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POLITICAL ASPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF UKRAINE'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Nadiia Kichera,

*PhD in Political Science, Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science
and Public Administration, Uzhhorod National University (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)*

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4998-7526

nadiia.kichera@uzhnu.edu.ua

Abstract. «Integration» in translation from the Latin means «integration» – restoration, unification into a whole. The term «economic integration» is characteristic for describing modern international politics and processes of regional and global rapprochement. Integration processes began in Europe after the Second World War, when joint efforts were necessary for rebuilding, to ensure peace and security on the continent. Thus, begins the process of institutionalizing a united Europe, culminating in the formation of the European Union. One of the common policies of the Union is the EU's foreign policy, toward third countries which includes cooperation with the possibility of further integration as a full member of the community. Cooperation between Ukraine and the EU began with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and reached the stage of Ukraine receiving the status of a candidate country and announcing the start of pre-accession negotiations.

Key words: integration, political integration, economic integration, agreement, partnership, European Union, Ukraine.

Introduction. The concept of «integration» in translation from the Latin «integration» means restoration, unification into a whole. The Cambridge dictionary provides the following definitions of integration: it is the action or process of successfully uniting or mixing with different groups of people; it is the action or process of effectively combining two or more things. As one example of such processes, the dictionary gives the signing of the Treaty of Rome – «the signing of the Treaty of Rome was the greatest event in the annals of European integration» (Cambridge dictionary). The Political Science Encyclopedic Dictionary defines «political integration» as a set of political processes aimed at the consolidation, merger of social, political, military, economic structures or ethnic groups within one state or several states in order to counteract destructive internal and external factors (Vilkov, 2004: 236-237).

The term «economic integration» is characteristic of modern world politics and processes of convergence. This term is also characterized by a plurality of definitions, which is logical given the possibilities and forms of economic cooperation. But in this case, integration is not only cooperation, it is unification, as well as relations and processes at the micro and macroeconomic levels, from a free trade zone to full economic integration with a single economic policy and common regulatory mechanisms (Petasiuk, 2020: 125-130). The definition of the concept by Michel Pembro is apt. He considers integration to be a complex process of interaction between states, characterized by two elements: legal form and economic content. In the international context, the term «integration» began to be used in the first half of the twentieth century, namely from the 1930s. (Trykhlil, 2016: 101) and became widespread in the middle of the century. The theoretical concepts underlying the concept at that time concerned primarily economic integration and were developed by German, Swedish and American economists (Prykhodko, 2015: 93).

Main part. The aim of the article is a detailed analysis of Ukraine's European integration progress towards obtaining candidate country status and the announcement of the opening of the pre-accession negotiations process as an important guarantee of post-war recovery and development. To achieve this goal, it is important to perform such research tasks as a multifaceted interpretation of the category

of «integration», an analysis of the regularities of the procedure and facts of the enlargement of the European Union, and the identification of the main stages in Ukraine's European integration progress, accompanying opportunities, obstacles, and challenges. The implementation of research tasks is impossible without the use of analysis methods to understand the essence, causes, prerequisites, features and prospects of integration processes in Europe, documents studying methods, to generalize the regulatory and legal basis of the processes of European integration, which began with the first treaties in the 1950s, and the regulatory framework of Ukraine's integration progress.

Results and their discussion. Integration processes are taking place all over the world, primarily where the necessary objective conditions have been created. However, they are taking place most dynamically and consistently in Europe, in particular due to the formation and long-term successful functioning of a unique regional integration entity – the European Union (*European Union*). The corresponding integration processes began in Europe after the Second World War, when joint efforts were needed to rebuild, ensure peace and security on the continent. Thus began the process of institutionalizing a united Europe, which was accompanied not only by constant interaction, but also by rivalry between the founding countries and future members of the European Communities. But, as Dutch historian and political philosopher Luuk van Middelaar believes, it is precisely because of this that Europe has constantly evolved (Middelaar, 2021). The challenges of ensuring peace and stability are still relevant today, in particular due to the Russian-Ukrainian war and other sources of instability caused by the Russian aggressor. In view of this, the issue of Ukraine's integration into the common European space is more relevant than ever.

The formation of a united Europe began after a long discussion and agreement between the participating countries and the signing of the Treaty of Paris establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) – 1951), Treaties of Rome – 1957, establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC, otherwise known as «Euratom»). The objectives of the communities were to harmonize economic development, sustainable economic growth, strive for closer cooperation between member states, establish common customs tariffs and implement a common trade policy, implement a common agricultural policy, and standardize the national legislation of member states to the extent necessary for the functioning of the common market. The communities were also open to new members.

The growth in the number of member states began in 1973, when Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom officially joined the European Communities. Accordingly, a Europe of nine was formed. Greece became the tenth member of the European Community in 1981. The paths to membership of some countries of the community turned out to be quite long and difficult, the prerequisites and factors of integration were not always of an economic nature. In particular, only the fall of the dictatorship opened the way to the Community for Spain and Portugal. In addition, an obstacle to the integration of these countries was the significant gap between the economic development of both candidate countries and the EEC. Spain and Portugal became the Community members on 1 January 1986, while the negotiations between these countries lasted the longest – 76 and 80 months respectively. The next waves of EU enlargement occurred in 1995, when, after the Maastricht Treaty and the formation of the European Union as such, Sweden, Finland and Austria became full members of the community. The next wave of enlargement took place in two stages, as a result of which the participants of the Luxembourg (58 months of negotiations) and Helsinki (36 months of negotiations, with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania) negotiating groups became members of the EU. In particular, in 2004, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Malta became the EU member states. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU. The last country to join the EU was Croatia, which fulfilled all the necessary conditions in 69 months and in 2013 was already a full member of the Union. In recent years, the EU has been characterized by not only integration,

but also disintegration trends in quantitative terms due to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the Union – Brexit. Western Balkans countries, Ukraine, and Moldova are waiting for their turn to join the EU.

The EU accession procedure is a complex path that includes several stages, a number of steps, and a methodology based on the Copenhagen criteria (EUR-Lex. *Accession criteria*), which include stable democracy, the rule of law, a functioning market economy, and the adoption of EU legislation. The main accession steps include the submission of an application by the country, a decision by the European Commission on the applicant, an anonymous decision by the Member States to grant candidate status, the opening of negotiations with the support of the Member States, followed by the approval of the negotiating framework by the Council of the EU and their final approval by the European Council; the organization and holding of the first intergovernmental conference; the review of legislation; opening and closing of clusters of chapters of the EU *Acquis communautaire*; signing and ratification of the Accession Treaty. Thematic clusters for accession negotiations include: fundamental issues; internal market; competitiveness and inclusive growth; green deal and sustainable links between countries; resources, agriculture and cohesion; foreign relations.

The external expansion of the Community is objectively accompanied by internal consolidation, the main features of which are the internal market and the four freedoms (free movement of goods, capital, services and people) (EUR-Lex. *Free movement of goods*), the protection of fundamental values – freedom, democracy, the rule of law, high standards, the Schengen Agreement and monetary union (a single currency – the euro), joint enhanced cooperation in the field of foreign policy, security and defense, support for development processes in the world, etc.

One of the EU's policy instruments, particularly with regard to non-member or third countries, is the association agreement. This is a type of agreement that defines the legal framework for cooperation between them. The main areas of cooperation within the association agreement are political, trade, social, cultural and security. The first association agreement was signed between the European Economic Community (EEC) and Greece (EUR-Lex. *63/106/EEC*). The same year, an agreement was signed with Turkey. Cooperation agreements are concluded by the EU within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (*The Diplomatic Service, The European Neighbourhood Policy*) – for the eastern neighbors and the Stabilization and association process (SAA) (EUR-Lex. *Stabilisation and association process*) – for the countries of the Balkan peninsula.

The Ukraine-EU Association Agreement was signed in 2014 and entered into force in 2017, but the history of bilateral relations is much longer and dates back to Ukraine's independence. The European Communities recognized Ukraine's independence and sovereignty immediately after the referendum, and Ukraine's official position towards the EU was formulated in 1993 by the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada «The Main Directions of Ukraine's Foreign Policy» (*Pro Osnovni napriamky zovnishnoi polityky Ukrainy*). Since 1993, the European Commission Representation (Predstavnytstvo...) has been operating in Ukraine. In addition, Ukraine was the first CIS country to sign the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU (Zakonodavstvo Ukrainy. *Uhoda pro partnerstvo i spivrobotnytstvo*). The Agreement was signed on June 14, 1994, and ratified by the Verkhovna Rada on November 10 of the same year. The Agreement entered into force on 1 March 1998, after ratification by the parliaments of all member states. Accordingly, the main priorities for cooperation were identified within the framework of the Agreement, including energy, trade and investment, justice and home affairs, approximation of Ukrainian legislation to EU legislation, environmental protection, transport, cross-border cooperation, and cooperation in the fields of science, technology and space. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was signed for a ten years period.

On November 28, 1994, the heads of government and state of the EU member states signed the EU Common Position on Ukraine, and on February 26, 1996, the EU Action Plan on Ukraine was approved. These documents became the regulatory and legal basis for regulating bilat-

eral relations between Ukraine and the EU. In addition, the technical assistance program TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) – a European Union program to assist the newly independent states of Eastern Europe and Central Asia in the transition period, was extended to Ukraine.

Institutionally, bilateral cooperation was facilitated by the EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council, the EU-Ukraine Cooperation Committee, the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (a forum for political dialogue between EU and Ukrainian parliamentarians), and the Senior Officials Committee (prepares an assessment of progress in the implementation of the Association Agenda). The Ukrainian part of the EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council was established in accordance with the Decree of the President of Ukraine of February 24, 1998 «On ensuring the implementation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Ukraine and the European Communities (European Union) (Zakonodavstvo Ukrainy. *Prohrama intehratsii Ukrainy do Yevropeiskoho Soiuzu*) and improving the mechanism of cooperation with the European Communities (European Union)» (Rada...). The Council met once a year. Current work was carried out by a Committee, which was also established in 1998. Depending on the area of cooperation, four subcommittees have been established within the Committee: on trade and investment, finance, economics and statistics, customs, transport cooperation, combating migration, money laundering and drug trafficking, energy, civil nuclear sector, environmental protection, transport, telecommunications, science and technology, education and training.

Coordination of bilateral relations took place within the framework of Ukraine-EU summits. The first summit was held on September 5, 1997 in Kyiv. The last, 24th Summit took place in Kyiv on February 3, 2023, with the participation of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the President of the European Council Charles Michel and the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen (*Spilna zaiava...*). The next, 25th Summit is scheduled for June 2025 (Kostina, 2025).

The Strategy for Ukraine's Integration into the EU was approved by the decree of the President of Ukraine dated June 11, 1998. The document stated that Ukraine's strategic goal is to gain full membership, and the medium-term goal is to gain associate membership. Short-term, medium-term and long-term priorities in Ukraine-EU relations were also defined in the Programme for Ukraine's Integration into the European Union, approved on September 14, 2000. As of the 2000s, the priority areas of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU were the energy sector (energy sector reform, efficiency of energy transportation, nuclear safety), trade (Ukraine's accession to the WTO), justice and home affairs (harmonization of legislation, border management), environment (implementation of Kyoto Protocol standards), transport (integration into trans-European transport corridors).

The EU's eastward expansion has presented bilateral cooperation with new challenges and opportunities, requiring a number of changes and additions. Therefore, in February 2005, the Ukraine-EU Action Plan was approved – a political document for a period of three years, which significantly expands bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and the EU, containing a list of Ukraine's commitments in the field of strengthening democracy, combating corruption, structural economic reforms, and developing cooperation in sectoral areas, including education and science. This document was extremely important, as it included the start of negotiations on concluding a new basic agreement to replace the PCA, which expired in 2008. The negotiation process on a new basic agreement began on March 5, 2007. Therefore, the PCA was extended until the conclusion of a new agreement.

After the completion of the Action Plan, it was envisaged that both sides would assess its implementation and, consequently, decide on the legal basis for further cooperation between Ukraine and the EU. In 2007, the Agreement on the Facilitation of Visas for Citizens of Ukraine was signed, ratified in 2008 (Zakonodavstvo Ukrainy. *Uhoda mizh Ukrainoiu ta Yevropeiskym Spivtovarystvom...*), and the Ukraine-EU Action Plan in the field of justice, freedom and security was adopted. After Ukraine joined the WTO in 2008, negotiations began on the establishment of a deep and comprehensive free trade area between Ukraine and the EU. A new EU strategy for Ukraine was approved

for the period 2007-2013, and in 2008, a new model of cooperation began in the Eastern Partnership format (component of the EU Neighbourhood Policy, which is the EU's framework policy towards the Eastern Neighbourhood countries, which officially began with the Eastern Partnership Summit in Prague on 7 May 2009) (Eastern Partnership. *Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood*).

The Eastern Partnership is an integral part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which operates at several levels: summits with the participation of heads of state and government of the EU Member States and partner countries; meetings of foreign ministers of the EU Member States and partner countries (discussing issues of multilateral sectoral cooperation and general development of the EP); thematic platforms (democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration and convergence with EU policies; energy security; people-to-people contacts); Flagship initiatives (integrated border management, promotion of small and medium-sized businesses, increasing energy efficiency, environmental management and prevention of natural and man-made disasters); Civil Society Forum (broad involvement of the non-governmental sector); parliamentary dimension (provided by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly) (*Ievropeiska intehratsiia. Pro Skhidne partnerstvo*).

In September 2008, at the Paris Summit, Ukraine and the EU agreed to conclude a new agreement in the form of an Association Agreement, the preparation and initialing of which in 2011-2012 was a significant achievement in bilateral relations. Since 2009, after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the Delegation of the European Commission has been transformed into the Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine (*Predstavnytstvo...*). The events in Ukraine in 2013-2014 affected bilateral relations, however, after the political changes of 2014, the pro-European course of our state was finally determined, and the economic and political parts of the Association Agreement were signed and ratified by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the European Parliament, which entered into force on September 1, 2017 (*Zakonodavstvo Ukrainy. Uhoda pro asotsiatsiiu mizh Ukrainoi...*). The Agreement is the largest regulatory legal act signed by Ukraine.

In 2017, the fifth Eastern Partnership summit was also held, which resulted in the adoption of a Joint Declaration and the formulation of «20 Expected Achievements of the Eastern Partnership by 2020» (*Porivnialnyi analiz: 4*). Among the priorities are broad interaction with civil society organizations, non-discrimination and gender equality, media independence, small and medium-sized businesses, financial infrastructure, jobs at the local and regional levels, harmonization of digital markets, rule of law, fight against corruption, judiciary, reform of the public administration system, security, energy efficiency, energy supply, use of renewable energy, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, environment and adaptation to climate change, visa liberalization, mobility, youth, education, culture, Eastern Partnership School, Research and Innovation.

The course towards full membership in the EU and NATO was set in February 2019, after the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine made relevant amendments to the Constitution. Regrettably, Ukraine's progress towards European integration was accelerated by the full-scale Russian invasion. On February 28, 2022, the President of Ukraine signed an application for Ukraine's accession to the European Union, and on June 23 of the same year, Ukraine received the status of a candidate for EU membership with seven recommendations, the implementation of which became a prerequisite for the opening of membership negotiations. These criteria are a number of important reforms for Ukraine, in particular: reform of the Constitutional Court, continuation of judicial reform, anti-corruption and appointment of the head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, fight against money laundering, implementation of the anti-oligarchic law, harmonization of audiovisual (media, advertising) legislation with European legislation, amendment of legislation on national minorities (strengthening the protection and implementation of minority rights). In 2023, Ukraine conducted a self-screening of the compliance of national legislation with EU law. In November 2023, the European Commission published the Progress Report on Ukraine (*Robochyi dokument...*). On December 14, 2023, the European Union decided to open negotiations with Ukraine, respectively, in February 2024.

The Government of Ukraine approves the Plan for the Implementation of the European Commission's Recommendations for Each Negotiation Chapter in Accordance with the Enlargement Methodology. In June 2024, Negotiating Frameworks were approved for Ukraine and Moldova.

The first intergovernmental conference in connection with the opening of negotiations took place on June 25, 2024, and bilateral screening meetings began in July. Accordingly, in October 2024, the European Commission published another report on Ukraine, the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on EU Enlargement Policy. According to the European Commission's assessment, Ukraine has made significant progress in reforms, but the Commission also identified areas on which Ukraine should continue to work within each cluster.

Obtaining candidate status means large-scale reforms and significant opportunities, including financial ones for the transformation of the legal system, society, and economy, joining the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), and access to European Union programs and initiatives. Ukraine is associated with fourteen European Union programs, including Horizon Europe, EURATOM Research and Training, Digital Europe, Fiscalis, Customs, Creative Europe, EU4Health, Life, Single Market, Union Civil Protection Mechanism, Connecting Europe Facility, Union Anti-Fraud, Justice, and Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values. Organizations and individuals from Ukraine can also take advantage of opportunities under the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programs. Ukraine participates in several Interreg programs and is a member of the EU macro-regional strategy for the Danube region. In addition, since March 2024, in order to provide Ukraine with stable and flexible support, the European Union has created a special financial instrument for the period 2024-2027 – the Ukraine Facility (*The Ukraine Facility...*) as a tool to promote the recovery, reconstruction and modernization of Ukraine, including on the path to European integration.

Conclusion. Thus, Ukraine is confidently trying to approach its main foreign policy goal – to integrate into the European space and become a reliable component of the European Union. Since 2014, a new promising stage in bilateral relations between Ukraine and the European Union has begun. This is not only close cooperation, but also guarantees of integration formation for member states and a number of advantages for candidate countries. For Ukraine, it is also cooperation in the field of security policy, which is extremely important in times of war. Membership in the European Union also means integration into a single economic space, the appropriate introduction of standards, increased competitiveness and an improved investment climate, as well as significant reforms to strengthen democracy and civil society, including the fight against corruption, constitutional, judicial, electoral reforms, public administration reforms, and decentralization. The successful implementation of these reforms will be the key to the reconstruction, development, and prosperity of the state in the post-war perspective.

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