

## UKRAINE'S EUROATLANTIC DEMOCRATIC CHOICE IN THE CONTEXT OF RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

*The article examines the history of relations and current problems of interaction between Ukraine and the EU in the context of Ukraine's aspirations for full membership in the EU as one of the basic goals of the Euro-Atlantic choice and resistance to Russian aggression. The implementation of the purpose of the article involves the use of various scientific methods, the main ones being historical retrospective, analysis and induction.*

*The formation of a monetary union and a single market has contributed to the fact that the European Union has now become a powerful macro-regional association of developed countries and an independent geopolitical center of global influence. For many post-Soviet republics, including Ukraine, the European Union is a kind of magnet, an attractive example of uniting mentally and civilizationally related peoples into a political and economic union for more effective solution of the tasks of their development in the conditions of the new information age. The European choice of Ukraine is based on the vital interests and historical aspiration of the Ukrainian people to be an integral part of a united Europe.*

*The fate of all humanity depends on how timely and effectively an effective mechanism for neutralizing the Russian threat is created. Based on this, relations between Ukraine and the EU acquire strategic importance for the preservation and development of the entire Euro-Atlantic civilization, because in the event of a hypothetical failure of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to resist the Russian army, there is a real prospect of transferring hostilities to the immediate territory of the European Union countries. In order to become a full member of the European Union, Ukraine ought to build an appropriate political model of a parliamentary republic with decentralized unitarism.*

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### **Євроатлантичний демократичний вибір України в контексті відносин з Європейським Союзом**

У статті розглядається історія взаємин та актуальні проблеми взаємодії між Україною та ЄС у контексті прагнень повноцінного членства України у ЄС як однієї з базових цілей євроатлантичного вибору та спротиву російській агресії. Втілення у життя мети статті передбачає застосування різноманітних наукових методів, серед яких основними є історична ретроспектива, аналіз та індукція.

84 — Утворення валютного союзу та єдиного ринку сприяло тому, що Європейський Союз на тепер перетворився на потужне макрорегіональне об'єднання розвинутих держав та самостійний геополітичний центр світового впливу. Для багатьох пострадянських республік, зокрема й для України, Європейський Союз є своєрідним магнітом, привабливим прикладом об'єднання ментально та цивілізаційно споріднених народів у політико-економічну спілку для більш ефективного вирішення завдань свого розвитку за умов нової інформаційної епохи. Європейський вибір України ґрунтується на життєво важливих інтересах та історичному прагненні українського народу бути невід'ємною частиною єдиної Європи.

Від того, наскільки вчасно та ефективно вдасться створити дієвий механізм нейтралізації російської небезпеки залежить доля усього людства. Виходячи з цього, відносини між Україною та ЄС набувають стратегічного значення для збереження та розвитку усєї євроатлантичної цивілізації, адже в разі гіпотетичної невдачі ЗСУ в опорі російській армії з'являється реальна перспектива перенесення бойових дій на безпосередню територію країн Європейського Союзу.

Україна щоб стати повноправним членом Європейського Союзу має побудувати у себе відповідну політичну модель парламентської республіки з децентралізованим унітаризмом.

**Ключові слова:** *євроатлантичний вибір, Україна, Європейський Союз, героїчний спротив Українського народу, демократія, комплекс реформ, європейська перспектива України.*

**Statement of the problem.** One of the leading trends in modern world development is the tendency to strengthen integration between different countries and interstate formations. This trend is so noticeable that even those states that are not officially part of any international alliance fall under its influence. The recent expansion of the European Union to the east has made Ukraine a direct neighbour of the EU. This relatively new circumstance significantly increases the opportunities for establishing comprehensive cooperation and interaction between the European Union and Ukraine. In light of recent events related to the full-scale aggression of the Russian federation against Ukraine, the mutual interest of Ukraine in the EU and vice versa of the EU in Ukraine has acquired a clear geopolitical meaning and has grown significantly. Ukrainians, armed with weapons, defend the values on which the democratic Euro-Atlantic civilization was formed, actually fulfilling the role of its outpost in countering expansion by authoritarian (neo-totalitarian) Russia. Ukraine has gone through a stage of choosing between the European and Eurasian vectors of state development (Yakymenko, Pashkov 2018).

Under the conditions of significant transformations in the existing world order, when the most influential autocracies declared their ambitions to build their own separate space (“Russian peace”, Chinese historical empire, etc.), democratic countries led by the USA found themselves faced with an urgent need to consolidate their efforts to protect their way of life and value foundations. There is an objective need to unite the potential of the countries of the world democratic coalition to organize effective opposition to the authoritarian-totalitarian threat from the east. Ukraine and the European Union play and will play major roles in this process, because geographically they are at the forefront of countering Russian expansion. It can be said without exaggeration that the fate of all humanity depends on how timely and effectively an efficient mechanism for neutralizing the Russian danger is created. Based on this, relations between Ukraine and the EU are gaining strategic importance for the preservation and development of the entire Euro-Atlantic civilization, since in the event of a hypothetical failure of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to resist the Russian army, there is a real prospect of transferring hostilities directly to the territory of the European Union countries. Officials of Putin’s fascist regime and the Russian President himself have repeatedly expressed their military threats against Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, including the use of nuclear weapons. Under these circumstances, comprehensive

collaboration between Ukraine and the EU is already motivated by the problem of survival in the process of military intervention by the Russian federation.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The problems of Ukraine's European integration and its relations with the European Union have long been the focus of attention of social scientists.

Various aspects of Ukraine's participation in integration processes and collaboration with the EU are considered in the works of such scientists as: Dir I. (Dir 2024), Zolkina M. (Zolkina 2014), Lepiiavko S. (Lepiavko 2001), Marchuk V. (Marchuk 2014), Plokhii S. (Plokhii 2016), Horbulin V. (Edited by Horbulin 2017), Halchynskyy A. (Halchynskyy 2016), Haidutskyy P. (Haidutskyy 2013).

The mentioned scientists study the problems of integration and cooperation of the EU with Ukraine, investigate the issues of Ukraine's accession to the EU and interregional integration.

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A certain profound layer in scientific developments devoted to the consideration of cooperation between Ukraine and the European Union is the work of such specialists as: Tarnavska I. (Tarnavska 2019), Baranovskyy F. (Baranovskyy 2018), Vasylenko S. (Vasylenko 2020), Kovaliova O. (Kovaliova 2003), Vinnykova N. (Vinnykova 2016), Bashtannyk V. (Bashtannyk 2010), Matiushenko I., Berenda S., Reznikov V. (Matiushenko, Berenda, Reznikov 2015), Gerasymiuk K. (Gerasymiuk 2016), Gladii V. (Gladii 2016), Maiev A. (Maiev 2016), Dudkevych V. (Dudkevych 2021).

It is worth mentioning separately the scientific works of prominent American political scientists such as Zbigniew Brzezinski (Brzeziński 2000) and Samuel Huntington (Huntington 2002), who considered the problems of interaction between Ukraine and the EU through the prism of geopolitical worldwide events and in the context of the development of existing cultures and civilizations.

**The aim of the article.** The purpose of this article is to consider the history of relations and current problems of interaction between Ukraine and the EU in the context of our aspirations for full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the EU as one of the basic goals of the Euro-Atlantic choice and resistance to Russian aggression. The implementation of the objective of the article involves the use of various scientific methods, the main of which are historical retrospective, analysis and induction.

**Presentation of the main material.** Throughout the history of the existence of the European Union, important development tasks that

regulate various areas of international relations have been implemented. First of all, the foundations of a common economic policy in the transport, agricultural and other sectors have been developed. Import quotas and customs duties on goods traded between the member states of the European Union have been abolished. A uniform customs system has been introduced for all goods from countries that are not part of the “Common Market” of the European Union. Within the EU, free movement of funds and labour was established, with certain exceptions for new EU member states. A single monetary system was created through the introduction of the single currency, the euro. It is worth emphasizing that after its introduction, the single European currency surpassed the US dollar in terms of cash circulation in the world, which is really eloquent in nature.

The formation of a monetary union and a single market contributed to the fact that the European Union has now become a powerful macro-regional association of developed countries and an independent geopolitical centre of global influence. For many post-Soviet republics, including Ukraine, the European Union is a kind of magnet, an attractive example of uniting mentally and civilizationally related peoples into a political and economic union for more effective solutions for their development in terms of the new Information Age.

For the first time, Ukraine’s desire to develop comprehensive relations with the EU was enshrined in the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine “On the Main Directions of Ukraine’s Foreign Policy” of July 2, 1993.

In general, relations between Ukraine and the European Union were initiated in December 1991, when the representative of the country presiding over the European Union at that time – the Netherlands, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of this country, on behalf of the EU officially recognized the state independence of Ukraine. Then, in the Strategy for the Integration of Ukraine into the European Union of June 11, 1998 and in the Program for the Integration of Ukraine into the EU of September 14, 2000, the strategic course of Ukraine for integration into the EU was proclaimed. It was determined that one of the fundamental principles of Ukraine’s foreign policy is to ensure the integration of Ukraine into the European economic, legal and political area with the aim of gaining membership in the European Union. The European Strategy of Ukraine was approved by the relevant Decree of the President of Ukraine. This was done deliberately. As D.Yu.Yurkovskiy fairly notes, Ukraine’s European choice is based on

vital interests and the historical aspiration of the Ukrainian people to be an integral part of a united Europe (Yurkovskiy 2013, 32).

At the Paris Summit in September 2008, the EU and Ukraine agreed to conclude a new agreement in the form of an Association Agreement, which was to be based on the principles of economic integration and political association. In order to implement these agreements, in 2009 the Ukrainian and European sides developed and approved the Association Agenda, which set out the guidelines for implementing reforms in Ukraine in the course of implementing the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU.

In December 2011, at the 15th EU-Ukraine Summit in Kyiv, negotiations on the content of the Association Agreement were completed, and in March 2012 the heads of the official delegations of the EU and Ukraine initialled the text of this Agreement.

88 — Then the well-known dramatic events took place. The refusal of the top political leadership of Ukraine, chaired by former President V. Yanukovich, in November 2013 to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU led to the beginning of a mass peaceful protest in defence of the European integration aspirations of the people of Ukraine, which was called “EuroMaidan” (Yehorova 2019, 22). This significant historical event finally confirmed the indomitability of the Ukrainian people in their European choice.

Under direct pressure from the citizens of Ukraine, in March 2014, the political paragraph of the Association Agreement was signed, and in June of the same year the economic part of the agreement was adopted. In September 2014, the European Parliament and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine simultaneously ratified the concluded Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine. Its provisional implementation began on November 1, 2014.

As A.V. Bredikhin emphasizes, “Ukraine was the first, but not the last, among the newly independent states that emerged on the territory of the former USSR to sign the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU. Following it, a similar agreement was signed with ten more former Soviet republics. Agreements with the remaining countries entered into force on July 1, 1999, with the exception of Belarus and Turkmenistan, with which these documents were never put into effect” (Bredykhyn 2009,11).

Shortly after the full-scale military invasion of the Russian federation into the territory of Ukraine on February 28, 2022, Ukraine submitted an

official application for membership in the European Union. The President of Ukraine, V. Zelensky, submitted a request for Ukraine's immediate accession to the EU under a "new special procedure." In support of this initiative, the presidents of eight European Union states called for accelerating the process of our country's accession to the European Union. On the same day, the President of the European Commission, U. von der Leyen, made an important statement that Ukraine is already a member of the European Union, and the bloc wants Ukraine to officially join this political entity, but this will take time. The current position of the EU leadership is conveyed by the words of Ursula von der Leyen, spoken at the Ukraine-EU summit in Kyiv in February 2023: "Today we came with a set of proposals to ensure that Ukraine has seamless access to the European Single Market. We want to help Ukraine mobilize its full economic potential for the fight against Russia and, later, for reconstruction." (Von der Leyen 2023). This position of the EU leader arouses great optimism among Ukrainians about Ukraine's future membership in the European Union. However, after the victory over the Russian federation, Ukraine still has a significant path to go through in terms of comprehensive reform in order to implement European standards in various areas of life.

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Ukraine's path to the European Union is unique and unconventional. Russia's aggressive, neocolonial war against Ukraine has left its mark on this complex process. Many modern politicians and political scientists see one of the main reasons for Russian aggression against Ukraine precisely in the attempt to stop and curtail the process of Ukraine's European integration. However, acting as an eastern outpost of Western civilization, defending liberal-democratic values and its own sovereignty with arms in hand, Ukraine is in practice proving its natural right to return to the European family of nations. Suffering in all areas of development, bearing great human, economic and military losses, Ukraine has successfully transitioned from the status of an associated member of the EU to the status of an official candidate for full membership of the European Union. At the same time, Ukrainians continue to implement Brussels' recommendations on implementing basic reforms and expanding sectoral cooperation with the EU.

Today, it is worth understanding that the revival of Ukraine and its achievement of a worthy place in the modern world is possible only if the main efforts are concentrated on the implementation of the strategic goal – the transformation of our country into a strong unitary state, which will

become a regional leader in Europe, capable of guaranteeing a high social standard of living and security for its citizens.

In essence, Ukraine and the European Union have entered a new phase of their relations, which is characterized by the growth of interdependence between Ukrainian and European partners, the expansion of interaction and cooperation in the defence, financial and security sectors, the activation of joint strategic planning, a significant strengthening and unification of efforts in organizing large-scale resistance to Russian expansion, etc.

In a certain sense, Russia's war against Ukraine created an additional powerful impetus to accelerate the process of Ukraine's integration into the EU, as both Europeans and Ukrainians were clearly convinced of the real lack of alternative to the course of Ukraine's return to the European community. The new geopolitical context, associated with the noticeable revanchist activation of the world's authoritarian tellurocracies (Russia, China, Iran, etc.), forces the world's democratic thalassocracies (USA, Great Britain, EU, etc.) to join forces. Ukraine has found itself at the epicentre of this confrontation and, as a young democracy, is paving its way into the alliance of the world's advanced polyarchies, finally rejecting the remnants of Soviet archaism.

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At the same time, the Russian federation's war against Ukraine has exacerbated some of the problems of our collaboration with the European Union. For example, there is a curtailment of some initiated and planned joint business projects with the participation of European private investors, who naturally neutralize their risks in a warring country. In addition, huge losses in the Ukrainian economy, a sharp decline in industrial production, and the reorientation of the Ukrainian state budget to predominantly finance the defence and security sectors have turned our country into a permanent requester and recipient of comprehensive foreign aid, the fate of which is critically important for keeping Ukrainian society afloat. Evidently such a situation cannot last forever, and it must be assessed very carefully in view of the prospect of our foreign allies gradually becoming tired of Ukraine's problems. This is an objective assessment, not a narrative of Russian propaganda, because in democratic societies of the West, the voices of politicians are increasingly louder, calling for limiting (or even stopping) and placing additional control over budgetary support for Ukraine: from supporters of Donald Trump in the USA to supporters of Marine Le Pen in France. The changing moods of the electorate in Western democracies can be understood, rising inflation due to a reduction in

real incomes, rejection of cheap Russian energy resources, an additional serious burden on the budget associated with social assistance to millions of Ukrainian refugees. All this leads to increased social tension in Western societies. Obviously, in the current situation, Ukraine ought to demonstrate appropriate efficiency in the use of funds from foreign countries. By the way, we need to resolutely take a course for total and radical reform of our statehood towards its transformation from a post-Soviet bureaucratic form to a modern service state of the Western model. It is necessary to complete the reform of the judicial branch of government so that Ukrainian citizens have access to fair justice and foreign investors receive guarantees of the inviolability of their capital.

A separate point in this process is the reform of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine. The Venice Commission has repeatedly emphasized that it is crucial to include an additional seventh member from a number of independent international experts in the advisory group of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine and to establish the binding nature of the decisions adopted by the commission. This will significantly improve the mechanism and quality of the selection of candidates for the position of a judge of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine. However, today, due to the incompleteness of the reform of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, the high-quality performance of this body's important functions as an independent branch of government looks problematic and raises quite natural questions from our European partners.

Ukraine's implementation of the obligations stipulated in the Association Agreement is planned for the period between 2014 and 2024. As of the end of 2019, according to the government system "Pulse of the Agreement", Ukraine has completed 43% of the tasks scheduled for this period. At the same time, the vast majority of areas in which reform is envisaged have tasks whose implementation has been postponed. The greatest progress has been achieved in areas that require mainly legal regulation, the creation of state institutions, new legislation or changes to existing ones, and other actions, the implementation of which does not require radical changes that may affect the functioning of the already formed state system (Chornobai 2021, 71).

Ukraine's sanctions policy against structures and representatives of the aggressor state of Russia also needs to be radically strengthened. It is unlikely that targeted sanctions against some odious characters of Russian show business, oligarchic groups, and politicians will achieve a landslide

effect for the fascist Putin regime. Here it is necessary to take comprehensive systemic measures that would be aimed at the real undermining of the anti-human system of power in the Russian federation. Moreover, our European and American partners have clearly and repeatedly demonstrated to us a master class in legal, economic, financial, and humanitarian sanctions policy against Russia, adopting more than 10 packages of sanctions against the aforementioned aggressor state, which violates all generally recognized norms of international law in the world community.

92 — One of the strategic directions of the European Union's development is the harmonization of international relations between partner countries and EU member states, which should create stability on the borders of the European community. This means that the EU plans to finance joint programs that will connect the territories of partner countries and EU member states that have common state borders. Ukraine, which borders a number of EU member states, should take advantage of this opportunity and make the most of joint projects to establish cross-border cooperation in European states that belong to the European Union. It is necessary to move towards a significant simplification of procedures and a noticeable increase in the efficiency of the use of technical assistance from the European Union. Moreover, today an important foundation has already been created for this - a visa-free regime between the EU and Ukraine. Plus, a new approach is being introduced to establishing long-term cooperation in the form of the creation of "structural funds": joint financing, partnership and multi-annual cooperation programs.

What prevents Ukraine from transforming from an extreme geopolitical subject into a normal, stable geopolitical subject?

In our opinion, a set of reasons, among which the main ones are *the extremely low efficiency of post-Soviet statehood and the kleptocratic oligarchic regime*. As a result of ineffective political governance, increased corruption and oligarchic clientelism, Ukraine has come under the influence of more powerful players who are trying to defend and satisfy their own national interests, including at the expense of Ukrainian subjectivity.

To acquire normal geopolitical subjectivity, Ukraine needs to carry out *a set of reforms aimed to radically modernize sovereign statehood*.

The first stage should be the implementation of a *political and administrative reform*. The mixed form of government in the form of a parliamentary-presidential republic has shown its ineffectiveness in Ukraine. This is a rather confusing and inefficient system that constantly

provokes the dualism of presidential and governmental power and general irresponsibility for the political decisions made.

Thus, in the context of its European perspective for Ukraine, it is essential to make a transition to a *parliamentary republic with decentralized unitarism*.

A *comprehensive economic reform* should be implemented as the second stage of reforms. It is vital to demonopolize and de-oligarchize the Ukrainian economy in practice. Otherwise, in the inertial scenario, the old oligarchy may be replaced by a new, post-war oligarchy – “new individuals” with old surnames. It is pivotal to move from the outdated post-Soviet oligarchic model to a modern model of *people’s capitalism*, where small and medium-sized businesses focused on serving the population play a key role.

So, in order to become a full member of the European Union, Ukraine ought to build a socio-political model that meets European standards in the first place. The terrible war that the Ukrainian people are experiencing should become a “watershed” between the archaic post-Soviet model of statehood and the modern European statist model of service. The crucial point is not to waste the historical chance for a radical modernization of the national Ukrainian state in order to move away from the slogan “man for the state” and move to the philosophy of “state for man”. Optimism in this process arises due to the formation of a clear public demand for the construction of a new post-war fair society in Ukraine.

**Conclusions.** Firstly, the expansion of the European Union to the east has turned Ukraine into a direct neighbour of the EU. This has significantly increased the opportunities for establishing comprehensive cooperation and interaction between Ukraine and the European Union.

Secondly, in order to gain stable geopolitical subjectivity and fully join the EU, Ukraine needs to implement a set of reforms aimed at the radical modernization of sovereign statehood.

Thirdly, to organize effective counteraction to the authoritarian threat from the Russian federation, there is an objective need to integrate the potential of the states of the world democratic coalition. The European Union and Ukraine have prominent places in this process due to the fact that geographically they are at the forefront of resistance to the aggressive actions of the Russian federation. In view of this, relations between the EU and Ukraine are gaining strategic importance for the protection and development of the entire Euro-Atlantic civilization.

Fourth, by acting as the eastern outpost of Western civilization, defending its ideological values and its state independence from the Russian federation with weapons in hand, Ukraine has practically proven its natural right to return to the European family.

Fifth, for Ukraine, in the context of its European perspective, it is necessary to make the transition to a parliamentary republic with decentralized unitarism.

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