to the Government's action plan, only one task was planned for implementation, «approval of the concept of the reform of the Security Service of Ukraine», and it has not been implemented. Meanwhile, in 2019, Ukraine put the removal of MPs' immunity on the Eurointegration score list, as well as developing the Electoral Code, and a number of measures within the framework of the reform of public service.[26] These were, undoubtedly, important measures touching upon sensuous spheres of political relations with the EU and improving the dialogue's general atmosphere.

However, it turns out that from the formal point of view no measures in the sphere of security and political dialogue had been implemented within the framework of the Agreement in 2020. It is evident though that the practice of relations with the EU over this period was filled with a number of important events and decisions. In particular, «The Plan of the Government's Priority Actions for 2020», in its «Path to Europe» chapter, contains a set of important measures being implemented, from working on the concept/mechanisms of updating the Agreement and preparing for concluding the ACAA Agreement to Ukraine's participation in the European Green Deal.[27]

At the same time, another issue is raised by the fact that only 10 measures are stipulated in the general Action Plan on the implementation of the Agreement mentioned earlier, in the chapter «Political dialogue, national security and defence». Only one of them (the reform of the Security Service of Ukraine) directly relates to problems of security. Such a situation makes even more topical the problem of coordination of operational and strategic planning of the authorities' actions on the path to Eurointegration and defining a block of sectoral priorities taking into account the available opportunities and resources.

The public support factor. Kyiv's weighty argument in its political dialogue with Brussels is the fact that Eurointegration and solidarity with the EU is a public narrative and a foreign-policy priority for a majority of the public, representatives of the expert guild, and leading political parties. This means that pro-European orientations are dominant in the society and in the politics. This is the Ukrainian authorities' main resource on the Eurointegration path.

In the Ukrainian society, in particular, despite complicated problems and critical assessments of the rates of Eurointegration, there is stable support for the European course and joining the European Union.[28] In March 2021, 59% of those polled expressed their conviction of the necessity to join the EU. If a hypothetical referendum on this issue is held in the nearest future, 72% of Ukraine's citizens would take part in it, with 80% of them voting for Ukraine's joining the EU. By European practices, this is a rather high level of active public and of support of the idea of joining the European community.

Support for moving towards the EU in noticeably higher in Ukraine's expert circles: in March 2021, 80% of experts supported Ukraine's joining the EU (this figure was 78% in both 2019 and 2020).

In their turn, the majority of parliamentary parties are also of pro-European orientation: «Sluha Narodu», «Yevropeyska Solidarnist», «Batkivshchyna», «Holos», etc. It is worth reminding that the dominant message of major political forces during the latest presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine was moving towards the European community.

At the same time, it should be taken into account that this level of public support depends on many domestic tendencies and external influences. The main factor among these is the practical result of the authorities' Eurointegration policy to be felt by the public in their everyday life.

3.3. Ukraine in the system of EU's external policy

For the EU, Ukraine is a partner country and a neighbour country with its role being defined by dynamic balancing between two concepts: ***integration*** into the European Union, and ***stabilization*** outside of its borders. Moreover,

[26] Report on implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU for 2019, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/55-GOEEI/ar-aa-implementation-2019-4.pdf.*

[27] Plan of priority actions of the Government for 2020. The Government Portal, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/pro-zatverdzhennya-planu-prioritetni-a1133r.*

the issue of the future membership of Ukraine in the EU or, in a broader context, the issue of the final goal of partnership with Ukraine is still one of the most arguable in the EU's external policy. This issue, as most of foreign-policy issues, requires full consensus of all the member states, as well as the EU's key institutions, in particular, of the European Commission and the European Parliament.

The integration concept originates from the very nature and the history of the development of the EU, tuned to broadening its membership to other European countries. The well-known Article 49 of the Treaty on EU states that every European country respecting and undertaking to spread the values listed in Article 2 of this Treaty has the right to apply for the EU membership.[29] It should be remembered that even before the prospect of large-scale enlargement which emerged after the end of the Cold War, the Copenhagen criteria were added to the requirements to potential candidates.[30] So Ukraine, referring to the letter of treaties and consistently insisting on full integration into the EU, recognized in the documented establishment of its ambitions, has established integration priorities of its own in the Constitution and emphasizes, in the dialogue with the EU, the need to define concrete prospects of membership.[31]

Ukraine's membership in the EU is supported to this or that extent, first of all, by the virtual ***«Eastern-Northern» group of countries***. These are, in the first turn, the countries of the former socialist camp which regard the Europeization of Eastern Europe in the security sense. Traditionally, Poland and Lithuania have been the leaders among these countries, actively lobbying Ukraine from the very moment of them joining the EU in 2004. Other «new members» support them, as well as Northern countries, in particular, Sweden. Among the «heavyweights» of the EU, Great Britain had been, traditionally, the most inclined towards further enlargement (as a deterrent to deepening integration within the EU). Its exit from the European Union has negatively influenced the internal debate on Ukraine's integration prospects.

The generally positive arguments in favour of Ukraine's future integration is treating enlargement as an inalienable way of the EU's functioning, spreading its «soft power», principles and values, strengthening the EU as an economic and security player by means of conquering new markets and enhancing its influence.[32] It is indeed this value-and-normative element that is the determining factor for the integration, so Ukraine's major breakthroughs in the integration direction had happened due to two massive pro-European events that had confirmed the society's demand for rapprochement with the EU. Thus, due to the Orange Revolution it became possible to amend the agenda of bilateral relations and convince European sceptics of the need to strengthen cooperation with Ukraine. As a result, 2007 saw the start of negotiations on a special enhanced agreement on cooperation, finally to become the Association Agreement.

The Euromaidan, in its turn, helped in signing and ratifying of this agreement by every country involved, even those with sceptical attitude to Ukraine's Eurointegration. Thus, the contents of bilateral cooperation and the level of partnership have evolved significantly.[33]

It should be noted that the phenomenon of association in the European tradition is rather blurred, being pointedly used since as early as 1960s, and describes very different versions of partnership with third countries, both presuming and not presuming membership.[34] The negative

[28] This is shown in more details in sociological research presented in this publication.

[29] Agreed by the Council of Europe in 1993, they concerned the compliance of a candidate for membership with the criteria of stability of institutions, market economy, and capability of fulfilling obligations required by the membership. – «Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union». Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union, article 49, – *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012M%2FTXT*.

[30] Accession Criteria (Copenhagen Criteria). Glossary of summaries, – *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhague.html*.

[31] For instance, V.Yushchenko in his time insisted on starting negotiations on Ukraine joining the EU in 2007. P. Poroshenko included the obligation to start such negotiations no later than in 2023 into his electoral program. President V. Zelenskyy emphasizes, in public discourse, the need to determine the prospects of joining the EU. The practice of reaching respective agreements with EU countries on their prospective support of Ukraine joining the European Union has been introduced. More details on this in this paper's Chapter 1.

[32] Striking differences are observed as to the question whether Ukraine's integration will strengthen or weaken the Union's security. In treating the issue of security by relatively new EU members from the former socialist camp, this is an important dimension of holding back the new-imperial ambitions of the Russian Federation. Meanwhile, more Western member countries often see the fast integration progress as a source of danger because of provoking the Russian Federation for violent actions.

[33] More details on this in Chapter 1 of this paper.

[34] For more details about the internal versatility of the EU agreements on association with other countries see D. Phinnemore, Association: Stepping-Stone or Alternative to EU Membership? Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

referendum of 2015 in the Netherlands on the Association Agreement and further conclusions of the Council of Minister of December 2015 had additionally restricted possible interpretations of the Association Agreement in the integration key having established that the agreement does not presume membership and does not impose additional obligations on the EU for security and economic support of Ukraine.[35]

However, it is important that the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Area it establishes have taken a huge part of bilateral relations beyond the search for political compromises between member countries within the framework of the EU's external and security policy. Instead, we have now a more technical and measurable level of achieving or implementing certain requirements acquis, moving towards «de facto integration» or «integration without membership» in direct cooperation, specifically, with all-European institutions.

The alternative ***stabilization concept*** пbegan to take shape is early 2000s, when the EU was getting ready for «the great wave» of enlargement. Thus, the issue of the limits of European integration and of the way to set the norms for relations with neighbouring countries arose for the first time. This was reflected in the European Neighbourhood Policy.[36] It concerned, in particular, the countries of Northern Africa and the Middle East, being, on the one hand, trade and political partners, and on the other, the originating and transit countries for migration flows, sources of political instability. These countries, by geographical definition, could not claim membership in the EU, only the enhanced cooperation or privileged relations. However, a similar approach, by the original idea, also concerned the post-Soviet countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus in relation to which the logic of integration was «slowing down» in the short-term prospect but was not ruled out.

The European Neighbourhood Policy, as an attempt to create a single «network of friends» around the EU, was the first test of the stabilization concept, initiated and supported by the ***virtual «Southern-Western group of countries»,*** not prepared to discuss realistic prospects of Ukraine's membership (or further enlargement in general). Such countries as European «heavyweights», Germany and France, can be listed in this group, as well as other founding members, for instance the Netherlands and Italy, and representatives of the Europe's South: Spain, Greece, and others.

Among the universal arguments for putting Ukraine on the path of stabilization, there are, first of all, the so-called «enlargement fatigue» and the need to deepen integration and correct misbalances within the European Union. They were additionally reinforced by a whole number of crises that the EU had faced over the recent 10-15 years: the financial crisis, the migration crisis, the rise of Eurosceptical populism, Brexit, the civil war in Syria, and the Russian aggression in Ukraine. ***All these factors necessitate reforming the EU itself up to the review of the founding treaties, and thus stimulate its focusing on the internal agenda***.

Among the specific factors of scepticism, the great size of Ukraine may be mentioned, as well as changes in adopting decisions in the EU in the case Ukraine is admitted to the Union, the weak economy which, though oriented, mostly, to the EU, is still responsible for a minimal proportion in economic relations of the EU with the rest of the world, as well as the discrepancy between Ukraine's declared ambitions and a modest scale of internal economic and political transformations being the most noticeable problem in public discourse.

However, for the biggest European players, France and Germany, the most important factor for ignoring the logic of integration in the post-Soviet direction is the priority of establishing relations with Russia in political and energy dimensions. As early as the beginning of 1990s, there was a desire to agree the optimum format of relations with the RF before the issue of the format of relations with Ukraine is resolved, and also not to do overly ambitious things in the Ukrainian direction, often treated as the Russian «zone of influence».

[35] Yu. Panchenko, S. Sydorenko. The Netherlands said «yes» to the Association. What is the price of this decision to Ukraine? – Yevropeyska Pravda, 30 May 2017, – *https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2017/05/30/7066453/.*

[36] The European Commission's strategic document on the European Neighborhood Policy directly emphasizes the alternative nature of the policy being introduced to the logic of integration: «Since this policy had been introduced, the EU was stressing that it offers tools to strengthen relations between the EU and neighboring countries different from those opportunities that Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union provides for European countries» See: Communication from The Commission. European Neighbourhood Policy. Strategy paper, Brussels, 12.5.2004, – *https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2004_communication_from_the_commission_-_european_neighbourhood_policy_-_strategy_paper.pdf.*

Thus, the EU's Global Strategy, approved in 2003 prior to the great enlargement and the introduction of the neighbourhood policy, stated that the EU has to spread the benefits from economic and political cooperation to Eastern neighbours but the enlargement does not have to create new division lines in Europe.[37]

The Russian problem has also significantly restricted the level of ambitions of the bilateral agenda after the Orange Revolution, mentioned earlier. However, it moved to the forefront with the strongest force after the Russian aggression of 2014.

The long-standing question has become sharper: Will the integration of Eastern Europe become a destabilizing factor? There are grounds to state that this question will become a cornerstone issue in the modern EU, without Great Britain and with a clear course to become separate from the USA and its policy, as well as with dreams of special subject role in international politics.

Analytical circles and public discourse have begun to raise the topic of the responsibility of the EU for the Russian aggression: presumably, for the reason of excessive activity in the region strategically important for the RF, accompanied by insistent advice to maximally decrease this activity.

An interesting example in this context is the evolution of the neighbourhood policy. In 2008-2009, the Union for the Mediterranean was specified (Northern Africa and the Middle East), and the Eastern Partnership proper (Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, being «Europe's neighbours» and «European neighbours», the key difference in the context of potential integration).

Since then, the concepts of integration and stabilization started to compete within the policy of the Eastern Partnership. Adherents to the first concept emphasize the need for more active and differentiated progress for the three most ambitious members of the Eastern Partnership who have signed Association Agreements. Adherents to the second concept are trying to move the emphasis from enhancing active cooperation of individual states of the Eastern Partnership with the EU to «multilateral cooperation» between the countries within the initiative, whatever the level of ambitions or involvement of its participants.

It is noteworthy that the EU Global Strategy of 2016 turns the definition of neighbourhood as widely as is possible, from Central Asia in the East to Sub-Saharan Africa in the South and puts the main emphasis in the policy concerning neighbours on building up their political and economic *resilience*.[38] The framework 7-year budget for 2021-2028 joined the separate financial instrument of the neighbourhood to other instruments of the policy of development.[39] Finally, a symbolic expression of the crisis of the Eastern Partnership policy was the cancelling of the jubilee summit in 2019.

In the final count, the impact of the Russian factor on the current placing of Ukraine in the system of external policy of the EU was non-linear and partly reflected the dilemma of applying the policy of «containment and dialog» concerning the aggressive actions of the RF. Thus, on the one hand, the Kremlin's aggression had not only stimulated the signing and ratification of the Association Agreement: the EU has also taken an active organizational and financial part in supporting the policy of reforms and helping the regions affected by the conflict.[40] On the other hand, discussing the future and the final objective of the partnership was avoided on principle. The recognition of Ukraine's «European aspirations» was a conflict moment at Ukraine-EU summits, while security cooperation was put into rather restricted limits. So the focus of bilateral relations has been practically completely transferred to the dimension of Ukraine's domestic reforming for the sake of successful implementation of the Association Agreement.

Thus, the issue of Ukraine's place in the current external policy of the EU is still without a clear-cut answer because balancing between integration and stabilization cannot find its point of parity. On the one hand, the integration,

[37] European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in Secured World, 12 December 2003, – *http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf.*

[38] Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, June 2016, – *https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.*

[39] More details on the special features of the new neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instrument see The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument. EU Budget for the Future, June 2020, – factsheet-mff-multiannual-financial-framework-v08-clean_0.pdf (europa.eu).

[40] See the review of the assistance provided on the page of the European External Affairs Service: Ukraine and the EU, – *https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/eastern-europe/1937/ ukraine-and-eu_en* and on the page of the European Council, Facts and Figures about EU-Ukraine relations, – *https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44402/685-annex-5-f-ukraine-factsheet.pdf.*

even after a prolonged time, is not possible without stabilization meaning drastic internal reforming, institutional in the first turn, and based on common values. However, successful and consistent reforming requires a much bigger scale of involvement, as it is exceptionally difficult to accomplish the unbelievable number of the necessary transformations on your own. This is why, although the stabilization concept looks less conflict-prone and more desirable for the EU, in practice it requires financial and organizational contributions; otherwise it stays within the limits of rhetoric and does not lead to the desire stability.

The idea of the Marshall Plan for Ukraine has not left the narrow circle of its initiators, while restrictions adopted as a result of the referendum in the Netherlands point to low probability of bigger involvement in the nearest future. However, the utopian projects like «Finlandization» of Ukraine in the status of *no man's land*, where the EU and Russia will have equal political influence are politically unattainable and risky from the point of security. So, while the attempts to combine the normative approach with the geopolitical approach continue, the Ukraine-EU relations are paused in the strategic dimension.

The key moment in the situation with Ukraine is the fact that the right to apply for membership does not mean its automatic acceptance even if all the defined criteria and planned reforms are implemented, meant to heal the old disease of bilateral relations, incompatibility of Ukraine's pro-European rhetoric with the contents and nature of domestic policy.

However, an evident positive factor and a favourable opportunity is the fact that within the framework of the implementation of the Association Agreement (which has to be essentially updated and enhanced) and with the maximum use of all the assistance that Ukraine receives from the EU, a transitionary situation is taking shape at the current stage, the so-called integration outside membership which should be efficiently used for result-bearing internal transformations and moving closer to the EU.

3.4. Association prospects

So, the issue of defining the coordinates of Ukraine joining the EU is present, in this or that form, in the European and Ukrainian political discourse, acquiring more topicality under the influence of internal and external factors. Representatives of the Ukrainian expert milieu try to find an answer to the question, «What next?», meaning how relations between the EU and associated countries should develop, while there are no clear prospects for the latter, including Ukraine.[41] Lately, the Ukrainian leaders have been insisting in the European discourse on the topic of defining the Eurointegration prospects for Ukraine and, in parallel, introducing the practice of creating «the range of support» for the idea of Ukraine joining the EU, by reaching corresponding arrangements with leaders of EU countries. Such accents in Ukraine's European policy may be explained by both general national interests of the country and by domestic opportunistic considerations of the team in power.

The differences that exist in the views of the EU and Ukraine on the future of their relations cannot but influence the dialog's atmosphere and the prospects of Kyiv's political association with Brussels. So, as noted earlier, the EU is interested, out of purely practical considerations, in the stable, democratically developed, and pro-Western Ukraine to «shield» its Eastern border.

[41] See: Priorities of developing the association with the EU: Expectations of Ukraine's civil experts. – «Civil synergy» Project, Kyiv, January 2020, – *https://www.civic-synergy.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Priorytety-rozvytku-asotsiatsiyi-z-YES_ochikuvannya-ukrayinskyh-gromadskyh-ekspertiv.pdf*;

Emerson M., Blockmans S. 100 Ideas for Upgrading the Association Agreements and DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. – 3DCFTAs Project, February 2020, – *https://3dcftas.eu/publications/100-ideas-for-upgrading-the-association-agreements-and-dcftas-with-georgia-moldova-and-ukraine*;

Non-Paper: Post-2020 Eastern Partnership deliverables for the three EU associated countries – Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, October 2020, – *http://ipre.md/2020/10/30/non-paper-post-2020-eastern-partnership-deliverables-for-the-three-eu-associated-countries-georgia-republic-of-moldova-and-ukraine/?lang=en*;

Emerson M., Blockmans S. Cenusa D., Kovziridze T., Movchan V. Balkan and Eastern European Comparisons: Building a New Momentum for the European integration of the Balkan and Eastern European associated states. – CEPS, Brussels, February 2021, – *https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/balkan-and-eastern-european-comparisons/*.

Expert opinion

Most frequently, experts point out that the EU is to this or that extent interested in political association with Ukraine: In particular, 9% of those polled replied «yes», while «rather yes» was the response of 41%. However, more than a third of those polled (36%) voice their doubts.

At the same time, the majority of respondents (54%) are convinced that relations between Kyiv and Brussels will be unchanged in the nearest years, 33% expect improvement of these relations.

The lack of strategic clarity in relations between Kyiv and Brussels has several reasons. On the one hand, one of the formal indicators of preparedness to join the EU is the level of implementing the Association Agreement and the state of realizing key reforms in Ukraine in different spheres, including the attainment of results of the campaign of de-olgarchization of the country, launched by the authorities in 2021. An important moment is the adequacy of internal political practice to European principles and standards. However, it is also clear that the process of implementing the Agreement (which has no expiry term) is the movement on the meeting courses, and the scale of domestic reforms required of Ukraine should generally be comparable to the scale of support from the EU.

On the other hand, a lot depends on political tendencies and changing situations within the EU. At the same time, because the Ukrainian Eurointegration has a clearly determined security dimension and a geopolitical dimension, it is impossible not to pay attention both to the influence of the NATO and the USA, and the growth of the Kremlin's opposition to Ukraine's European integration. Thus, several geopolitical power lines are focused on Ukraine's movement towards the EU. This cannot but impact on the position of the official Brussels.

Taking into account the correlation of forces within the EU, as well as the current tendencies in the relations between Kyiv and Brussels, there are grounds to forecast that strategic unresolvedness on Ukraine's Eurointegration can last at least for the mid-term prospect. It is entirely clear, however, that this situation: a) should not influence the rates of Eurointegration; b) in no way should serve as a foundation for Europessimism, for discrediting the idea of joining the EU, and for looking for some imaginary «alternatives» to Eurointegration.

When outlining closer prospects of relations between Kyiv and Brussels, it should be noted that it is hardly worth expecting «breakthroughs» and cardinal changes in the process of Ukraine's moving towards the EU. Mostly sectoral but very important work will continue on the implementation of the Association Agreement which brings Ukraine closer to the European community. In this respect, a tactical priority is updating the Agreement with the aim to liberalize Ukraine-EU economic relations and minimize the barriers in mutual trade. Another point of the agenda is concluding agreements on «the industrial visa-free regime» and on the common air space, integration into the common digital and energy markets of the EU, developing agrarian dialog, joining the European Green Deal, etc. ***Thus, successful sectoral integration may be considered both the foundation and the favourable background for deepening political relations, strengthening mutual trust and making movement towards the Ukraine-EU association more active.***

Clearly, for the Ukrainian side, the current temporary period of «integration without membership» contains, among other things, a certain unfavourable political-and-ideological and socio-psychological aspect, connected, in particular, with the public Euro-expectations and the level of support for the Eurointegration course.

Another thing is clear, as well: joining the EU is a tool to improve the citizens' life, not the political goal of the authorities per se, and not the end point of internal transformations. So, the current period should be used with maximum efficiency to: a) strengthen the political dialog, broaden sectoral integration, strengthen resilience and capacity to counteract security challenges; b) gradually and irreversibly establish European principles, norms and rules in political practice; c) broaden the spheres of enhanced cooperation, actively participate in framework programs and agencies of the EU; d) strengthen cooperation with the EU in the sphere of security with a special emphasis on counteracting hybrid threats.

In the prospect dimension, important also is the use of instruments of political dialogue and available integration formats, the Eastern Partnership in particular.

It is worth pointing out the pro-active positions of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova who had more than once voiced joint proposals concerning strengthening cooperation between the EU and these three countries, as well as calls for the need of differentiated integration within

the framework of the Eastern Partnership.[42] In particular, in May 2021, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova concluded the Memorandum on enhanced cooperation on issues of European integration within the framework of «The Associated Trio». This document declares aspiration to join the EU, combining it with intentions to broaden and strengthen instruments and means of Eurointegration, as well as acquiring a new quality of the three countries' relations with the EU.[43]

Another component of relations between Kyiv and Brussels in the near prospect will remain their joint opposition to the Russian expansionism. It is extremely important for Ukraine that the EU shows clear and consistent support of Ukraine's independence and sovereignty.[44] The EU's governing structures, in particular, the European Parliament, have adopted a number of statements, decisions, and resolutions in 2014-2021, demanding to stop the Russian aggression and to secure Ukraine's territorial integrity.

The official Brussel's policy will continue to focus on: a) non-recognition of the annexation of Crimea and condemnation of the Russian intervention in Donbas; b) financial-and-economic and material-and-technical assistance to Ukraine; c) prolongation of sanctions against the aggressor country, participation in the «Normandy format», etc. However, along with this, tendencies in the EU's policy in the Russian direction, potentially dangerous for Ukraine, cannot be ruled out. In the European governmental and political establishment both lack of clarity on the strategy of actions in the Russian direction, and fear in the face of the blackmail of the nuclear country are driving towards the search for a common language with the Kremlin and for the restoration of relations in the business as usual format. The message that Putin should not be irritated and there should be no infringement on Russia's «privileged» interests in the post-Soviet area is alive on the terrain of Europe.

On the other hand, the EU's assistance does have limits. In this respect, indicative is the statement of the Minister of Defence of Germany H.Maas who emphasized on 1 June 2021 that «The conflict (meaning the war in Donbas — ed.) can be resolved solely in political way... Arms supplies do not help in this».[45]

In general, the EU's reaction in response to Russia's aggression will be restricted to diplomatic and political-and-economic measures. This conclusion may be drawn, in particular, from the resolution of the European Parliament (April 2021) suggesting that in the case of escalation of the aggression by the RF, Russia should be disconnected from the global *SWIFT* payment system, while all the assets of oligarchs close to the Russian authorities and of their families in the EU have to be frozen, and their visas should be cancelled.[46]

Thus, when outlining the closer prospects of the political association between Ukraine and the EU it should be noted that against the background of the lack of strategic clarity, the sides' partnership will focus on gradual stage-by-stage integration of Ukraine into the European space within the framework of the Association Agreement. The major priorities are updating the instruments of cooperation, comprehensive sectoral integration, and liberalization of economic contacts. Another important component of political relations is solidarity and the search for joint responses to current challenges and threats in the sphere of security, in particular, in opposing the Russian hybrid aggression on the European continent.

[42] See: Joint Statement by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on the Future of Eastern Partnership. – Bratislava, 19 December 2019, – *https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/76418-ministri-zakordonnih-sprav-ukrajini-gruziji-ta-moldovi-vistupajuty-za-diferencijovanij-pidkhid-u-ramkah-iniciativi-jes-skhidne-partnerstvo*; Joint letter of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on enhanced cooperation with the Associated Partners within the Eastern Partnership', Tbilisi, Chisinau, Kyiv, 1 February 2021, – *https://3dcftas.eu/library/documents/joint-letter-of-georgia-moldova-and-ukraine-on-enhanced-cooperation-with-the-associated-partners-within-the-eastern-partnership*.

[43] The Memorandum between MFAs of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova on launching enhanced cooperation on issues of European integration, the Associated Trio. 17 May 2021. – The website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, – *https://mfa.gov.ua/news/memorandum-pro-vzayemorozuminnya-mizh-mzs-ukrayini-gruziyi-ta-moldovi-shchodo-zapochatkuvannya-posilenogo-spivrobitnictva-z-pitan-yevropejskoyi-integraciyi-asocijovanogo-trio*.

[44] For more details on EU's support of Ukraine in opposing the Russian aggression see: Analytical paper of the Razumkov Centre. Ukraine's European integration: The Russian factor. – National Security and Defence Journal, No.1-2. 2020. pp. 3-6, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD181-182_2020_ukr.pdf*.

[45] Berlin has no intention to supply arms to Ukraine: FRG's MFA. – Interfax-Ukraine, 1 June 2021, – *https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/political/747705.html*.

[46] European Parliament's resolution suggests Russia is disconnected from SWIFT system in case of aggression against Ukraine. – Radio Liberty, 29 April 2021, – *https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-rosija-evroparlament/31230189.html*.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This Chapter generalizes problems, tendencies and special features of political relations, outlined in the paper, and sums up expert observations and assessments. The Chapter also contains a number of suggestions of internal nature and recommendations for possible joint measures by Ukraine and the EU. This concerns, in particular, improving actions of state institutions in the European direction, raising productivity of the Ukraine-EU political contacts, strengthening the security component of the dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels. Also, some initiatives aimed at developing partnership with the EU within the framework of «The Associated Trio» of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia are suggested.

The main goal of these expert recommendations is to assist in Ukraine's progress towards the political association with the EU and in securing prerequisites for entering the community of European countries.

4.1. Path to the EU: Special features, challenges, prospects

The evolution of relations between Kyiv and Brussels. Eurointegration is a complex process and contains problem periods, dramatic events, successes, and achievements. The initial stage of the Kyiv-Brussels relations was characterized with establishing systemic political dialogue, creating a set of partnership relations in different spheres of cooperation, and with gradual establishing of Ukraine's pro-European course. In parallel, legal foundations for the Ukraine-EU partnership were formed: The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was concluded (1994), the Ukraine-EU Action Plan (2005) was adopted, etc.

Ukraine has met large-scale problems and dangerous challenges along its path to the EU. On the one hand, these are the difficult social-and-economic situation, the weakness of democratic institutions, the inertia of post-Soviet psychology, opportunistic interests of oligarchic groups. On the other hand, there is the lack of preparedness and desire of the EU leader countries for Ukraine's full-scale Eurointegration. Burdened with internal problems, the EU has viewed the opening of EU membership prospects before Kyiv with scepticism, setting sights on partner agreements where their fulfilment is not a guarantee of the prospects of joining the EU. At the same time, Russia's aggressive pressure has been rising in its continuous attempts to bring the former union republics back to the zone of its own «privileged» interests and in trying to impose the alternative of Eurasian integration.

With the conclusion of the Association Agreement (2014), the new stage of «political association and economic integration» has

started. This period is marked by the Ukraine-EU partnership acquiring a new quality, by the joint opposition to the Russian aggression, by the final establishment and legal instituting of the irreversibility of Ukraine's Eurointegration course.

The Agreement has opened the way to political association and is the bilateral treaty of the largest scale in the entire history of relations between Ukraine and the EU, a program of Ukrainian reforms in different sectors and branches, while the level of its implementation is the indicator of the efficiency of Ukraine's Eurointegration course. This document has established an enhanced multilevel system of contacts in the form of joint bodies on the platform of which political dialogue is taking place.

However, the results of the Agreement's implementation in 2017-2020 are causing concern: in 2017, the general progress of implementation was assessed as amounting to 41%, in 2020, the slowing down of the rate was observed – 34%.

The political dialogue's contents and priorities. In general, there are grounds to speak of positive dynamics of the relations between Kyiv and Brussels: the current Ukrainian authorities have managed to retain previous achievements and positive tendencies in relations with the EU, to continue modernization of the legal basis, to make sectoral cooperation more active, to retain political solidarity and economic support in opposing the Russian aggression..

The Ukraine-EU political relations embrace many important spheres and directions connected to domestic and foreign policy, security, justice, etc. It is, however, clear that for Ukraine the problems of security and of implementing internal reforms in the priority spheres most «sensuous» for the EU are the most urgent: in particular, the judiciary, fighting corruption, democracy and the rule of law, public governance, etc. The issues of domestic reforms are determining the contents and character of the Ukraine-EU political relations to a significant extent. Thus, the European institutions' resolutions and decisions, the Association Council's meetings, annual reports of the European Commission focus attention on problems and drawbacks of the implementation of key reforms in Ukraine.

On the other hand, the aggravation of political-and-security situation in Europe and the world, in particular, the Russian hybrid expansionism, are fundamental challenges and a threat to Ukraine and the EU. The security and foreign-policy dialogue is now focused on the issues of the Russian aggression, in particular, on the negotiations process within the framework of «the Normandy Four», on consultation on applying and prolonging sanctions, on talks within the framework of the Tripartite Contact Group in Minsk, on the involvement of the OSCE Mission, etc. For instance, the joint statement resulting from the last Ukraine-EU summit of 6 October 2020 stresses condemnation of the RF's actions, support for the Normandy negotiations process, etc.

Challenges and threats along the path to the EU. The following threats should be singled out from among the external threats:

First. Against the background of centrifugal tendencies and the pandemic, geopolitical turbulence and confrontation between global players are mounting in the world, in particular, at the Russia-the West axis, between China and the USA, etc. These events and processes influence the agenda of the dialogue and the entire relations between Kyiv and Brussels.

Second. Europe has faced new threats. A new «zone of tension» has emerged on the continent: the intense civil conflict in Belarus. Domestic political situations in Moldova and Georgia are complicated. The sporadic activation of «frozen» conflicts in the post-Soviet area is dangerous (the brief war between Armenia and Azerbaijan).

Third. The state of relations with Brussels is being influenced (directly or indirectly) by dangerous centrifugal processes within the EU, pushing the Ukrainian topic to the background, and making the issue of the prospects of Ukraine's integration into the EU less urgent. What is meant here is, in particular: a) the weakening and erosion of traditional democratic institutions, the rise of public mistrust in them and, against this background, right-wing radical and Eurosceptic movements becoming more active; b) dangerous aftereffects of the migration crisis, complicating social-and-economic and demographic situations in the EU countries; c) the lack of the EU strategy in the Eastern direction, fear of blackmail by Russia, dangerous

concessions to the Kremlin, and attempts to find a common language with the aggressor country; d) improper mechanism of adopting important foreign-policy decisions, etc.

Fourth. Beginning from 2014, counteracting the Russian aggression has become one of the central topics of the dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels. When assessing the impact of the Russian factor on Ukraine's European progress, on the one hand *the aggression against Ukraine*, should be singled out, having the aim of blocking the Western drift of Kyiv with the help of, among other things, direct military intervention, and, on the other, *the Russian hybrid expansionism in the EU area*, posing the threat to the unity, political system, and the existence of the European Union in general. The situation in the zone of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Crimea, Donbas) contains the threat of escalating. Russia continues its military, political, economic, energy, and information aggression against Ukraine.

Ukraine's domestic problems are within the focus of the political dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels. In particular, concern and criticism from the EU is caused by biding time with the reform of judiciary in Ukraine. A chronic irritant in the Ukraine-EU relations is the problem of corruption, traditionally emphasized in statements and declarations of the European side.

At the same time, the intensity of the dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels and the prospect of deepening it are directly dependent on observing fundamental values, in particular, norms of democracy and of the rule of law.

In their turn, the vulnerable aspects of the Ukrainian side in relations with the EU are lack of conceptual approaches, improper efficiency of the system of public governance, drawbacks in coordinating actions of the branches of power, deficit of communication with the society, controversies within the team in power, resistance from the oligarchic clans, etc.

Regrettably, the declared Euro-integration course has not been so far converted to positive social-and-economic transformations that the public would feel.

These and other internal problems and discrepancies are complicating the development of the Kyiv-Brussels partnership and slowing down the movement towards political association.

It should be noted separately that the political component of the partnership between Kyiv and Brussels influences significantly the progress in the implementation of the trade-and-economic part of the Agreement. The state, character, and atmosphere of political relations influence significantly the formation of the general climate of carrying out economic activity on the territory of Ukraine in the context of the level of security and existing risks, trust, the state of securing the rule of law, and transparency of decisions adopted by Ukraine's structures of power.

Principles, problems, and prerequisites of political association. Political association with the EU, along with economic integration, is «the heart», «the nucleus», the main goal of the Agreement as such. Political association acts as a certain platform for cooperation between Kyiv and Brussels, in the political-and-legal sphere first of all. It is based on such fundamental democratic principles as the rule of law, good governance, securing human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect to human dignity, etc. All these fundamental notions act as a certain world-view condition and play the role of the main driving force.

However, it should be noted that Chapter II of the Agreement, «Political dialogue and reform, political association, cooperation and convergence in the field of foreign and security policy», does not contain a clear interpretation of the term, «political association». This chapter is concise, purely declaratory, and contains only general wordings like «strengthening the political-and-security convergence» or «promoting international stability and security». In contrast to the «economic bloc», the Agreement's political part does not contain the sides' clear-cut obligations, specific plans, time markers, and implementation indicators. Thus, this chapter requires comprehensive updating and enhancement with the view to modern geopolitical, security, and political-and-legal realities.

In general, there are grounds to say that elements of political association (amalgamation) are there. *First*. What is meant here is joining the EU's foreign-policy statements and decisions (in 2020, this indicator amounted to almost 90%).

Second. Ukraine actively supports the EU's sanctions policy in relation to third countries. In particular, in 2020-2021, the official Kyiv joined a number of sanctions introduced by the EU against the leaders of Belarus and the leaders of

Transnistria, as well as the sanctions against the RF and other countries of the world for violation of human rights.

Third. A sign of privileged political relations is the presence among the Agreement's fundamental elements of such clauses as respect to sovereignty and territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, and independence.

However, another thing should be pointed out. The Association between Ukraine and the EU is «external», not «internal». The associated member status and the lack of full-fledged membership do not allow to influence adoption of important foreign-policy decisions of the EU, with participation in the shaping of these decisions brought to the minimum, only within the framework of the Association's joint bodies.

Also, the authority of the Association Council is extremely limited where amending the min text of the Agreement and appending its clauses are concerned. Thus, the procedure of the Agreement's upgrading/updating is extremely complicated.

Prospects of the Ukraine-EU association. Taking into account the state, dynamics, and tendencies of relations between Kyiv and Brussels, and the situation on the territory of the EU, «breakthroughs» and cardinal changes in the process of Ukraine's movement towards the EU can hardly be expected. The difficult work on the implementation of the Agreement will continue, taking Ukraine closer to the European community. Tactical priorities are its updating with the aim of liberalizing the Ukraine-EU economic relations, minimizing barriers in mutual trade, integrating into the EU's common market (including digital and energy markets), cooperation within the framework of the European Green Deal, etc. In this context, it is important to determine priorities clearly, to orientate at key directions and spheres capable of becoming «locomotives» of Eurointegration and of delivering fast and tangible results.

Thus, successful sectoral integration is a favourable factor of deepening political relations, strengthening mutual trust, and making the movement towards the Ukraine-EU association more active.

On the other hand, there are differences in the EU's and Ukraine's visions of the future of their mutual relations. Such strategic uncertainty of the prospects of Ukraine's Eurointegration cannot but impact on the atmosphere of cooperation. This makes the Ukrainian leaders push, in the European discourse, for the issue of defining Eurointegration prospects for Ukraine, in order to legitimize the idea of joining the EU by way of reaching respective arrangements with the leaders of individual EU countries. In this context, a substantial argument for Kyiv is the fact that pro-European orientation is continuously dominant in the Ukrainian society and political circles.

It is clear that such situation of uncertainty should not influence the rates of Eurointegration. The current «transitionary» period has to be used to the maximum effect, on the one hand, to update the instruments of cooperation, to strengthen political relations, to broaden and deepen sectoral integration; and, on the other hand, to gradually and irreversibly establish European principles, norms, and rules in the domestic political practice, to implement urgent transformations in the most problem-ridden spheres.

Another priority component of political relations is solidarity and the search for joint responses to the current challenges and threats in the sphere of security, in particular, opposing the Russian hybrid aggression on the European continent.

4.2. Suggestions

After the ratification of the Association Agreement and the start of the functioning of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, Ukraine's policy of Eurointegration requires new ideas and strategic approaches in order to achieve the goal set by the Constitution, the full-fledged EU membership.

In the circumstances of «the enlargement fatigue» and the EU's caution concerning possible deepening of relations with the associated countries of Eastern Europe in the context of the Russian aggression, the most productive mid-term strategy is seen as the maximum use of opportunities provided by the Association Agreement, updating, modernizing, and deepening some elements of the Agreement, and strengthening sectoral integration in the most promising directions.

The desired basic prerequisites for successful movement towards the EU, meanwhile, still are enhancing the capability of the state and its

institutions, including with the EU's financial and organizational support, and implementing efficient domestic transformations, first of all, the reform of judiciary, efficient fight against corruption, improvement of the public governance system, protection of human rights, etc.

At the same time, the future format of relations between Ukraine and the EU will depend on the development of the EU itself, on the development of its internal discussion on the future of Europe, on the way of resolving crises and their aftereffects, on creating the new institutional architecture. Meanwhile, Ukraine should join the European dialogue on the future of the EU, prepare and lobby suggestions on enlargement and deepening of interaction formats within the frameworks of various strategic models of the European Union's further development.

Previous studies of the Razumkov Centre dedicated to relations between Ukraine and the EU,[1] contain a set of suggestions on security problematics, on the development of sectoral integration (in particular, in the spheres of economy, energy, transport, banking sphere, environment, etc.). This study offers a number of individual recommendations of general and specific character, focused on developing and activating political relations, of systemic dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels, moving along the path of achieving the Association's objectives. It is, in particular, about upgrading legal foundations for cooperation with the EU, intensifying contacts in different spheres, in the security sphere first of all, and in general about raising the quality of partnership and securing conditions for Ukraine's joining the EU.[2]

Upgrading the legal foundations for the Eurointegration process

1. To develop and approve, by the President's Decree, **Ukraine's Foreign Policy Strategy**.

   1.1. An important component of this document, to harmonize with other foreign-policy directions, has to be a chapter on the strategy of European integration outlining long-term objectives, tasks, priorities, mechanisms of state policy in the European direction and mid-term milestones on the path to EU membership.

This chapter of the strategy has to:

- ✓ take into account various options of the EU's further development in general and of its policy towards the associated countries of Eastern Europe and of the Russian Federation, suggest different scenarios of developing and deepening Euro-integration with account to this context;
- ✓ contain essential suggestions on including Ukraine into the European security system within the framework of the strategic course aimed at the EU's strategic autonomy, combining this course with the strategic course at Ukraine's membership in the NATO;
- ✓ move forward initiatives and measures aimed at levelling differences in positions between the Ukrainian and European sides on the integration's ultimate objectives. Consider Ukraine's security, political and economic stabilization a transitionary stage on the way to full-fledged membership;
- ✓ combine the well-balanced strategy of updating and enhancing the ambitions of the Association Agreement in priority sectors, on the one hand, with realistic internal reforms necessary for successful implementation of this strategy, on the other hand.

1.2. Within the framework of the overall Ukraine's Foreign Policy Strategy, development and implementation of **mid-term specific strategies of actions (state policies)** should be ensured in relations with the EU countries, in the first turn, with the states of Western and Southern Europe with the most sceptical view of further enlargement of the EU and of Ukraine's Eurointegration, and also

[1] In particular, see: Ukraine after the elections: expectations, political priorities, development prospects. – The Razumkov Centre. Kyiv, 2019. pp. 11-12, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2019_Koalits_Ugoda.pdf*; Sectoral integration of Ukraine into EU: prerequisites, prospects, challenges. – The Razumkov Centre, Kyiv, 2020. pp. 51-56. – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_sektor_eu_ukr.pdf*.

[2] This list of proposals also takes into account some previous recommendations by the Razumkov Centre which were not taken into account and remain topical now.

with the countries without clearly defined positions on this issue. Such strategies must take into account and provide answers to every individual country's «doubts on this issue (for instance, levels of priority of their relations with the RF, different perceptions of security challenges, apprehension of migration risks, stereotypes about the state and potential of Ukraine's internal development, etc.).

2. The existing system of constitutional-legal support for the Ukraine-EU political association needs upgrading. In connection with this, it is necessary to make some amendments to a number of current laws and, possibly, to develop new normative acts on the proper legal provision for the strategic course of the state aimed at acquiring Ukraine's membership in the EU.

   - ***To introduce a number of amendments and additions to the Law of Ukraine «On the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine».*** In particular, Article 2 of the Law (the Article's title, «Major tasks of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine) should be appended by clause «1-1»of the following content: «ensures the realization of the state's strategic course at acquiring the full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization».

   - Part 1 of Article 6 of the Law (the Article's title, «The composition of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the status of its members») should be appended by the words, «Vice Prime Minister on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration» and presented in the following wording: «1. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine is composed of the Prime Minister of Ukraine, the First Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine, the Vice Prime Minister on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, Vice Prime Ministers, and Ministers of Ukraine». In Article 11 of the Law (the Article's title, «The program of work of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine»), Part 1 can also be appended by clauses directly obliging the government to include in their program of actions clauses on ensuring the realization of the state's strategic course at acquiring Ukraine's full-fledged membership in the EU and the NATO in short-term and mid-term perspective.

3. ***Make some amendments to the Law of Ukraine «On the Committees of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine».*** In particular, present the first sentence of Part 1 of Article 5 (the Article's title «The number, composition, and subjects of Committees») in the following wording: «1. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine creates the Committee on the issues of Ukraine's integration into the EU, approves the number of other committees, their titles, and subjects of competence».

   - Introduce changes to the Verkhovna Rada's Regulations providing for establishment of the procedure of passing Eurointegration draft laws. Define as the reason for returning draft laws without putting them on the agenda of the Verkhovna Rada's plenary sessions a conclusion that draft laws do not comply with Ukraine's obligations within the framework of the Association Agreement with the EU.

   - Ensure priority consideration in the Parliament of «Eurointegration» draft laws if deadlines of their introduction into Ukraine's national legislation are approaching.

4. ***Develop and pass the Law of Ukraine «On guaranteeing, by the President of Ukraine, of the realization of the state's strategic course at acquiring Ukraine's full-fledged membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation».***

This Law could become an efficient factor of the mechanism of upgrading the system of normative regulation of the Ukraine-EU political association. This document, proceeding from the essence of national constitutional requirements and the contents of clauses of respective international legal acts, could stipulate the main tasks and mechanisms of such guaranteeing, and «detail» the authority and specifics of cooperation of the Head of State with the Parliament, the government, judiciary and law-enforcing bodies in this sphere.

Specifically consider the possibility of «providing for» legislative clauses on «detailing» constitutional requirements for the emergence of reasons for removing the President of Ukraine from this position by way of impeachment in the case of facts of systemic improper performance of Presidential Constitutional duties on guaranteeing the realization of the state's

strategic course at acquiring Ukraine's full-fledged membership in the EU and NATO.

5. ***Carry out a number of normative-and-organisational measures on improving the actions of state bodies in the Eurointegration direction.*** In particular, with this aim:

   - To bestow the right of veto to the Vice Prime Minister on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine during consideration by the Government of draft laws contradicting the Agreement on Association with the EU.

   - To improve the work of the Government Office on coordination of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. To resolve, without delay, the issue of appointing the head of the Government Office. To amend the Regulations on the Government Office by: a) subordinating the Government Office solely to the Vice Prime Minister on the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration; b) giving the Government Office the rights to monitor the implementation of tasks on development of draft laws in the sphere of European integration by Ministries and other bodies of executive power.

   - To provide for the mechanism of consultations on Eurointegration draft laws within purpose-oriented structures of the Association Council before they are submitted to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

   - To include Deputy Head of the President's Office on the issues of Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration into the joint parliamentary-governmental platform on Eurointegration.

   - To introduce the practice of considering the Government's report of the implementation of the association Agreement at a plenary meeting of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. To include into the structure of the annual report, prepared by the Government Office, information on practical impact of the implementation of norms, directives, and regulations of the EU on the situation in respective spheres. To define among indicators, the state of awareness and support by the public of the process of Eurointegration, the impact of the Association Agreement's implementation on the level of well-being and social well-being of the public.

   - To structurally update and review the Action Plan on implementing the Association Agreement and the Association's Agenda with the view, on the one hand, of the key directions and spheres capable of becoming Eurointegration's «locomotives» and bearing fast and tangible results. On the other hand, attention should be paid to institutional capacity of the state structures and the resources available.

   - To publish, with open access, lists of priority draft laws aimed at the implementation of the Agreement and approved by the Government and the Parliament.

Making political dialogue and institutional cooperation with the EU more active

Chapter II of the Association Agreement, dedicated to political dialogue, clearly demonstrates urgent necessity to bring the Agreement's content and ideology and real practice and priorities of the current Ukraine-EU relations to a common denominator. In particular, this concerns the urgent need to review and update the document's policy part. It would be useful to stipulate the new priorities, including the ones in the spheres of foreign policy and security cooperation, in a corresponding purpose-oriented appendix to the Agreement, the roadmap.

At the same time, being oriented at the strategic goal of gradual deepening of different components of the political dialogue with the EU, the following measures should be purposefully introduced:

1. ***In the dialogue with the European Union, to push forward the issue of a fuller involvement of Ukraine in the processes of decision-making at the EU level.***[3] With this aim:

[3] Some researchers suggest similar measures in order to deepen political dialogue between the partners. See: Emerson M., Blockmans S. Cenusa D., Kovziridze T., Movchan V. Balkan and Eastern European Comparisons: Building a New Momentum for the European integration of the Balkan and Eastern European associated states, – CEPS. 2021.

- To propose to the European side to consider the possibility of: a) the Ukrainian side's participation (in the observer status, without the right to vote but a full-fledged member in perspective) in the work of two consultative bodies of the EU: *the Economic and Social Committee*, and *the Committee of Regions*; b) gradual involvement of Ukraine in the work of some European programs and agencies related to the issues defined in the Association Agreement, in particular, the introduction of corresponding clauses of *acquis communautaire* in the national legislation.

To initiate the issue of the presence of a delegation of Ukrainian MPs at the sessions of the European Parliament where topics touching upon Ukraine's interests are considered. To propose to the European side to introduce the practice of consultative meetings of purpose-specific committees of the European Parliament and the Verkhovna Rada.

- To actively lobby Ukraine's structured participation, as well as of other associated countries of Eastern Europe, in developing the next EU Global Strategy and the European Security Strategy, in particular, in determining the priorities of cooperation with the associated countries. To propose new options of deepening coordination in external policy issues outside of the framework of mechanical joining the EU's statements and positions.

2. ***To strengthen institutional support for cooperation with the EU in the sphere of justice and internal affairs.*** More active integration into the system of purpose-specific European institutions is necessary for this. In particular: to initiate obtaining the observer status in the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (*ENCJ*), to ensure participation in the work of the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats and the Europol's joint investigation teams. It is feasible to broaden the partnership of Ukrainian law-enforcement bodies with the European Anti-fraud Office (*OLAF*) and to launch institutional dialogue with the new European Public Prosecutor's Office (*EPPO*). Cooperation should be also intensified with the databases of the Schengen and Visa information systems (*SIS, VIS*) and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

3. ***It is necessary to use the synergy of «the Associated Trio» of the eastern Partnership in the dialogue with the EU to the maximum active degree with the aim of deepening political contacts and sectoral cooperation with the EU.*** Ukraine, together with Georgia and Moldova, has to focus its efforts on the following directions:

- To jointly push forward the idea of a closer sectoral cooperation in energy, green economy, transport, digital transformation, in the sphere of justice and internal affairs, strategic communications, public health. For this, the European side should receive a proposal to organize informal joint meetings of the respective Ministers of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, with representatives of the European Commission.

- To move forward the idea of launching the annual «Trio-European Union» dialogue on economic policy, based on the example of the dialogue taking place between the EU, the countries of Western Balkans, and Turkey.

- To use joint efforts of the «trio» for their involvement in the framework programs and agencies of the EU, ensuring a wider access to the European Union's funds and resources, in particular, for financing joint projects within the framework of «the Trio».

- To initiate participation of the «Trio» officials in sessions of different formats of the EU Council, to suggest that the European side invites representatives of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, as observers to some meetings of the EU working groups (for instance, *COEST*) and committees of the European Commission.

- To assist in the more productive integration of the «Trio» in the *European Research Area*, broaden the participation of their research structures in the forthcoming framework programs, «Europe's Horizon» (2021-2027) and «Euroatom» (2021-2025).

- To suggest that the three associated countries join the European Index of Digital Economy and society (*DESI*).

Strengthening cooperation with the EU in security sphere

The security sphere is characterized by the asymmetry of ambitions between Ukraine and the EU, with the EU prepared to offer limited cooperation on ensuring stabilization, resilience, carrying out «soft» and humanitarian security measures. At the same time, the need to revise the security policy has ripened for the EU itself, in the direction of strategic autonomy or, at least, of significant enhancement of the European component of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic security, Ukraine, as well as other countries of the Eastern Partnership, faces the risk to stay outside of this process.

Thus, it is necessary to work on creating external and internal prerequisites of strengthening the security cooperation, maximally using and upgrading, in parallel, the available tools. The corresponding policy of the Ukrainian side must provide for: a) political dialogue with some member states on re-thinking the potential of security cooperation (first of all, with France and Germany); b) internal reforming of the security and defence sector in the direction of enhancing mutual compatibility, fight against corruption, and introduction of democratic civil control; c) new proposals for broadening security cooperation with the EU and its members.

In this context, it is feasible to consider the issue of developing a purpose-oriented appendix (roadmap) to Chapter II of the Association Agreement, which could, among others, contain some of the following initiatives and measures in the sphere of security.

- To initiate the enhancement of Ukraine's participation in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations in geographical, quantitative, and subject-matter respects. To consider possible formats of involvement into the future «*European Intervention Initiative*».

- To secure all the necessary conditions (according to the rules designated by the EU in November 2020) for practical participation in the projects of priority for Ukraine within the framework of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (*PESCO*).

- To continue the practice of concluding agreements on bilateral military cooperation and military-technical cooperation with EU member states. To conduct the inventory of current agreements with the view to their updating and modernizing in the context of current realities and threats. To strive for removal of political barriers in the sphere of military-technical cooperation with individual EU member states.

- To actively involve specialists from EU countries for consulting on the issues of reforming the Ukrainian military-and-industrial complex, raising its attractiveness for European investors.

- To deepen cooperation in the sphere of exchanging experience on overcoming cyber threats, as well as in assisting in ensuring security of government communications and critical infrastructure within the framework of the cyber dialogue launched between Ukraine and the EU. To make cooperation with the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity more active.

- To set up in Ukraine *the Regional Cyber Partnership Centre of Excellence*; to join the work of *the EU's Cyber Crisis Liaison Organisation Network* (*CyCLONe*) and enhance cooperation with t*he European Cybercrime Training and Education Group*.

- To promote development of cooperation of Ukraine's and the EU's intelligence bodies,[4] including information exchange, technical support, and programs for strengthening the institutions' potential (provided reforms in this sphere are deepened).[5]

- To broaden the practice of Ukraine's participation in EU countries' training missions and exercises, to stimulate the involvement of a bigger circle of EU countries in such exercises.

- To deepen cooperation with the European Defence Agency and to ensure participation in its purpose-oriented events.

[4] For example, the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre, *EU INTCEN* and *European Union Military Staff – Intelligence Directorate, EUMS INT*.

[5] See: Gressel G., Popescu N. The best defence: why the EU should forge security compacts with its Eastern neighbours. – ECFR Policy Brief, November 2020, – *https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-best-defence-why-the-eu-should-forge-security-compacts-with-its-eastern-neighbours/*.

- To promote the EU's more active involvement in military education, combat training, as well as to ensure Ukrainian officers' access to the so-called «Military Erasmus», the European initiative for the exchange of young military officers (*EMILYO*).

- To set up the joint platform of the associated states with the EU to fight disinformation and hybrid threats, to provide for systemic cooperation with *the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats*.

- To join the work within the framework of activities of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (*ENISA*) and *the EU Rapid Alert*.

- To strengthen cooperation with the European Security and Defence College (ESDC), in particular, on conducting joint scientific-and-research projects and adaptation of EU curricula.

Upgrading monitoring mechanisms and assessments of the Agreement's implementation

- To propose to the EU to improve the methodology of the annual assessment of the implementation of the Agreement in vein with the one that the EU applies to the Western Balkan countries. Such reports are more detailed, they contain qualitative and quantitative assessment of implementation of the Agreement and reforms in this or that sphere, recommendations on ensuring progress in respective spheres, and specific *benchmarks* to be achieved the next year;

- To introduce, from the EU side, special instruments for the assessment of ensuring the rule of law in the country, namely, progress reached in such important spheres as the reform of judiciary and fight against corruption.

- To ensure active participation of state structures and the expert milieu in periodical study of the state of things in the judiciary sector of the Eastern Partnership countries, «*Justice Dashboard EaP*», which the Working Group on Western Balkans of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (*CEPEJ*) has started to implement.[6]

- To introduce «Justice Scoreboards», a periodical study of the state of things in the judiciary sector, like «*The Justice Scoreboard*» that the EU publishes for its member countries, and «*Justice Dashboards*» composed by the Working Group on Western Balkans of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (*CEPEJ*).

- To set up a special tool for monitoring the anti-corruption sphere, like *the EU Anti-Corruption Report*.[7] Taking this into consideration, it looks feasible to advise the EU not to realize this monitoring with their own means (and not to rely entirely on the government of Ukraine) but to entrust the assessment of anti-corruption reforms to independent specialized organisations.

- To create a new Appendix to Chapter III, «Justice. Freedom, and Security»,[8] or to approve the relevant special agenda by the Association Council, or to stipulate respective tools in the updated agenda of the Association. A new version of this document has to replace the no longer topical agenda of 2015, determining concrete short-term and mid-term goals and priorities of the Agreement's implementation.

[6] Support for a better evaluation of the results of judicial reform efforts in the Eastern Partnership («Justice Dashboard EaP»). – Council of Europe, – *https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/justice-dashboard-eap*.

[7] However, it is worth reminding that this report was published just once in 2014, while the respective «anti-corruption» part of the recent European Commission's report on the state of the rule of law in EU countries was criticized by some experts for the lack of assessment of the real state of affairs in the sphere of fighting corruption in member states. See: Mungiu-Pippidi A. Unresolved Questions on the EU Rule of Law Report. – Carnegie Europe, 20 October 2020, – *https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/10/20/unresolved-questions-on-eu-rule-of-law-report-pub-82999*.

[8] This method was suggested by the Government when they presented the new agenda in the JFS sphere to the European Union. However, considering lack of progress on this issue because of the need to agree such innovation with all the EU member states, respective alternatives are being suggested.

Strengthening the economic foundation for the Ukraine-EU political association[9]

The contents of the Agreement should be adjusted in such a way that it becomes more innovation-oriented and helps raining Ukraine's competitiveness in modern spheres of economic activity. In this context, the priorities of interaction should be: a) deepening cooperation in the scientific-and-technological sphere and introducing new contactless technologies; b) broadening interaction in the sphere of public health and pharmaceuticals; c) enhancing interaction in the sphere of business and employment.

The following concrete measures on implementing the listed priorities should be marked:

- To establish a certain minimum quota for Ukraine concerning access to money allocated within the EU's research programs and broadening of the current opportunities of access to other EU programs, connected to technological development and increase of competitiveness.

- To revise the Agreement's clauses concerning the tasks of digital development with the full adaptation to the process of forming the digital single market (*DSM*) of the European Union and defining the ways and mechanisms of Ukraine's integration in the DSM, including ensuring joint counteraction to the growing challenges in the sphere of cybersecurity. To actively promote the development of start-ups and digitalization of the economy and services sectors on the basis of comprehensive strategy of digitalization of European industry and introduction of new technologies of providing financial services (*FinTech*).

- To form the platform of constant interaction of the Ukrainian business with the business of EU member states as an inseparable part of institutions governing the process of association and Eurointegration. Such changes should be directed at significant increase of the level of quality of decision-making on the process of association and Eurointegration.

- To develop and introduce to the text of the Agreement the institutional framework for interaction in the sphere of training specialists for new professions of the economy of the future, including on the basis of broadening opportunities for exchanges in hi-tech spheres with the aim of borrowing best practices of organizing highly efficient and competitive production in the sphere of high technologies.

- To study possibilities for conducting negotiations on Ukraine's joining some mechanisms introduced within the framework of the EU Banking Union in the way similar to the one applied to member countries of the European Economic Area. This would benefit creating prerequisites for more efficient interaction between Ukraine and the EU in the financial sector and the implementation in the Ukrainian practice of new approaches to further making the banking sector healthier and to raise its capability to finance large-scale investment projects and structural transformations in the Ukrainian economy.

[9] For more details on this see: Ukraine's sectoral integration into the EU: Prerequisites, prospects, challenges. – The Razumkov Centre, Kyiv, 2020. p. 52, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_sektor_eu_ukr.pdf*.

PATH TO EU-UKRAINE POLITICAL ASSOCIATION

(Materials of round table by correspondence between government representatives and independent experts)

This round table by correspondence was conducted in April-May 2021 in the framework of project «EU-Ukraine: Factors and Prospects of Political Association» implemented by the Razumkov Centre with support of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Ukraine. The remote dialogue between state officials and independent experts covers problems and prospects in the development of political relations between Kyiv and Brussels. In particular, participants assessed the current state, trends and content of the political dialogue, singled out factors that facilitate and inhibit political relations between parties, and outlined paths and prospects for political association.

It is clear that the content and nature of the political dialogue, its agenda are influenced by many external and internal factors. At the moment, priority sectors in EU-Ukraine partnership include: an update of the existing Association Agreement with the view of further liberalisation of relations with the EU, joining European digital market, further integration of Ukraine's energy systems with EU's energy market, involvement in the European Green Deal, launch of industrial «visa liberalisation», etc.

At the same time, an important component of EU-Ukraine partnership is joint opposition to Russian aggression. For Ukraine it is important that the EU demonstrates political solidarity and provides economic support, realises the policy of sanctions against the aggressor.

Round table participants believe that conditions for Ukraine's successful progress towards political association with the EU include implementation of shared values and norms, execution of basic reforms defined by the Agreement, resolution of a complex of internal issues that are slowing down our rapprochement with the European community. Yet another thing is clear: EU-Ukraine partnership is a two-way street and it is definitely important that the EU moves towards Ukraine as well.

It is obviously impossible to cover all sectors of cooperation with the EU in this round table by correspondence, but opinions and assessments of its participants give an idea of the current problems and important priorities for Ukraine's further Eurointegration, as well as of the measures that need to be taken to accelerate movement in this direction.

Eurointegration means fundamental reforms that bring us closer to EU standards

Olha STEFANISHYNA

Deputy Prime Minister
for European
and Euro-Atlantic Integration

— What are the current state, trends and main topics on the agenda of political relations between the EU and Ukraine? Which factors facilitate and which impede Kyiv-Brussels' political dialogue?

EU-Ukraine partnership is based on shared interests and values — democracy, rule of law, respect for international law and human rights. Coordination of effort in countering Russian aggression, EU support in *COVID-19* pandemic response are the proof of strength of our ties. Despite the global restrictions due to coronavirus crisis, in 2020 we succeeded in maintaining intensive dialogue with the EU on all levels, as well as in raising topics, which are important for Ukrainian business and society.

Despite the fact that EU institutions are avoiding «offline events», and Brussels itself is under a strict lockdown because of the pandemic, both the EU-Ukraine summit and the Association Council took place with participants being present in person. This exception made for Ukraine showed once more the respect that the EU has for our relations.

As, by the way, did the unprecedented volume of European Parliament's report on the implementation of the Association Agreement approved in February 2021. Today there are almost no internal policy sectors not covered by the Eurointegration process. Thus, the list of issues on the EU-Ukraine agenda is expanding each year.

At the EU-Ukraine summit in October 2020, parties made a key decision, they confirmed the intention to proceed with a comprehensive review of achievement of Association Agreement goals, as foreseen in Article 481. The first step on each side will be the internal assessment, results of which will be presented at the EU-Ukraine summit in 2021. Our main task is to determine «bottleneck places», which stand in the way of using full Agreement potential, so that we can start working on clearing them up. An important element of assessment will be determination of areas, where Ukraine and the EU can deepen their cooperation through an update of the Agreement.

Besides this, at the Association Council meeting we launched consultations on further liberalisation of trade in goods as part of the free trade area, in line with Article 29 of the Agreement, and started working on updating respective Annexes. Ukraine's stance in negotiations with the EU was developed taking into account interests of the Ukrainian business community, which has been engaged in dialogue with the Government launched last year upon my initiative.

We are actively working on integrating our country in EU Digital Single Market and Ukraine being included in the EU's internal market in the telecommunications sector. Our focus also includes intensifying Ukraine's economic and regulatory approximation with the EU in such sectors as digital economy, trade facilitation, customs cooperation, justice and internal affairs.

Ukraine is waiting on the start of negotiations on signing the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products, the so-called «industrial visa liberalisation».

On the agenda is also integration of Ukraine's energy systems with EU energy market based on efficient implementation of the updated Annex XXVII to the Association Agreement.

Another important signal of Ukraine being recognised as a participant of EU's internal policies is our presidency in EU Strategy for the Danube Region since November 2021. Ukraine became the first non-EU member state to take presidency in the Strategy. Its goal will be to identify priority areas of cooperation for Danube countries.

Ukraine also announced its intention to take part in the new political and economic EU initiative «European Green Deal», which aims to achieve zero carbon emissions by 2050. We have already defined priority areas of cooperation: energy efficiency, hydrogen, transformation of coal regions, industrial alliances, and climate architecture development. Ukraine has joined European Raw Materials Alliance and European Battery Alliance, and launched a dialogue with the EU on such application of carbon border adjustment mechanism (*CBAM*), which will minimise its influence on our bilateral trade.

Development of EU-Ukraine dialogue is based on our achievements in executing Eurointegration reforms, adaptation of legislation to EU requirements, institutional changes aimed at ensuring efficient implementation of the Association Agreement.

We have developed a map of priority Eurointegration bills that open up new economic sectors for us. For instance, the Verkhovna Rada has approved in its entirety the Law on Ukrenergo certification, which will allow to certify NEK Ukrenergo as electricity transmission system operator of European standard, separate it from Russia and refocus it to European electricity market and *ENTSO-E* system.

The law on inland waterways came into effect aiming to integrate our waterways into the pan-European ones. This is important as this transport sector has been among Eurointegration outsiders for a long time. The Verkhovna Rada also adopted the electronic communications law necessary for further integration in EU Digital market.

In our dialogue with the EU, the issues of ensuring the rule of law and establishing honest and transparent rules in economic sector are extremely important. In the press conference after the Association Council meeting, it was the judicial reform that the High Representative of the EU Josep Borrell named «the mother of all reforms» — a key to Ukraine's

success. Yet, this is not just the EU's stance, it is our shared understanding. The judiciary acting against state interests poses a threat to national security. Together with foreign partners, we are building our anti-corruption infrastructure, and finalising the reform of the judiciary. We do have to admit that sometimes our steps lack consistency and coherence, and this, to our regret, somewhat delays achievement of the set goal.

— How would you describe the ways and prospects of political association between the EU and Ukraine?

Currently, Ukraine and the EU are partners and friends united by a shared vision of the future. In 2020, Ukraine joined almost 90% of EU declarations on international events and approaches to their resolution. At the same time, the EU supports sanctions against Russia for its aggression in Donbas and occupation of Crimea.

Translated from the diplomatic lingo, post-Association Council statement would mean the following: The European Union stands together with Ukraine in the issues of territorial integrity, overcoming *COVID-19* pandemic, and deepening sectoral integration. Ukraine is ready to be a reliable partner in the implementation of EU's global and regional initiatives. In particular, we are the first non-EU member state that announced its desire to join the European Green Deal. After all, European Union's ambitious plan to achieve climate neutrality is impossible without Ukraine.

Eurointegration foremost means fundamental reforms that bring us closer to European Union standards.

Ukraine has started a public administration reform, which will allow to create a strong management framework with institutional memory, the lack of which has always been acutely perceptible in public administration. Recently, the Verkhovna Rada approved a bill that reinstated competitions for government positions to select the best candidates. Firing senior level civil servants for political reasons was rendered impossible.

Decentralisation reform became one of the most successful ones in Ukraine. Our partners took note of this too. The European Parliament called on the European Commission to study Ukraine's experience to apply it in other countries. Ukraine has also created almost 900 administrative service centres that provide convenient public services to our citizens.

The Verkhovna Rada has approved the Electoral Code of Ukraine, introduced a mechanism of state funding for political parties intended to ensure their independence.

Our law enforcement is actively cooperating with EU Advisory Mission (*EUAM*) on reforming civilian security sector. The mission is helping conduct a comprehensive reform of Ukrainian law enforcement system in line with European standards. By the way, last year a regional office of the Mission opened in Mariupol. This was an important sign of EU's support in building a safe Ukraine, where each citizen feels protected.

Cooperation with such structures as Interpol, Europol and European Anti-Fraud Office expands possibilities for effective work of law enforcement bodies in Ukraine and the EU. At the Association Council, an agreement was signed between the Office of the Prosecutor General and the European Anti-Fraud Office (*OLAF*), which lays the legal grounds for joint anti-fraud work using EU funds. Next step is concluding administrative agreements between *OLAF* and Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, National Police of Ukraine and Security Service of Ukraine.

The intensity of EU-Ukraine integration allows us to talk about «Eurointegration 2.0», its transition to the new level. Our dialogue is not limited to several meetings per year any more (even such high-level meetings as summits or Association Council). The new format of cooperation includes regular «sectoral dialogue», which gradually synchronises our country's standards with those of the EU. Ukraine is becoming an important part of not just the economic, but also of political, legal and security sectors in the EU.

At the same time, our ambitions go beyond the model of political association and economic integration, which are based on neighbourhood and Eastern Partnership. In other words, Ukraine has grown out of EU neighbourhood policy framework. ***Our country's goal is to achieve all EU membership criteria and get included in the enlargement policy.***

A change of the political framework created by the EU for its Eastern neighbours, foremost those that are implementing the Association Agreement, will create conditions for Ukraine's full-fledged future membership in the European Union.

Continuation of domestic reforms is the cornerstone of success

Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE

Head of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the EU

This year we will be celebrating the tenth anniversary of the official announcement of the end of negotiations on the Association Agreement. What have we achieved? What problems do we have? What needs to be done? Society demands answers to these questions. The agenda of our country's survival demands answers to these questions.

We have shared values with the EU, which is why a continuation of domestic reforms is the cornerstone of success. The crucial ones include: judicial and constitutional reforms, public administration reform and decentralisation, maintaining stability and independence of the banking system, corporate management reform, independent and efficient operation of the anti-corruption infrastructure, etc.

I am surprised that we are still discussing ways to return home, to our European family. I am surprised that Ukrainian government is still asking about specific things we have to accomplish for this.

The answer is simple. First of all, we have to meet our obligations in full, not partially. We have to implement the Association Agreement. And then proceed to take steps towards gaining membership in line with EU's current legislation.

Among main results of 2020, we see that the progress of Association Agreement implementation has unfortunately gone down to 34% of tasks accomplished in a year.[1] That being said, we saw that in a year's work, the Verkhovna Rada has adopted approximately 30 Eurointegration laws. Clearly, this is insufficient. Talking about current and future tasks, we need to understand that compared to government institutions, abilities of the Verkhovna Rada in preparing bills aimed at approximation of our legislation to comprehensive directives and clear regulations of the EU are limited.

This is why we have to use the experience of EU member states and intensify the work of our ministries and Government as a whole to prepare quality bills. I would pay particular attentions to such areas as financial cooperation and anti-fraud work (24% completed during the period), agriculture (26% in 2020), energy (37% completed in 2020).[2]

I am sad to say that in the past two years, despite loud statements, the very idea of Eurointegration has been largely discredited. I would like to remind you that it was the political part of the Agreement that was signed first. And this is the part about values, foundations and framework of democratic development, about our future. And it is this part that is being stubbornly ignored at the moment by the top echelons of Ukrainian government.

Cato the Elder finished all of his speeches at the Roman Senate with the words «Carthage must be destroyed», even when his speeches had nothing to do with Carthage. Every conscientious Ukrainian politician must live with the belief: «Russian empire has to be destroyed, and for this, Ukraine has to be in the EU and NATO». Because, as Zbigniew Brzezinski said, there is no Russian empire without Ukraine. And I am convinced that this is the future. Russian empire will disappear, and Ukraine will be a part of the free western world. We will return home.

This is only a matter of time. Yet we have to understand that without doing our homework, our claims to either EU or NATO membership will receive an objective answer — no. Our demands for EU membership have to come together with high-quality implementation of the Agreement

1 See: Government website «Agreement Pulse», — *https://pulse.kmu.gov.ua/.*

2 Ibid.

and effective democratic reforms, not their imitation.

The EU supports our independence, territorial integrity, and directs effort to achieve enduring political resolution of the situation connected with Russia's aggression in Donbas. EU approach includes a combination of pressure through restrictive measures, and diplomatic efforts and continuation of dialogue. We appreciate this effort, but at the same time, I believe that security sector development should be a crucial component of EU-Ukraine cooperation.

For a long time, negotiations were being held on participation of third countries in projects under Permanent Structured Cooperation programme (*PESCO*). Today there are active consultations on the projects, in which Ukraine could participate, and the volume of such participation. We realise that these initiatives have to facilitate stronger integration of our agencies and companies with the EU security sector, and this area of cooperation must be steadily expanded.

It is unfortunate that in the past years we have been observing manipulations and back-and-forth shifts in our government. Last year, we were told that diplomats are the country's «investment bankers» and their only task is to increase economic cooperation and attract new investment. We have heard that the Agreement is a tool for economic integration and nothing more. Political ambition has been at zero.

And now, being totally honest, our government is blackmailing the west. According to our head of state, reforms will not save us from Russian aggression, so the only thing we need is the membership, and immediately. Yet, it would be much easier to talk about membership, if the reforms were still progressing. If the country truly adhered to the rule of law, sincerely conducted anti-corruption work. If Ukraine was not undergoing the creeping consolidation of power and persecution of opposition.

We need to understand that there is no collective Brussels. There is a unified voice of countries, where each country has a different degree of influence. It is important to conduct a substantive and consistent dialogue with each EU member state to ensure further political unity in EU support for Ukraine.

And although we are most likely on the eve of European political crisis, as Chancellor Angela Merkel is leaving, and President Emmanuel Macron has a risk of losing to his pro-Russian opponent, in these difficult times it is important not to lose our chances due to our own inadequacy and self-persuasion.

Thus, indeed: Ukraine must be in the EU, — but not through adolescent blackmail and childish statements by government officials. It is important that our government understands a simple truth. Ukraine needs reforms not just to join the EU or NATO. Ukraine needs reforms to change for people's true well-being. And European integration is a roadmap for such reforms.

Unlock the full potential of the Association Agreement as the roadmap for reforms

Matti MAASIKAS

Ambassador of the EU,
Head of the EU Delegation
to Ukraine

Since the Revolution of Dignity, the political agenda and political dialogue between the EU and Ukraine remain among the most intensive that the EU conducts across the world. This is reflected in my daily work as the EU representative in Ukraine, whose task is to facilitate rapprochement between Ukraine and the EU. It is also reflected in the work of my colleagues in Brussels and EU Delegation to Ukraine, and in the intensive multi-level cooperation and support, which also emphasises Ukraine's importance to us as a close neighbour and crucial partner.

The abovementioned agenda is captured in our Association Agreement, the goal of which is to maintain regular political cooperation

and economic integration between Ukraine and the EU, also manifested in our active political and diplomatic engagement, from the top level — through regular visits, summits and telephone conversations between our presidents, to the level of ministries — through participation in the meetings of the Association Council and the Committee, and to the technical level — through sessions of subcommittees and local implementation of projects.

Our unique political agenda is also manifested in the existence and continuous support of the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform (*EUAM*) and its work in the entire country, as well as unique special expert groups in Brussels, namely, EC Support Group for Ukraine.

Another piece of evidence is financial assistance in the amount of over EUR 16 billion — in grants and loans to support reform programmes in Ukraine, as well as humanitarian aid mobilised by the EU for Ukraine since 2014. This support has helped Ukraine implement critical reforms, such as in the rule of law and anti-corruption sectors, public administration, state finance, decentralisation and integrated border management.

Last year, we provided additional EUR 190 million to support Ukrainian Government's efforts in response to the global *COVID-19* pandemic. Our support is also being continuously adapted to Ukraine's own reform priorities, such as digitalisation and «green» energy transition, which are currently being implemented in the country.

Obviously, our political agenda and political dialogue include EU's unalterable support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, our non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, our sanctions, diplomatic involvement, and support of the Trilateral Contact Group and OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which reflects our shared standing.

As for implementing the Association Agreement, which is the main expression of our political agenda, it mainly includes Ukraine's implementation of reforms launched after the Revolution of Dignity. Every year, prior to Association Council meeting with the Prime Minister and the Government, the EU publishes its Report on implementation of the Association Agreement, which contains our assessment of the already achieved progress.

The report is the basis for EU's consolidated position in the Association Council and covers the course of reforms. In the last report, some things were evaluated as «good», for instance, such momentous achievements as the law on inevitability of withdrawing banks from the market, approved in May 2020, as well as progress of the digital sector of Ukraine, which is moving ahead of schedule. Instead, other sectors did not do as well,

Namely, energy sector and corporate management of public enterprises require further coordinated effort. We also expect Ukraine to abstain from adopting laws that contradict the Agreement, such as proposals to introduce localisation in public procurement.

The EU is paying a lot of attention to the issues of justice, rule of law and anti-corruption work, which still present serious challenges. Along with the efforts to restore the system of e-declarations after last year's Constitutional Court decisions, a comprehensive and sustainable reform of the judiciary has become crucial in this respect, and together with our international partners, including the IMF and other G7 members, we have clearly articulated our position on this issue to the Ukrainian government, with which we continue to work closely together.

In a wider sense, we welcome the updated Government initiatives on prioritising legislative reforms in order to meet commitments in the framework of the Association Agreement, as well as involving Ukrainian civil society in these reforms. According to Agreement conditions, this year, we are planning to update it — after five years of it coming into effect. At the same time, we are continuing our joint work on unlocking its full potential as the roadmap for reforms. We are also working on updating Agreement Annexes in order to properly match the evolution of provisions and norms on both sides.

At the end, I would like to add that although *COVID-19* is currently barring most of us from travel, visa-free travel regime granted to Ukraine three years ago is an example of the EU honouring *our* commitments to Ukraine. Since that time, Ukrainians have travelled to the EU over 50 million times, and our citizens have truly become closer. We sincerely hope that these processes will be shortly restored.

Overcoming challenges shoulder to shoulder with the EU

Mykola TOCHYTSKIY

Representative of Ukraine to the EU (February 2016 – April 2021)

— What are the current state, trends and main topics on the agenda of political relations between the EU and Ukraine? Which factors facilitate and which impede Kyiv-Brussels' political dialogue?

I will start by saying that Ukraine is a priority partner for the European Union: the EU supports Ukraine in ensuring a stable, prosperous and democratic future for its citizens and is unwavering in its support for Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty, which is important amidst the ongoing Russian occupation of separate territories of our country.

The Association Agreement, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (*DCFTA*), was signed in 2014 and is the main instrument for EU-Ukraine rapprochement, facilitation of creating deeper political ties, strengthening economic relations and respect for shared values. The EU remains Ukraine's largest trade partner. Even in the situation of global trade slowdown as a result of the *COVID-19* pandemic that started in 2020, the EU retained its share of 40.8% in our country's foreign trade.[3]

The EU is supporting us in our implementation of internal reforms, which include priority reforms in the anti-corruption sector, judicial reform, constitutional and electoral reforms, improvement of business climate and energy efficiency, as well as public administration reform and decentralisation.

It is important to note that starting from 2014, the EU and financial institutions have mobilised over EUR 15 billion in grants and loans to support our reforms, and this support strongly depends on further progress.

In June 2017, visa-free travel regime for Ukrainian citizens with biometric passports came into effect; it was the result of successful completion of dialogue on visa liberalisation, which included major reforms starting from the rule of law to comprehensive border management.

Visa liberalisation is one of the most powerful EU instruments to expedite establishing of contacts between people and strengthen ties between citizens of third countries and the EU. And although due to the pandemic, Ukrainian citizens cannot use all the benefits of visa-free travel at the moment, — this is a temporary occurrence. The main thing is that this unique mechanism works. Currently, the EU is working on the introduction of vaccination certificates, and it is also on the EU-Ukraine agenda.

The next ambitious goal is Ukraine's approximation to the so-called «industrial visa liberalisation». We were able to achieve major progress in this area. For the first time on the high level, at the 22nd EU-Ukraine Summit, parties officially agreed to launch a pre-assessment mission on Ukraine's preparedness to sign *ACAA*, the so-called «industrial visa liberalisation regime».

We also achieved major success in coming closer to mutual recognition of electronic trust services and authorised economic operators. These steps bring us closer to the EU.

Our special interest at the moment is further progress towards the update of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, as well as the issues of digital economy, green deal, and strengthening energy security.

[3] Statistics of trade between Ukraine and the EU. — Mission of Ukraine to the EU, 15 April 2021, — *https://ukraine-eu.mfa.gov.ua/en/2633-relations/torgovelno-ekonomichne-spivrobitnictvo-ukrayina-yes/pokazniki-torgovelno-ekonomichnogo-spivrobitnictva-ukrayina-yes.*

Also, in 2021, we expect to sign the EU-Ukraine Common Aviation Area Agreement, which will have positive effect on the air transport market.

Security, of course, cannot be evaded either. ***The EU is steadfastly supporting efforts aimed at restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.*** Since the start of Russia's armed aggression in 2014, the EU has been consistently supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity, condemning the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The EU fully supports initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable political resolution of the situation connected with the aggression in Donbas, using all available means. EU approach includes a combination of pressure through restrictive measures, along with diplomatic efforts and continuation of dialogue. Diplomatic restrictions against Russian Federation were first introduced in March 2014. The EU has been gradually increasing restrictive measures, aiming sanctions against persons responsible for actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence.

Period of EU sanctions against Russia is tightly connected to full implementation of Minsk agreements. In the framework of its endeavours for political resolution of the Donbas situation, the EU has involved OSCE assistance. Russian President's Order as of 24 April 2019 that allowed a simplified procedure for issuing Russian passports in separate occupied regions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine contradicts the spirit and goals of Minsk agreements. This is why the EU has developed Recommendations for member states on how to consider visa applications from residents of territories temporarily uncontrolled by the Government of Ukraine.

Quite unique is the EU's policy of non-recognition of Crimea occupation. In March 2014, the European Council has strongly condemned the illegal occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation.EU leaders emphasised that in the 21st century Europe there is no place for application of force and compulsion to change borders. For seven years in a row, the EU has persisted in not recognising and continues to condemn this violation of international law.

The EU has applied its policy of non-recognition of Crimea occupation, which has led to introduction of major personal and sectoral sanctions that are being regularly extended.

An important track is developing dialogue on topical issues of cybersecurity. I will just say that based on results of the 22nd EU-Ukraine Summit that took place in October 2020 we have achieved agreement in principle on the launch of cyber dialogues. Today we are actively preparing for the first round of such dialogues. If this happens, Ukraine will become the seventh non-member state to have this format of cooperation with the EU.

We have started working on strengthening the security component in the framework of Eastern Partnership. I am convinced that the only way for us to stimulate EU to view security problems in the wider context of Eastern Partnership policy is through «baby steps» policy. Such steps are being worked on at the moment.

While Russian aggression in Donbas is escalating, ensuring Ukraine's involvement in the implementation of EU projects in the security sector is extremely relevant. At the end of 2020, the EU has approved the long-awaited decision on the possibility for third countries to take part in the implementation of projects in the framework of Permanent Structured Cooperation programme (PESCO). Today active consultations are being held on the projects, in which Ukraine could participate, and the volume of such participation. But even without important technical details, it becomes clear that this cooperation will facilitate stronger integration of our companies and structures in the EU security sector.

Significant accumulation of Russian armed forces at Ukrainian borders poses a real new threat not just for our country, but for the entire system of international security. And although the EU is not a military organisation, exacerbation of the situation at the border is a key issue on the agenda of EU-Ukraine political dialogues. The latest example — discussion of this package of issues at the EU Council meeting on 19 April 2021, in which Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba took part at the invitation of High Representative of the EU Josep Borrell.

The Minister has provided detailed information to meeting participants about

Russia-caused exacerbation of security situation in the area of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and along the state border, familiarised his colleagues with the complex of threats that current Russian actions pose to Ukrainian and European security. The Minister has also proposed a step-by-step action plan to deter Moscow from further escalation, a key element of which is development of a new package of sectoral sanctions to be immediately introduced in case of a new onslaught of aggression from Russia. Escalation in the Azov Sea area also was the topic of discussion with EU partners.

Obviously, the Russian aggression is a major factor that overall inhibits Ukraine's consistent development. And the fact that despite the seven-year war with Russia, the EU and we managed to achieve progress of historical significance says a lot.

Ukraine's success in reforms, dedication to implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, anti-corruption work are the very factors that certainly facilitate the political dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels.

The unprecedented level of EU support and solidarity with Ukraine in countering Russian aggression, as well as intensive political dialogue despite *COVID-19*, indicate that Ukraine is moving in the right direction.

In these complicated times, shoulder to shoulder with European partners, Ukraine is overcoming current challenges in the security sector, economics, and the unprecedented consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

A demonstration of strategic importance of developing political dialogue with Ukraine on the part of the EU was the fact that the 22nd EU-Ukraine Summit was the first in-person summit with a third country in 2020 that the European Union held amidst the pandemic. Effective and successful EU-Ukraine Summit and Seventh session of the Association Council in February 2021 contributed to strengthening the political dialogue and provided strong momentum for progressing with the ambitious agenda of EU-Ukraine relations.

A powerful signal of EU's political support for Ukraine were also the first visits of European Council President Charles Michel to the East of

Ukraine in March of this year and the visit of High Representative of the EU Josep Borrell to Kyiv in September 2020.

I would like to note that Ukraine and the EU have invested incredible effort to create and ensure operation of anti-corruption system in our country. Ukraine remains dedicated to developing cooperation with the EU in the area of fighting corruption and further strengthening of anti-corruption bodies in the country, and hopes for EU's continued support in this sector.

A number of anti-corruption bodies are active in Ukraine, namely, Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO). Candidate selection to SAPO was depoliticised and conducted as a competition with removal of all political influence on the work of selection the committee.

National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) is also working, and even despite the infamous decisions of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, NABU as an institution continues its operation and execution of its functions as per normal.

I am pleased to note that the EU has given positive assessment to the level of cooperation between the European Anti-Fraud Office (*OLAF*) and NABU, namely in the part of exchange of information to counter contraband. National Agency on Corruption Prevention, State Investigation Bureau, High Anti-Corruption Court are all functioning properly. In this context, I would like to emphasise EU's disposition to

conclude administrative agreements between *OLAF* and MIA of Ukraine, National Police of Ukraine, SBU. Importantly, such an agreement has already been signed in February 20201 with the Prosecutor General's Office.

I especially want to highlight the judicial reform, successful implementation of which will become a guarantee of successful development of cooperation with the EU, foremost, in economics. Judicial reform is among the toughest challenges, but I hope that we will complete it in three years, creating a transparent, effective judicial system in Ukraine.

Ukraine is reforming Supreme Council of Justice (SCJ), which entails among other things transparency in SCJ member selection to ensure high standards in requirements to professional ethics and integrity, with effective and meaningful involvement of international representatives in this process. A transparent reboot of High Qualification Commission of Judges (HQCJU) is taking place, with involvement of international representatives and an independent competition commission that has the power to establish its internal rules for competitive selection of HQCJU members.

The President has also presented Strategy for the Development of Judiciary and Constitutional Justice for 2021-2023, developed by the Legal Reform Commission with involvement of expert community representatives.

In summary, I would like to emphasise that in the implementation of these reforms we are working closely together with the European Union, which is our reliable partner on the path to creating success stories of pro-European changes and transformations in Ukraine.

— How would you describe the ways and prospects of political association between the EU and Ukraine?

Ukraine has already achieved significant success in political association with the EU. Our prospects look very promising. And it is our common challenges and threats that necessitate further deepening of our cooperation in various areas, namely, foreign, security and defence policies.

Obviously, Ukraine aims for tighter political association and economic integration with the EU. While remaining dedicated to the ambitious agenda of Eurointegration reforms in the framework of the Association Agreement, with are working with the EU to achieve even more ambitious aspirations and goals in the future. This foremost includes the prospect of EU membership for Ukraine. This path is not an easy one, given EU's current feelings about further enlargement. However, non-optimistic trends do not scare us, quite the opposite — they give us determination to confidently move towards our goal.

In this context, at the 22nd EU-Ukraine Summit, Ukraine received an important confirmation of the EU's acknowledgement of our European aspirations and our pro-European choice, as well as parties' unalterable dedication to strengthening political association and economic integration between Ukraine and the EU based on the Association Agreement. The leaders have confirmed their intention to use the full potential of the Agreement to ensure maximal rapprochement between Ukraine and the EU. The launch of a comprehensive review of achievement of Association Agreement goals and the start of dialogue on DCFTA parameters update is a sign of good prospects for deepening of integration processes between Ukraine and the EU already in the near future.

A telling example of foreign policy convergence is the practice employed by Ukraine of joining most declarations by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on a wide number of issues, including sanctions. Lately, the level of such accession has been over 90%, which demonstrates significant strengthening of our political association in the past years.

Ukraine's real approximation to European values will be instrumental for political dialogue with the EU

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— What are the current state, trends and main topics on the agenda of political relations between the EU and Ukraine? Which factors facilitate and which impede Kyiv-Brussels' political dialogue?

Relations between Ukraine and the EU in the political area are simple and convoluted at the same time. Simple, because everything seems to be clear: Ukraine is an important element of EU's neighbourhood policy aimed at creating a perimeter of stable democratic countries with market economy on EU's borders, which would be a source of opportunities for the EU itself, and its partners in mutually beneficial cooperation, instead of security risks. Convoluted, because Ukraine, while declaring its aspirations for EU accession and even constitutionally capturing them as foreign policy priority, still remains a source of major risks. Moreover, the topic of Ukraine as a whole, and the prospects of Eastern Partnership project remain debatable issues within the EU itself. There is no unified strategy in this regard.

Instead, there is the common denominator in the form of diplomatic and political support for Ukraine in its fight to restore territorial integrity, and anti-Russia sanctions, along with a variety of Ukraine policies of different EU member states. For some, the topic of Ukraine is important, for instance, for Poland, Hungary and Romania. For some, like Germany or France, — it is a derivative of their Russia policy. And for others — it is secondary.

Joint foreign policy and security policy have traditionally been a weak spot in the European Union, and recent trends and challenges have moved decision-making in these areas to the national level even more. Given these aspects, in the near future, Ukraine can hardly hope for something drastically different in its dialogue with the EU from what is already captured in the Association Agreement.

Key issues on the political agenda of EU-Ukraine relations are the following.

The «age-long issue» of Ukrainian reforms. It is important to the EU that is partner-states, even more so those, on which it borders, were as close as possible to European political standards. These standards are rather simple: the rule of law, protection of human rights, functioning democracy and protection of minority rights. This is the political component of the «European values» so often mentioned in Ukraine itself. They call for approximation to specific standards and are fully measurable. Measurements show that Ukraine is not a full democracy yet, — and in general, its trajectory in the ranking of democracies over the past years has been rather twisted. This leaves the issue unresolved, and Ukraine's path to EU membership closed for the next few years.

Opposing Russian aggression. This problem is a shared one, although nuances are obviously different. For Ukraine, Russia's aggression has become and will long remain a direct threat to statehood. The ongoing occupation of Crimea, as well as the conflict in Eastern Ukraine are exhausting the Ukrainian state, weakening and creating schisms in society, significantly inhibiting European and Euro-Atlantic integration. For Europe, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is a challenge, which foremost undermines regional security, deteriorates climate, and holds hidden risks: economic and trade losses, and in case of escalation — transnational challenges, like the issue of refugees. The EU wishes to «freeze» the conflict and bring the possibility of new confrontation down to zero. For this, France and Germany, EU political leaders are taking part in the Normandy format; the EU is supporting the anti-Russia sanctions regime, and providing substantial volume of financial aid to Ukraine.

Applications of this aid and, in particular, the problem of corruption are also an important topic on the agenda of the bilateral political relations. Europeans view massive corruption as a factor that cuts down the efficiency of any assistance to Ukraine and freezes institutional weakness as is. At the same time, it became clear that Ukraine is unable to resolve this problem, and the debate around ways and methods of this resolution became a separate topic in the political dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels.

In a wider context of regional security and the future of Eastern Partnership, Ukraine is a key element in the security of Eastern Europe and the Black Sea basin, — important regions for the EU.

— How would you describe the ways and prospects of political association between the EU and Ukraine?

The overall state of political relations can be described as satisfactory and predictable. At the same time, in the mid-term perspective, several trends are visible, which will affect it in the future.

First, transformation of priorities within the EU itself due to Brexit. This has changed the alignment of forces between the main poles of the Union, and is affecting the geography of its political and geopolitical interests.

Second, there is an increasing aggravation of the US-China opposition, which is becoming a systemic factor in international policy. In this situation, the EU will have to search for its role on the global level of international policy, reviewing its key security policy priorities in this light.

Third, there is certain indeterminedness as to the future of Transatlantic relations. It is quite possible that the crisis that arose under Donald Trump's Administration will be overcome or mitigated, but important and at times controversial issues of energy, trade and security will remain on the agenda.

Political dialogue between Ukraine and the EU will be best facilitated by Ukraine's real approximation to European values: rule-of-law, democratic state with effective protection of minority rights. This is the kind of Ukraine that could find most support among the population of EU member states. Along with this, it is important to find common issues, where cooperation is meaningful and mutually beneficial. This goes foremost for the sector of energy, where great potential is being uncovered in connection with European Green Deal; transit potential; investment and trade. The more issues of pragmatic cooperation we have on the agenda instead of statements, the more meaningful our political dialogue will be.

Text of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement sets the general framework, priorities and directions for political and security cooperation. On the one hand, it contains enough important areas for political cooperation. On the other, this text is more a description of potential and overall nature of cooperation, rather than a precise algorithm for its deepening.

Most goals in the political dialogue between Ukraine and the EU reflect the importance of Ukraine's role specifically in the security sector. International security, crisis response management, and European security are the areas, where Ukraine could make effective contribution, and thus also the sectors, where we can count on development of cooperation. At the same time, it is not quite clear, what the deepening of political association mentioned in Article 4 of the Agreement would look like. Given that EU membership remains out of Ukraine's reach at the moment, we need to think about potential institutions for such deeper cooperation.

Ukraine-EU: developing cooperation between political elites and communities

Petro BURKOVSKIY
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— What are the current state, trends and main topics on the agenda of political relations between the EU and Ukraine? Which factors facilitate and which impede Kyiv-Brussels' political dialogue?

Political relations between Ukraine and the EU are shaped and developed mostly independently from the state of bilateral trade. Going by Eurostat data, most intensive political approximation between parties was in 2014-2018, when trade exchange was down due to Russian aggression.[4] If in its policy regarding Ukraine the EU was guided exclusively by benefits and economic expansion, relations with our country would have been steadfastly frozen for a long time until conclusive resolution of the conflict with Russia. This logic would suggest a practical choice of foreign partner that is economically more attractive and seems more stable, and in our case, this is Russia.

Note that over the past seven years a number of EU member states did adhere to this practical approach. Namely, support for Russian Nord Stream-2 project was consistently expressed by German Social Democrats and their ministers

[4] Ukraine-EU – international trade in goods statistics. March 2021. – Eurostat, – *https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Ukraine-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics#EU-Ukraine_most_traded_goods.*

in Angela Merkel's government; Austrian right-wingers in Sebastian Kurz's first government raised questions regarding anti-Russian sanctions; Italian nationalists from Lega Nord and populists from Five Star in Giuseppe Conte's first government called for full restoration of trade with Russia. In these and some other EU states such views are supported by opposition parties (e.g. French «National Assembly»), which have good chances of victory in the elections and then will be able to influence the agenda of the entire European Union. This is the reality that Ukraine has to take into consideration working on its foreign policy decisions.

At the same time, it was Russian aggression that became both the stress test and the impulse for the development of bilateral EU-Ukraine relations based on values and shared vision of security and development. The uprising against the authoritarian «turnback from the EU» in 2013[5] and the independence war that is still going on — the war for the right to join the community of European nations, — were a strong proof and evidence in favour of the pro-European choice of Ukrainian people. Nothing like that has happened in Europe since the time of «velvet revolutions» in Central and Eastern Europe and German reunification.

Seeing Ukraine and Ukrainians' readiness to defend their pro-European choice with weapons showed European elites how valuable, despite all internal problems, the achievements of European integration are. And at the same time — what powerful, destructive external forces are seeking to put a stop to this experiment, split Europe and divide it into new sectors of influence.

Capitulation in favour of the aggressor — Russia, or accepting a compromise on its conditions would be the first step to further disintegration of the entire European Union. Instead, firmness and consistent support for Ukraine have allowed to gradually create real common external and security policy, which affects not some remote countries, but concerns directly many of EU member states, their security and stability.

However, such standing of the EU also has its disadvantages and weak spots, which is being actively criticised from within. It is impossible for the complex mechanism of interest and position alignment of 27 very different states to depend on the success of a country that has long been on EU's eastern border, demonstrating very slow internal political and economic progress. Thus, along with significant diplomatic support of Ukraine, manifested foremost in real sectoral sanctions against Russia, the EU demands a number of internal transformations from Ukraine.

A connection between the need to support Kyiv and implementation of judicial or anti-corruption reforms in Ukraine has been causing major tensions in the bilateral relations from the very start. Despite the long-term benefits of these changes, for a part of elites and citizens, these demands look like meddling in our internal affairs. And this impression is being actively used by third parties (Russia, China) to weaken and break EU-Ukraine cooperation. However, these problems that could get worse during the pandemic, are being resolved through active public diplomacy and joint effort in fighting sabotage propaganda and false information. Looking at overall social sentiment, there is strong foundation for this, as well as grounds for optimism.

A joint study by the «Democratic Initiatives» Foundation and Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in the framework of global research by Gallup International Association found that for a half (50%) of Ukrainian citizens, the EU is a stabilising factor in global policy, and centre of positive influence and attractive values (which, by the way, exceeds the average global percentage of 42%).[6]

The format of political relations does not always entail a possibility for Ukraine to make counter demands in a similarly persistent fashion, when the behaviour or «short» historical memory of individual EU member states, e.g. Poland or Hungary, touches the topics of internal security and stability. It is important that European institutions are not used by individual member states as leverage for additional pressure on Ukraine for the purpose of receiving some exclusive preferences in trade or other sectors. Even more so, as accusations against Ukraine essentially have no grounds.

[5] At Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit on 29 November 2013 President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU.

[6] Global States Do Not Guarantee a Safe World Anymore. – Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 12 March 2021, – *https://dif.org.ua/article/globalni-derzhavi-vzhe-ne-garantuyut-bezpechnishiy-svit.*

For instance, according to results of a regional study by the «Democratic Initiatives» Foundation, in August-September 2020, conditions of Hungarian community in Zakarpattya oblast have improved in the past five years, rather than deteriorated.[7]

In the issue that is most important to Ukraine — putting a stop to the war and settling the future of the temporarily occupied territories, the EU is stalling with the decision on the ultimate policy regarding Russia: curtailing the relationship and turning to containment policy or continuing the «strategic patience» policy in regard to Kremlin's provocations and aggression. This choice is also important for the unity and stability of the EU itself, as other EU member states neighbouring on Russia are also following the situation.

— How would you describe the ways and prospects of political association between the EU and Ukraine?

Coronavirus pandemic has become a tough challenge for the development of political relations between the EU and Ukraine in the mid-term perspective. A common position, true partnership does not entail provision of vaccines as part of humanitarian aid, but rather — transferring technologies and knowledge for vaccine production in Ukraine. This would allow not just to overcome *COVID-19*, but would also lay the foundation for prompt and more efficient prevention of new, more dangerous pandemics to come in the future. I am talking about setting up modern production facilities in Ukraine to work together with science and research centres. Thus, the «four freedoms» of the EU community have to be supplemented with the «freedom of movement of ideas and technologies». This will allow to avoid creation of new «Iron Curtains» and «sanitary borders», which have shown their inefficiency.

Besides the level of «high politics», relations between Ukraine and the EU are developing through cooperation between political elites and various communities.EU-Ukraine political dialogue would be richer and more diverse, if Ukrainian political parties and politicians were more actively involved in European inter-party networks and associations. It is hard to overestimate the importance of dialogue that was taking place between the leadership of Ukraine and leaders of political forces united in the European People's Party, aimed at introduction and support of visa liberalisation process, free trade, and containment of Russian aggression in Donbas and the Azov Sea. The time has come to build relations with European social democrats, liberals, «greens». But are there forces in Ukraine that are able to conduct this dialogue on the appropriate level and to propose transnational projects with mutual benefits?

In this context, communications between Ukrainian and European scientific and cultural communities look more advanced. To support this area of EU-Ukraine relations, a Ukrainian Institute has been launched:[8] academic, expert and cultural events are taking place, which among other things introduce Europeans to previously unknown to them modern Ukrainian art, educate them about the affinity of Ukrainian cultural heritage with European culture and difference from Russian culture. It is the Ukrainian state, and not foreign donors, who has to support and facilitate production of information and cultural product that will be interesting to Europeans, and will create a long-term foundation for support for accepting Ukraine into the European community.

[7] Analytical report based on results of Zakarpattya oblast survey. — Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 19 November 2020, — *https://dif.org.ua/article/analitichniy-zvit-za-pidsumkami-opituvannya-v-zakarpatskiy-oblasti.*

[8] State enterprise «Ukrainian Institute», created to present Ukraine in the world through the means of cultural diplomacy, — *https://ui.org.ua/en.*

EU-UKRAINE POLITICAL RELATIONS THROUGH EXPERTS' EYES

Expert study was conducted by the Razumkov Centre with support of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Ukraine, and covered the problems and special aspects of Ukraine's European integration, namely, the current state and prospects of EU-Ukraine political relations.[1]

In the survey, experts assessed the pace of Ukraine's progress towards the EU, nature and specific aspects of Ukrainian leaders' Eurointegration policy, the current state and problems in political relations between Kyiv and Brussels.

Overall, this study focused on EU-Ukraine relations in the political sector. Experts reviewed the goals, priority components and efficiency of political dialogue between partners, as well as the impeding factors. Subjects of study also included specific aspects and details of EU-Ukraine political association, including the level of achievement of corresponding goals set out in the Association Agreement. To what extent is the EU interested in political association with Ukraine? Does the association between Kyiv and Brussels declared in the Agreement really exist? Experts attempted to answer these and other questions as part of this study.

In a wide sense, expert assessments are related to the nature and level of political solidarity between Ukraine and the EU. Thus, study results are of interest, on the one hand, in light of external factors and internal processes influencing the dynamics and prospects of political partnership between Kyiv and Brussels. On the other, the topicality of joint search for answers to traditional and new challenges, and threats of global and continental significance is ever increasing.

That said, there is an important fact to be considered. Ukrainian expert community demonstrates a consistently high level of support for Ukraine's European course and the idea of EU accession.

Survey results provide grounds for the following observations and conclusions.

Pace and Specific Aspects of the EU Integration

Summarising expert survey results for 2006 - 2021, we need to pay attention to the following trends. *First*, ***experts are steadily critical of the pace of Ukraine's integration into the EU.*** Most often, respondents describe this pace as «slow». The maximum of 81% was recorded in February 2010 (remember that it was then, in February, that pro-Russian politician V.Yanukovych got the victory in the second round of presidential elections).

We can assume that the overall scepticism among experts was largely due to the fact that Eurointegration course was mostly declarative, on the level of statements, and did not convert into practical socio-economic results. At the same time, government's internal policy failed to match European norms and standards as well. Moreover, at the end of 2013, at the Vilnius summit, V.Yanukovych attempted to roll back Eurointegration by refusing to sign the EU Association Agreement.

Second, Eurointegration is not a linear process with steady speed. The timeline of Kyiv-Brussels relations had complicated, ambiguous, dramatic periods, namely, accelerations and slowdowns of cooperation pace. Ukraine's movement to the EU is being slowed down by a set of adverse external factors, among which the most dangerous one has been Russia's hybrid aggression.

Third, compared to the previous period (2006-2012), in the past three years (2019-2021), expert

[1] Expert survey was conducted by the Razumkov Centre on 16-31 March 2021. 104 experts have been surveyed in 16 Ukrainian oblasts and the city of Kyiv – representatives of relevant ministries and departments, regional government authorities, state and non-governmental research agencies, instructors from higher education institutions, independent experts, public figures. Results of this study are compared with results of previous studies done by the Razumkov Centre.

assessments of the pace of Ukraine's movement towards the EU have slightly improved. While in April 2012, percentages of «medium», «slow» and «zero» were 18%-65%-14%, respectively, in March 2021 they were 40%-50%-8%. So, percentage of relatively positive opinions noticeably grew at the expense of negative ones. Overall, on the one hand, this dynamic is linked to results of important positive Eurointegration developments, namely, adoption of backbone the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, introduction of visa-free travel to the EU for Ukraine, capturing of EU accession course in the Constitution of Ukraine, etc.

On the other hand, the current Ukrainian government, continuing along the Eurointegration path, is working to intensify dialogue with the EU, deepen sectoral integration, ensure a review of the Association Agreement, liberalise trade and economic contacts with the EU, etc. Thus, experts see positive trends, but think them insufficient for ensuring proper Eurointegration pace.

At the same time, describing results of latest studies, we must pronounce that ***the overall expert opinion on the Eurointegration policy of the current Ukrainian government is predominantly rather critical***. Most often, experts describe this policy as lacking efficiency, incomprehensible to the public and partner states, having no clear action strategy. Respondents believe that government Eurointegration policy also lacks consistency and balance. At the same time, note, that transparency and openness of Eurointegration policy are assessed more positively.

What are the motives and reasons behind these assessments? We can speculate that there is a general trend of gradual decrease of social trust in the current government and growth of critical sentiment. This has been a traditional trend throughout the entire modern history of Ukraine and, clearly, it is also affecting assessment of government actions in the essential Eurointegration sector.

An apparent motive for experts' critical attitude are the noticeable mistakes and miscalculations in the Eurointegration activity of the government team, which Razumkov Centre has mentioned in its previous studies, and which, unfortunately, remain topical.[2] In particular, this includes: a) the lack of strategic vision for the implementation of Eurointegration course (Ukraine still has no clear comprehensive foreign policy strategy, where European integration is an inseparable component); b) controversial reorganisation of respective government bodies, weak personnel policy. In particular, position of the Head of Government Office for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration has been vacant for a long time; c) miscalculations in law-making, which has been done in the «high-speed mode»; d) lack of coordination between government bodies in the European integration sector, etc.

Another topical issue is the unsatisfactory information support for government's Eurointegration policy. This means that government fails to ensure effective public work in the media space, has a weak position in the national media network. There is a lack of open, detailed and regular information on the progress of events in EU-Ukraine relations, on difficulties, achievements and miscalculations in Eurointegration, etc. Thus, it can be assumed that this is the reason for the significant number of experts to abstain from assessment of government Eurointegration policy in the survey.

The situation is further complicated by intensified public confrontation between government and opposition forces that share the same European values and support Eurointegration course. At the same time, efficiency of Eurointegration policy is affected by a number of other internal and external factors, which we discuss below.

The EU-Ukraine Political Dialogue: Nature and Results

Political dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels has multiple layers and encompasses various areas connected with international issues, internal Ukrainian reforms, topics of security, human rights, etc.

Expert community representatives in Ukraine are generally reserved in their assessments of efficiency of EU-Ukraine political dialogue – average score is 2.9 (on the five-point scale).[3] This corresponds to assessments of the pace of Eurointegration. That said, describing the state of relations and

[2] See: Ukraine's Sectoral Integration into the EU: Preconditions, Prospects, Challenges. – The Razumkov Centre, Kyiv, 2020, pp.75-76, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_sektor_eu_eng.pdf*.

[3] Political dialogue efficiency was assessed by experts in the following way: «5» – the dialogue is very efficient, «1» – inefficient.

productivity of EU-Ukraine dialogue, along with internal and external factors, we should be taking into consideration the general critical factor — the global *COVID-19* pandemic, which has drastically changed the agenda of the European and global community, socio-economic situation. The pandemic has directly affected the intensity of the EU-Ukraine dialogue and the topics being discussed — political and diplomatic contacts have been restricted, a number of important meetings and consultations have been postponed (namely, the Association Council meeting), the number of Ukraine's political, informational and cultural activities in the EU has drastically reduced. Due to quarantine restrictions, overall activity of Ukraine's public diplomacy in Europe has decreased.

Noteworthy are expert opinions on the crucial components of political dialogue, — i.e. instruments for contacts with the EU. Experts prioritise (62%) high and top level visits and negotiations. Note that despite quarantine restrictions, this format of dialogue is being actively used — high-ranking European officials visited Ukraine and Ukrainian leaders visited Brussels. Next by importance according to experts (48%) are the EU-Ukraine annual summits. A summit is a crucial event in relations between Kyiv and Brussels, during which parties sum up the results and define near-term prospects for cooperation. Namely, in this sense, the latest 22nd EU-Ukraine summit (October 2020) can be considered a success.

Third place (44%) in the survey is taken by dialogue in the framework of EU missions (programmes) in Ukraine. This is one of the priority components in relations given the importance of assistance, for instance, in the framework of EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform in Ukraine, which has been active since 2014. The EU is also running a number of programmes aimed at supporting internal reforms in different sectors in Ukraine.

Other important formats of dialogue marked by experts include contacts on the level of ministries and government agencies (37%), cooperation in the framework of working bodies of Association (32%). Overall, these directions correspond with each other, as sectoral integration, which is implemented by respective executive agencies is an inseparable component of the Association Agreement, where progress and efficiency are controlled and adjusted by joint working bodies. Among other formats, experts also name relations on the level of diplomatic missions, inter-parliamentary contacts, dialogue on the expert level, etc.

Expert opinions on progress in achieving the goals of the political dialogue as per the Association Agreement form an intricate picture. *First*, experts more often support the idea (55%) that parties succeed in upholding the principles of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity in the framework of the dialogue. This is an unchanging and consistent shared position of Kyiv and Brussels, the crucial political component in opposing Russian aggression. Opinions divided almost in half regarding the following: a) deepening of political association and increasing political and security policy convergence and effectiveness; b) deepening of cooperation in the security and defence sector. Clearly, the state and prospects of EU-Ukraine partnership in policy and security sectors depend on many factors, which will be analysed below.

Rather critical are expert opinions on strengthening respect for democratic principles, the rule of law, good governance, and the contribution to consolidating domestic political reforms. This must be due to the sensitivity of the topic of democratic freedoms and legal system efficiency, as well as the topic of efficiency of Ukraine's domestic transformations, in EU-Ukraine relations. At the same time, this topic of democracy and the rule of law is also topical in EU member states, in particular, in view of sharp criticism of Poland's judicial system changes and internal processes in Hungary by the EU institutions.

Assessing progress in achieving the goals of political dialogue, experts gave mostly negative answers regarding parties' efforts in promoting international stability in general and achieving peace and security in Europe. This can be explained by the dangerous trends of increasing turbulence and conflict level, globally and regionally. We mean aggravation of antagonisms between key world players — USA, China, EU, Russia. For instance, lately, relations between Brussels and Moscow have reached a record low, especially after the failed visit of High Representative of the EU Josep Borrell to Moscow in February 2021.

At the same time, situation in Europe is further complicated by the long-lasting crisis in Belarus, opposition of pro-European and pro-Russian forces in Moldova. We should also remember

about the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, etc.

Current State and Specificity of Political Relations Between Kyiv and Brussels

In the broad sense, EU-Ukraine political relations are complex and include different areas of cooperation. Evolution of these relations, stages of their development are described in previous studies by the Razumkov Centre.[4] According to experts, what are the current state, specific aspects and quality of relations between Ukraine and the EU in the political plane?

Expert opinions in general are mixed due to the complex nature of relations between Kyiv and Brussels, internal factors, geopolitical circumstances, historical aspects, etc. Summarising expert assessments, we can single out positive and negative aspects. Describing EU-Ukraine political relations, respondents most often say that these relations are transparent and open. This is the view of the majority of respondents (55%).[5] Indeed, the political dialogue between partners has no back-room dealings, secret negotiations, non-transparent decisions. There are grounds to talk about the public nature of joint actions and cooperation in general.

Also, most often (49%) experts describe EU-Ukraine political relations as such that have a tendency to develop, grow stronger. This is an important moment that shows the upward dynamic of the partnership and strong future prospects. This assessment can be considered an asset of government's Eurointegration policy, foremost, given the instability and complexity of situation in Europe and the world.

Among the negative aspects, we should foremost consider the fact that most (68%) experts do not see EU-Ukraine relations as equitable. The reasons for this are understandable and come from the real state of affairs. *First*, objectively, socio-economic and scientific-technical potential of the two parties is significantly different, and Ukraine is the recipient of financial aid provided by the EU. *Second*, it is Ukraine that is willing to join the EU and adhere to European norms and standards, while the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement can be viewed as «homework» for Ukraine. *Third*, Ukraine, implementing its own policy, at least in Europe, takes EU's position as guidance to some degree. All of this creates certain «asymmetry» in relations.

In turn, 52% of experts express doubts as to the «sincerity and trust» in the political relations. Rather, in politics, we should be talking about pragmatism and mutual benefits. Obviously, Kyiv and Brussels are pursuing their own national interests. We can assume that experts' sceptical attitude to the «sincerity of relations» together with other motives, is to some degree due to the factor of national egoism and «vaccine isolationism» that surfaced during the pandemic not just in EU's relations with third countries, but within the EU itself.

Experts are generally critical of the efficiency of political relations between Kyiv and Brussels. We can assume that this is due to the shortcomings of government's Eurointegration policy, which were discussed above. At the same time, it is also clear that the EU is burdened by a set of urgent internal problems, which push the topic of Kyiv-Brussels partnership to the background. Also, one should take into account adverse external influences that indirectly affect the efficiency of Kyiv-Brussels partnership.

Study results allow to identify the complex of factors that hinder political relations between Kyiv and Brussels. Unsurprisingly, in this list of obstacles, experts rate «Ukraine's internal set of problems» first — 4.1 points.[6] This is a chronic issue in EU-Ukraine's relations. Corresponding documents by the European Commission and EU Parliament, joint resolutions of summits and Association Council meetings, high and top level negotiations results are largely focused on internal Ukrainian issues. In particular, this includes the insufficient level of anti-corruption work, imbalance in the system of anti-corruption bodies, imperfection of the judicial power reform, oligarchisation of the country, etc.

In the second place (3.7 points) — also an internal factor — «insufficient efficiency of the work of Ukrainian government bodies in the European direction, lack of professionals». In this context, we can remember the deficit of experience in cooperating with the EU in the

[4] See: Analytical report by the Razumkov Centre. Ukraine's European Integration: The Russian Factor. National Security and Defence Jornale, No.1-2, 2020, pp.3-6, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/eng/NSD181-182_2020_eng.pdf*.

[5] Hereinafter, we sum up the «yes» and «rather yes» or «no» and «rather no» answers.

[6] The 6-point scale, where «0» – does not hinder at all, «5» – hinders maximally.

new presidential team and in the MP corps, personnel policy issues and the imperfection of system that supports foreign relations in general. According to experts, these internal factors go in complex with the lack of strategy of the current Ukrainian leadership regarding Europe.

An important (3.6 points) negative factor is «Kremlin's hybrid aggression, opposition to Ukraine's Eurointegration progress».[7] Talking about the influence of the Russian factor, we need to mention the following. *First*, countering Russia's hybrid intervention requires major material and financial, human resources that could otherwise be efficiently used for the country's development, including progress towards Eurointegration. *Second*, the aggressor is using pro-Russian forces inside Ukraine, a network of influence agents to destabilise the internal situation, undermine trust in the current government, its Eurointegration course, instigate frustration regarding the European idea. *Third*, Russia is actively and consistently working in the EU, namely through right-wing radical and extremist movements, pro-Russian politicians and public activists to discredit Ukraine, its Eurointegration aspirations.

Also, experts talk about the internal situation in the EU, different attitude to Ukraine among member states. Clearly, top priority for the official Brussels is, on the one hand, preserving stability and security of the EU itself, overcoming the dangerous centrifugal trends connected with internal issues and conflicts. And on the other — advancing its own interests and strengthening its position in Europe and in the world. That said, despite joint support for Ukraine in countering Russian aggression, different EU member states have some differences in attitude towards Ukraine — e.g. the Baltic states and Poland act as Ukraine's allies and «advocates», while Italy and France tend to prefer restoring contacts with the Putin regime.

Among other factors that hinder EU-Ukraine relations, experts name adverse geopolitical trends, EU's unwillingness to deepen political association with Ukraine, and the lack of guarantees regarding future EU membership for Ukraine, etc. These factors are not secondary or insignificant, — they noticeably affect the state and prospects of Kyiv-Brussels relations. At the same time, note, that according to experts, relations are least hindered by the overall civilizational, cultural differences between Ukraine and the EU.

What will facilitate strengthening of EU-Ukraine political relations? Experts' answers to this question are based on the logic of previous answers. Thus, they believe that, ***the crucial direction is resolution of internal issues and implementation of real pro-European reforms*** (78%). After that, respondents place strengthening of economic partnership, effective sectoral integration (41%). No less important (40%) is deepening cooperation in the security and defence sector (which is a clear priority for Ukraine in the situation of dealing with Russian aggression). This corresponds to the other point, which includes intensification of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration. Note, that among measures meant to strengthen political relations between Ukraine and the EU, many experts (31%) name defining Ukraine's EU membership prospects.

Reality and Trends of Political Association

An association in simplified form means an alliance of parties where they preserve their independence and self-government. In the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement this term is not clearly defined, instead, only general association goals are set. So does a political

[7] This topic is analysed in more detail in the analytical report by the Razumkov Centre «Ukraine's European Integration: The Russian Factor». — National Security and Defence Journal, No.1-2, 2020, pp.23-66, — *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/eng/NSD181-182_2020_eng.pdf.*

alliance of Kyiv and Brussels really exist? ***Most (67%) representatives of Ukrainian expert community believe that EU-Ukraine political association does exist in part.*** This position can be explained by the fact that on the one hand, Kyiv coordinates its political positions and actions in a number of foreign policy areas with Brussels, there is a consistent policy of Ukraine joining EU statements and decisions. Thus, there are reasons to say that elements of association (alliance) are present. Yet on the other hand, Ukraine is not a member of the EU, is not taking part in developing important foreign policy decisions, but rather is following in the footsteps of the EU's policy.

Another thing is clear though: in today's atmosphere of exacerbating geopolitical confrontation, national isolationism, legal nihilism on the state level, it is utterly important that Ukraine preserves and strengthens solidarity and association with the EU as leverage for internal reforms and the main instrument in its fight against Russian aggression.

Half of experts (50%) say that the EU is interested in political association with Ukraine to varying degrees. 36% of respondents had their doubts. Obviously, even from the standpoint of purely practical benefits, the EU (foremost, Eastern European countries) is interested in a stable, democratically developed and «pro-Western» Ukraine at its borders. This is what European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership project are aiming to achieve. Unfortunately, at the moment Brussels views Ukraine more as a closest ally and a partner, not a member of the European Union.

Experts are generally reserved in their assessment of the level of progress in achieving the overall goals of EU-Ukraine association, as per the Association Agreement. In their opinion, the level of progress in four out of six goals is 3 points on the five-point scale.[8] These include: rapprochement between the Parties and Ukraine's participation in EU programmes and agencies; ensuring enhanced political dialogue; introducing conditions for deeper trade and economic relations; development of cooperation in other areas.

Somewhat lower assessment was given by experts to ensuring the rule of law and respect for human rights (2.9 points), and preservation of peace and stability in the regional and international plane (2.7 points).

Summarising these results, we would like to note the following. *First*, it is clear that experts record an «intermediate» state of progress towards the defined goals. We have five more years of Association Agreement implementation ahead of us. Thus, we are rather talking about the pace of progress towards the defined reference points. Note that the goals are worded in a general way and in this context we have to pay attention to a number of specific indicators (including appendices), contained in different sections of the Agreement. *Second*, experts' reserved attitude about the level of progress in achieving association goals is foremost due to the slow pace of Eurointegration and the current state of Kyiv-Brussels relations. In particular, while the political dialogue is rather active, Ukraine's participation in EU agencies is not satisfactory. At the same time, Ukrainian manufacturers' ability to access EU's internal market is limited, there are issues with ensuring the rule of law. *Third*, most critical are assessments of preservation of peace and stability on the continent. As noted above, the security component of EU-Ukraine relations is the most important and most problematic one.

Regarding security issues, pay attention to the following results of the expert study. 89% of experts are convinced that Title II of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement dedicated to cooperation in foreign and security policy must be updated and further elaborated given the current situation, namely, Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine. Indeed, by contrast with others, this Agreement section is extremely concise, has overly general framework nature, and fails to match the current situation in the security sector. But this is a topic for another study.

Prospects of EU-Ukraine Relations

Assessing the prospects of Kyiv-Brussels relations in the next few years, experts most often (54%) underline that these relations

[8] The 5-point scale, where «1» – minimal achievements, «5» – goal achieved.

will remain without change. This should hardly be viewed as the «death sentence» of Eurointegration, as the partnership in its current form has a tendency for development and strengthening. However, another thing is clear: the pace of Eurointegration, in experts' view, is not satisfactory, and thus efficient measures are necessary to intensify EU-Ukraine cooperation. A third (33%) of respondents are more optimistic, and predict an improvement of relations in the near future. Only 8% of respondents predict a deterioration of contacts between Kyiv and Brussels.

This can be explained by the fact that in the near future we are not expecting any «breakthroughs» or drastic changes in EU-Ukraine relations, like the introduction of visa-free travel for Ukrainians. There will be day-to-day work on implementation of the Association Agreement. In general, the following areas of cooperation may be singled out: a) an update of the Association Agreement with the view of liberalisation and overcoming barriers in mutual trade; b) sectoral integration, namely, introduction of «industrial visa liberalisation», Ukraine entering EU's energy and digital markets, joining the European Green Deal, etc.; c) joint counteraction against Russia's aggression, which is becoming ever more relevant as Russia increases the count of its military forces on Ukrainian borders.

Thus, we are talking about practical short-term prospects. That said, it is unclear how Kyiv-Brussels contacts will progress after the Association Agreement expires. ***There are grounds to talk about the lack of clearly defined strategic goals in the EU-Ukraine relations.*** Remember that while containing the general formula of political association and economic integration between the EU and Ukraine, the Association Agreement does not provide any prospects of EU accession.

Lately, Ukraine has been increasingly more vocal with Brussels regarding defining clear prospects of its membership in the EU. Thus, should the issue of Ukraine's membership in the EU be put on the agenda of official negotiations with the EU? Most representatives of the expert community answer this question positively — 71% (in 2020 — 65%). 14% of respondents believe that this is unnecessary.

This position is understandable, as the «vacuum» in strategic prospects of Eurointegration is the factor that slows down and deters our movement towards the EU, disorients the public, plays into Eurosceptics' hands. Obviously, a formalised and approved membership prospect will have a powerful galvanising effect on the Ukrainian society.

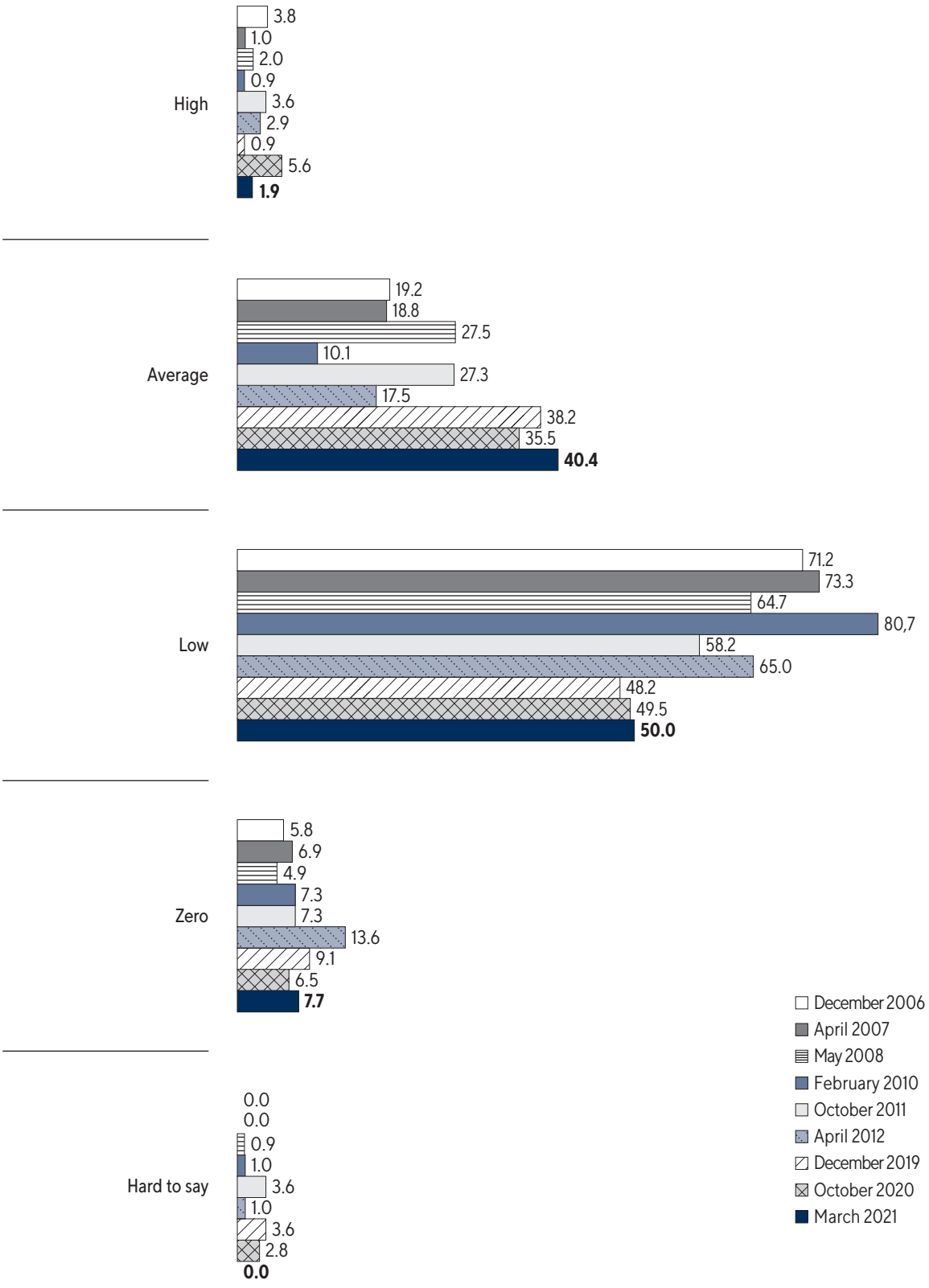
At the same time, we need to acknowledge that EU member states do not have a unified position on this issue, in the European community there is noticeable scepticism regarding the prospect of integrating Ukraine in the EU. Numerous reasons for this include issues from EU prioritising its internal problems to destructive Russian influence aimed at discrediting Ukraine.

Summarising survey results, we would like to note the following. Experts are rather critical about the pace of European integration, government actions in the European direction, overall political relations between Ukraine and the EU. This is determined by external circumstances, as well as internal factors. So, the work on progress towards the EU must be intensified and improved.

At the same time, the main outcome of this study is that despite critical assessments, there is predominantly stable and consistent support of Ukraine's Eurointegration course, the idea of full-fledged accession to the European community among Ukrainian experts. 80% of experts support Ukraine's EU membership (in 2019-2020 — 78%). It is important that pro-European sentiment is also prevalent among Ukrainian citizens.

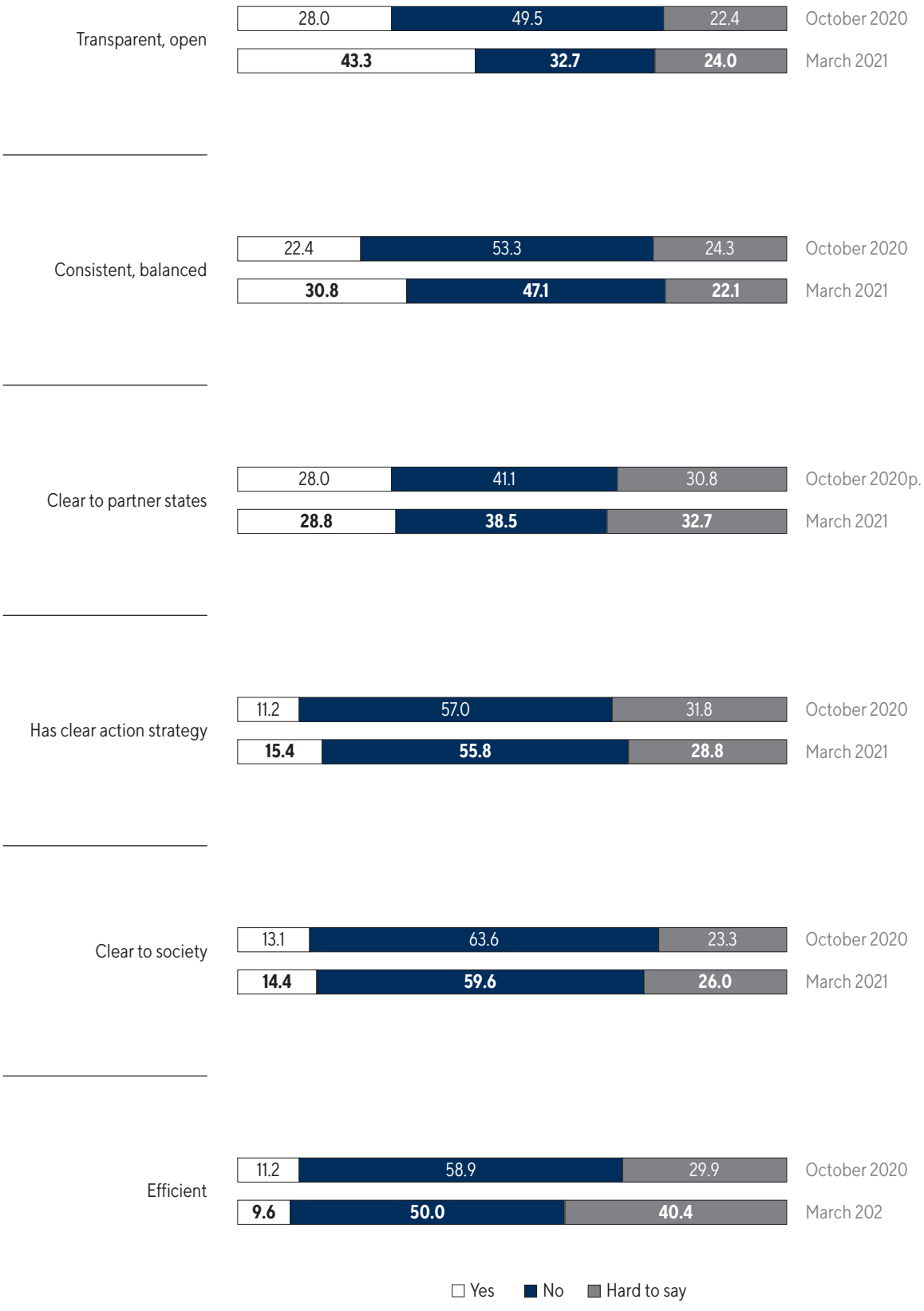
HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE PACE OF UKRAINE'S INTEGRATION INTO THE EU?

% polled experts



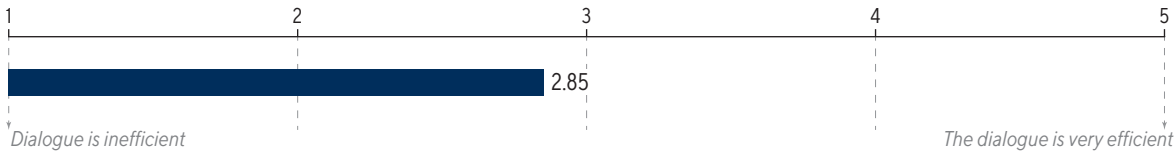
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE EUROINTEGRATION POLICY OF CURRENT UKRAINIAN LEADERSHIP?

% polled experts



WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFICIENCY OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN UKRAINE AND THE EU?*

average score

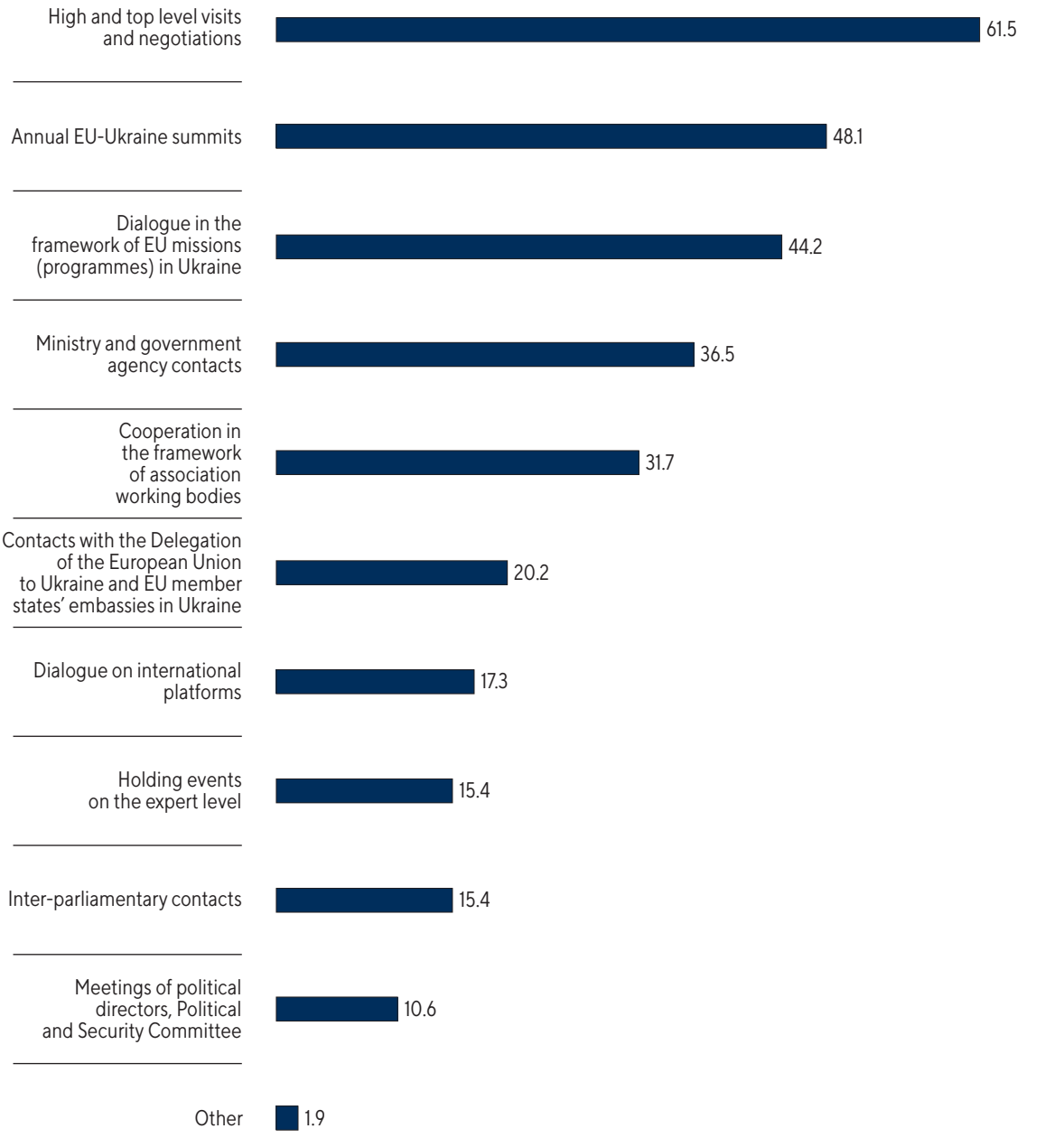


March 2021

* «5» – very efficient, «1» – inefficient

WHAT COMPONENTS OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN UKRAINE AND THE EU ARE MOST IMPORTANT?*

% polled experts

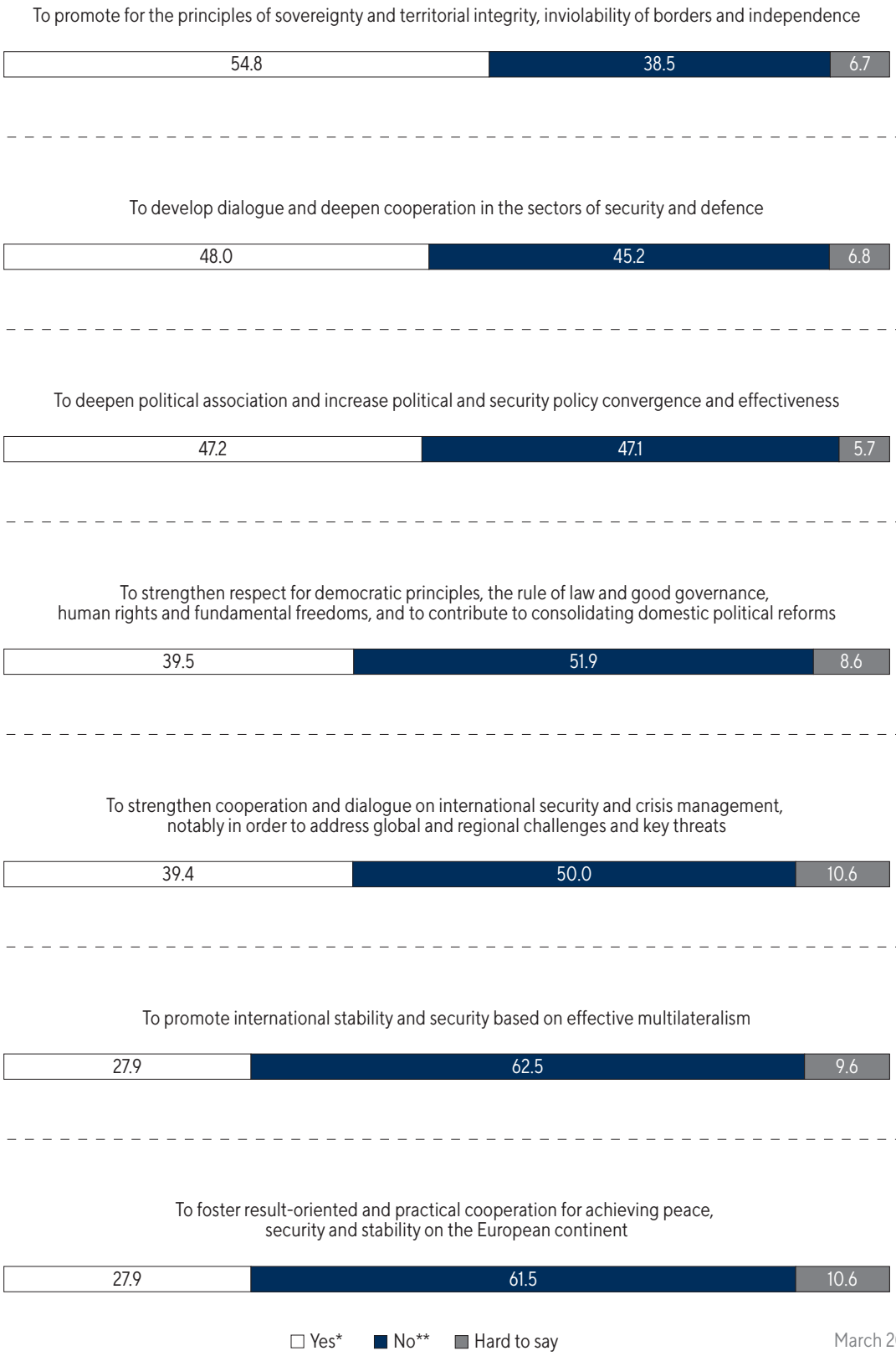


March 2021

* Three relevant options.

HAVE THE GOALS OF THE EU-UKRAINE POLITICAL DIALOGUE, AS DEFINED IN THE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT, BEEN ACHIEVED?

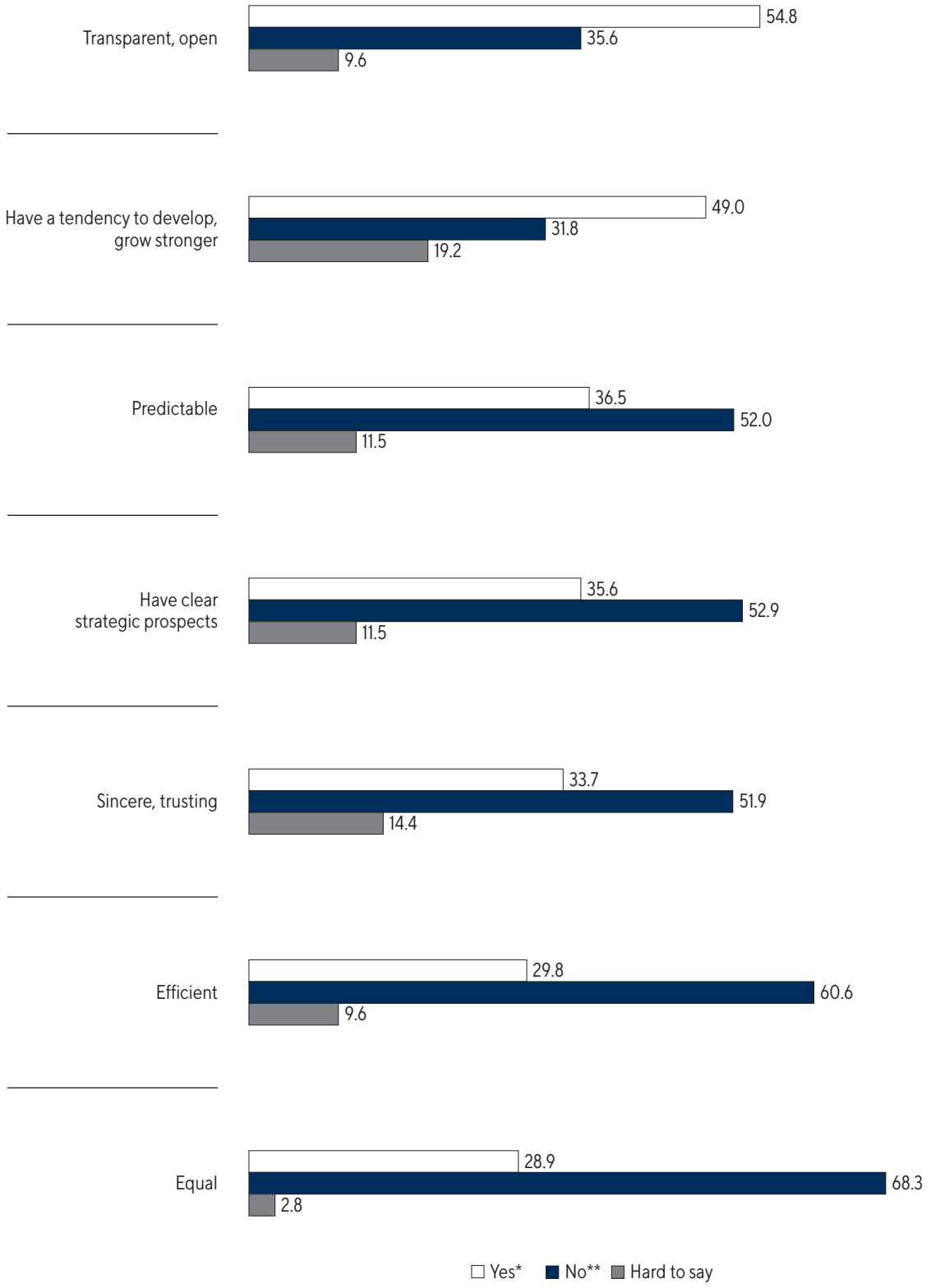
% polled experts



* The sum of the answer options «yes» and «rather yes».
** The sum of the answers «no» and «rather no».

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EU AND UKRAINE?

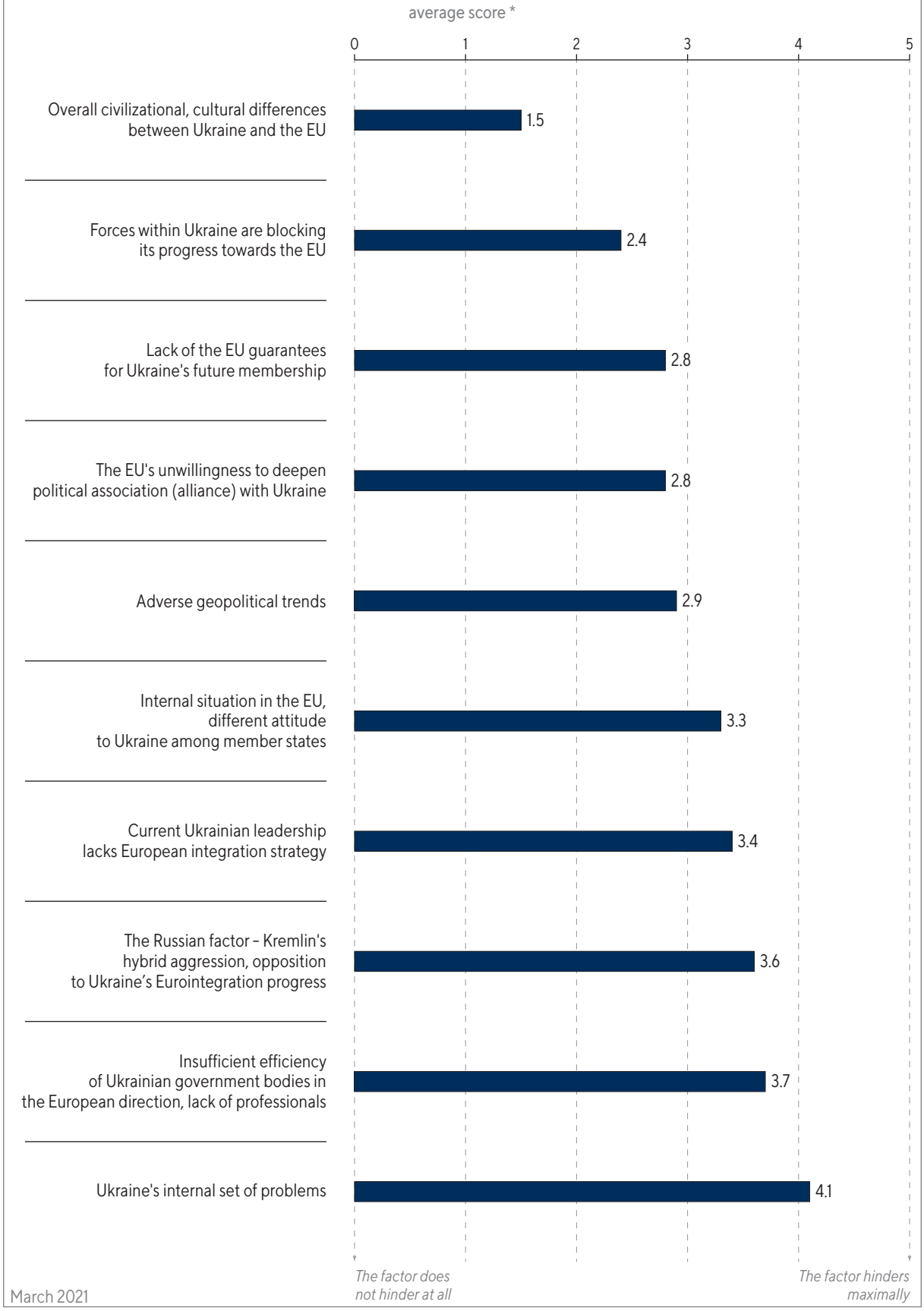
% polled experts



* The sum of the answer options «yes» and «rather yes».
** The sum of the answer options «no» and ««rather no».

March 2021

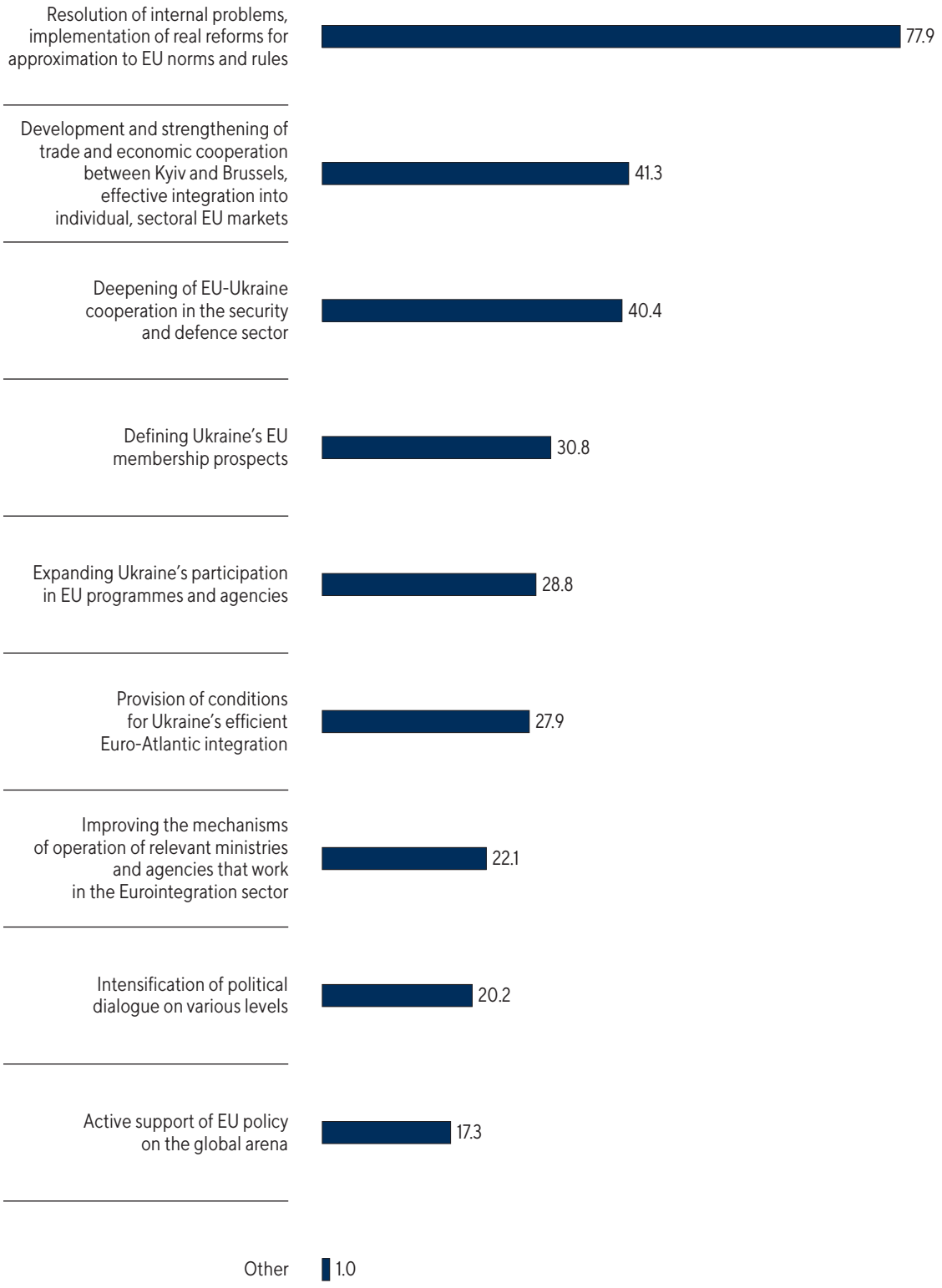
TO WHAT EXTENT DO THESE FACTORS HINDER THE EU-UKRAINE POLITICAL RELATIONS?



* «0» – does not hinder, «5» – hinders maximally

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT MEASURES WILL FACILITATE STRENGTHENING OF THE EU-UKRAINE POLITICAL RELATIONS MOST?*

% polled experts

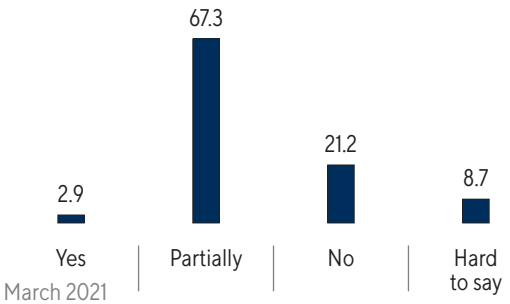


March 2021

* Three relevant options.

IS THERE REAL POLITICAL ASSOCIATION (ALLIANCE) OF THE EU AND UKRAINE ?

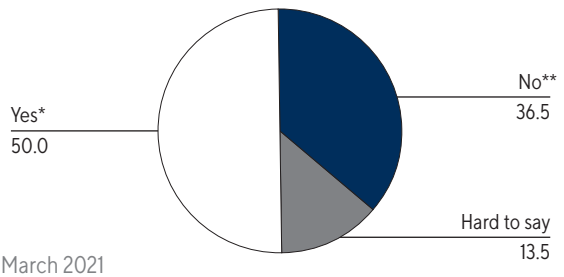
% polled experts



March 2021

IS THE EU INTERESTED IN POLITICAL ASSOCIATION (ALLIANCE) WITH UKRAINE?

% polled experts

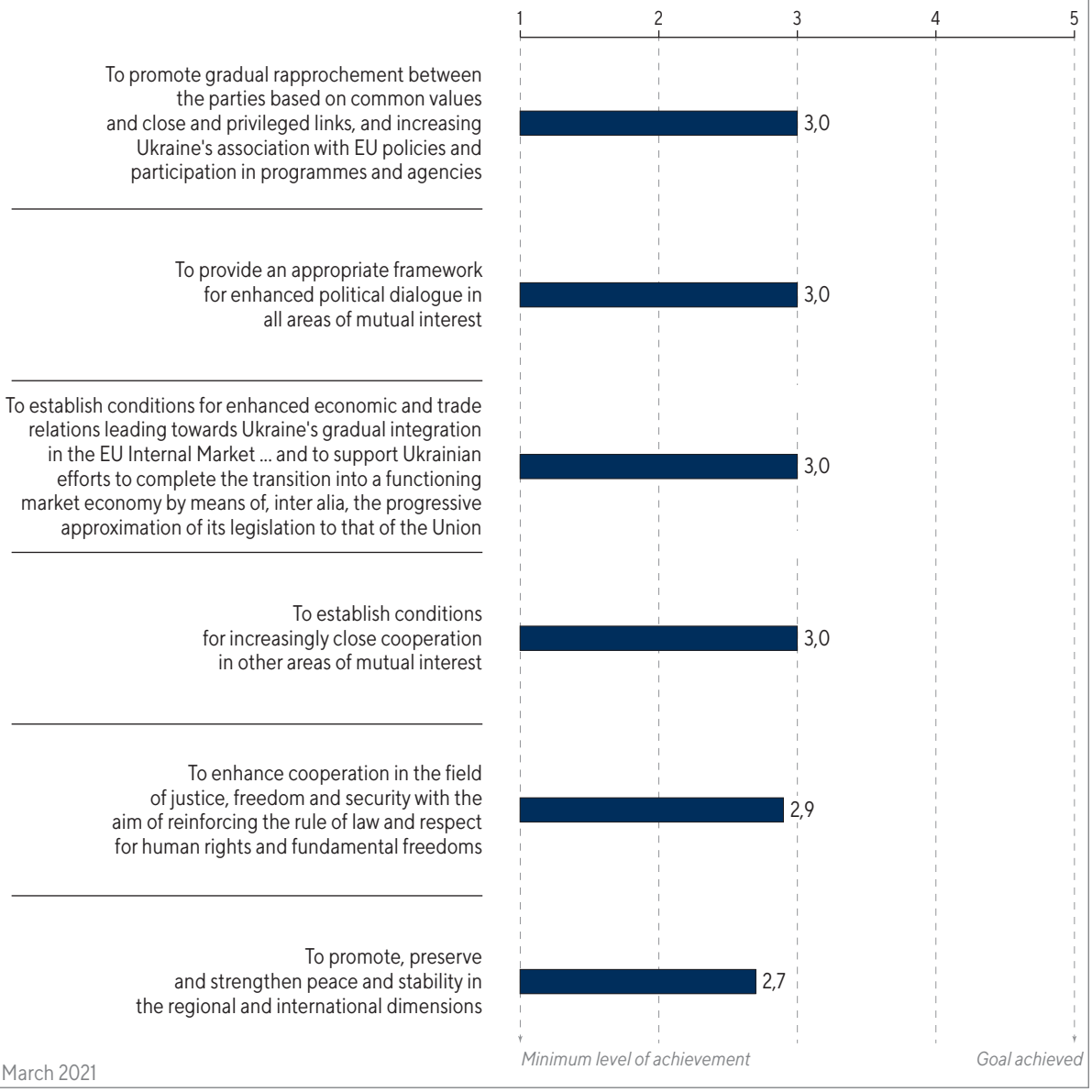


March 2021

* The sum of the answer options «yes» and «rather yes».
** The sum of the answer options «no» and «rather no».

HOW WOULD YOU EVALUATE THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT OF OVERALL EU-UKRAINE ASSOCIATION GOALS, AS DEFINED IN THE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT?

average score *

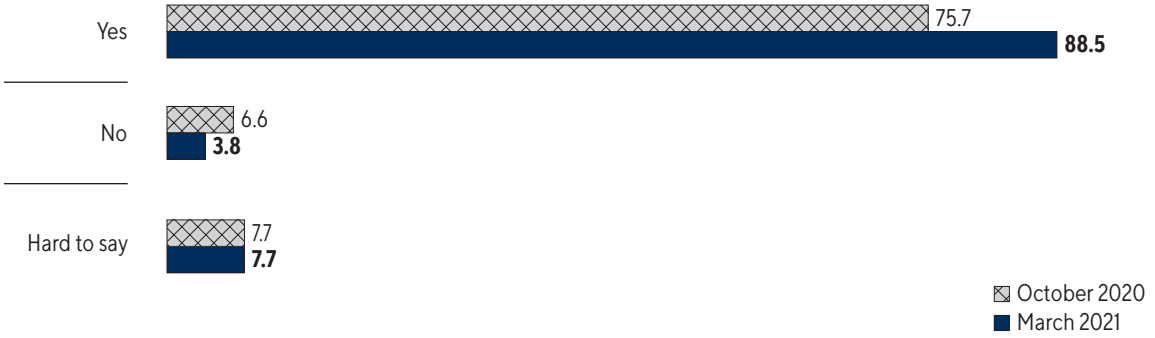


March 2021

* The 5-point scale, where «1» – minimal achievement, «5» – goal achieved

DO PARTIES NEED TO UPDATE AND SPECIFY CHAPTER II OF THE EU-UKRAINE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT ON COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY, IN VIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION, IN PARTICULAR, RUSSIAN MILITARY AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE?

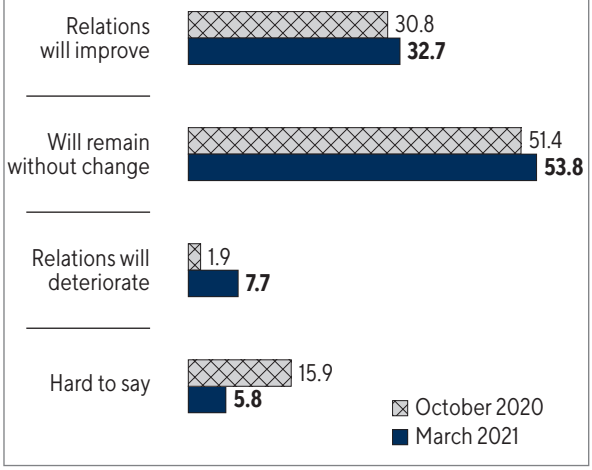
% polled experts



* The sum of the answer options «yes» and «rather yes».
** The sum of the answer options «no» and «rather no».

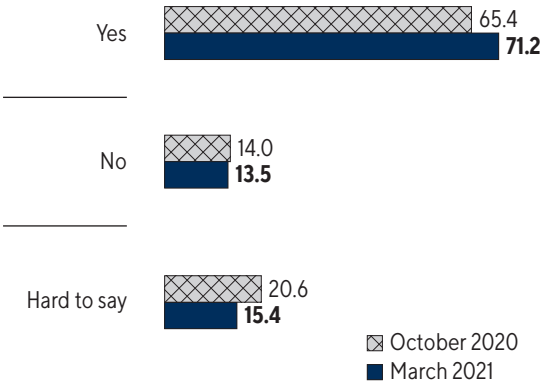
HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE PROSPECTS OF EU-UKRAINE RELATIONS DEVELOPMENT IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

% polled experts



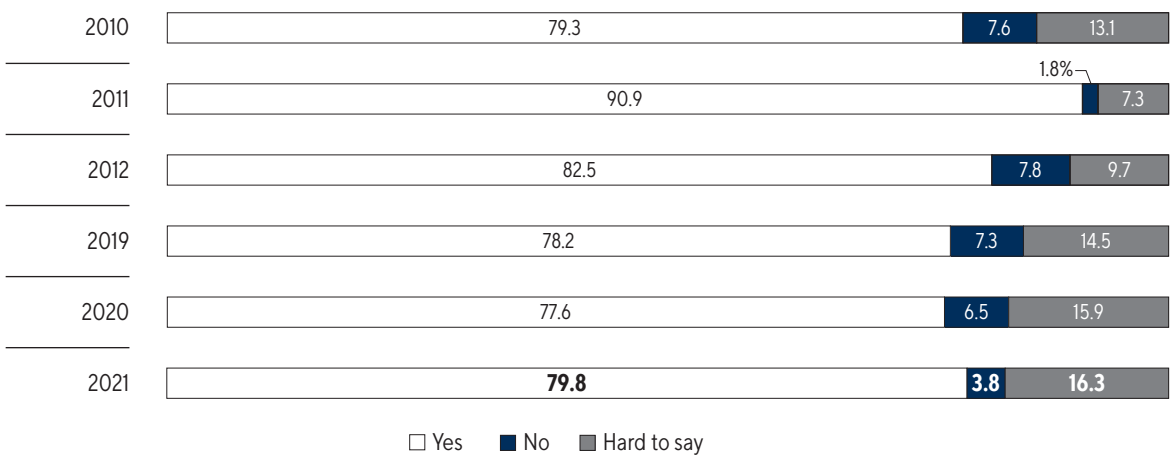
IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE EU, DOES UKRAINE NEED TO OFFICIALLY RAISE THE QUESTION OF DEFINING ITS EU MEMBERSHIP PROSPECTS?

% polled experts



DOES UKRAINE NEED TO JOIN TO THE EUROPEAN UNION?

% polled experts



UKRAINE'S MOVEMENT TO THE EU: CITIZEN OPINIONS AND ASSESSMENTS

This survey was done as part of project «Ukraine-EU: Factors and Prospects of Political Association», which is a continuation of previous sociological studies of the Razumkov Centre dedicated to the topic of European integration.[1] The goal of the study was to find out Ukrainian citizens' views, follow the dynamic of their assessments of the state of current relations between Kyiv and Brussels, pace and nature of European integration, factors slowing down Ukraine's progress to the European community. The Razumkov Centrel also assessed the level of social support for Ukraine's accession to the EU, prospects of future Kyiv-Brussels relations.

This local survey, obviously, does not claim to determine the full picture of citizen positions. Rather, we are presenting certain important trends in social opinions regarding EU-Ukraine partnership. At the same time, the received results have value both, from the point of view of dynamics of respondents' answers in view of latest events in EU-Ukraine relations, as well as in the context of regional specificity of respondents' attitudes to European integration of Ukraine.[2]

Study results allow to make a number of observations and conclusions.

Aspects of Kyiv-Brussels Relations

During the entire period of study (2005-2021), Ukrainian citizens most often viewed Kyiv-Brussels relations as unstable. This is a generally steady trend. Even in 2005, in times of the post-Orange Revolution surge of «euro-optimism» and accession to power of the team of euro-integrators, the highest level of positive assessments of EU-Ukraine relations recorded was 35%. Even then, 43% of respondents described them as «unstable».

In March 2021, compared to previous study (November 2020), respondents' assessments did not change drastically. A half of respondents (50%) describe Kyiv-Brussels relations as «unstable», 16% as «good» and 17% as «bad».

Such diverging assessments are due to both internal factors (some of them – of chronic nature), as well as external circumstances. First, unsteadiness in relations with the EU is largely caused by Ukraine's own problems – namely, unsatisfactory anti-corruption work, slow judiciary reforms, low level of socio-economic development, etc. Internal conflicts in Ukraine further complicate its relations with the EU.

In this context, we should pay attention to the noticeable increase of negative assessments of EU-Ukraine relations in November 2020, which comes from the fact that in October 2020 the Constitutional Court of Ukraine made a controversial, politicised decision in the incredibly sensitive anti-corruption sector. This caused a sharp negative reaction from the official Brussels, and it was then that numerous apocalyptic forecasts regarding the collapse of relations with the EU appeared in Ukrainian media. That said, the situation around the Constitutional Court still remains unsettled.

Second, it is obvious that Kyiv-Brussels relations are affected by internal problems in the EU. This includes dangerous centrifugal trends that developed in the aftermath of the migrant crisis, and due to increasing influence of right-wing radical movements. We have been observing growth of «national egoism» and isolationism in the EU.

Third, in Europe as well as in the world in general, confrontation and unrest have been on the increase. This cannot but affect contacts between Kyiv and Brussels, which depend on the global environment.

[1] The study was conducted by the Sociological Service of the Razumkov Centre from 5 to 9 March 2021 in all regions of Ukraine, except Crimea and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Number of respondents – 2018, age – from 18 y.o. Theoretical error of the sample – 2.3%.

Materials also utilise results of previous surveys by the Razumkov Centre.

[2] The following regional division of oblasts is applied: West: Volyn, Zakarpattya, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Chernivtsi oblasts; Centre: Kyiv City, Vinnytsya, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Sumy, Khmelnytskiy, Cherkasy, Chernihiv oblasts; South: Mykolayiv, Odesa, Kherson oblasts; East: Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhya, Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (except for the occupied territories).

Fourth, COVID-19 pandemic became a new adverse factor, which restricted both official political and diplomatic exchange between Ukraine and the EU, as well as tourism and interpersonal contacts due to the introduction of strict quarantine on EU borders.

Talking about regional differences in respondents' opinions we should pay attention to local specificity. In the West and Centre, people most often describe Kyiv-Brussels relations as unstable (61% and 50%, respectively). In the South and East, compared to other regions, somewhat more respondents describe these relations as «bad» — 18% and 25%, respectively.

Pace of Integration in the EU

The general assessment picture of the state of EU-Ukraine relations is obviously tied to characteristics of the pace of Ukraine's movement towards the European community. Most often, respondents agree that the pace of Ukraine's movement towards the EU is slow. However, compared to the previous study, there is a slight growth of positive assessments. Namely, the share of answers that assessed Ukraine's movement tempo as «medium» grew from 23% to 30%, and «low» — decreased from 44% to 38%. Yet, this does not significantly affect the overall dynamics of people's opinions on the pace of Ukraine's movement to the EU.

Outlining general social sentiment in the past years, it is worth to note that citizens overall are not satisfied with the pace of Eurointegration, more often describing it as «low». The range of such assessments is from 55% in November 2009 to 38% in 2021. There are numerous reasons for scepticism. One the one hand, the announced by Ukrainian government Eurointegration course was rather a «declaration of intent» than a clear programme of practical actions. Meanwhile, in everyday life there is a lack of specific visible results in EU-Ukraine cooperation. This is experienced particularly acutely today, in the midst of the pandemic.

Ukrainian citizens are aware of the major socio-economic gap between Ukraine and the EU. Overall, the fact that our country falls behind EU member states (coupled with long-term information aggression by Russia) discredits the European idea inside the country, fuelling disappointment and despondency regarding Eurointegration in the society.

Looking at regions, overall, there are no dramatic differences. However, note that respondents in South and East of the country are more critical with a noticeably higher level of negative assessments. While 10% and 14% of residents in West and Centre describe the pace of Eurointegration as «zero», in East and South — these figures are 27% each.

Given the critical descriptions of the nature and pace of Eurointegration, it is logical to ask about the barriers that stand in the way of Ukraine's movement towards Europe. So, what factors, according to citizens, are the strongest obstacles to Ukraine's Eurointegration progress?

Factors Hindering Eurointegration

Summarising data from latest surveys (2019-2021), we would like to note that in the hierarchy of adverse factors that hamper the development of contacts with the EU, respondents consistently place the high level of corruption in Ukraine first. Also, the «weight» of this factor has been growing in the past three years — 58% — 65% — 72%. Such assessments by citizens fully correspond with statements and declarations of official EU structures regarding Ukraine, where this problem is defined as the crucial one in the context of further development of Kyiv-Brussels partnership, as well as in regard to Ukraine's internal development. Obviously, the unsatisfactory level of fighting corruption, imbalance in the system of anti-corruption bodies is a chronic problem, which manifests itself as the strongest obstacle in the Eurointegration process that adversely affects the atmosphere and nature of relations between the EU and Ukraine.

Another internal obstacle on the way to the EU, according to respondents, is the low level of economic development and insufficient pace of reforms (respective assessment dynamic —53% — 52% — 57%). This factor complicates trade and economic contacts between Kyiv and Brussels, integration in different sectors of cooperation, and the overall implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.[3] In contrast to the previous study, here, respondents placed third the problem of democracy in Ukraine, the level of which fails to match that in Europe. This is another problem area in relations between Kyiv and Brussels, connected with efficiency of state institutions in ensuring reliable protection of citizen rights and freedoms.

[3] For more information, see: Ukraine's Sectoral Integration into the EU: Preconditions, Prospects, Challenges. – The Razumkov Centre, Kyiv, 2020. pp.3-55, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2021_sektor_eu_eng.pdf.*

Along with internal issues, citizens single out a number of external factors that slow down Eurointegration. First of all, it is the hybrid war waged by Kremlin against Ukraine. 28% of respondents chose this option. Resisting Russian aggression requires major material and monetary, human resources, political and diplomatic effort, which could otherwise be used to achieve stronger results in European integration.[4] Thus, the long-lasting hybrid war waged by Kremlin against Ukraine is not only exhausting our human and economic potential, and slowing down Ukraine's progress towards Europe, but is also complicating the internal situation within the country, weakening its standing on the international arena, etc.

21% of respondents emphasise Moscow's attempts to block Kyiv's Eurointegration path. Interfering with Ukraine's movement to the EU is the main reason and motivation for Russia's aggression. Kremlin has engaged its entire hybrid war armoury to keep Ukraine within its «zone of privileged interest» and forcefully re-orient Ukraine from Europe to Eurasia.

Also noteworthy is that every fifth (20%) respondent is convinced that the EU does not want to come into conflict with Russia because of Ukraine. On the one hand, such thoughts are reasonable given the rather widespread pro-Russian sentiment in the EU (also nourished through the network of «influence agents»), pro-Russian, extremist movements, which shatter the stability of the EU's political system.

And, on the other hand, it is very clear that lately EU-Russia relations have been in a critical state, reaching their lowest in the entire modern history of relations between Brussels and Moscow. The EU is doing its best to avoid a large-scale escalation of conflict with the aggressively imperial Russia, leaving window for dialogue. That said, official Brussels is maintaining consistent and rather clear policy of condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine, demanding liberation of the occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine and not recognising the illegal annexation of Crimea. The EU provides considerable financial and economic assistance to Ukraine and introduces corresponding sanctions against Russia.

Together with the factors above, a large part of respondents (24%) notes the EU's unpreparedness to integrate Ukraine. This opinion has likely developed due to the fact that official Brussels is avoiding dialogue with Kyiv on clear definition of Ukraine's EU membership conditions and prospects. The EU, burdened by internal problems and threats, is now mostly focused on overcoming them. This largely cancels out the significance of the Ukraine topic. Also, top-priority issues nowadays both for Ukraine and the EU are issues related to the global pandemic response.

On the regional level, citizen opinions showed both, similarities and certain differences. Thus, in all regions, respondents most often said that the main obstacles to Ukraine's progress towards the EU are corruption issues and low level of economic development. However, while in the West and Centre, third most important adverse factor was the hybrid war waged by Russia, respondents in the East and South thought that the fact that Ukraine's democracy level is incompatible with that of the EU and EU's unpreparedness to integrate Ukraine were more important. Note that in the East, the Russia factor is named noticeably less often than on the average in Ukraine, and the cultural differences from the EU — more often.

Eurointegration Prospects

Movement towards the EU, enshrined in the Constitution, is the basic pubic narrative, the ideological position of most top political parties in Ukraine. Based on the latest survey, 59% of citizens believe that Ukraine has to become a member of the EU. Overall in the society, the idea of Ukraine's accession to the EU is steadily prevalent.

In almost twenty years (2002-2021), there have been several instances of a certain decrease of the level of support for Ukraine's accession to the EU (minimal — 40% was recorded in September 2005). At the same time, maximum support was recorded in November 2002 — 65%. Thus, we can acknowledge domination of pro-European sentiment, despite the complicated and dramatic history of our movement to the European community.

Since 2014, a stable majority of Ukrainian citizens support the country's accession to the EU. Russia's aggression aimed at derailing our Eurointegration movement and ensuring control over Ukraine obviously increased pro-European and Euro-Atlantic preferences in the

[4] For more information, see: Ukraine's European Integration: The Russian Factor. Analytical report by the Razumkov Centre. – National Security and Defence Jornale, No.1-2, 2020. pp.2-65, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/eng/NSD181-182_2020_eng.pdf.*

Ukrainian society. Overall, during the seven years of war, major changes have taken place in the public perception of geopolitical orientations (among other things). This manifests itself in two clear trends: scepticism regarding «the peaceful nature of brotherly Russia» and the increasing awareness of the importance and lack of alternative to Ukraine's Eurointegration course. Without doubt, the basis and the backbone of Ukraine's Eurointegration course is conscious and steady support of its citizens, their civilizational choice in favour of EU integration.

However, we cannot but talk about noticeable regional differences. Traditionally, the highest level of support for EU accession is in the West of the country. In March 2021, percentage of EU accession supporters in this region was 84%. Residents of the Centre also demonstrated clear prevalence of pro-European preferences — 63%.

However, in the South and the East the situation is different. In the South, respondents' opinions divided in half — 42% each, of those pro and against EU accession. In turn, in the East, respondents stand against Ukraine's accession to the EU somewhat more often — 46% and 38%, respectively. This can be explained by a number of external and internal factors — namely, the remains of certain socio-cultural traditions in Ukrainian oblasts bordering on Russia, habitual geopolitical orientations, foremost in older people, including pro-Russian preferences, psychological exhaustion from the military conflict going on nearby, as well as disorientation as a result of Russia's information aggression.

An important gauge of people's attitudes is their readiness to take part and vote in the hypothetical referendum on Ukraine's accession to the EU. Thus, if such a referendum were to take place in the near future, 72% of Ukrainian citizens would vote in it. Out of them, 80% would vote for Ukraine's accession to the EU. This is a rather telling result, which shows that most citizens support the country's Eurointegration course and see Ukraine's future as a full-fledged member of the European community.

Obviously, today it is hard to make predictions regarding the prospects of Kyiv-Brussels relations, namely, on further steps in Eurointegration and the timeframe of Ukraine's accession. As emphasised above, this is conditional upon many internal and external circumstances. Citizen assessments of development of Kyiv-Brussels' relations in the next few years — varied. Most often (39%), respondents said that relations will remain unchanged. On the one hand, one might view this opinion as sceptical, as overall, this means stagnation of contacts and lack of movement forward.

But on the other, amidst negative global and regional dynamics, increasing complexity of socio-economic environment on the European continent, — steady and unchanging nature of partnership is not a negative factor. Moreover, if we are talking about EU's unchanging policy regarding political solidarity and economic support of Ukraine in countering Russian aggression, extension of anti-Russia sanctions, etc. Therefore, in this context, no change is also a good factor.

26% of respondents are convinced that EU-Ukraine relations will improve. We can assume that such favourable prognosis is based on the currently ongoing active political and diplomatic dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels, the start of process of updating the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, progress in launching «industrial visa liberalisation», more active cooperation with the EU in various sectors, etc.

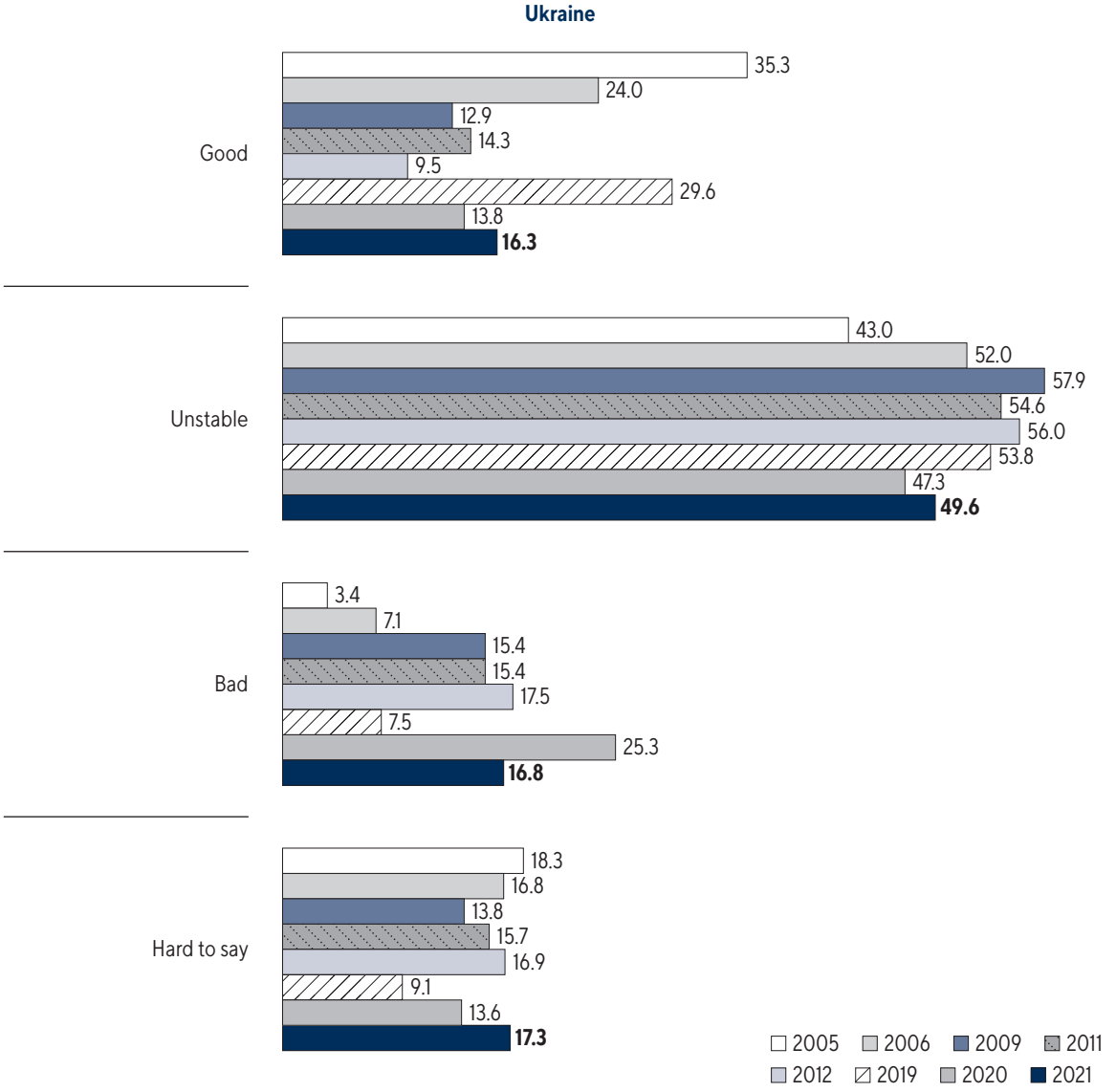
Only each tenth respondent (10%) predicts deterioration of relations.

Summarising survey results, we would like to note that Ukrainian citizens are rather critical in their assessment of the state of EU-Ukraine relations, and of the overall pace of Eurointegration. In their opinion, this is caused by a number of internal and external factors, among which respondents foremost single out the problem of corruption and low level of economic development. Among external factors that slow down Eurointegration progress is Russian hybrid aggression.

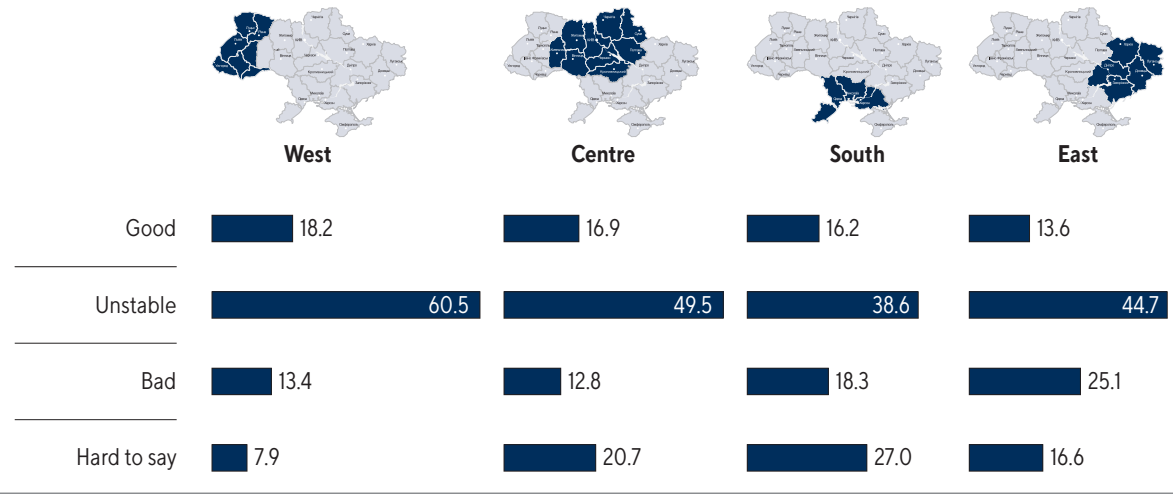
But main thing is that support of pro-European course and accession to the EU are steadily prevalent in the Ukrainian society.

HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS PRESENT RELATIONS BETWEEN UKRAINE AND THE EU?

% of respondents

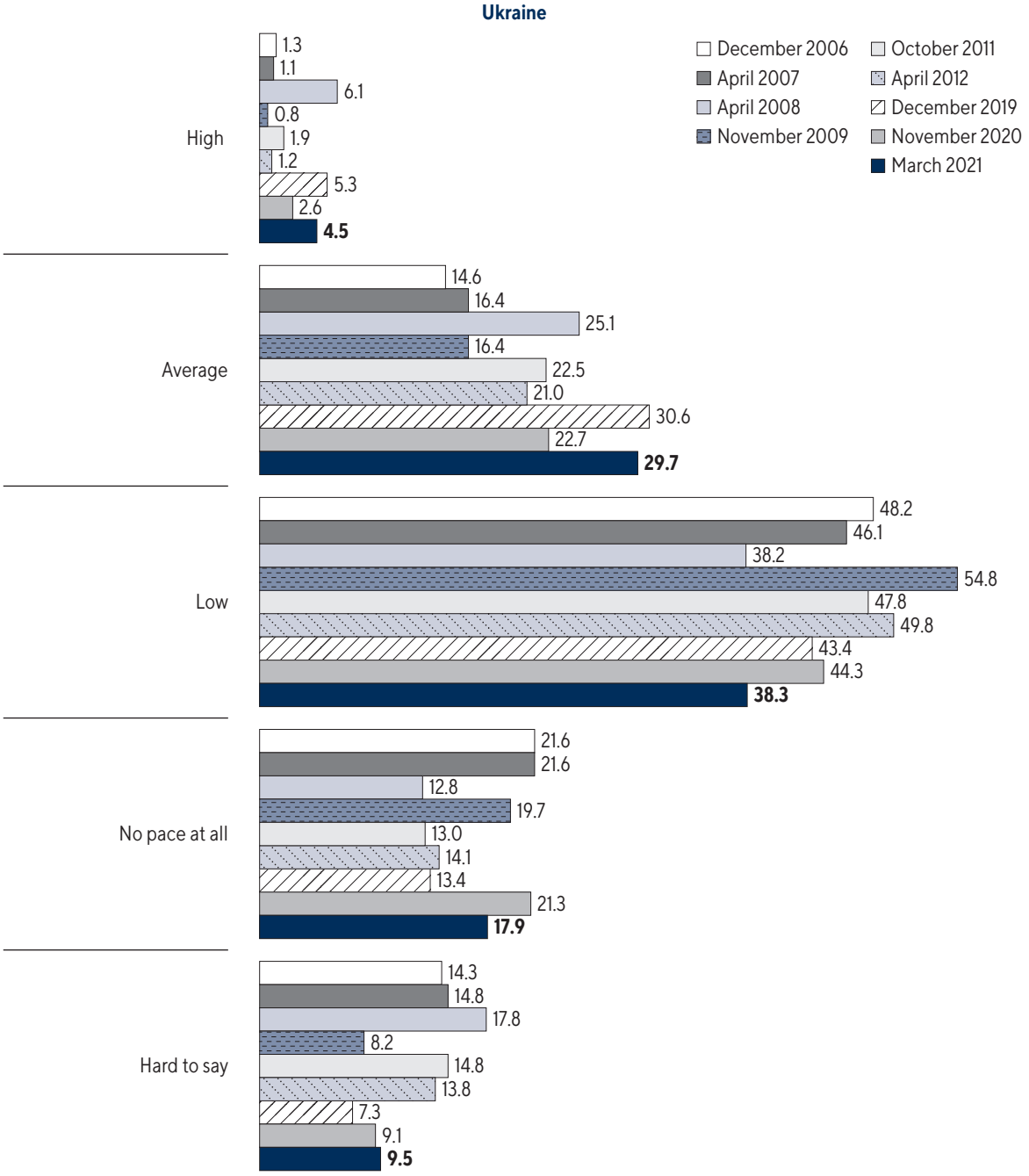


REGIONS (2021)

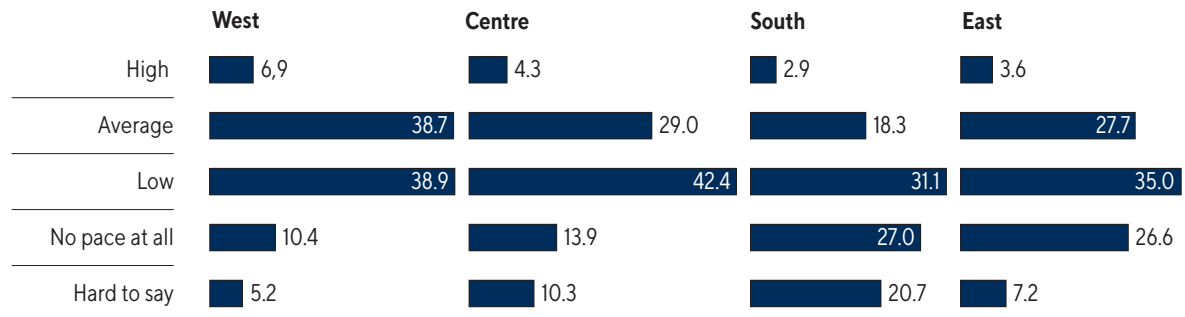


HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE PACE OF UKRAINE'S INTEGRATION TO THE EU?

% of respondents

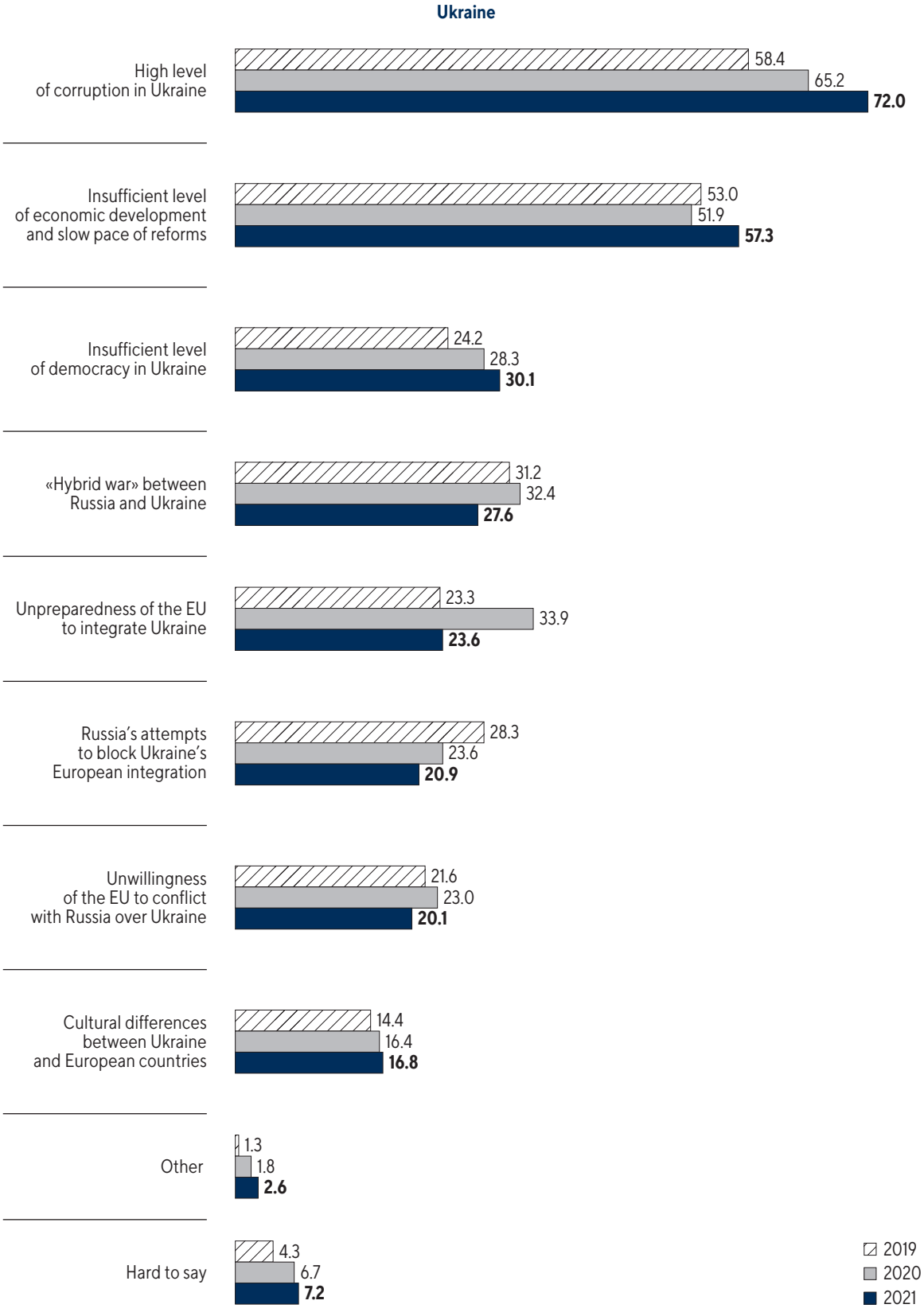


REGIONS (March 2021)



WHAT FACTORS HINDER UKRAINE'S INTEGRATION TO THE EU THE MOST? *

% of respondents



* All relevant options.

WHAT FACTORS HINDER UKRAINE'S INTEGRATION TO THE EU THE MOST?*

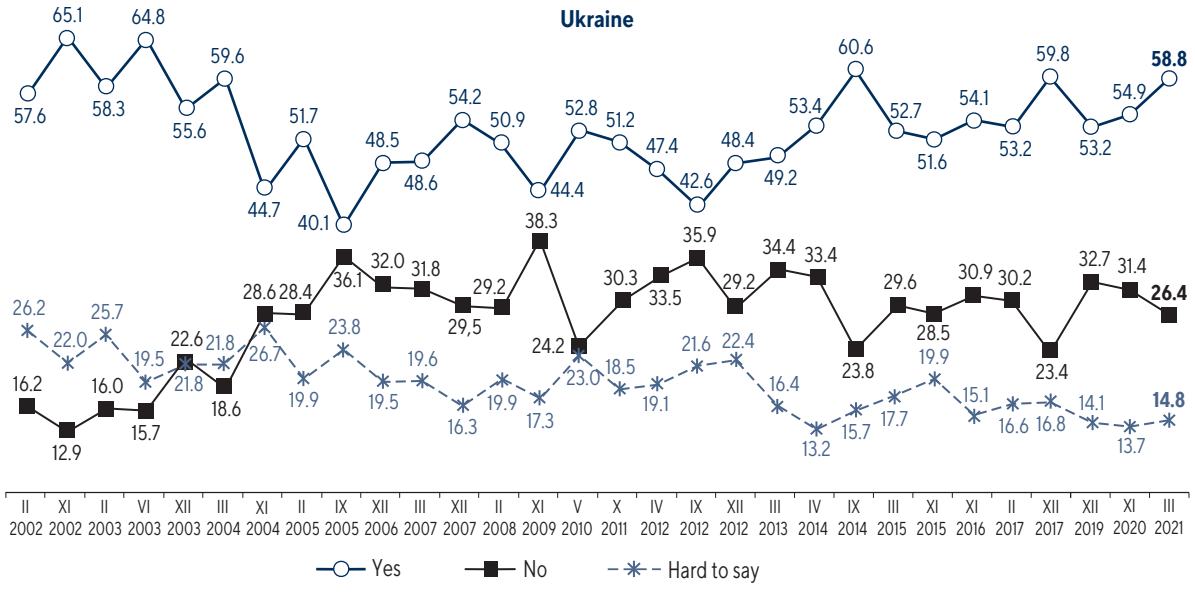
% of respondents

	West	Centre	South	East
High level of corruption in Ukraine	70.6	73.3	79.2	68.3
Insufficient level of economic development and slow pace of reforms	66.0	55.4	54.6	53.4
Insufficient level of democracy in Ukraine	23.1	31.4	30.4	34.6
«Hybrid war» between Russia and Ukraine	33.3	28.9	28.3	20.2
Unpreparedness of the EU to integrate Ukraine	18.5	20.4	26.1	31.8
Russia's attempts to block Ukraine's European integration	24.8	22.5	10.8	19.5
Unwillingness of the EU to conflict with Russia over Ukraine	23.5	18.2	20.8	19.7
Cultural differences between Ukraine and European countries	11.0	14.1	25.0	22.1
Other	0.6	5.9	0.8	0.6
Hard to say	2.5	9.6	9.6	6.8

* All relevant options.

DOES UKRAINE NEED TO JOIN THE EU?

% of respondents



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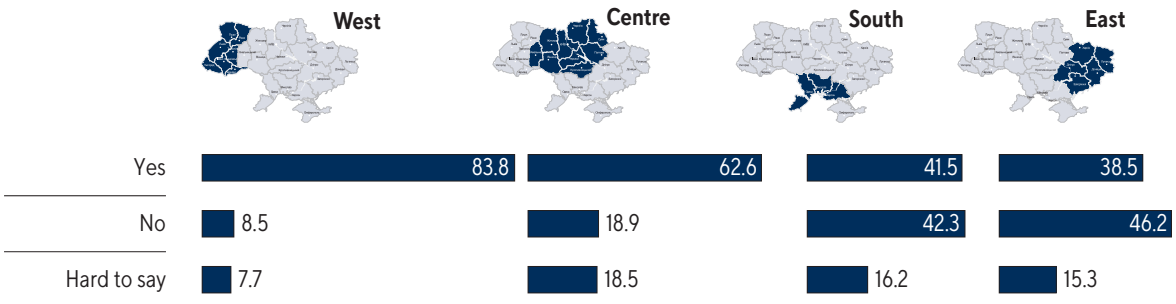
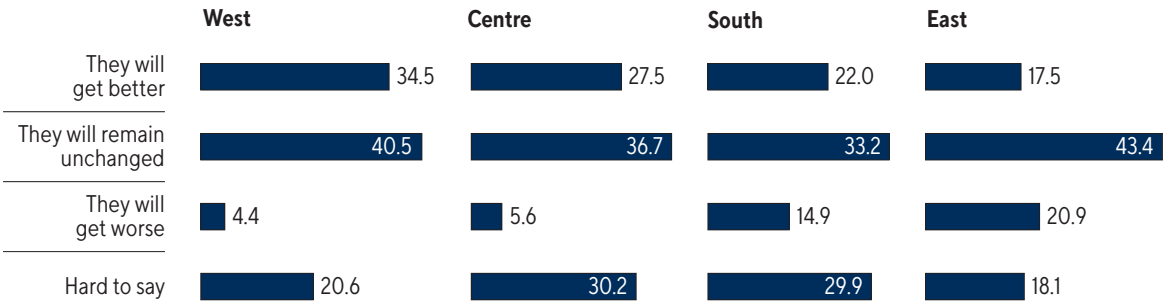


HOW WOULD YOU EVALUATE THE PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN UKRAINE AND THE EU FOR THE COMING YEARS?

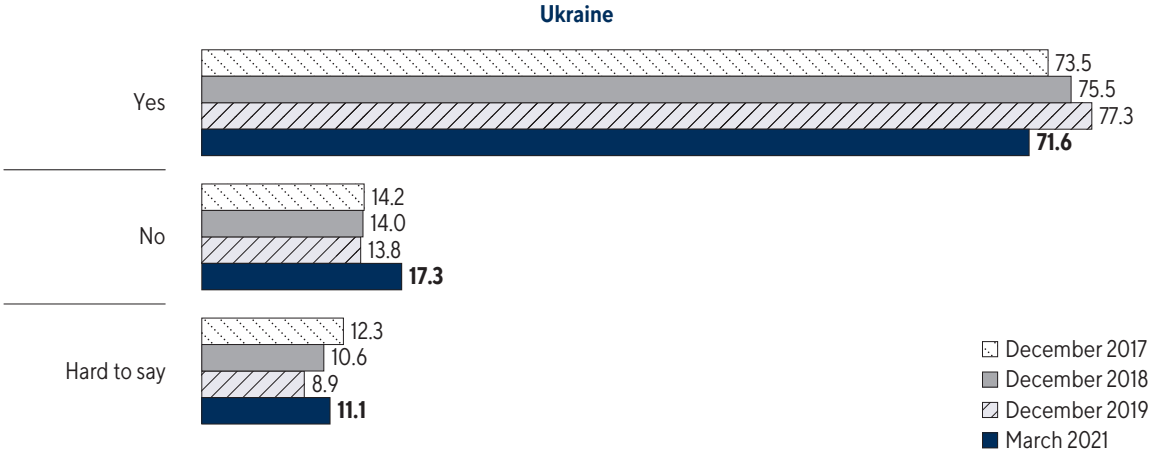
% of respondents

REGIONS (March 2021)

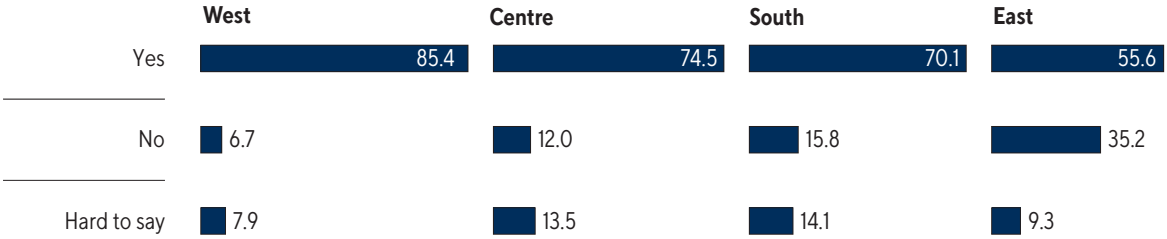


IF A REFERENDUM ON UKRAINE'S ACCESSION TO THE EU TOOK PLACE IN THE NEAR FUTURE, WOULD YOU PARTICIPATE?

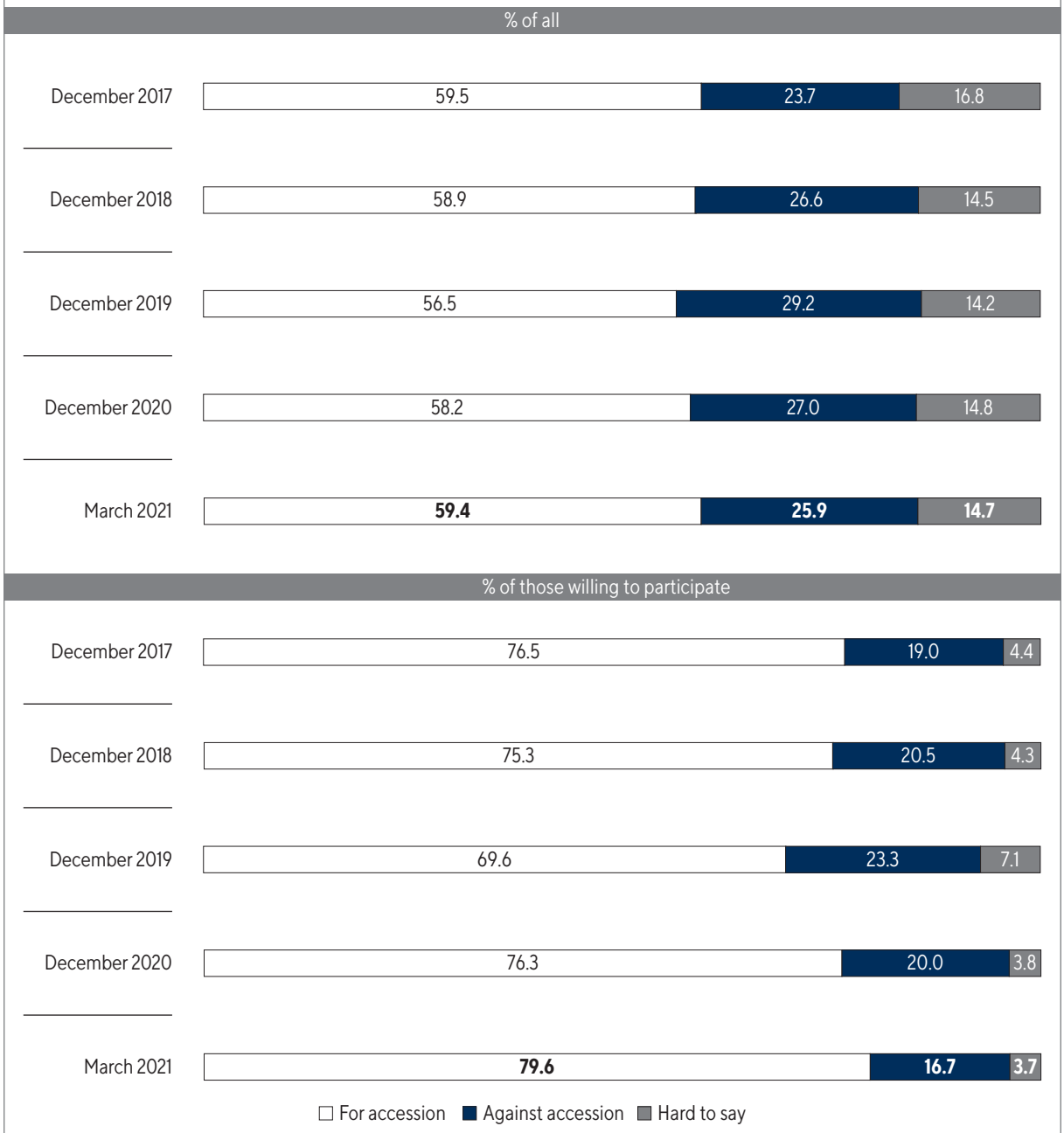
% of respondents

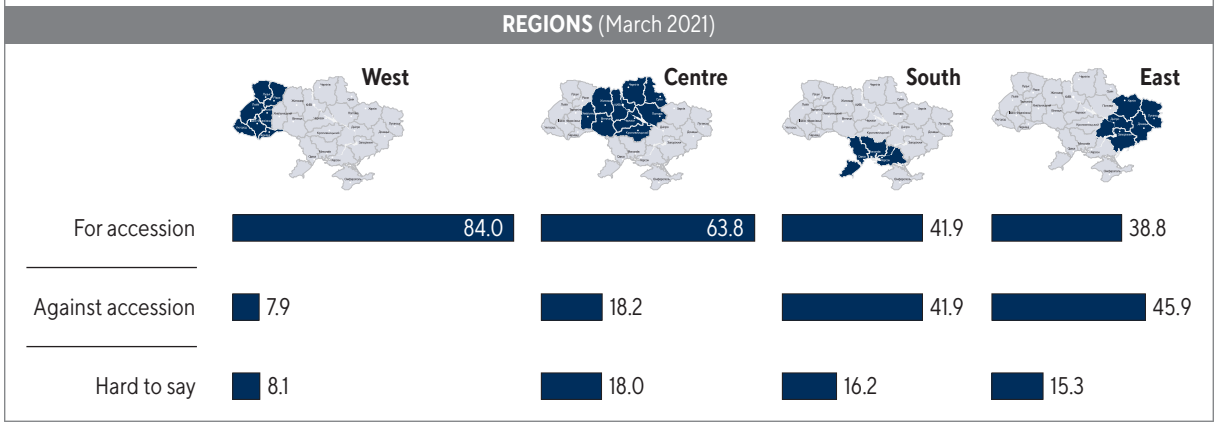


REGIONS (March 2021)



IF YOU PARTICIPATED IN A REFERENDUM ON UKRAINE'S ACCESSION TO THE EU, HOW WOULD YOU VOTE?





ROAD TO THE EU: EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL ASSOCIATION ISSUES

Andriy VESELOVSKIY

Advisor to the Director of the National Institute for Strategic Studies

In the multitude of external issues arising before Ukraine at the same time, the current state and prospects of its relations with the European Union are among the most complex. Politicians can take their time arguing what is more urgent — NATO or the EU, until experts actually remind them that the composition of both unions is 95% the same. As for Ukrainian society, it turns out it has already realised that national interests are best served by accession, not nominal integration into the EU, which is essentially a process aimed at arriving at the desired result.

Let us try to define, at which stage of this process our country finds itself by Ukrainian and European assessments.

Ukraine-EU: Mutual Expectations and Development Strategy Issues

Kyiv. According to the Ukrainian side, political relations between parties are in the range between good and excellent. Kyiv believes that this state was achieved through correctly built communications, consistent execution of commitments under the Association Agreement (AA), which do not come in conflict with Ukraine's *current* national interests, as well as due to Ukraine's uncompromising position in confronting Russian aggression that poses a threat to the entire European continent.

Ukraine expects, foremost, consolidated, unfailing, and increasingly larger support from the EU in countering Russian aggression in all possible sectors: legal, diplomatic, economic, information, etc.

Ukraine hopes for a less demanding EU stance on all issues on the agenda, justifying it by human, political and economic expense to counter the aggression. Without any own serious political or diplomatic influence in most EU countries, Ukraine is coun'ting on Brussels as a group of governing institutions (European Commission, European Council, European Parliament and many other bodies and institutions) to support it in the bilateral relations.

Official Kyiv is talking to the EU to increase the number of EU top politicians' visits to Ukraine, preferably including visits to the Donbas demarcation line, and is using visits, meetings, interviews to garner internal political support.

However, unfortunately, Ukraine is not ready to turn European integration into the matter of national strategy. Ukrainian Government does not intend to become the headquarters for AA implementation as the socio-economic basis for the social system. This is the reflection of attitude of the majority of politicians, who have not created (agreed upon) a national development strategy in general, and do not see the pro-European choice as its basis, in particular.

Brussels. According to European side, there is a rather large part of strategically-minded and motivated people in Ukrainian society, who see the future of the nation as part of the EU. Despite the small number and low quality of this group, permanent Russian pressure and the ongoing outflow of the youngest and the best through emigration, the EU acknowledges the possibility of growth of the politically active and conscious nucleus that views European integration as Ukraine's national interest.

The EU is aware of the poor quality and low efficiency of state institutions, shortfalls of the judiciary and law enforcement, high level of poverty, deterioration of infrastructure and production capacities, low qualifications of workforce, etc.

At the same time, all of these issues are not viewed as insurmountable given that the political leadership is aware of them and is trying to professionally deal with them. At the moment, Europe is not seeing this realisation in Ukraine and is seeking to develop it in the Ukrainian government. In this situation, all other issues — level of help, communications, top-level meetings, anti-Russia sanctions, etc. are viewed more as tools for achieving the main political goal: a conscious decision of Ukrainian political class to see the pro-European choice as the development strategy for the country and society.

There are influential people and countries in the EU that will view Ukraine as a part of European Neighbourhood in the same status as Jordan or Morocco. There are also those that will demand large and small concessions for each step towards integration — just remember the argument between Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

In addition, collective Brussels and its member states do not consider it either possible or necessary — in particular, as «retribution for Ukraine» — to dissociate themselves from Russia, cut ties due to its aggressive military and cyber activity, stifling of human rights, and threatening international peace and security.

External and Internal Dimensions of Political Association

Both, in Association Agreement text, and in the process of integration, first sections are dedicated to political association. First, values and principles are harmonised, and only then rapprochement starts taking place.

Political association has two dimensions. Contrary to the popular opinion, it is not just about the similarity/sameness of external policy, but also about the values underlying internal policy in the broad sense: rule of law, democratic institutions and procedures, responsible governance, human rights on everyday level. Another marker of the state's efficiency is the level of personal security, service value of the work of customs and tax bodies, high national standards in education and healthcare.

Efficiency in these sectors is achieved through sectoral policies developed and implemented based on EU/European institutions' models. Transport and food quality control policies in Ukraine have to conform to model policies published in corresponding EU directives. This will mean approximation to political association with the EU, as it will bring social standards and criteria closer to those used or promoted in EU countries.

Foreign policy association seems in this case overall simpler and more achievable, which has been made possible by Russia's aggression and the change that took place in societal majority's perception of national interests and ways of achieving/protecting them (which affected the current public view of the EU and NATO). A powerful contributory factor is the position of partner states and main supporters of Ukraine on the international scene. A high opinion regarding the efficiency of «collective West» societies is shaping up in Ukraine, which facilitates acceptance of their foreign policy vectors and practices.

Foreign policy association does not require any major changes in habits and rules, its economic cost seems justified given Russia's aggression and the threat to national security.

Meanwhile, internal political association requires a significant change of behaviours, assessments, and habits of the majority of society, a transformation of the style, standards, approaches in production, everyday life and values. These changes require additional material and monetary expenditure (they do shorten other excessive inefficient costs, but this is noticed less). But most of all, they make us accept new, foreign, different concepts.

In many cases, these changes seem foreign to a part of Ukrainian society, as they were essentially not accepted in the imperial (post-colonial, post-Soviet) state model. This includes respect for different nations (including Roma), different languages (including Crimean Tatar), acceptance of different religious denominations, including Greek Catholic, and even the possibility of non-traditional marriage, including same sex marriage. There are no homogeneous societies in the world, signs of otherness are present in all countries. Our Ukrainian society is a European one and is not an exception. Responsibility of politicians, especially those, who proclaim the EU a national goal, is to consistently and convincingly explain this truth.

The underlying values of political association, less pronounced in foreign and much more — in internal policy, are the hardest thing to recognise and practice to the majority of society, which is, for instance, observed in Central and Eastern European countries and the Balkans — the latest additions to the EU. In case of Ukraine, a lot of people still do not accept the notion of private property, the basic human value intrinsically present in the abovementioned countries. Ukrainians, born owners, through the Famine Genocide and systematic killing off of the best for three generations in a row, were taught the ultimate reality of collectivism, state control. This is the basis of strong paternalistic illusions in a part of society still existing today. And where private property is not a value, neither is private initiative — a powerful development engine.

Realisation of value of political association in society is slowed down by insufficient attention to this aspect of European integration in government's public communications with people, which in turn shows the insufficient realisation of its value in the political class and government. There is also lack of proper education on the part of European institutions.

What could become the critical success factor is targeted and comprehensive education about the value of political association as convergence of European and Ukrainian societies as part of programmes of all education and training facilities, and respective methodological training of counsellors and academics on the national level.

Brussels would support this move. But it is Kyiv that has to initiate it. Because it is Kyiv that has to integrate.

INTEGRATION TO THE EU: LONG-TERM PRIORITIES AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

Yuliia BIDENKO

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In conditions of rise in security threats, challenges in the economy and system of social and medical support in Ukraine, the issues of European integration have become somewhat less visible on political no less than media agenda. But there is the obvious fact – within the strengthening of geopolitical turbulence and complex domestic problems facing Ukraine – enhancing partnership and solidarity with the EU, energizing the dialogue with official Brussels and implementation of reforms within the framework of European integration are becoming vital.

The relations between Ukraine and the EU occur in various spheres, therefore, paraphrasing the European slogan «Europe of different speeds», one can talk about «integration of different speeds», although concepts of harmonization and cooperation would be more precise.

Ukraine-EU: Harmonisation and Cooperation Prospects

Talking about harmonisation, as approximation of Ukrainian legislation to EU acts and standards, introduction of new policies and regulations, — in some sectors (gas market, industrial standards, education, transport, state finance, energy efficiency, housing and utilities sector) — there is certain progress.[1] It should be noted, however, that overall progress of Association Agreement implementation in 2020 was 34 %,[2] and in some of the abovementioned sectors it rarely exceeded 60% of the plan. The least progress over the past years has been achieved in financial cooperation and fighting fraud, protection of consumer rights, social policy and labour relations, national security, environment and civil protection, as well as sanitary and phytosanitary standards.

Not to rush with negative assessments of the current government, we should remember that a major part of the «homework» on harmonising legislation and adopting new norms has been done by Ukraine in the first five years after Agreement signing, when the government and society had to re-orient exports, gain political and micro financial support for the post-revolutionary government, and launch key reforms. Besides comprehensive work on completing the economic part of the Agreement, it was then that the package of political decisions was adopted to fulfil the roadmap for EU visa liberalisation for Ukraine. These decisions included fighting corruption and illegally received funds, prosecution reformatting, launch of e-declarations, and state funding for political parties.

In 2014-2016, Ukraine became an associate member of EU Research and Innovation

[1] EU-Ukraine Association Agreement Pulse: monitoring of the implementation plan of the Agreement, 2021, – *https://pulse.kmu.gov.ua/en/current-progress.*

[2] Analytics by years. EU-Ukraine Association Agreement Pulse, 2020, – *https://https://pulse.kmu.gov.ua/ua/a/year/2020.*

Framework Program «Horizon 2020», became the most active partner state in the Eastern Partnership region of the EU programme to support mobility in education, training, youth and sport *Erasmus+*, joined the «Creative Europe» programme and the EU «*COSME*» grant programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME). The package of EU measures to support Ukraine in 2014 - 2020 was significantly expanded with the total volume reaching approximately EUR 11 billion,[3] which is comparable to assistance from the USA and the World Bank. Over the past several years, activity of the EU Delegation to Ukraine became more noticeable not just on the level of parliamentary and government communications, but also in regions, including through support of decentralisation, grants provided to civil society, local media, development of Euroclub networks, «Team Europe» youth ambassadors and experts, opening and support of work of modern administrative services centres in communities, EU information centres and Eurointegration offices in key regions.

The EU shows political support through non-recognition of the annexation of Crimea and condemning Russia's actions in Donbas, including, through continuing sanctions and applying new restrictive measures, as in the case of escalated tensions in the Azov Sea in 2018-2019.

In turn, after the change of country leadership, each of the newly appointed Ukrainian governments in 2019-2020 confirmed our Eurointegration direction as a comprehensive priority of the Cabinet of Ministers Programme.[4] EU-Ukraine Association Council noted the progress of the Ukrainian side in a number of sectors, and top-level political meetings — EU-Ukraine Summits — ran without devastating criticism or express embarrassments for the country's leaders.

Today, EU-Ukraine cooperation is in a more stable phase, and the Association Agreement itself, which has been developed 10 years ago, needs to be adjusted. Thus, I believe that current tasks in front of our government team include maintaining political dialogue on the current level, a review of Agreement requirements with priority given to certain sectors that match Ukraine's national interests, and, most importantly, continued meticulous work on the basic areas of Eurointegration.

Elements of Political Dialogue between Kyiv and Brussels

The intensity and success of political dialogue between Ukraine and the EU since the moment of Agreement signing depended on at least three main determinants: neighbourhood policy and foreign policy priorities of the Union itself; success of reforms in Ukraine; and the conflict with Russia in and around Ukraine.

Regarding factor one, we should understand that European Neighbourhood Policy in the Eastern Partnership format has been launched back in 2009, and over this time the degree of approximation of different states in the region to the EU became very varied (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia), with authoritarian and pro-Russian or isolationist trends increasing in others – such as Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia. This is a major complication in the work of themed platforms, as well as in the multi-lateral dialogue in the framework of this European neighbourhood policy tool. Thus, Ukraine has focused on the bilateral relations with the EU. However, it is the Eastern Partnership framework, where Ukraine could contend for regional leadership, especially in the context of the review of its format. Yet, such leadership claim would be justified in case of positive economic and political achievements inside the country.

Factor two. Basic conditions for continued political dialogue between the EU and Ukraine have been and still are the irreversibility of reforms, fight against corruption, respect for human rights and the rule of law. According to Eurobarometer opinion polls, protection of human rights in the entire world, gender equality, and solidarity between European states are the priorities, which according to European voters must be first and foremost protected by

[3] Financial support and technical assistance. – Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine,. – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/diyalnist/yevropejska-integraciya/finansova-pidtrimka-ta-tehnichna-dopomoga.*

[4] On Approving Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine Action Programme. CMU Resolution No.471, 12 June 2020, – *https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/pro-zatverdzhennya-programi-diyalnosti-kabinetu-ministriv-t120620.*

EU institutions.[5] Comparing public opinion in Europe with Ukrainian citizens' views,[6] we see a clear direction for reforms: justice system, anti-corruption measures, security and law enforcement reform, banking sector and social policy. By the way, it is these sectors that the EU-Ukraine Association Council singles out as areas with least progress by Ukraine. Reforming these areas is most painful for today's political and economic elites, it triggers major opposition in government bodies and requires them to abandon the populism of fast showy decisions. Government must have a strength reserve and the vote of confidence of its people, which unfortunately is waning with each coming month, especially in the situation of worsening economic situation and healthcare system collapse amid the *Covid-19* pandemic.

These problems are global — they affect EU and member states' policy and thus simply push Ukraine out of the immediate circle of issues on Brussels' agenda. European countries are facing unprecedented economic and humanitarian challenges, and economic recovery, changing biosafety approaches, conceptual issues of dividing the burden of crisis between the «old» and «new» Europe are the factors that are taking away from European politicians' attention to processes outside EU borders.

Third factor — less predictable, and thus equally important, is the security factor, which can be viewed as both external threats, as well as internal volatility of public institutions in Ukraine. Increasing concentration of Russian military on Ukrainian borders, escalation in Donbas, Russia's participation in misinformation and destabilisation campaigns inside EU member states are the factors that are destructively affecting Ukraine's Eurointegration prospects and the tempo of reforms announced by President V. Zelenskyy in 2020 at the EU-Ukraine Summit and in the Government programme.

Lack of political consensus in the Parliament is a challenge, and the fact that the 9th Verkhovna Rada is less focused on adopting «eurointegration» legislation has resulted in 19% parliamentary progress in adopting the envisaged laws and regulations in 2019, and 12% — in 2020. While, for instance, in 2014 and 2015, it was 86%, in 2017– 60%, and in 2018– 51%.[7] At the Davos forum in January 2020, the head of Servant of the People faction also talked about the need to «abandon the policy of harmonising Ukraine's legislation with the EU for the time being, creating instead our own rules and using our competitive advantages».[8] Because further progress in reviewing the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and further harmonisation in such sectors as energy, agriculture, financial and trust services, transport, digital market can interfere with interests of powerful economic stakeholders, achieving consensus in the Parliament may become increasingly difficult.

If we add increased internal tensions in the society, obvious conclusion of the «high-speed mode» in the Parliament, contradictory decisions in the justice sector and government volatility, it is hardly possible that Ukraine will be able to make up for its underperformance in Agreement implementation of the past years by the end of 2021.

[5] A Glimpse of Certainty in Uncertain Times. Eurobarometer Survey 94.2: A Public Opinion Monitoring Study. 2020, – *https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2020/parlemeter-2020/en-report.pdf.*

[6] Ukraine-2020: Unfulfilled Expectations, Unexpected Challenges. Year's Results Through the Mirror of Public Opinion. – The Razumkov Centre, 16 December 2020, – *https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/ukraina2020-nevypravdani-ochikuvannia-neochikuvani-vyklyky-pidsumky-roku-u-dzerkali-gromadskoi-dumky-gruden-2020r.*

[7] The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement Pulse: analytics by years, – *https://pulse.kmu.gov.ua/en/a/year.*

[8] Ukraine should temporarily abandon harmonisation of its legislation with the EU – Arakhamia. – Ukrinform, 22 January 2020, – *https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/2861110-ukraini-slid-timcasovo-vidmovitisa-vid-garmonizacii-zakonodavstva-iz-es-arahamia.html.*

Ways and Prospects of Eurointegration

In 2020, Ukrainian exports to EU countries dropped 14%, and imports — 12.7% compared to 2019,[9] and their structure shows that Ukraine is at risk of remaining trapped as a producer of agricultural low value-added goods. So the following sectors require particular attention in our economic cooperation with the EU:

- ✓ introduction of «industrial visa liberalisation»;
- ✓ joining EU Digital Single Market, regulation of the system of telecommunications and electronic trust services, development of critical infrastructure and strengthened cybersecurity;
- ✓ completing the implementation of «Third Energy Package»;
- ✓ joining the European Green Deal with corresponding comprehensive changes in energy, transport, agriculture and industry, waste treatment, etc.;
- ✓ further steps to join Single European Transport Area;
- ✓ harmonising the rules in financial and banking sectors.

In the humanitarian plane, it is important to increase our participation in the *Horizon Europe* programme and maintain regional leadership in *Erasmus+* and Creative Europe programmes, as they simultaneously build both, institutions and human capital in science, education and culture. For this reason, it is also desirable (but less probable in the near future) to successfully join the European *EU4Health* programme.

In the political plane, it is critically important to complete the reform and adopt corresponding legislative changes to complete the reforms in justice and decentralisation, national security and anti-corruption systems, party funding and democratic elections. While the previous government had to tackle the launch of reforms and creation of new institutions (especially problematic in the areas of anti-corruption, control and management of public funds), – one of the most important tasks of today's political elite is their preservation and ensuring their institutional sustainability.

It is important to coordinate efforts of the Government, EU and its Delegation to Ukraine, other donors, including international organisations and individual countries that provide support to Ukraine. The experience of Donor Board on Decentralisation Reform created in 2017[10] under the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine allowed to bring together efforts of the EU, USA, Switzerland, Germany and Canada, which showed the efficiency of joint setting of priorities and directions for key reform reinforcement.

We need to intensify cooperation with EU Advisory Mission in civil security and law enforcement reforms. We should also synchronise the final adoption of the National Strategy for Civil Society Development for 2021-2026 with an update of the EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Ukraine, consultations on which took place in March 2021. Also, remember that 2021 is the final year of the Communications Strategy in the Field of European Integration for 2018-2021, which must be renewed and must take into account current trends in public opinion amidst the changes in national and local government.

However, our basic priorities are still preservation of peace and resolution of conflict in Eastern Ukraine, economic growth and intensification of exports to the EU. The country's leadership must abandon its policy of fast flashy announcements and showy decisions and substitute it with efficient painstaking work aimed at reviewing and implementing the Association Agreement, sectoral integration with respective EU markets. This means everyday capacity building of institutions created to ensure public sector integrity, and renouncing the temptation of populism in European integration sector.

[9] European Integration of Ukraine in 2020. Ukraine-EU Dialogue. Key Results. – Government office for coordination of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine. Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2021, – *https://eu-ua.kmu.gov.ua/sites/default/files/inline/files/european_integration_of_ukraine_2020_0.pdf.*

[10] Council of Donors on Decentralization, – *https://donors.decentralization.gov.ua/donor_board.*

LATEST EU-UKRAINE SUMMITS: DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE

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In the past years, political dialogue between Ukraine and the European Union has been marked by stability and orientation at integration, which is supported by more than just statements from political leaders. The country's strategic course towards gaining full membership in the European Union is now captured in the Basic Law of Ukraine.[1] This is the constitutional foundation for the practical part of Ukraine's relations with the EU — implementation of the Association Agreement, which is the basis of Kyiv-Brussels political dialogue.

Stability is not something that was always characteristic of Ukraine's relations with European partners. Prior to the well-known events of 2013-2014 (the toppling of V.Yanukovych's regime, Russia unleashing its hybrid war against Ukraine), the EU-Ukraine political dialogue was rather unpredictable and was not marked by a high level of mutual trust. Foremost, due to the lack of interest in rapprochement with European structures of top Ukrainian leaders at the time, who were dependent on Russia's influence.

After 2014, Kyiv-Brussels relations transformed, in particular, more intensive and deeper cooperation was launched on different levels. In this context, the crucial event was the ratification of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement,[2] the launch of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, as well as the introduction of the visa-free travel regime for Ukrainian citizens. Changes also took place in the political dialogue: the agenda of top level meetings between Kyiv and Brussels now included issues connected with Russia's aggression in Ukraine, and resolution of the situation in the temporarily occupied territories. Since that time, European partners have been regularly emphasising their support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence. EU's ongoing political and economic pressure on Russia (condemnation of aggression acts, support of anti-Russian sanctions regime) remains important for Kyiv.

The positive aspect in the current political dialogue between Ukraine and the EU is stability and predictability of the partnership. For Ukraine, its Eurointegration course is the defining factor in implementing internal democratic changes. The success of such changes can help establish the efficiency of EU's normative power and use the Ukraine precedent as motivational example for a number of other post-Soviet states.

[1] The Law of Ukraine «On Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine (Regarding the Strategic Course of the State for Acquiring Full-Fledged Membership of Ukraine in the European Union and in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization)» as of 07.02.2019. – The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, – *https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2680-19#Text.*

[2] Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part, – *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0529(01)&from=EN.*

A favourable result for Ukraine is the ability to use its progress in political relations with the EU to shape a positive image of Ukraine as the «European» state on the global arena, as well as build its «relative weight» and international identity in negotiations with partner states. In turn, the EU has the opportunity to use Ukraine's experience in confronting Russian aggression and jointly develop new response approaches to Kremlin's hybrid expansion in Europe and the world. Thus, today, political cooperation between Ukraine and the EU is demonstrating increasingly stronger coordination and mutual expediency, namely, for support of internal and regional stability.

Despite the general upward dynamic in the EU-Ukraine association process, the bilateral relations complicate and place a burden on a number of problematic factors. Regardless of the political power layout in the countries and global trends, certain basic issues in the focus of Kyiv-Brussels political dialogue remain unresolved.

For our European partners, implementation of democratic reforms and approximation to European standards have always been and still are the defining factors in developing relations with Kyiv. Fighting corruption and absence of the truly working rule of law system have been and still remain our immediate «painful» chronic issues. These issues have always affected the level of trust, transparency and potential of EU-Ukraine relations, which has been defining the atmosphere and nature of political dialogue.

Besides, our European integration is still hampered by institutional problems (weak inter-agency coordination, inconsistency of government structures' activity directions, shortcomings in strategic planning and decision- making).

The search for consensus among EU member states on the progress of political dialogue with Kyiv remains a challenge, as they are facing their own internal issues. First of all, this includes conceptual issues of searching for joint approaches to further operation and expansion of the EU. The very project of «united Europe» in its current form is facing a number of controversies regarding leadership within the EU, and problems between the countries of the «old» and «new» Europe. This is being used by populist and eurosceptical movements, which have grown more popular due to the migrant crisis, terrorist acts in European countries, and the coronavirus pandemic. Let us not forget how complex and slow the work of the EU «bureaucratic machine» is, which also affects Kyiv-Brussels relations.

Political association between Ukraine and the EU is slowed down by a number of external factors, which influence Ukrainian political leaders, as well as leaders of European states. The main challenge for the efficiency of bilateral cooperation is Russia's aggressive policy, which is being implemented in a consistent and targeted way, using a complex of hybrid instruments to destabilise regional environment. On the one hand, Russia is taking steps to prevent successful integration of Kyiv into European structures, creating «*a failed state*» image of Ukraine. On the other hand, Moscow is trying to undermine the system of European unity and discredit EU's liberal democratic values. Its goal is to create socio-political tensions inside European countries and in some cases it is succeeding. Another external factor that is adversely affecting foremost Ukraine-EU communications is the *COVID-19* pandemic and related quarantine restrictions.

After all, Ukraine's question regarding specific EU membership prospects remains unanswered. At the moment, they are neither acknowledged in the framework of the Association Agreement, nor in any other formats of cooperation between Kyiv and Brussels (e.g. Eastern Partnership). Thus, in top level meetings between Ukraine and its European partners' attention is mainly paid to current bilateral cooperation issues, while defining clear long-term prospects in the form of Ukraine's EU membership remains «outside of scope».

Nevertheless, the overall dynamic of top level negotiations between Kyiv and Brussels shows definite orientation towards rapprochement and development of dialogue. This is confirmed by the analysis of two latest EU-Ukraine Summits that reflect the current state of relations between parties and define «error correction work» that must be done by Kyiv immediately. As we know, such summits are a part of EU-Ukraine political dialogue foreseen in Article 5 of the Association Agreement. Starting in 2015, from the 17th EU-Ukraine Summit in total and the first one since Agreement ratification, these top level meetings between Kyiv and Brussels have been taking place each year, stimulating

both sides to «keep their finger on the pulse» to prevent a backslide in the progress already achieved.

2019-2020 summits were special due to participation of the newly elected President of Ukraine V.Zelenskyy. For European partners it was important to understand whether the new government was ready to continue following the chosen Eurointegration path. The results of the summits confirmed Kyiv's readiness to join the European community. Despite different external circumstance that influenced meeting agenda, both summits captured promising standpoints, which are likely to define the development of relations between parties in the near future.

First of all, this includes the very vision of a partnership based on political rapprochement and economic integration in the framework of the Association Agreement. This is based on recognition of shared values upheld by Ukraine and the EU (the values that our society usually sees as «European» — principles of democracy, rule of law, respect for international law and human rights, including gender equality). Both summits emphasised the priority of supporting Ukraine's macroeconomic stability, the importance of fulfilling its commitments to the IMF and execution of conditions agreed upon in the framework of EU's macro-financial assistance programme (i.e. Ukraine doing its «homework» in exchange for financial assistance packages). The EU could not but mention the need to intensify anti-corruption work and deoligarchisation. Obviously, parties will continue their joint work on approximation of Ukrainian legislation to EU standards.

Both summits devoted attention to the issues of sectoral integration. Parties stressed the importance of continuing civil security sector reforms, joint work against hybrid threats and fighting false information, support of Ukraine's integration into EU's energy market (with reference to the updated energy annex to the Association Agreement) and Digital Single Market. Among other points of reference — improving connections between Ukraine, the EU and other Eastern Partnership countries in order to develop trade, transport connections and support human contacts, in particular, between young people (Ukraine's participation in EU programmes Erasmus+ and Creative Europe).

Besides, this was yet another instance where parties discussed their obligation to conclude Common Aviation Area («open skies») Agreement. Nevertheless, the topic of the respective document remains open — previously, the signing has been delayed due to political obstacles (disputes about Gibraltar airport ownership between Spain and the UK), and today — due to technical moments on the part of the European Commission.

During meetings, European partners clearly and consistently expressed their position of condemning the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity as a result of Russia's aggression, militarisation of the peninsula, violation of human rights and freedoms. The appeal to official Moscow to acknowledge its responsibility and cooperate on bringing to justice those guilty of shooting down the MH17 plane was reiterated. An appeal to Russia was recorded on the need to ensure access of international organisations and human rights advocates to the territories uncontrolled by Ukraine, to respect international humanitarian law, to release the illegally detained citizens of Ukraine in the occupied Crimea and Russia.

It is important for Kyiv that European partners assure it of their full support on the political level, namely, in the Normandy format, OSCE, Trilateral

Contact Group and OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, as well as of extension of EU's economic sanctions against Russia.

Consolidated political support of Ukraine by European partners and condemnation of Russia's aggression are important for strengthening Ukraine's standing in the global arena, on the one hand. And on the other – for keeping the topics of illegally annexed Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine on the global community's agenda.

At the same time, despite the similar recurrent theme of the summits, there is a number of noticeable differences in the final statements of the 21st and 22nd summits, due to new trends in Ukraine's and EU's internal development, and the international context of events. First of all, Ukraine's progress in Association Agreement implementation was noted. The final statement of the 21st summit[3] states that since the launch of the free trade area in January 2016, the bilateral trade between Ukraine and the EU has increased 50%, and the final statement of the 22nd summit[4] shows that this figure has grown to 65%.

The 2019 statement noted Ukraine's progress in the process of implementing reforms in such sectors as healthcare, decentralisation, pension provision, public administration, state procurement. The 2020 statement welcomed the start of the land reform in Ukraine, adoption of the law on regulation of banking activity and the progress achieved in decentralisation.

The importance of reforming the judiciary and anti-corruption work, namely in the context of events that took place in the period around the 22nd EU-Ukraine summit, drew EU's particular attention. Shortly before the summit, there was a scandal regarding the selection of the head of Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecution Office of Ukraine.[5] And only several weeks after the summit, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine made several decisions that recognised certain provisions of anti-corruption legislation as unconstitutional, which essentially terminated a number of key NACP functions.[6] These events caused a predictably negative reaction from our European partners, who saw these steps as a «throwback» in the already achieved reform progress in Ukraine, which could influence further Eurointegration processes for Kyiv, as well as provision of macro-financial assistance.

EU programmes in Ukraine discussed in 2019 included support for decentralisation, civil society, anti-corruption work. A year after, at the next summit, they were supplemented with programmes aimed at supporting agriculture, local micro-production, small and medium enterprises. Ukraine's progress in approximation of legislation to EU standards in the digital sector was acknowledged in 2019, and in 2020 it was agreed to develop a joint work plan of cooperation between EU and Ukraine in electronic trust services sector (the said plan has been developed in January 2021, and will be implemented over the next several years[7]).

The context and agenda of the latest 22nd summit in 2020 were significantly influenced by the *COVID-19* pandemic, which defined a number of decisions in the Kyiv-Brussels dialogue. Major portion of the final statement was dedicated to parties' response to pandemic consequences and provision of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine by the EU in relation to that. While in 2019, the amount of the second tranche of EU's macro-financial assistance was EUR 500 million, in 2020, in order to overcome

[3] Joint statement following the 21th EU-Ukraine Summit. – Mission of Ukraine to the European Union, 8 July 2019, – *https://ukraine-eu.mfa.gov.ua/en/news/73700-posilyujemo-vzajemni-zobovjazannya-spilyna-zajava-za-pidsumkami-21-go-samitu-ukrajina-je*s.

[4] Joint statement following the 22nd EU-Ukraine Summit – Mission of Ukraine to the European Union, 6 October 2020, – *https://ukraine-eu.mfa.gov.ua/en/news/spilna-zayava-za-pidsumkami-22-go-samitu-ukrayina-yes;*.

[5] The EU and USA: further support for Ukraine will depend on transparency of SAPO head selection. – DW Ukraine, 17 September 2020, – *https://www.dw.com/uk/yes-i-ssha-vid-prozorosti-obrannia-hlavy-sap-zalezhatyme-podalsha-pidtrymka-ukrainy/a-54966873*.

[6] Decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine in the case of constitutional appeal by 47 People's Deputies of Ukraine on agreement with the Constitution of Ukraine (constitutionality) of certain provisions in the Law of Ukraine «On Preventing Corruption», Criminal Code of Ukraine as of 27 October 2020. – The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, – *https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/v013p710-20#Text*.

[7] Liudmyla Rabshynska: Ukraine and EU will work together on mutual recognition of electronic trust services. – Ministry and Committee of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, 27 January 2021, – *https://thedigital.gov.ua/news/lyudmila-rabchinska-ukraina-ta-es-spivpratsyuvatimut-zadlya-vzaemnogo-viznannya-elektronnikh-dovirchikh-poslug*.

the negative consequences of *COVID-19*, a decision was made to allocate EUR 1.2 billion of macro-financial assistance to Kyiv. That said, the conditions for receiving the second tranche (EUR 600 million) are implementation of the anti-corruption reform and successful cooperation with the IMF.

The 22nd EU-Ukraine Summit emphasised the priority of more active cooperation in the sectors of «green» and digital transformation; agreement was reached on the targeted dialogue for Ukraine's policy and legislation approximation to European Green Deal. Changes foreseen in the joint statement of 2020 also included the sectors of intellectual property rights, state procurement, trade protection, sanitary and phytosanitary norms.

All of this is important to build open business and investment climate in Ukraine, to ensure transparency of entrepreneurial activity, its protection. Also, during the summit, parties welcomed the launch of preliminary assessment mission on Ukraine's readiness for the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products («industrial visa liberalisation»). This will be a priority topic in the near future discussions.

Comparing the 2019 and 2020 statements, one can deduce that Ukraine and the EU are focused on developing cooperation in key areas — Association Agreement implementation, support of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, political and socio-economic transformations in Ukraine.

The 2020 summit launched new and expanded the already existing areas of cooperation, with account for current topics on the international agenda — the pandemic, environmental challenges, spread of digitalisation. We have embarked on the path to an Association Agreement update, which has to generally accelerate progress towards the «four freedoms» in Kyiv-Brussels relations.

Next, 23rd EU-Ukraine Summit in Kyiv is tentatively scheduled for the second half of this year (however, as of today, it is still up in the air due to the epidemiological situation in the world). In any case, the new meeting will be especially important for both parties, as results of internal assessment of progress in achieving Association Agreement goals will be presented there.

Overall, further development of EU-Ukraine partnership will depend on the irreversibility and consistency of fulfilment of the undertaken commitments, which must be based on clear goal setting and understanding of mutual benefits of such cooperation.