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EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES OF UKRAINE'S ECONOMY ON THE PATH TO EU MEMBERSHIP

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Summary. *This article presents a comprehensive study of the current state and prospects of European integration of Ukraine in the context of full-scale war and during the pre-accession negotiations for membership in the European Union. The relevance of the topic stems from the unprecedented nature of the situation in which Ukraine is pursuing a course of European integration and fulfilling the requirements for adapting national legislation and institutions to European standards under martial law. It is demonstrated that the integration process has acquired not only political and economic significance but also significant security implications for both Ukraine and the European Union itself. The study analyzes the key challenges facing Ukraine on its path to EU membership. Particular attention is paid to issues of macroeconomic stability, compliance with the Maastricht criteria, overcoming the consequences of the military crisis, modernizing the economy, and ensuring sustainable economic growth. The study examines the impact of demographic changes and migration processes on the functioning of the labor market, as well as the prospects for rebuilding human capital as one of the key resources for the country's post-war development. The paper examines the specifics of the agricultural sector's adaptation to the requirements of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy and identifies the main risks and opportunities for Ukrainian producers in the context of future integration into the single European market. Significant attention is paid to issues of environmental policy, the implementation of «green transition» principles, energy security, and the need to modernize the industrial complex in accordance with EU standards. It has been established that achieving the goals of European integration requires not only the formal adoption of European standards but also the creation of effective mechanisms for their practical implementation within the context of Ukraine's socio-economic realities. It is argued that Ukraine's accession to the European Union is a mutually beneficial process that will contribute to strengthening Europe's economic potential, security architecture, and strategic resilience. It is determined that Ukraine's candidacy already serves as a catalyst for internal transformations within the European Union itself and stimulates a reevaluation of certain approaches to the functioning of its institutions. It is concluded that Ukraine's successful European integration depends on the consistent implementation of structural reforms, the strengthening of the rule of law, the development of an innovative economy, effective post-war recovery, and the maintenance of a strategic course toward full EU membership.*

Key words: *European integration, sustainable development, Ukrainian economy, structural modernization, EU membership, post-war recovery, macroeconomic stability, European market.*

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ЄВРОІНТЕГРАЦІЙНІ ТА ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЙНІ ПРОЦЕСИ ЕКОНОМІКИ УКРАЇНИ НА ШЛЯХУ ДО ЧЛЕНСТВА В ЄС

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Резюме. *Здійснено комплексне дослідження сучасного стану та перспектив європейської інтеграції України в умовах повномасштабної війни та на етапі передвступних переговорів щодо набуття членства в Європейському Союзі. Актуальність теми зумовлена безпрецедентністю ситуації, за якої Україна реалізує євроінтеграційний курс і виконує вимоги щодо адаптації національного законодавства та інституцій до європейських стандартів в умовах воєнного стану. Доведено, що процес інтеграції набув не лише політичного та економічного, а й вагомого безпекового значення як для України, так і для самого Європейського Союзу. Проаналізовано ключові виклики, які постають перед Україною на шляху до членства в ЄС. Особливу увагу приділено проблемам макроекономічної стабільності, відповідності маастрихтським критеріям, подоланню наслідків воєнної кризи, модернізації економіки та забезпеченню стійкого економічного зростання. Розглянуто вплив демографічних змін і міграційних процесів на функціонування ринку праці, а також перспективи відновлення людського капіталу як одного з ключових ресурсів повоєнного розвитку держави. Досліджено особливості адаптації аграрного сектора до вимог Спільної аграрної політики Європейського Союзу, визначено основні ризики та можливості для українських виробників у контексті майбутньої інтеграції до єдиного європейського ринку. Значну увагу приділено питанням екологічної політики, реалізації принципів «зеленого переходу», енергетичної безпеки та необхідності модернізації промислового комплексу відповідно до стандартів ЄС. Встановлено, що досягнення цілей європейської інтеграції потребує не лише формального упровадження європейських норм, а й створення ефективних механізмів їх практичної реалізації в умовах українських соціально-економічних реалій. Обґрунтовано, що вступ України до Європейського Союзу є взаємовигідним процесом, який сприятиме зміцненню економічного потенціалу, безпекової архітектури та стратегічної стійкості Європи. Визначено, що українське кандидатство вже сьогодні виступає каталізатором внутрішніх трансформацій самого Європейського Союзу та стимулює перегляд окремих підходів до функціонування його інституцій. Зроблено висновок, що успішна євроінтеграція України залежить від послідовного здійснення структурних реформ, зміцнення верховенства права, розвитку інноваційної економіки, ефективного повоєнного відновлення та збереження стратегічного курсу на повноправне членство в ЄС.*

Ключові слова: *євроінтеграція, сталий розвиток, економіка України, структурна модернізація, членство в ЄС, повоєнне відновлення, макроекономічна стабільність, європейський ринок.*

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Problem statement. Ukraine's European integration is one of the key strategic priorities of national development, driving the transformation of the political, legal, economic, and social systems in line with European Union standards. After obtaining EU candidate status in 2022 and the official launch of the negotiation process, Ukraine has entered a new phase in its relations with the European community. At the same time, the integration process is taking place amid a full-scale war, which poses unprecedented challenges for implementing reforms, ensuring macroeconomic stability, reviving the economy, and meeting membership criteria. Under such conditions, European integration takes on not only political significance but is also

viewed as a vital tool for strengthening national security, modernizing the economy, and ensuring the country's long-term development.

Despite Ukraine's significant progress in implementing European norms and standards, a number of complex challenges remain on the path to full EU membership, related to the need for structural reforms, the adaptation of legislation to the acquis communautaire, the modernization of the agricultural sector, ensuring energy security, implementing environmental policy, and addressing the consequences of the demographic crisis. Additional challenges are posed by the significant economic losses caused by the war, the destruction of industrial and social infrastructure, and the need for large-scale post-war reconstruction. In this context, it is particularly important to examine the current challenges and prospects of Ukraine's European integration, identify key directions for economic reform, and establish strategic guidelines for the country's further progress toward membership in the European Union.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The issue of Ukraine's European integration is a focal point for domestic scholars who study its political, economic, legal, and security aspects. The economic consequences of integration and the impact of European integration processes on the development of the national economy are examined in the works of O. Zayats [1], who focuses on the institutional and structural effects of realizing Ukraine's competitive advantages in the context of EU integration, as well as by Y. Redziuk [2], who examines the factors of economic divergence between Ukraine and the European Union. The scientific, technological, and innovative aspects of Ukraine's cooperation with the EU are discussed in the work by I. Pidorycheva [3], which outlines the strategic directions for developing the partnership in the field of innovation and technological modernization of the economy. A separate area of research is related to issues of Ukraine's post-war economic recovery, as reflected in the works of V. Yemets [4], M. Skoryk, and S. Danilenko [5], who identify the main reserves and promising directions for the country's economic reconstruction. A significant contribution to the study of the political, legal, and security dimensions of European integration was made by A. Nahirnyak [6], O. Blyznyak and A. Rykov [7], V. Marchuk [8, 9], and M. Marchuk [9], V. Dudkevych [10], I. Lisna [11], and V. Suprun [12]. Their works analyze the current state of Ukraine's European integration policy, the impact of the russian-Ukrainian war on integration processes, the transformation of security policy, the adaptation of the national legal system to EU standards, as well as the prospects for Ukraine's future membership in the European Union. The prospects for Ukraine's accession to the EU amid russian aggression are examined by N. Romanyuk and V. Nechyporuk [13], while V. Gulitska and A. Pyvovar [14] focus on the key challenges and prospects for the country's further integration progress. The specifics of the legal framework for European integration under martial law are discussed in the works of S. Kvasha, O. Pavlenko, and V. Vakulenko [15]. At the same time, despite a significant body of academic work, the issues surrounding the comprehensive interplay of economic, institutional, and security challenges in Ukraine's European integration at the current stage of pre-accession negotiations remain under-researched, which underscores the relevance of this study.

Purpose of the study. The purpose of this article is to conduct a comprehensive study of the current state of Ukraine's European integration process amid a full-scale war and during the pre-accession negotiations with the European Union, to identify the key economic, institutional, legal, social, and security challenges on the path to EU membership, to assess the prospects for the country's further integration progress, and to justify strategic guidelines for reforming the national economy and mechanisms for adapting to European standards in the context of ensuring sustainable development, post-war recovery, and Ukraine's successful integration into the European political, economic, and security space.

The work is structurally divided into three sections. The first section is devoted to examining the values-based and security foundations: why Ukraine is consistently moving

toward the EU, and why this is no less important for the Union itself than it is for Kyiv. The second section provides a step-by-step analysis of specific barriers – economic, legal, and institutional. The third section focuses on forecasting and strategic planning: which scenarios are most likely and what needs to be done today.

Statement of the task. The aim of this study is to analyze the current state of Ukraine's European integration amid a full-scale war, identify the main economic, institutional, legal, and security challenges on the path to European Union membership, assess the prospects for adapting the national economy to European standards, and outline the strategic priorities for the country's further integration and post-war recovery.

Statements of the main material of the study. Ukraine's European integration at this stage is one of the most far-reaching transformational processes in the country's history, encompassing the economic, political, legal, social, and security spheres. Ukraine's attainment of candidate status for European Union membership in 2022 and the official launch of accession negotiations were landmark events that demonstrated the European community's recognition of Ukraine's strategic role in shaping the continent's future security architecture and development. At the same time, the uniqueness of the current phase lies in the fact that the implementation of the European integration course is taking place amid a full-scale war, which significantly affects economic stability, the functioning of state institutions, the demographic situation, and the ability to carry out necessary reforms. Under these circumstances, the process of integration into the EU not only takes on the significance of a foreign policy priority but also serves as an important tool for modernizing the economy, accelerating structural reforms, and ensuring Ukraine's long-term sustainable development.

The European Union has never been merely an economic community. From its very inception, it has been built around shared values – democratic governance, the rule of law, and respect for human dignity. Ukraine has followed a unique path in this regard. While at the turn of the century, for many Ukrainians, Europe primarily symbolized the possibility of visa-free travel and better-paying jobs, today's perception has become much deeper. Having gone through the crucible of the Revolution of Dignity, and subsequently a full-scale war, society has come to understand that the European choice is, above all, a choice of a value system built on law and freedom. Ukraine's chosen course toward European integration is the result of a conscious decision by both citizens and the government [6, p. 167]. The key word here is «consciousness»: people understand that the path to membership will be difficult, yet they consciously choose it because they see no acceptable alternative.

In this context, it is worth citing the observations of V. Dudkevych, who emphasizes that a consistent process of European integration will lead to the development of a genuine, rather than merely formal, democratic political regime; the formation of a functionally viable civil society; the creation of an internally consolidated political nation; the effective realization of citizens' rights and freedoms; the modernization of the economic system; and so on [10, p. 120]. In essence, we are already observing this process in real time. Paradoxically, the war has accelerated national consolidation – Ukrainians have ceased to divide themselves along regional or linguistic lines, rallying around a shared civilizational choice.

As Olena Zayats points out, the total potential for economic recovery is estimated at over $500 billion, with a focus on green technologies and human capital [1, p. 148]. Such an astronomical figure clearly demonstrates that European integration is not just about abstract ideals, but also about very concrete material prospects for every citizen. Post-war reconstruction based on European models will mean a fundamentally new quality of life, the creation of modern jobs, and broader opportunities for professional and personal fulfillment. In light of all this, it can be argued that Ukraine is approaching the Copenhagen Criteria not only at the level of legal texts but also at the level of spirit – society already thinks and behaves in a European manner, even if state institutions have not yet caught up with this progress.

When considering the security aspect of European integration, one should start with a simple yet often underestimated observation: today, Ukraine acts as a net contributor to security for the entire European continent. This means that, in terms of defense, it gives more than it receives. The Ukrainian military not only defends its own land – it also deters an aggressor who poses a direct threat to all of Eastern and Central Europe. Marchuk aptly notes that the main elements of Ukraine's relationship with the EU today are joint resistance to russia's continental expansion, political solidarity, and military, financial, and economic support for Ukraine, as it has long been defending the EU's eastern flank [8, p. 109]. This thesis captures the essence of the new security reality: Ukraine holds the front line, while Europe provides it with the necessary resources. The unique combat experience accumulated by the Armed Forces of Ukraine deserves special attention. No army of any NATO or EU country has practical experience in waging large-scale conventional warfare using the full arsenal of modern weapons – from conventional artillery to strike drones and electronic warfare systems. Ukrainian servicemen have become true experts in these matters, and this experience is of extraordinary value to the entire architecture of collective security. Integrating Ukraine's defense-industrial complex into European defense structures could significantly strengthen the defense capabilities of the entire continent.

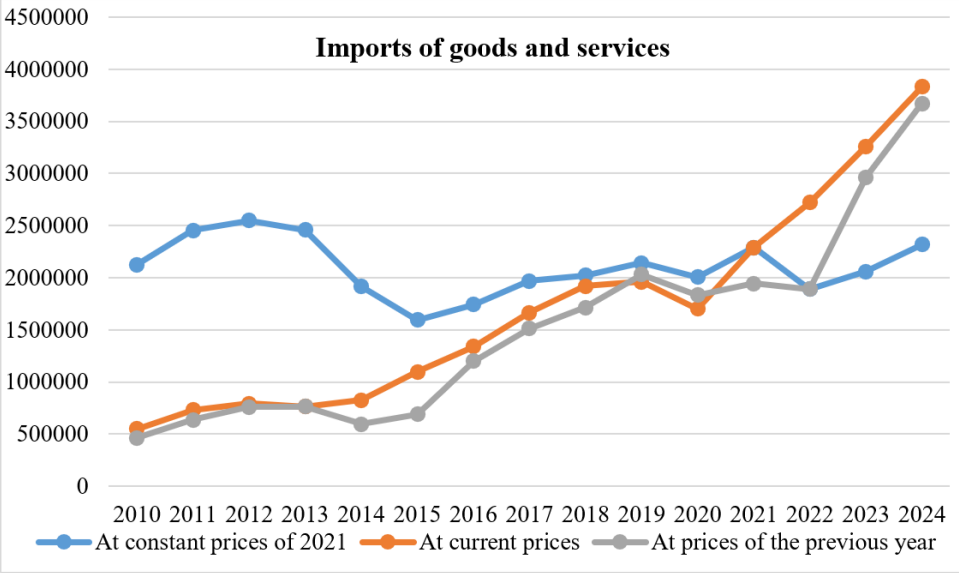

Figure 1. Dynamics of imports of goods and services of Ukraine in 2010–2024, UAH million*

*Generated by the authors based on [16].

It is a fairly widespread misconception that the expansion of the European Union is a one-sided process in which a candidate country needs to adapt to pre-established standards, while Brussels merely assesses the level of compliance. In reality, the situation is more complex: the prospect of Ukraine's accession is already prompting the EU itself to review its own rules and procedures. It is no exaggeration to say that Ukraine is forcing the European Union to grow up. The accession of a country that is large in terms of territory and population, with a developed agricultural sector, is causing a veritable tectonic shift in the Union's institutional structure. In Brussels, there is a growing realization that without reforming decision-making mechanisms (in particular, without abandoning the principle of unanimity in certain areas), further expansion will become practically impossible.

Perhaps the most pressing issue on the path to full membership is the question of the Ukrainian economy's ability to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria, specifically keeping public debt within 60% of GDP and the budget deficit no higher than 3% of GDP. But how can this be achieved when nearly a third of all government spending goes toward defense? A paradoxical situation arises: the European Union insists on financial stability, while the country is simultaneously forced to spend enormous sums on basic survival.

To assess Ukraine's foreign trade activity, it is advisable to analyze the trends in exports and imports of goods and services over the period 2010–2024. An analysis of the data presented indicates significant structural changes in the country's foreign economic activity, driven by both internal economic transformations and the influence of external factors, including military aggression by the russian federation, global crises, and the intensification of European integration processes. As shown in Fig. 1, the volume of imports of goods and services during the period under review demonstrated a general upward trend, although individual years were characterized by significant fluctuations. A particularly noticeable decline in import activity was observed in 2014–2015 and 2022–2023, which was linked to the economic crisis, the devaluation of the national currency, the outbreak of hostilities in eastern Ukraine, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the russian federation. At the same time, starting in 2016, imports gradually recovered, and in 2023–2024 reached their highest levels for the entire period under review, indicating growth in domestic demand, the need to rebuild the economy, and significant dependence on imports of energy resources, equipment, technologies, and consumer goods.

The trend in exports of goods and services, shown in Figure 2, is characterized by less stable trends. In constant 2021 prices, there has been a gradual decline in export volumes since 2011, which became particularly pronounced after the outbreak of full-scale war in 2022.

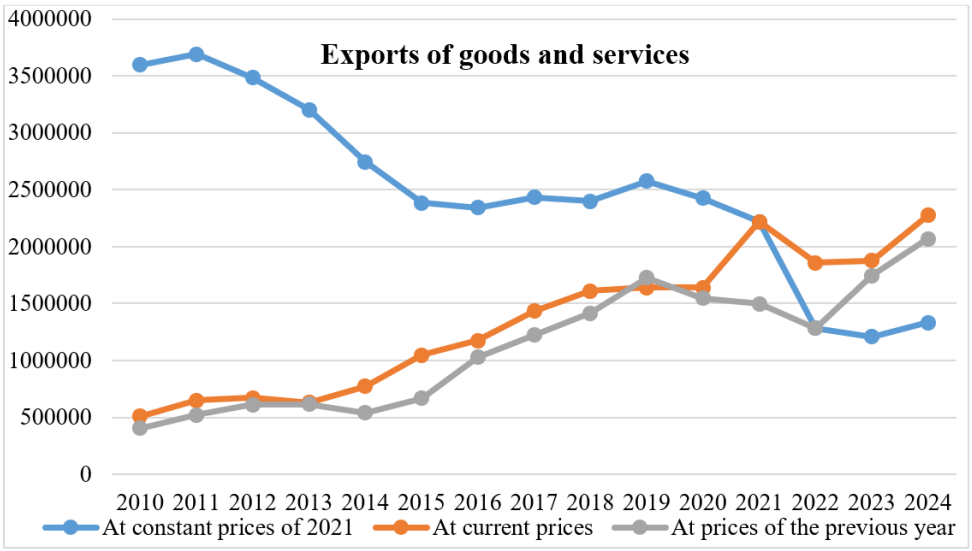

Figure 2. Dynamics of exports of goods and services of Ukraine in 2010–2024, UAH million*

*Generated by the authors based on [16].

Despite some recovery in exports at current prices in 2023-2024, their real volumes remain significantly lower than at the beginning of the period under review. This situation is explained by the destruction of production and transport infrastructure, restrictions on logistics routes, the temporary loss of part of production capacity, and changes in the structure of foreign trade.

A comparative analysis of Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 allows us to conclude that a sustained trend toward faster growth in imports compared to exports is emerging. While in previous years the foreign trade balance was characterized by relatively moderate imbalances, in 2022–2024 the gap between import and export volumes has significantly widened. This indicates a deepening of the foreign trade deficit and an increase in the economy's dependence on external financing. At the same time, a significant portion of imported goods is related to meeting the state's defense needs, supporting the functioning of critical infrastructure, and implementing recovery programs, which, under martial law, is an objective necessity.

Ukraine's further integration into the European economic area needs to be accompanied by measures to stimulate exports of high-value-added products, diversify foreign markets, modernize production, and enhance the competitiveness of domestic manufacturers. In the context of European integration, deepening Ukraine's participation in the European Union's internal market takes on particular significance, as this could become one of the key factors in balancing foreign trade flows and ensuring long-term economic growth.

The agricultural sector is no less complex. Ukraine is one of the world's largest grain exporters, yet EU regulations in the agricultural sector remain extremely detailed. They encompass a system of subsidies, quotas, environmental standards, and food safety regulations. At the same time, the problem lies not only in the sheer number of laws. The main risk is mechanically copying European standards without adapting them to Ukrainian realities. However, modeling the Ukrainian system on the European one does not automatically mean its development and adaptation to foreign operational mechanisms. This requires a number of conditions, including the harmonization of all domestic components [11, p. 171]. In other words, it is not enough to simply translate European directives into Ukrainian. These regulations also need to be effective in the context of war and post-war reconstruction. Ukrainian industry is suffering enormous losses as a result of russian attacks. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, russian terror has caused the Ukrainian economy to shrink by more than a third. Thousands of enterprises and infrastructure facilities have been destroyed. Millions of people have become internally displaced persons [14, p. 22]. Under such conditions, the overly rapid implementation of certain European standards could place an additional burden on businesses. This is precisely why Ukraine needs a flexible approach and specific transition periods.

The energy sector is another area where Ukraine's integration ambitions face harsh reality. Ukraine made a historic breakthrough by disconnecting from the russian energy grid and synchronizing its system with the European ENTSO-E. However, this undeniable achievement has been largely undermined by large-scale missile attacks on power generation facilities. A country that declares its aspiration to be part of the European green transition currently has destroyed thermal power plants and severely damaged hydropower generation. In the current situation, the concept of «smart recovery» – known in international discourse as «Build Back Greener» – plays a leading role. Its core idea is not to rebuild destroyed capacity using outdated technologies, but to immediately construct a modern, highly efficient, and environmentally safe energy sector. While this requires higher initial costs, it proves to be a significantly more cost-effective solution in the long term. Integration into the European gas and electricity markets has the potential to become a powerful driver of decarbonization and stimulate investment in the renewable energy sector.

Reform of Ukraine's judicial system is arguably the most difficult and painful path on the entire journey toward the European Union. It is often called an «eternal battle», and this description is by no means accidental: despite numerous attempts to overhaul the justice system, the results achieved remain mixed. Without trust in judicial institutions, there is no hope for a large-scale influx of investment, as no serious investor will risk capital in a country where there

is no confidence in the reliable protection of property rights. It is for this very reason that the issue of the rule of law consistently tops the list of the European Commission's recommendations. The seven key reform measures include:

1. Reforming the Constitutional Court and adopting legislation on the procedure for selecting judges.
2. Continuing comprehensive judicial reform.
3. Strengthening anti-corruption measures, particularly at the highest levels, including the appointment of new heads of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) and the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU).
4. Combating money laundering and adopting a comprehensive strategic plan for reforming law enforcement agencies.
5. Implementing the provisions of the so-called «anti-oligarch law».
6. Bringing media legislation into line with the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive.
7. Completing the reform of legislation in the field of national minority rights [7, p. 126].

Harmonization of legislation is directly linked to the country's economic security. Without production and logistics partnerships and without integration into the world's most powerful economic centers, Ukraine's domestic socio-economic environment will continue to deteriorate and face the risks of a globalized economy [2, p. 116]. At the same time, it is precisely the transposition of EU law that creates the foundation for the country's long-term modernization. Granting candidate status will serve as an impetus for continuing reforms and transformations in all spheres and for Ukraine's further integration into the EU's single market [13, p. 56]. In addition, European integration encompasses scientific and technological development. As Ukraine moves along the path of European integration, it should align its national strategic goals, political actions, and decisions regarding national scientific, technological, and innovation development with pan-European ones, striving to ensure their compatibility while taking national interests into account, in order to achieve a synergistic effect from joint efforts with European partners and minimize policy fragmentation. In this context, international cooperation can be viewed as an effective means of utilizing the global knowledge and technology base, which will accelerate industrial development and stimulate Ukraine's economic growth [3, pp. 61, 68].

The current state of the regulatory framework for Ukraine's accession to the EU is characterized by challenges that are primarily linked to the need to align Ukrainian legislation with that of the European Union – a process that has, in fact, been ongoing for 25 years [15, p. 32]. Thus, the transposition of the acquis communautaire is not merely a technical procedure but a large-scale transformation of the entire state system, consisting of a series of stages (see Figure 3). Ukraine needs to simultaneously adapt its legislation, implement reforms, and rebuild the country amid a war. The effectiveness of the entire negotiation track depends on the success of this process.

Equally challenging is the task of restoring local self-government in the de-occupied territories. Some communities have lost their infrastructure, administrative buildings, and personnel. In some regions, the local governance system will effectively have to be rebuilt from scratch. At the same time, decentralization remains one of the most successful Ukrainian reforms of recent years. It was the communities that often demonstrated the greatest effectiveness in the first months of the war. In this context, the issue of trust in the authorities takes on particular importance. For the European Commission, the democratic resilience of the state is one of the key evaluation criteria.

Nor should the security dimension be overlooked. The main reform priorities outlined in the EU Doctrine involve improving the unified national civil protection system, reforming the mobilization and mobilization training system, and enhancing the effectiveness of

democratic civilian oversight over the security and defense sectors [12, p. 25]. In fact, Ukraine will have to simultaneously restore democratic procedures and ensure a high level of security.

When discussing Ukraine's accession to the European Union, the focus is usually on Ukraine's own problems – corruption, reforms, economic difficulties, or the war. However, it has become increasingly clear in recent times that one of the main challenges lies not in Kyiv, but in Brussels itself. The European Union is currently going through a difficult period of internal conflicts. Expansion to the east raises questions for the EU about the ability of its institutions to function effectively under new conditions. If Ukraine, Moldova, the Western Balkan states, and potentially other candidates join the Union, the number of member states could exceed 35. This automatically creates a problem with decision-making. The situation is particularly complicated due to the unanimity principle, which still applies in certain areas of European policy. In effect, any member state can block an important decision. It is precisely for this reason that Hungary and, to some extent, Slovakia are already viewed as potential blockers of certain stages of Ukraine's integration. Domestic political cycles in individual EU countries also significantly influence the negotiation process. Governments' positions may shift depending on elections, the economic situation, or public sentiment. As a result, even states that generally support Ukraine sometimes begin to act more cautiously.

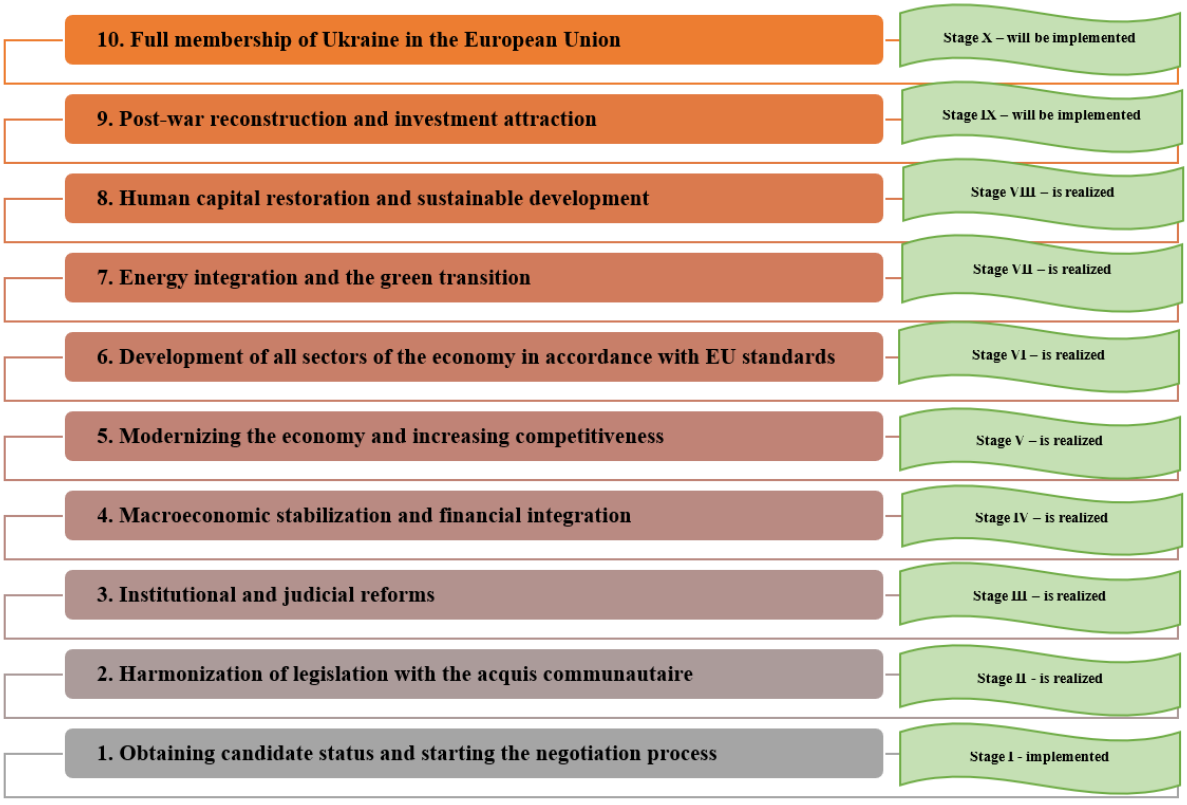

Figure 3. Strategic directions of Ukraine's European integration on the path to EU membership*

*Generated by the authors based on [4; 5; 9].

When examining the external factors influencing Ukraine's European integration process, it is also necessary to take into account intra-European contradictions, which may pose certain risks to Ukraine's socioeconomic development [10, p. 123].

This is precisely why discussions about the need to reform decision-making mechanisms within the EU itself are becoming increasingly common. The transition to a qualified majority instead of unanimity is gradually becoming not just a desirable reform, but in fact a condition

for further enlargement. The Ukrainian issue is already forcing the European Union to reconsider its own model of operation. In fact, Ukraine is becoming a catalyst for internal reforms within the EU.

Conclusions. Ukraine's European integration amid a full-scale war is a complex, multidimensional process that encompasses economic, legal, institutional, social, and security transformations. The study found that, despite significant challenges related to war losses, macroeconomic instability, the need for large-scale post-war reconstruction, and the adaptation of legislation to EU requirements, Ukraine is demonstrating consistent progress in implementing its European integration course. At the same time, successful progress toward membership requires further strengthening of the rule of law, improving the efficiency of state institutions, developing an innovative economy, and ensuring the competitiveness of domestic production.

It has been established that Ukraine's accession to the European Union is of strategic importance not only for the Ukrainian state but also for the EU itself, contributing to the strengthening of European security, economic stability, and institutional development. The prospects for successful integration depend to a large extent on Ukraine's ability to combine the fulfillment of its European integration commitments with the tasks of rebuilding the country and modernizing its economy. Provided that the consistency of reforms is maintained, international support is used effectively, and the strategic course toward a European future remains unchanged, Ukraine has real prospects for achieving full membership in the European Union.

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