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## European integration as a path for Ukraine's post-war recovery: challenges and prospects

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**Relevance of the problem.** This article examines the challenges and prospects for European integration as a path for Ukraine's post-war recovery and sustainable development. It is determined that European integration as a path for Ukraine's post-war recovery directly depends on the management decisions of the political authorities and the willingness of the political elite to consolidate its commitment to the European integration vector of state and societal development.

**Purpose.** The purpose of the study is to identify the challenges and prospects of European integration as a direction for post-war reconstruction and sustainable development.

**Research Methods.** The theoretical and methodological basis for studying the problem of European integration as a direction for post-war reconstruction and a vector of development for Ukraine is provided by the results of scientific research and empirical studies assessing the threats and challenges of the European integration process.

The results of an expert survey demonstrate that the main challenges to European integration include both external issues related to the risks of continued war and geopolitical instability in the world, as well as internal problems reflected in low administrative and institutional capacity and the slow pace of implementation of European legislation and reform of the public system. The following are identified as the most promising areas for achieving and fulfilling the conditions for EU accession: digitalization of public and state administration, high potential and prospects for modernization of the educational and scientific research systems, strengthening intercultural communication, increasing public participation, and expanding the role of civil society in the adoption and implementation of public and administrative decisions. The main challenges to European integration include external problems associated with the risks of continued war and geopolitical instability in the world (the threat of reconstruction, lack of foreign investment, declining financial capacity of the EU to provide assistance, strengthening populist and center-right political sentiments in EU countries, declining military and political support for the United States), as well as declining military and political support for the United States. The key EU requirements that pose challenges include: implementing European legislation into the national legal system, accelerating judicial reform, establishing a stable political system, and achieving high social and quality of life standards.

**Key words:** European integration, post-war reconstruction, political power, digitalization, public participation, administrative and institutional capacity, public administration, sustainable development.

**Introduction.** Ukraine's European integration vector of development, as a direction of domestic and foreign policy, is a leading factor in Ukraine's development as a social, legal, and democratic state in the context of achieving the Sustainable (Balanced) Social, Economic, and Environmental Development Goals [8] and requires reform and modernization of all spheres of Ukrainian society. The process of European integration, which began before the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014), is enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine and accelerated after the onset of full-scale Russian aggression on February 24, 2022. It is defined as a priority geopolitical vector, with Ukraine gaining the status of a candidate for the second direction of the future of Ukrainian society, which is of particular importance in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction.

**Analysis of the latest research and publications.** The issue of European integration has attracted the attention of the domestic scientific community for two decades, and a wealth of literature has accumulated in this area, illuminating various aspects of Ukraine's European integration vector of development. While prior to the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, scholars focused primarily on gradual reform and modernization in the social, economic, and legal spheres of society in accordance with EU requirements, since 2022, the process of fulfilling the country's conditions for accession to the European Union has accelerated in Ukraine's legislative, political, and post-war renewal.

Among the recent publications and studies relevant to our topic, the following should be noted. Thus,

N. Romaniuk (2023) examines the prospects for Ukraine's European integration in the context of Russia's armed aggression and, based on the results of a SWOT analysis, identifies scenarios for the development of relations between Ukraine and the EU based on the candidate country's status (optimistic, pessimistic, and realistic), as well as expected [1]. The author's conclusions demonstrate the need for consolidation of society and political elites to achieve such a strategic goal as Ukraine's accession to the EU, which will determine the vector of recovery and development of post-war Ukraine.

L. Voytovich and M. Fedyk (2024) define strategies for the post-war recovery of Ukraine in the context of European integration and sustainable development, focusing on socio-economic aspects and strategic directions, among which the authors identify [2]: attracting international investment, creating a favorable investment climate, restoring critical infrastructure, restoring industry, and energy and energy independence. A. Fedun (2025, [12]) continues the study of European integration in the context of Ukraine's post-war recovery and development based on sustainable development. The author examines the directions and paths of Ukraine's green renewal as the implementation of sustainable development environmental goals, focusing on the challenges and need to implement EU environmental directives and environmental legislation into national environmental legislation and the principles of Ukraine's environmental and climate policy.

A. Karsim (2025) examines the problem of adapting European public administration models to the conditions of post-war Ukraine [4]. The author systematizes the challenges for public administration in wartime and the post-war period in Ukraine, noting the need to implement best European management practices, and identifies areas for the effective adaptation of European public administration models in Ukraine in the post-war restoration of the political and public administration system based on openness, transparency, and accountability as a foundation. The analytical report, based on the results of an expert survey conducted in April 2025 by the Razumkov Center and the Public Council under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine with the support of the Hans Seidel Foundation, "European Integration of Ukraine: Status, Challenges, Prospects (Expert Opinions and Positions)," presents expert assessments of Ukraine's prospects for EU accession [3]: the level and scope of European integration, the level of European humanitarian and military aid, Ukraine's fulfillment of Cluster 1 of the EU accession conditions, and an assessment of the accession timeframe.

Thus, current research aims to identify the main paths of Ukraine's European integration policy in the context of war and post-war reconstruction. Therefore, further scientific developments in this area are crucial, which further informs the topic of our study.

**Purpose and Objectives.** The purpose of the study is to identify the challenges and prospects of European integration as a direction for post-war reconstruction and sustainable development.

**Research Methods.** The theoretical and methodological basis for studying the problem of European integration as a direction for post-war reconstruction and a vector of development for Ukraine is provided by the results of scientific research and empirical studies assessing the threats and challenges of the European integration process, the obstacles and problems of restoring Ukraine, its government and society on democratic principles, and the prospects and directions of European integration in the context of sustainable development and the attainment of full rights.

The empirical basis of this study is formed by the results of: 1) an expert survey (November-December 2025, n = 53). The main sample consisted of 53 experts in the field of political science and politics teachers and researchers from Ukrainian universities (29 experts), regional political leaders (14 experts), and heads of public organizations whose activities are related to the socio-political sphere (10 experts). The study was conducted primarily online via the social network Facebook and e-mail correspondence. The sample was random, non-randomized, and formed based on the criterion of accessibility and the personal consent of the respondents. The expert survey method was a questionnaire; 2) a secondary analysis of the results of an expert survey conducted in April 2025 by the Razumkov Center and the Public Council under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine with the support of the Hans Seidel Foundation "European Integration of Ukraine: Status, Challenges, Prospects (Opinions and Positions of Experts)" [3].

**Results.** Under martial law and in the context of Ukraine's acquisition of candidate status for membership in the European Union, the scientific community is paying particular attention to identifying the key areas of reform in all spheres of Ukrainian society in accordance with EU requirements and conditions, the fulfillment of which initiates the negotiation process for Ukraine's membership. Generally speaking, European integration as a process includes political, economic, and social aspects: 1) political integration is, first and foremost, the implementation of European legislation in the national legal space, respect for human rights and the principle of legality, the modernization of public administration; reform of the judicial system and the fight against political corruption; 2) economic integration is associated not only with opening access to the European market, but also with the adaptation of the national economy to quality and safety standards for products and services and the creation of conditions for international and European investment; 3) in social terms quality of life, well-being, and education; the creation of an effective social protection system, etc. To date, many of the tasks and requirements of the European

Union have already been implemented, and the support of citizens for Ukraine's accession to the EU has been assessed predominantly positively (according to the results of a nationwide survey by the sociological group "Rating", conducted on January 14-16, 2023, 87% of Ukrainians would support Ukraine's accession to the European Union c1) [8]. In addition, many EU programs in various areas of cooperation are open to Ukraine: cross-border cooperation programs; Horizon Europe, aimed at financing research and innovation (for example, before the war, according to the results of participation in the Horizon 2020 program, Ukraine took 7th place among 16 associated countries [7, p. 720], which indicates Ukraine's significant scientific research potential); Life is an EU financial instrument for supporting environmental, nature conservation and climate projects; Creative Europe is a program for the development of cultural cooperation; Erasmus+ is an EU program to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe); Digital Europe, which aims to improve access to digital technologies for businesses, citizens, and public institutions, is an instrument of the European Commission. TAIEX supports public administrations in the approximation, application, and enforcement of EU legislation [5]. Thus, even in times of war, European integration is the leading vector of Ukraine's development.

On April 21, 2022, the National Council for the Reconstruction of Ukraine from the Consequences of War was established an advisory body under the President of Ukraine working on the preparation of strategic initiatives and an action plan for the restoration and development of the state, engaging the government, the public, business, academia, and international institutions in supporting and financing sustainable development. Therefore, research and scientific developments on the implementation of the European integration process in various areas of sustainable development deserve special attention: socio-economic, environmental, public-political, educational-scientific, etc. Thus, in the socio-economic aspect of the post-war recovery of Ukraine in the context of European integration, domestic scientists highlight the following strategic areas: activation of production capacities, modernization of equipment, reconstruction and modernization of infrastructure, attraction and increase of foreign investment, increase of legal protection of investments and optimization of the regulatory environment, ensuring energy independence of the force, integration of immigrants [2]. In general, as noted by leading scientists in the field of economics, "the post-war reconstruction of the Ukrainian economy should take into account the preliminary path taken by Ukraine and the experience gained, the consequences of inversion-type market transformations and be aimed at the formation of nationally rooted economic development" [6, p. 149]. Moreover, scien-

tists believe that the success of the post-war economic recovery largely depends on the political will of both the EU countries and the Ukrainian political authorities, as well as on the incorporation of the best foreign practices and the experience of post-war recovery in European countries.

In the context of European integration and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, a "green recovery" will also play an important role. It is based on key principles such as "Build back better and greener," sustainable development, transparency and accountability, decentralization and community participation, etc. [12, p. 10]. [12, p. 10] ... Sustainable development and the development of a knowledge society require a radical modernization of the national education and science system, facilitating full-fledged entry into the global and European scientific and educational space (university autonomy, recognition of diplomas and academic degrees, a high level of academic mobility, exchange of fundamental research results, etc.), which is possible through the adaptation of national legislation and the public system.

However, the largest segment of European integration is associated with the reform of the sphere of public and political administration. Thus, A. Karsim, defining the basic principles of public administration transformation in wartime (flexibility and adaptability; efficiency in the use of resources; transparency and accountability; integration of civil society and volunteerism) [4], also identifies threats in the public and state administration system associated with the destabilization of the functioning of state institutions. response, etc. The prevention of these threats in wartime will be facilitated by the implementation of EU legislation; continued reform of decentralization, the civil service, and the institutional system of anti-corruption bodies; Strengthening the role of civil society in public administration and political decision-making.

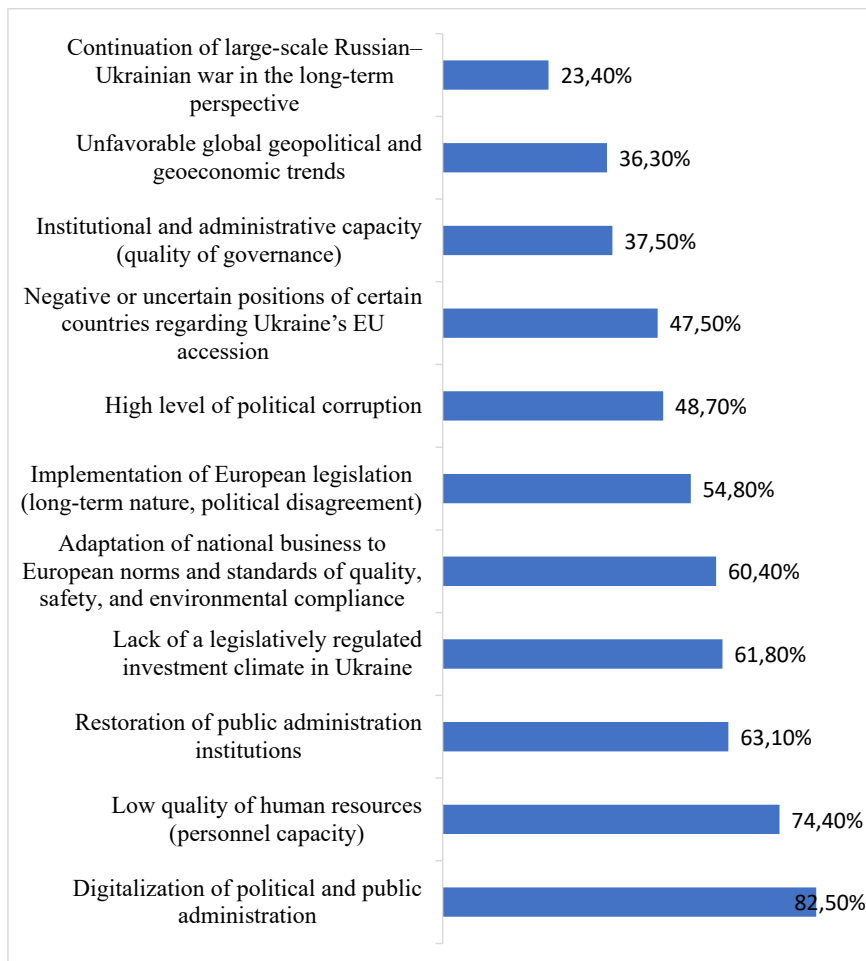
T. Mylovanov and J. Roland argue that post-war recovery and strengthening the process of European integration lie in the political sphere, namely in the reform of public and political governance in Ukraine, aimed at achieving the following objectives: 1) affirming the principles of liberal democracy; 2) institutional support for political reform; 3) prioritizing judicial reform; 4) clearly delineating powers between the executive and legislative branches of government; 5) continuing civil service reform; 6) reforming the media; 7) preventing political corruption and restoring the oligarchic power structure; 8) supporting the decentralization of power [1].

Consequently, European integration as a direction for Ukraine's post-war recovery directly depends on the management decisions of the political authorities and the willingness of the political elite to consolidate its commitment to the European integration

vector of state and societal development. However, in our opinion and the opinion of many scholars, Ukraine may face a number of challenges and threats of a political, economic, and geopolitical nature on its path to joining the EU after the war. According to the results of an expert survey, "European Integration of Ukraine: Status, Challenges, Prospects," conducted by the Razumkov Center in April 2025, 80.2% of experts believe that European integration processes in Ukraine are slowing due to internal problems and challenges [3], primarily related to the slowdown in reforms and the spread of political corruption. The authors of the study, "A Realistic Path to Ukraine's Accession to the EU," prepared by the Ukrainian Center for European Policy with the assistance of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Representative Office in Ukraine (Kyiv), emphasize institutional and administrative capacity as the leading challenge to Ukraine's post-war recovery and preparation for EU accession. This study, which required 2-3 years from the adoption of legislation to its full implementation, emphasizes this.

Another challenge Ukraine will face is the adaptation of national businesses to European norms and standards of quality, safety, and environmental compliance. This could reduce the competitiveness of Ukrainian producers, while the lack of a legislatively regulated investment climate could discourage European (and other) investors. Therefore, creating conditions for the transition of the national economy to European standards is crucial. Established cooperation between the executive and legislative branches of government with Ukrainian producers and businesses is crucial.

Internal problems also include challenges facing the public administration system in the post-war recovery and on the path to EU accession. Scholars highlight [4]: the restoration of public administration bodies, strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms and guaranteeing transparency in the use of public resources, the introduction of digital technologies, the development of electronic services, and ensuring cybersecurity and governance.



**Fig. 1. Challenges to European Integration in the Context of Post-War Reconstruction in Ukraine (up to six most significant challenges could be selected)**

Among the external challenges, according to the results of the expert survey "European Integration of Ukraine: Status, Challenges, Prospects," the continuation of the large-scale Russian-Ukrainian war in the long term is highlighted (67.4%); The positions of some countries on Ukraine's accession to the EU: 34.9% of experts cite the Hungarian leadership's slowdown in Ukraine's European integration as a negative factor; 33.7% of respondents noted the unfavorable impact of global geopolitical and geoeconomic trends [3].

Other studies [9] also note the influence of the positions of different European Union countries: 1) Germany is committed to EU enlargement, but in the long term and subject to the candidate countries fulfilling all accession criteria and institutional reform of the EU; 2) France's concerns about EU enlargement without institutional reform of the EU; 3) the lack of a common position in Central and Eastern Europe.

Taking into account these internal and external challenges to Ukraine's European integration in the post-war period, we developed a list of statements for the expert survey, from which respondents were asked to select six (6) of the most significant and threatening statements to European integration. The results are presented in Figure 1.

According to the expert survey, the most influential challenges to European integration related to external threats and problems were identified as: the continuation of the large-scale Russian-Ukrainian war in the long term (82.5% of experts surveyed), the adverse impact of global geopolitical and geo-economic trends (74.4%), and negative ones (61.8%). Among internal problems, the most influential were institutional and administrative capacity (quality of governance) (63.1% of experts surveyed), high levels of political corruption (60.4%), and the implementation of European legislation (long-term nature, political disagreement) (54.8%). Relatively high figures were found among challenges of an economic nature (adaptation of national businesses to European norms and standards of quality, safety, and environmental compliance 48.7%; the lack of a legislatively regulated investment climate 47.5%).

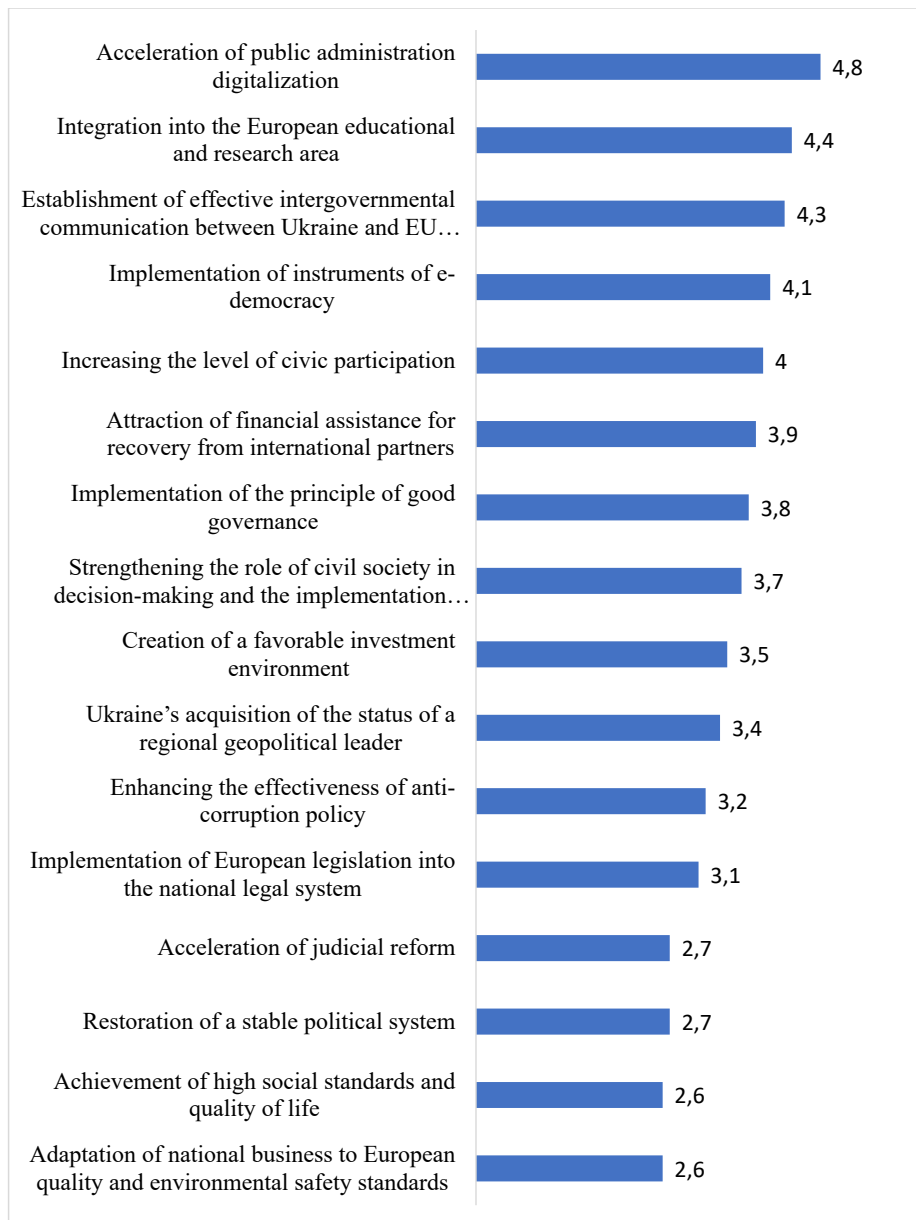
Thus, the main external challenges to European integration are related to the risk of continued war (possibly in its hybrid form), which will threaten recovery and create a long-term unfavorable and dangerous investment climate, thereby reducing the financial capacity for recovery for both Ukraine and the EU countries that may be involved in the plan. Furthermore, there are geopolitical issues (the unclear and sometimes unacceptable position of the United States and countries of the Global South) and the clearly anti-Ukrainian stance of some European countries (Hungary, Slovakia). On the other hand, challenges to European integration may stem from internal problems in the Ukrainian political system

the increasing trend toward centralization and autocracy in political power, and the lack of consolidation among political actors regarding the implementation of European legislation and reform of the public administration system.

Academic circles frequently raise questions about the prospects for Ukraine's accession to the EU, particularly regarding the timeframe. For example, according to the results of an expert survey conducted by the Razumkov Center, a trend towards cautious optimism regarding the start of the Fundamentals cluster opening next year in the negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU (according to EU rules, this cluster is the first to open and the last to close): 54.6% of respondents answered "yes," while 3% of respondents gave a negative answer. As for the timeframe for Ukraine gaining the status of a full EU member, the experts' answers were divided as follows: 3.5% of experts believe that accession will take place within 1-3 years; 29.1% note the prospect of 3-5 years; 51.2% of respondents are convinced that Ukraine will join the EU in 5-10 years; 8.1% believe that accession to the European Union in 10-20 years is realistic[3]. As the survey results show, the majority of experts hold a realistic position regarding Ukraine's prospects for joining the EU, which, to a certain extent, depends on the timing of the end of the war (or cessation of hostilities), institutional reforms within the European Union itself, and Ukraine's fulfillment of the conditions (reform clusters) for accession.

Consequently, the timeframe for gaining EU membership largely depends on external factors and the political will of EU countries, its institutional capacity, and the reform of the mechanisms for the negotiation process for acquiring full EU membership status. In this context, N. Romaniuk's approach proved interesting. She predicted three main scenarios for relations between Ukraine and the EU [11, pp. 30-31]: 1) an optimistic scenario, according to which Ukraine will receive EU membership status by 2030, provided that all requirements and recommendations are met; 2) a pessimistic scenario candidate status remains for several decades, with the main factors negatively impacting this include the war in Ukraine, the slow pace of reforms and legislative implementation, the high level of corruption in the country, and the rise of Eurosceptics and center-right political forces in Europe; 3) a realistic scenario envisions a gradual negotiation process after the end of the war and the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine (membership is possible after 2035).

In this study, we examine the prospects for European integration from a qualitative perspective, which involves assessing reform and modernization in the key strategic areas of post-war reconstruction and fulfillment of EU accession requirements: political, public administration, socio-economic, educational and scientific, etc. Therefore, experts were asked to



**Fig. 2. Expert assessment of the potential for achieving European integration conditions in the first years of Ukraine's post-war recovery**

assess the potential for achieving European integration conditions in the first years of Ukraine's post-war reconstruction (from 1 to 5 points, where 1 represents low development and implementation potential, and 5 represents high potential). The results are presented in Figure 2.

Experts identified the most promising areas for achieving and implementing EU accession conditions as those in which Ukraine has already achieved significant success and created the conditions for further development of key areas of improvement. This primarily concerns the digitalization of public and state administration (4.8 points out of a possible 5), reflecting both the current state of providing digital administrative, public, and social services to citizens, businesses, and public organizations, as well as

a focus on further implementation of digital technologies and tools in political governance (implementation of e-democracy tools) 4.1 points. Secondly, significant achievements in the national education and science systems (confirmed by data on close international cooperation in EU educational and research programs [7]) indicate high potential and prospects in this area (4.4 points according to the survey). Third, experts note significant successes and opportunities in promoting the "Ukraine" brand in the context of intercultural communication (4.3 points), which strengthens support for Ukraine within European society not only in sociocultural terms but also in sociopolitical terms, influencing European governments and EU institutions. Fourth, experts are optimistic about the prospects for increased public participation (4 points)

and an expanded role for civil society in the adoption and implementation of public administration decisions (3.7 points), which will create conditions for reforming the political and public administration system, renewing the political space, and developing modern democracy in Ukraine. However, despite the high prospects in the above-mentioned areas, problematic areas for fulfilling the requirements of European integration and Ukraine's accession to the EU include key requirements such as the implementation of European legislation into the national legal system (3.1 points), acceleration of judicial reform (2.7 points), establishment of a stable political system (6.2 points), and adaptation of national businesses to European quality and environmental safety standards (2.6 points). Without achieving the goals and requirements of European integration in these areas, the time frame for Ukraine's accession to the EU may be quite long. These promising areas of post-war recovery will accelerate the socio-economic, infrastructural, and demographic recovery of Ukraine and Ukrainian society.

**Conclusions and prospects for further research.** The following conclusions were drawn from the study:

First, European integration as a direction for post-war recovery and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals represents a process of modernization and reform across virtually all areas of Ukraine's societal development: socio-economic (reconstruction and modernization of infrastructure, increasing the legal protection of investments and optimization of the regulatory environment, "green recovery," raising social standards and quality of life, etc.); state-political (implementation of political reforms, prioritization of judicial reform, implementation of European legislation, reform of public administration and civil service, decentralization of power); educational, scientific research, and cultural (entry into the European and global educational and scientific space, established intercultural communication and interaction, etc.);

Second, European integration as a direction for Ukraine's post-war recovery directly depends on the management decisions of the political authorities and the willingness of the political elite to consolidate its commitment to the European integration vector of state and societal development;

Thirdly, the main challenges to European integration include external problems associated with the risks of continued war and geopolitical instability in the world (the threat of reconstruction, lack of foreign investment, declining financial capacity of the EU to provide assistance, strengthening populist and center-right political sentiments in EU countries, declining military and political support for the United States), as well as declining military and political support for the United States; increasing centralization and autocracy of political power, lack of consolidation of political

actors in decision-making, the slow pace of implementation of European legislation and reform of the public administration and judicial systems);

Fourthly, experts have identified the most promising areas for achieving and implementing the conditions for EU accession to be those areas in which Ukraine has already achieved significant success and created the conditions for further development of key vectors of improvement: digitalization of public and state administration, high potential and prospects for modernization of the educational and scientific research system, strengthening intercultural communication, and increasing the level of public participation;

Fifth, problematic areas for fulfilling the requirements of European integration and Ukraine's accession to the EU include key requirements such as the implementation of European legislation into the national legal system, acceleration of judicial reform, establishment of a stable political system, and achievement of high social and quality of life standards.

A promising area for further research is studying the experience of European integration in Central and Eastern European countries with the aim of implementing best institutional and modernization practices to meet the requirements for full membership in the European Union.

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# Європейська інтеграція як шлях післявоєнного відновлення України: виклики та перспективи

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*Актуальність проблеми.* У цій статті розглядаються виклики та перспективи європейської інтеграції як шляху післявоєнного відновлення та сталого розвитку України. Визначено, що європейська інтеграція як шлях післявоєнного відновлення України безпосередньо залежить від управлінських рішень політичної влади та готовності політичної еліти закріпити свою відданість європейському інтеграційному вектору розвитку держави та суспільства.

*Мета.* Метою дослідження є визначення викликів та перспектив європейської інтеграції як напрямку післявоєнної відбудови та сталого розвитку.

*Методи дослідження.* Теоретико-методологічну основу для вивчення проблеми європейської інтеграції як напрямку післявоєнної відбудови та вектора розвитку України забезпечують результати наукових досліджень та емпіричних досліджень, що оцінюють загрози та виклики процесу європейської інтеграції.

*Результати експертного опитування демонструють, що основними викликами європейській інтеграції є як зовнішні питання, пов'язані з ризиками продовження війни та геополітичної нестабільності у світі, так і внутрішні проблеми, що відображаються в низькій адміністративній та інституційній спроможності та повільних темпах впровадження європейського законодавства та реформування державної системи. Як найбільш перспективні напрямки для досягнення та виконання умов вступу до ЄС визначено: цифровізацію державного та державного управління, високий потенціал та перспективи модернізації освітньої та науково-дослідної систем, посилення міжкультурної комунікації, розширення участі громадськості та розширення ролі громадянського суспільства у прийнятті та впровадженні державних та адміністративних рішень. До основних викликів європейській інтеграції належать зовнішні проблеми, пов'язані з ризиками продовження війни та геополітичної нестабільності у світі (загроза реконструкції, брак іноземних інвестицій, зниження фінансових можливостей ЄС надавати допомогу, посилення популістських та правоцентристських політичних настроїв у країнах ЄС, зниження військово-політичної підтримки Сполучених Штатів), а також зниження військово-політичної підтримки Сполучених Штатів. До ключових вимог ЄС, що створюють труднощі, належать: імплементація європейського законодавства в національну правову систему, прискорення судової реформи, створення стабільної політичної системи та досягнення високих соціальних стандартів та стандартів якості життя.*

**Ключові слова:** європейська інтеграція, повоєнна відбудова, політична влада, цифровізація, участь громадськості, адміністративний та інституційний потенціал, державне управління, сталий розвиток.

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