

**European Economic Integration**

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**POLITICAL-ECONOMIC PARADIGM  
OF EU ENLARGEMENT:  
THE CASE OF UKRAINE****Abstract**

The Copenhagen criteria define the requirements for Ukraine's membership of the European Union: democracy guaranteed by stable institutions, a functioning market economy and the ability to implement the union's economic, political and monetary objectives. Despite progress made in important areas, Ukraine

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must take further steps on reforms related to abuse of power, lack of transparency and labour migration. Joining the European Union will pose a challenge for Ukraine to reform bad practices and implement European legislation into national law. The Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade, which contain economic, judicial and financial principles, should be used as a model for a gradual approach to EU policies and legislation. Ukraine's future success depends on the reforms implemented, the ability to eradicate corruption, keep people in the country, attract foreign investment and rebuild the country, while maintaining ongoing military support to defend the integrity of Ukrainian territory.

### **Key Words:**

European Union, Copenhagen Criteria, reform, competitiveness, trade flows, security, integration, import, export, risks.

**JEL:** F15, F02, F22, F53.

12 figures, 33 references.

### **Problem Statement**

The enlargement of the European Union has always been a process that determined the political and economic development of the continent. For the EU, expansion to the east is a tool for ensuring stability, but requires consideration of economic, political and social integration factors. In the conditions of increased global competition and the need for structural reforms, the study of the relationship between political and economic factors is key to successful integration.

On 23 June 2022, the European Union (EU) decided to grant Ukraine candidate status for EU membership after Ukraine applied for it, on 28 February 2022 (European Council, 2023). In the conditions of Russia's armed aggression and the need for large-scale reforms, understanding the political and economic condi-

tions for successful integration is critically important for Ukraine. The candidate status is the first step to process the key criteria for accession. A four-step process is required to become a member: application, candidacy, negotiations and accession (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The conditions for membership were determined at the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 and we know them as «Copenhagen criteria». They include a stable democracy, the equality of all citizens before the law, a market economy in which the prices of goods and services are guided through voluntary transactions according to the laws of supply and demand and the acceptance of EU legislation, including of the euro (EU, 2023; European Council, 2022).

Ukraine has an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU since September 2017, following the Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) since January 2016 with EU (Disney & Szyszczak, 2022). The DCFTA includes: 1) abolition of import duties of goods; 2) introduction of rules of origin of goods; 3) align EU rules and Ukraine's procedures, technical regulations, sanitary measures and food safety measures to avoid additional certification in the EU for Ukrainian industrial, agricultural and food products; 4) creating optimal conditions for accessing the services markets of Ukraine and the EU; 5) opening the EU market to Ukrainian companies through the introduction of EU rules on Ukrainian public procurement; 6) introduction of measures to protect intellectual property rights in Ukraine and 7) introduction of simplified customs procedures to prevent fraud and smuggling in the cross-border movement of goods.

## Literature Review

Throughout its history, the European Union has been characterized by significant socio-economic disparities and political diversification, both in its internal processes and in the accession of new members. These disparities have often been associated with key threats to the current and future functioning of the EU. The model of differentiated integration is optimal for conceptualizing strategic directions for the EU's future expansion as well as for deepening internal integration (Krysovaty, Lishchynskyy, 2023). Leuffen et al. (2012) mentioned that from a political perspective, integration into the EU primarily involves the harmonization of national legislation with the EU's *acquis communautaire*.

Scholars and practitioners have developed a range of terms to describe both synonymous and different parameters or methods of further EU enlargement. Stubb (1996) proposed a classification of the modifications in the EU's legal regimes, which can also be applied to typologize differentiated integration based on three criteria: time, space, and content. Later different close approaches were proposed, particularly «the condominium» of many Europes, «multi-menu integra-

tion», «multi-speed integration» etc. (Frey & Eichenberger, 1995; Schmitter & Marks, 1996; Hooges & Marks, 2016; Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020).

Rather vast number of research is dedicated to the provision of an economic perspective, estimating the potential costs and benefits of admitting Eastern European countries into the Union. The studies underscore in general that while there are economic gains to be had from enlargement, the structural adjustments required pose significant challenges, particularly for less developed member states (Epstein & Jacoby, 2014; Anghel & Jones, 2022; Kononczuk, 2022; Lishchynskyy & Lyzun, 2018).

Research on Ukraine's integration into the European Union (EU) focuses on several key areas: political reforms, economic alignment, security and geopolitics, the challenges of meeting EU standards, etc. Overall, the literature underscores that while Ukraine has made significant strides in aligning with the EU, it faces substantial challenges in political reforms, economic modernization, and navigating external geopolitical tensions (Dabrowski, 2019; Kuzio, 2017; Wolczuk, 2016; Savelyev et al, 2021).

### **Research objective and Methodology**

The war Russia-Ukraine has changed the world and the EU perception. It sets a challenge to EU leadership about the need to strength its security and administrate its internal problems. Ukraine's application for EU membership puts more pressure on the leadership of the EU and member states, as the response could be decisive for the future of the EU.

**The aim of this work** is the analysis of political and economic factors affecting Ukraine's progress towards EU membership, and the identification of key challenges and opportunities on this basis.

To study the political and economic aspects of the EU enlargement, an analysis of the official documents of the European Union, the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, the EU's strategies for enlargement, as well as the internal normative legal acts of Ukraine related to European integration was carried out. Quantitative methods were used to study economic aspects (Ritchie et al, 2013), including statistical data on economic growth, foreign trade and consumption expenditure. Qualitative analysis is aimed at assessing the political and social consequences of reforms and European integration processes.

## Research Results

The EU has been interested in building a relationship with Ukraine since its independence in 1991, with this interest intensifying during key events such as the Orange Revolution of 2004-2005, the 2008 invasion of Georgia, and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014. With the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the focus shifted to political, social and security issues to the detriment of economic issues (Bélanger, 2022).

Becoming an EU member is a complex procedure that is known as «Copenhagen criteria». Ukraine must fulfil the following criteria, (EC, 2023):

- institutions that are stable and ensure democracy, uphold the rule of law, protect human rights, and respect and safeguard minorities;
- a functional market economy capable of handling competition and responding effectively to market forces within the EU;
- the capability to assume and fulfil membership obligations, including commitment to the objectives of political, economic, and monetary union.

The first criterion is political, demanding stable institutions that uphold the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, especially the rights of minorities.

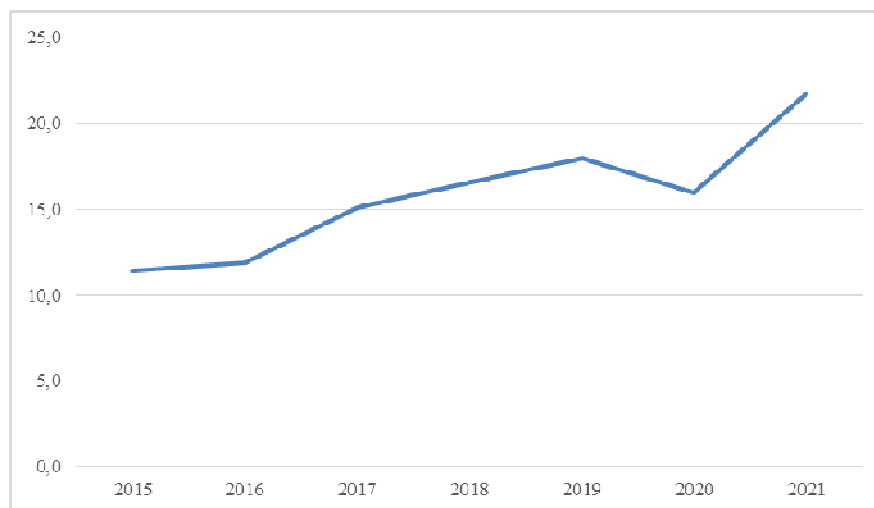
The second criterium is economic. The criteria to be assessed include having a functional market and the capacity to handle competitive pressure and market dynamics. Data from the agreements signed by Ukraine, DCTFA and AA, may provide the necessary information to assess the economic environment and may also provide the framework for the accession treaty (Van Elsuwege and Van der Loo, 2022).

The third criterion concerns Ukraine's competence to adopt membership obligations. Ukraine must show that it can adopt EU legislation into its national system and its political and economic purposes and monetary union.

The free trade area between Ukraine and the EU is one of the most important tools for deepening economic relations and bringing Ukraine closer to European standards. This agreement has a fundamental impact on various spheres of economic life of Ukraine, contributing to its European integration. Statistics show that the DCTFA and the AA have already contributed to increasing trade flows between Ukraine and the EU. Ukraine's exports to the European Union (EU 27) rose from 11.4 million euros in 2015 to 21.7 million euros in 2021, up 90.4% (Fig. 1). Ukraine's exports to the European Union (EU 27) in 2021 accounted for 39% of Ukraine's exports to the world.

Figure 1

## Ukraine's exports to EU27



Source: United Nations

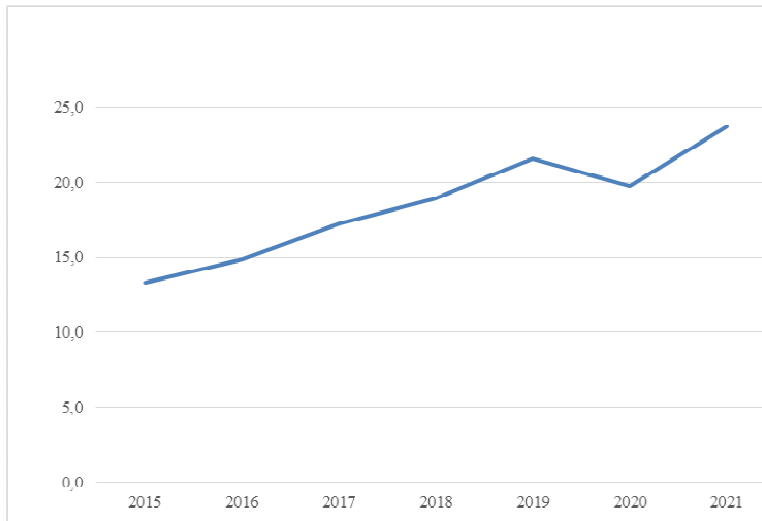
Ukraine's imports from the EU 27 rose from 13.3 million euros in 2015 to 23.7 million euros in 2021, up 78.6% (Fig. 2). Ukraine's imports from the European Union (EU 27) in 2021 accounted for 40.2% of Ukraine's imports from the world.

However, despite the increased flow of trade between Ukraine and the EU, our country has had general economic and social development problems. The Ease of Doing Business (EDB) ranks economies by sorting aggregated scores on 10 topics related to the regulatory environment conducive to beginning and operating a local business. The EDB 2020 ranked Ukraine 64th out of 190 states in the World Bank's 2020 Ease of Doing Business Index, which means that are aspects that should be improved to increase the Ukraine's competitiveness.

Various dimensions of Ukraine's EDB should be improved (Fig. 3, 4). «Starting a Business» measures the number of procedures, time and capital requirement for a business to start up and formally operate in each economy's biggest trading city.

Figure 2

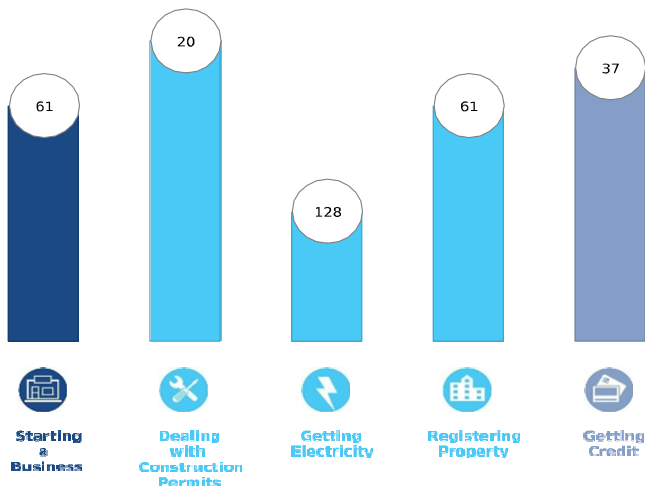
Ukraine's imports from EU27



Source: United Nations

Figure 3

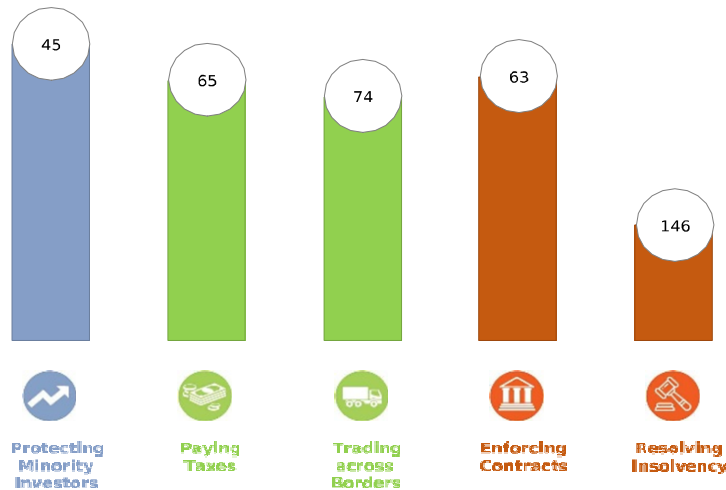
Rankings on Doing Business – Ukraine



Source: Doing Business, 2020

Figure 4

## Rankings on Doing Business – Ukraine



Source: Doing Business, 2020

Ukraine ranked 61st out of 190 economies, behind the countries of Georgia (position – 2), Moldova (position – 13), Kazakhstan (position – 22) and Belarus (rank: 30). Ukraine should reduce number of procedures.

«Dealing with Construction Permits» defines the time, procedures, and cost to build a warehouse, obtain permits, submit all necessary notifications, request all necessary inspections, obtain utility connections, measures the construction quality control index and assesses the quality of building regulations and professional certification requirements. Ukraine ranked 20th and is ahead of Georgia (position – 21), Kazakhstan (position – 37) and Belarus (position – 48).

«Getting Electricity» examines the procedures, time, and cost involved in connecting to the electrical grid, as well as the reliability of the electricity supply and the transparency of tariffs. Ukraine ranked 128th behind Belarus (position – 20), Georgia (position – 42) and Kazakhstan (position – 67). The primary factors contributing to Ukraine's poor performance are the wait for the project design of the external connection by a private firm and its approval (90 calendar days), along with the wait for the completion of external connection works (120 calendar days).



«Registering Property » examines the procedures, in the property registration process and measures the quality of the land administration system. Ukraine ranked 61st behind Georgia (position – 5), Belarus (position – 14), Moldova (position – 22) and Kazakhstan (position – 24). To improve this dimension, the number of procedures should be reduced.

«Getting credit» assessment evaluates the efficiency of credit information systems and insolvency frameworks in supporting lending activities. Ukraine ranked 37th behind Georgia (position – 15) and Kazakhstan (position – 25) and ahead of Moldova (position – 48).

«Protecting Minority Investors» examines the effectiveness of measures designed to prevent directors from misusing corporate assets for personal gain, as well as the strength of shareholder rights, governance practices and corporate transparency requirements in mitigating the risk of abuse. Ukraine ranked 45th out of 190 economies and is behind Georgia (position – 7), Kazakhstan (position – 7) and Moldova (position – 45) and ahead of Belarus (position – 79). The following indices compare the best regulatory performance between Ukraine and other economies and it is inferred that Ukraine's performance should be improved: Extent of disclosure index (Disclosure, review, and approval requirements for related-party transactions); Extent of ownership and control index (Governance safeguards protecting shareholders from undue board control and entrenchment) and Extent of corporate transparency index (Corporate transparency on ownership stakes, compensation, audits and financial prospects).

«Paying Taxes» identifies a comprehensive overview of the tax liabilities for medium-sized companies, including the administrative burden associated with tax compliance and post-filing procedures such as VAT refunds and tax audits. Ukraine ranked 65th out of 190 economies behind Georgia (position – 14), Moldova (position – 33) and Kazakhstan (position – 64) and ahead of Belarus (position – 99). Ukraine should reduce the total tax and contribution rate (% of profit) which is 45.2% compared to Europe and Central Asia which is 31.7% and OECD high income countries which is 39.9% and reduce the bureaucracy as well that consumes 328 hours a year in Ukraine compared to 213.1 hours a year in Europe and Central Asia and 158.8 hours a year in high-income OECD countries.

«Trading across Borders» measures the administrative burdens and costs involved in international trade, focusing on the time and expenses associated with documentary requirements, customs clearance, and domestic logistics. Ukraine ranked 74th out of 190 economies behind Georgia (position – 5), Belarus (position – 24), Moldova (position – 38) and Georgia (position – 45) and ahead of Kazakhstan (position – 105). To achieve better performance, Ukraine should reduce the time to export (documentary compliance – hours), the time to import (border compliance and documentary compliance – hours), the cost to export (documentary compliance – USD) and the cost to import (border compliance and documentary compliance – USD).

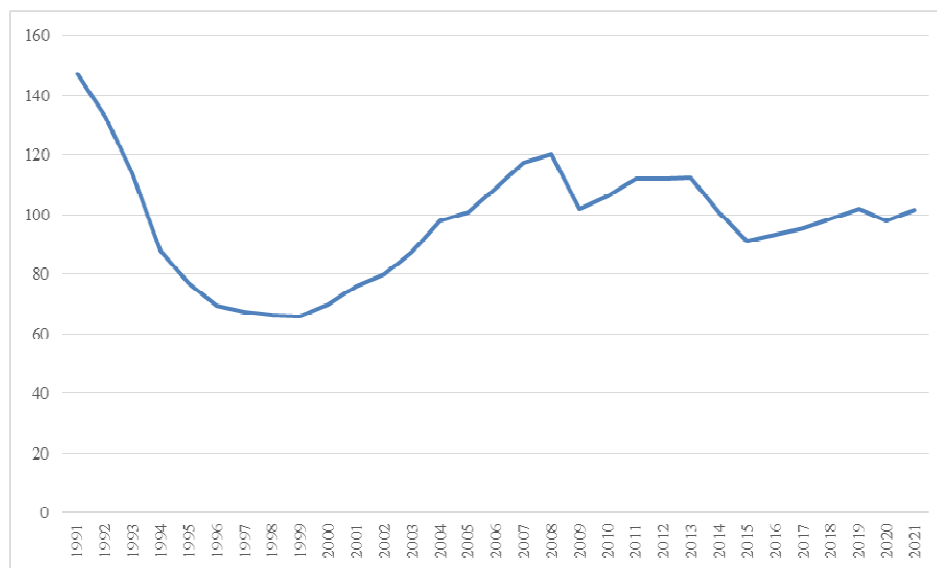
«Enforcing Contracts» measures the time and cost to resolve a commercial dispute through a local court of first instance, and the quality of court proceedings. Ukraine ranked 63rd out of 190 economies behind Kazakhstan (rank: 4), Georgia (rank: 12), Belarus (rank: 40) and Moldova (rank: 62). To become more competitive, Ukraine should reduce the cost (% of claim value) and increase the quality of judicial processes.

«Resolving Insolvency» analyses the time, cost and outcome of insolvency proceedings for national legal entities. Ukraine ranked 146th out of 190 economies behind Kazakhstan (rank: 42), Georgia (rank: 64), Moldova (rank: 67) and Belarus (rank: 74). Ukraine should reduce the time (years) and cost (% of estate) to improve its performance.

The Ukrainian economy over the past three decades has experienced several turning points (Figure 5). Since 1991, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, trade with Russia has declined considerably and after 2000 there was a substantial recovery. After 2007 there was a stagnation of the GDP, as in many countries, motivated by the financial crisis of 2007-2008 that was aggravated by the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014.

Figure 5

**GDP per capita (constant 2015 US\$ Billion)**



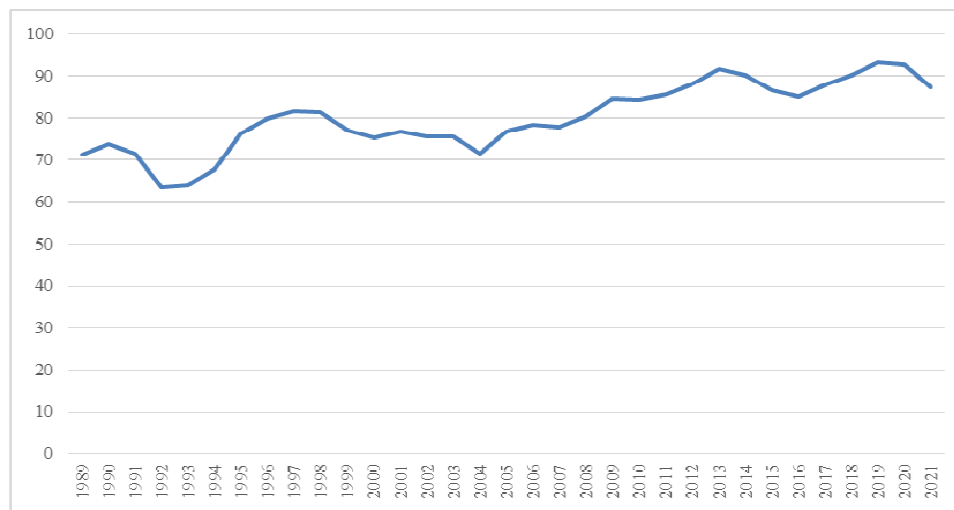
Source: World Bank

It is important to underline that this standard measure of GDP per capita overstates the weakening in living standards over the first and last decade.

During this period, the share of GDP allocated to consumer spending grew steadily (Figure 6), to the detriment of spending on military and state activities, which allowed the Ukrainian population to benefit.

Figure 6

**Consumption expenditure (% of GDP)**



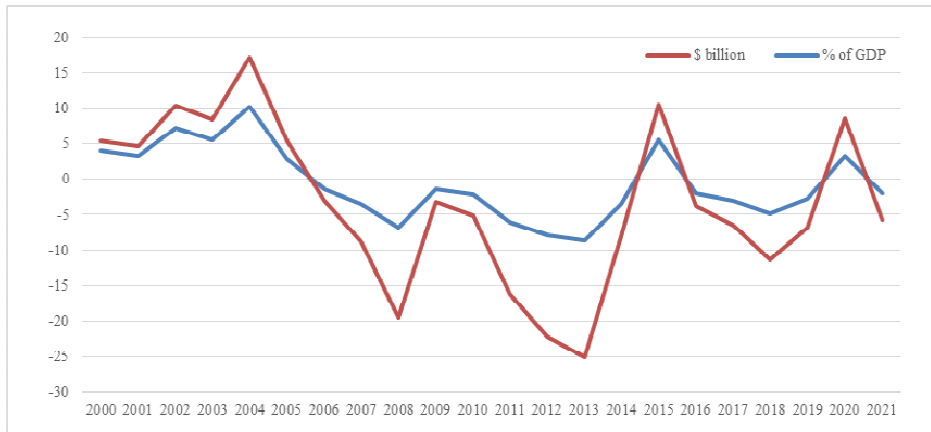
Source: World Bank data

From 2010 onwards, a period of GDP stagnation is followed by a deterioration in Ukraine's balance of payments (Fig. 7), causing a current account deficit of almost 9% of GDP in 2013.

After the ending of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was unable to diversify its exports, keeping raw materials and traditional agricultural products as its main exports. In 2014, only one month of imports was covered by foreign exchange reserves (Fig. 8) and the Ukrainian currency devaluated sharply against major world currencies such as the dollar (Fig. 9).

*Figure 7*

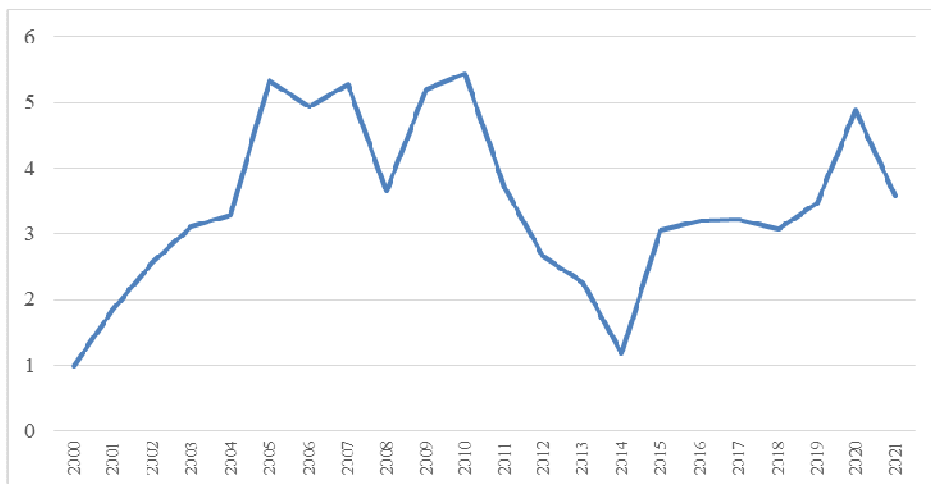
**Current account balance (BoP, current US\$)**



Source: World Bank data

*Figure 8*

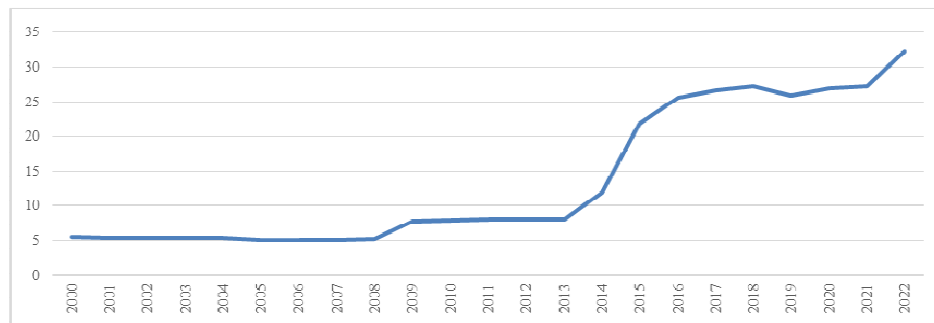
**Foreign currency reserves: months of imports**



Source: World Bank data

Figure 9

Official exchange rate (1 US\$ = Ukraine currency (HRY))



Source: World Bank data

Ukraine has also been hurt by an absence of foreign investment. Investors were wary of investing in one of the least transparent countries in the world. In 2015, Transparency International ranked Ukraine 130th out of 168 countries in its Corruption Perceptions Index. Although the score is still low, war-torn Ukraine is one of the countries that has seen significant improvements in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), having gained eight points since 2013 (Fig. 10). Ukraine has long struggled with abuse of power and lack of transparency, having given important steps to improve oversight and accountability.

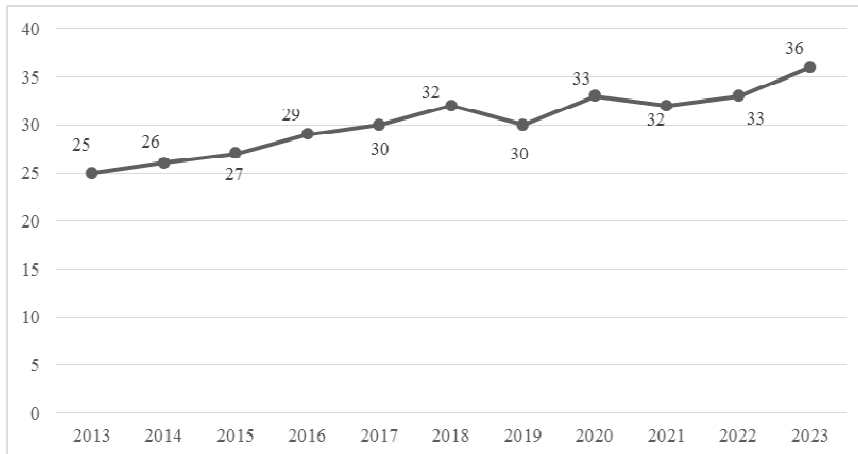
The flow of remittances from the Ukrainian diaspora, together with a considerable improvement in the domestic economy, saved the Ukrainian economy (Basel Institute on Governance, 2023). These remittances had a substantial increase, especially after 2014, due to the internal economic environment and the political movements that occurred. Remittances increased from 1% of GDP in 2000 to around 10% in 2020 (Fig. 11).

Ukraine's accession to the EU involves changes in terms of country risk, i. e. reducing foreign investment uncertainty and losses for investors. Standard & Poor's credit rating for Ukraine stands at «CCC» with negative outlook. «CCC» meaning that Ukraine is currently vulnerable and is dependent upon favourable business, financial, and economic conditions to meet its financial commitments (Bloomberg, 2023).

Another important issue is related to labour migration. The United Nations (2020) estimates that since 2010 the stock of international migrants from Ukraine has been increasing: In 2010 there were 5.4 million, in 2015 there were 5.8 million and in 2020 there were 6.1 million (Fig. 12).

Figure 10

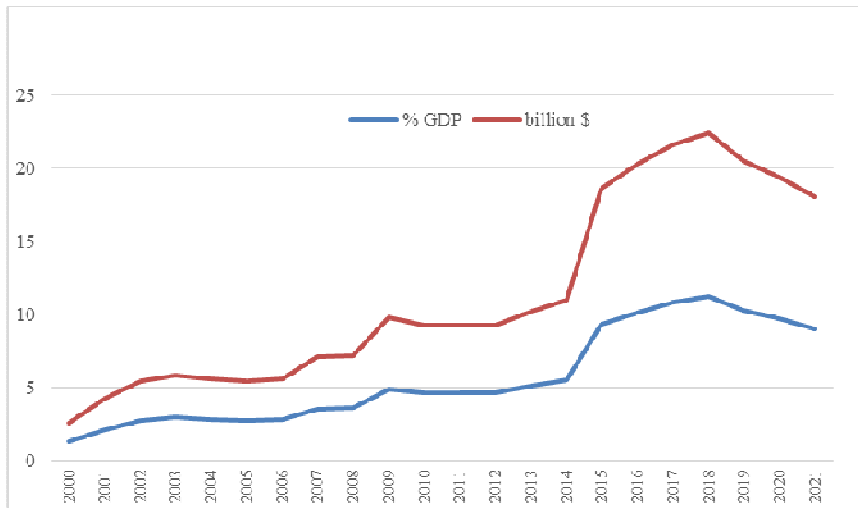
Corruption Perception Index



Source: Corruption Perception Index, 2023

Figure 11

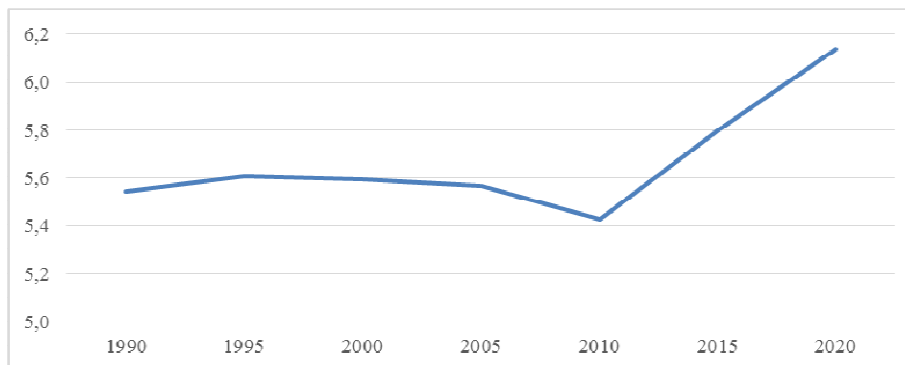
Ukrainian Diaspora Remittances



Source: World Bank data

Figure 12

International Migrant Stock (million)



Source: United Nations

The high number of refugees has compounded the problem of labour migration and their return to Ukraine can be a lengthy process.

Ukraine's migration pattern underwent a marked change after 2014. Prior to 2014, the destination of most Ukrainian migrants was Russia and from 2017 Poland became the destination of most Ukrainians.

According to the International Labour Organization (2012), in 2012, before the occupation of Crimea, the destinations of Ukrainian migrants were Russia (43%), Poland (14%), Czech Republic (13%) and Italy (13%).

Migrants to Poland rose from 200,000 to 900,000 in the period between 2012 and 2017. Surveys identified around 2.9 million Ukrainians working abroad for short periods, most of them low-skilled workers with around four million Ukrainians involved in this circular migration network (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2017).

In 2020, Eurostat (2022) confirms that 1.35 million Ukrainians had a residence permit for the EU, 500 thousand for Poland, 223 thousand in Italy, 166 thousand in the Czech Republic, 95 thousand in Spain and the rest mainly in Germany and Eastern and Central Europe.

Studies by the Centre for Economic Strategy (2017) indicate that the salaries of Ukrainians in the European Union are considerably lower than those of citizens of the European Union. However, wages of Ukrainians abroad are higher

than wages in their own country (specially wages outside the capital) but lower than national workers abroad, especially in Poland.

According to Freedom House (2023), Ukraine is classified as «Partly Free». Improving the freedoms of «capital» and «personnel», of the four freedoms of the EU's internal market (goods, services, capital and people), are fundamental for the progress of the Ukrainian economy and for the EU/Ukraine negotiations (Disney & Szyszczak, 2022).

## Conclusions

On March 1, 2022, the European Parliament made the recommendation for Ukraine be officially a «candidate» for EU membership and, based on the Versailles Declaration, the EU required the presence of all EU member states to initiate an accession process (European Commission, 2023). There is a wide base of support for accession to the EU within most EU member states reacted positively to this idea. There is a broad base of support for EU membership in most EU member states who have responded positively to the idea (Buras et al, 2023).

Ukraine's accession of the EU will give economic advantages to Ukraine, not so much in terms of trade but above all at the migrant exit stop being necessary to improve wages.

EU membership will also pose a governance challenge for the Ukrainian government and parliament in terms of transposing European legislation into domestic law and monitoring the implementation of EU policy, especially about incentives and contracts of investment.

The aftermath of the Russian invasion and the consequent application for Ukraine to join the EU showed the need for the EU to rethink its own security and manage its internal problems ranging from Brexit to violations of the rule of law perpetrated by Hungary and Poland. The war in Ukraine is also a challenge for EU leadership and for all member states in the way they act on the issue of candidacy for membership of a country at war.

The Ease of Doing Business Index is an excellent benchmark for pursuing economic reforms to increase Ukraine's competitiveness. Despite significant improvements in the fight against corruption since 2013, Ukraine must take further steps to win the battle against corruption. Alongside the fight against corruption, the Ukraine's need for military support to protect people and the territory integrity and the reconstruction of Ukraine are of vital importance for the future of the country. In April 2023, the estimative to rebuild Ukraine (family and enterprises buildings, schools, universities and agro-sector infrastructures) rises to EUR 134.6 million (at replacement cost) (Basel Institute on Governance, 2023). The



reconstruction will be done at the same time as the military support to people and restore territorial integrity. Both actions will be under rigorous scrutiny from citizens and donors alike.

The results of the study indicate that the process of European integration of Ukraine is complex and multifaceted. Political instability, economic problems and external pressure are the main obstacles on the way to the EU. At the same time, Ukrainian society demonstrates steady support for European integration, and the government makes certain efforts to carry out the necessary reforms. For successful European integration, Ukraine needs to accelerate the pace of economic reforms and strengthen cooperation with international partners. Ukraine's future success depends on the government's commitment to Reconstruction, fighting corruption, attracting foreign investment, stemming people's flight by creating attractive conditions for staying in the country, as well as permanent military support to recover and maintain the integrity of the Ukrainian territory.

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