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СУЧАСНІ ВИКЛИКИ В УМОВАХ ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЇ СИСТЕМИ МІЖНАРОДНИХ ВІДНОСИН



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Науковий збірник присвячено сучасним викликам в умовах трансформації системи міжнародних відносин, важливим випробуванням якої стала російсько-українська війна, розпочата у 2014 році окупацією Криму, окремих районів Донецької та Луганської областей України.

В основі збірника – результати досліджень викладачів, науковців, а також наукової молоді – здобувачів вищої освіти першого, другого та третього рівнів, які обговорювалися на Всеукраїнській науковій онлайн-конференції «Сучасні виклики в умовах трансформації системи міжнародних відносин», що відбулася 17 квітня 2025 р.

Цей науковий збірник адресовано викладачам, вченим, практикам, фахівцям з міжнародних відносин, дипломатам, здобувачам вищої освіти, а також усім, хто цікавиться проблемами міжнародних відносин та зовнішньої політики.

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COMPARATIVE VIEW OF UKRAINE'S CHALLENGES ON THE PATH TO EU MEMBERSHIP AND THE CORRESPONDING EXPERIENCE OF BULGARIA: CURRENT STAGE

The article analyzes the issues of integration progress towards EU membership of Ukraine, as a candidate country, in comparison with the experience already gained on this path of Bulgaria, as an EU member state. The uniqueness of the integration path of Ukraine, which is currently experiencing full-scale armed aggression from Russia and requires significant assistance, is characterized. Accordingly, the integration practice of Bulgaria, as well as its recommendations, could significantly contribute to the integration efforts of Ukraine. Promising areas and directions of such co-operation between the two states are given.

Key words: European integration, clusters of coordination of progress towards EU membership, dimensions of European integration.

To start with, it needed to give some introduction and a brief overview of the history of the two countries' approaches and relative problems in European integration process in addition to their current state of affairs in the international arena.

According to the pure statistics, Ukraine has twice as big figures in the real GDP than of Bulgarian ones, and, at the same time, about half less figures on Bulgarian's real GDP per capita.

Relatively the American Factbook interpreted that Bulgaria is an upper-middle-income EU economy with EU structural funds contributing to her investment recovery. It has suffered the skilled labor shortage driven by emigration and aging population. In the sphere of foreign trade Bulgaria exporting mostly refined petroleum and oppositely – importing the crude one as a deeply sensitive for the country product.

Ukraine, in her turn, is considered as lower-middle-income, non-EU, Eastern European economy. And it is a key wheat and corn exporter abroad, gradually recovering economically after 30% GDP loosing at the start of present war with Russia – in parallel with enormous damages to infrastructure and life-style of her people. International aid has stabilized foreign exchange reserves of Ukraine, allowing managed currency float and, in particular, continued progress on anti-corruption reforms.

Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, together with Romania. And for sure, her road to the EU membership was not so easy – political, socioeconomic and institutional problems prevented it from joining Union in the first wave of the Eastern enlargement in 2004 [3].

The EU in pre-accession period has been in great help to Bulgaria, that included, among the other, joining the European Economic Area (EEA) and a financial assistance notably from the Phare program – which were tied to Bulgaria's commitment to implement significant

economic and political reforms, such as closing down nuclear power units in 2003 and 2006 years, strengthening the rule of law and fighting corruption and adopting the EU's legal framework (Acquis Communautaire). Bulgaria fulfilled economic responsibilities and the EU Commission recognized Bulgaria as a market economy in 2002 [1; 2].

So, to make a completion, it was an active counter-movement to promote reforms and transition from planned economy and communism to economic liberalization, transformation of state institutions and society, and the reinforcement of democracy.

Neither look easy the steps to United Europe for Ukraine. At the beginning – after dissolving of the Soviet Union and establishing a sovereign state – it took us more than a decade to create from the part of soviet economy a self-sufficient national economy with the general concept of its openness to the world and transitional capacities for trade and co-operation worldwide.

Public support for any integration or to the unionism was minimal at that time. Ukraine at the beginning tried to pursue the multi vectoral policy at the international arena and, in general, failed due to the lack of trusty international security norms and guarantees. National economy and domestic policy fell under dependence of oligarchs and external positioning on the map appeared to resemble classic buffer zone or a kind of “sandwich” in between democratic and totalitarian dimensions.

Obviously, such situation led to massive protests of democratic forces, especially young people and students, who initiated the “Maidans” for revolutionary internal changes and directed the country’s general political course on integration with the EU as a civilizational choice for Ukraine. After signing EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in 2014 followed by adopting the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area provisions (2017) and especially after the country was formally recognized as an EU candidate in 2022, Ukraine has undergone deep and multifaceted political, institutional, and social transformation.

And since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion, public support for Ukraine’s accession to the European Union has reached record highs – by nationwide surveys in 2024, the share of Ukrainians in favor of EU membership raised from 85% to 89%. This was a significant increase compared to 52% in 2021 and showed how EU membership has grew up from a political aspiration of elite into a widely recognized necessity of all the nation [5].

The EU integration process comprises two key dimensions: technocratic and political. The technocratic aspect involves adopting a vast amount of EU legislation, the Acquis Communautaire. The political aspect requires Ukraine to ensure unanimous support from all 27 EU Member States at all stages of negotiations. Both aspects represent a serious challenge for Ukraine.

Among the latest – European Commission has published its Enlargement Report, assessing that:

1. Ukraine has fulfilled the conditions for opening three out of six negotiation clusters (33 chapters of legislation):

Cluster 1: Fundamentals (rule of law, public administration reform, democracy).

Cluster 2: Internal Market.

Cluster 6: External Relations.

2. Positive assessments were given to: public administration reform, economic criteria, the customs union, and progress in the area of justice, freedom, and security.

At the same time, the report includes several recommendations, particularly those related to the civil service reform, filling judicial vacancies, appointing judges to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, and safeguarding the independence of anti-corruption

institutions, among others. Ukraine expects all clusters with the EU to be finalized by the end of November and ready for opening of negotiations in December this year.

But simultaneously Ukraine's accession talks remain blocked by Hungary despite broad political support from the majority of EU member-states. Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine and Moldova have implemented the most reforms on their path to EU membership among all candidate countries during the year. This was announced by EU Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Cos, presenting the EU enlargement report to the European Parliament on November 4.

These candidates have ambitious goals. Montenegro wants to conclude negotiations by the end of 2026, Albania by the end of 2027, Moldova and Ukraine by 2028 [4].

Such is the situation for the case of Ukraine and Moldova's integration into the EU for today, and it is understandable that both countries need broad international support in this way. For Ukraine, situation is unique as our country is continuing to be under full scale Russian military aggression, carrying heavy military spending and needing multifaceted support.

With Bulgarian side, looks essential to consult Ukraine about different kinds of possible co-operation, most promising, as seen, are the following:

- concerning challenges and competition in agrarian sector of the EU;
- any ways of possible influence or assistance in negotiations with Hungary on Ukraine integration;
- vision of simplification of the European procedures on enlargement matters;
- possible forms for co-operation in post war renovation processes, namely on constructions of auto bans through our countries (in the frames of Three Seas concept, Black Sea coast lines (precedent to BSEC) etc.
- additional pipelines for energy supply or any other proposal of mutual interest for both Sides.

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