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UKRAINE'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOPOLITICAL PROCESSES

Expert assessments of the nature
and impact of selected external factors

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UKRAINE'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOPOLITICAL PROCESSES

(Expert assessments of the nature and impact of selected external factors)

This study was prepared by members of the Public Council under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (MFA) with the participation of the Razumkov Centre, the Open Politics Foundation, and the NATO-Ukraine Civic League as part of a project supported by Hanns Seidel Foundation. The project included a series of research initiatives and public presentations of expert surveys focused on the challenges and specifics of Ukrainian diplomacy under wartime conditions, external influences, and prospects for European integration.

The current study focuses on specific external processes and trends affecting Ukraine's position on the international stage and its relations with partner states. Important in this context are developments within the EU, the American factor, and the partnership with NATO.

Previous studies underline that Ukraine's foreign policy has been largely shaped by the prolonged functioning of national diplomacy under martial law conditions, involving militarisation and centralisation of public institutions. Diplomatic efforts have therefore focused on securing international political support and military, financial and economic assistance to counter the aggressor.

This paper does not claim to be a complete and exhaustive analysis of all global and regional influencing factors and trends. Instead, it outlines several key vectors of external influence, highlighting contradictory transformations of the geopolitical landscape, relevant global and regional processes, as well as the state of Ukraine's cooperation with the EU, the US and NATO.

Given the high dynamics of international developments, the geopolitical situation continues to evolve rapidly, generating new risks, challenges, and opportunities for Ukraine. These require timely and adequate responses.

I. GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE: TURBULENT CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

Among the geopolitical processes affecting Ukraine's position on the global stage, particular attention should be paid to the *polarisation of the international community* and the deepening global division – ideological, political, and economic – between the democratic world (EU, NATO) and the bloc of countries dominated by authoritarian/totalitarian trends, the cult of personality, disregard for human rights and international norms (Russia, China, North Korea, Belarus, Iran).

Open and latent struggles for influence are ongoing between these global centres across various regions of the world. This confrontation is increasingly unfolding in the countries of South-East and Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and others.

At the same time, Donald Trump's new America-centric course has, on the one hand, complicated relations with some partner states

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and, on the other hand, caused a turbulent impact on the global trade system and triggered economic instability in various regions. Furthermore, despite certain recent positive trends, the geopolitical confrontation between Washington and Beijing holds significant conflict potential, given the Chinese leadership's claims to global leadership, China's active militarisation, and the strengthening of its military presence in the Taiwan Strait. Moreover, the EU-China Summit (24 July 2025) highlighted profound differences between the European Union and the PRC.

Overall, this polarisation of the international community is gradually becoming a leading geopolitical trend. In this context, it should be noted that the [military-political partnerships](#) and treaty-based foundations of integration among authoritarian states are strengthening, while problems and contradictions are increasing within the collective West, making it vulnerable and weakened.

There are grounds to assert that the confrontation along the «democracy – authoritarianism» axis will determine the nature and dynamics of global trends in the near future.

Devaluation of the authority and influence of international security institutions.

The full-scale war in Ukraine has exposed the inability of global and regional security organisations to respond effectively to Putin regime's aggression or to put an end to the crimes committed by the Russian occupying forces. By exercising its veto power, Russia has blocked the UN Security Council's activity on the Ukrainian issue, turning it into a platform for relaying false [Russian narratives](#), speculation and futile discussions.

In turn, numerous initiatives and proposals by UN member states to reform the Security Council have not been implemented. The 80th anniversary session of the UN General Assembly, despite the high level of representation, resulted neither in a «breakthrough» in optimising the work of the principal international institution, nor in progress towards ending the war in Ukraine.

The UN is currently facing a [financial crisis](#), including due to restrictions by the United States on funding for humanitarian programmes, peacekeeping operations and the UN budget. Several UN institutions have been forced to reduce personnel. At the same time,

a UN working report (July 2025) refers to excessive bureaucratisation of the UN and an increase in the volume of documentation. In particular, in 2024, the UN system held [27,000 meetings](#) involving 240 different institutions, while the UN Secretariat prepared a record number of reports – 1,100.

Despite its pro-Ukrainian stance, the OSCE's efforts to stop the war on the continent are limited by several factors. First, the consensus principle nullifies the peacebuilding efforts of most participating countries. Second, the aggressor effectively blocks the OSCE consolidated budget and impedes the work of the Secretariat and the Ministerial Council. Russia uses its OSCE membership to conduct information provocations, justify aggression, and destroy this organisation from within. Third, the OSCE has rather limited resources and tools of influence. [According to Yuriy Vitrenko](#), Ukraine's Permanent Representative to International Organisations in Vienna, «Given the organisation's objectively limited resources, the OSCE's role cannot be leading or decisive in peace processes. Instead, it may perform a supporting function...»

In a broader context of the effectiveness of major international organisations, it must be stated that under conditions of prolonged Russian aggression and escalating crises across various regions, the consensus mechanism (the veto power) has proven ineffective. This mechanism devalues and complicates the work of international institutions, affecting not only the UN Security Council and the OSCE, but also the EU and NATO.

Conflicts in different regions of the world.

In 2025, the security situation continued to deteriorate across multiple regions. According to [Peace Research Institute Oslo \(PRIO\)](#), the number of wars and conflicts has increased in recent years (61 conflicts in 36 countries in 2024), and the dangerous escalation of violence continues. At the same time, certain trends towards the cessation or localisation of some conflicts have recently been observed. In particular, in October, the United States, as well as Egypt, Qatar and Turkey [signed an agreement](#) on ending the war in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Hamas. Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed on a temporary ceasefire and on creating conditions for stable peace. On 26 October, during the South-East Asian summit, mediated by the United States, the heads of government of Cambodia and Thailand [signed a peace agreement](#).

However, the cessation of conflict does not mean its elimination, as the problem may shift into a latent phase. It may be assumed that such a situation is currently observed in the Middle East. In turn, the situation around Taiwan should be regarded a potential challenge to global stability.

In general, regional conflicts draw political and diplomatic efforts and the military resources of Ukraine's allies, temporarily shifting the issue of the Ukraine war to the background of the international agenda.

Escalation of russian hybrid aggression in Europe. In September 2025, a new phase of russian hybrid aggression began on the European continent. Russia carried out a series of forceful provocations against NATO countries. On 10 September, about 19 russian drones crossed the Polish border from Belarus and Ukraine; subsequently, russian fighter jets violated the Estonian airspace, and aerial provocations occurred against Romania, Norway, Germany, France and other EU countries. UAV incursions and mass cyber-attacks led to the closure of several European airports. The totalitarian empire is employing the full arsenal of hybrid influence against European countries.

Overall, the active «stress testing» of Europe's defence capabilities by the aggressor has revealed a rather restrained and cautious reaction from European leaders. This only encourages russia to pursue further hybrid intervention.

Political processes in Europe: the rise of right-wing forces. One can observe the general shift to the right among the electorate and the strengthening of populist and far-right political forces. This is explained by a combination of internal and external factors, including deterioration of the socio-economic situation, migration pressures, «war fatigue» regarding Ukraine, growing distrust of traditional democratic institutions, fear of escalation with aggressive russia, and more. These destructive sentiments in European society are exacerbated by russian hybrid expansion. At the same time, the positions of European politicians and ordinary citizens are influenced by the United States – in particular, by the commercialisation of foreign policy, conservatism, departure from democratic norms, and autocracy in internal governance.

Overall, the **strengthening of the political positions** of populist and right-wing conservative forces affects, to varying degrees, both the level of support for EU foreign policy and stances on the war in Ukraine and bilateral relations. For example, with the election of a new Czech parliament, the Czech initiative on the delivery of ammunition to Ukraine has been called into question. After Karol Nawrocki assumed office as President of Poland in August 2025, there was a prolonged pause in high-level contacts with Ukraine.

In October 2025, **the threat of a new round of arms race (including nuclear)** was added to the list of external factors. *First*, russia **tested new types of weapons** with nuclear capabilities – the Burevestnik cruise missile and the Poseidon underwater vehicle. At a meeting of the russian Security Council, Defence Minister Belousov proposed preparation for the resumption of nuclear weapons testing. *Second*, on 30 October 2025, the US President **announced** that he had instructed the Pentagon to «initiate testing of US nuclear weapons», and the US subsequently conducted tests of the new Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile. *Third*, Belarus has scheduled the deployment of Oreshnik medium-range ballistic missiles, which the aggressor plans to put into serial production. *Fourth*, North Korea has also demonstrated a new intercontinental ballistic missile.

Dangerous trends are gradually materialising, including the increased militarisation of global actors and the expansion and modernisation of arsenals of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons.

In conclusion, it should be noted that this list does not exhaust the external factors affecting Ukraine. Against this backdrop, external influences from the EU, the US and NATO are of particular significance.

II. THE EUROPEAN UNION WITHIN THE GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The EU's position on the global stage. Large-scale geopolitical transformations, in particular russian intervention in Europe, the reorientation of US foreign policy, and the polarisation of the international community, have compelled the EU to **reassess its strategic priorities** and launch extensive reforms across multiple sectors.

The European establishment recognised and reacted to a range of security threats and challenges, primarily those linked to the Ukraine war. In 2025, the EU undertook several strategically important steps: a) adoption of a new defence strategy – the White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030 and a five-stage [Rearm Europe](#) plan; b) substantial investments in the European Defence Fund; c) announcement of the concept of the EU's Preparedness Union Strategy for civilians (crisis response); d) introduction of new mechanisms for investment in the defence industries of Member States; e) publication of a new Black Sea Strategy aimed at strengthening security and stability in the region; f) preparation of a new EU defence programme, the [Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030](#), focused on four **flagship readiness initiatives**. The document also contains a strategically important statement that Ukraine is an integral part of Europe's defence and security architecture; g) plans to establish an [European Centre for Democratic Resilience](#) to counter disinformation campaigns by Russia and other authoritarian regimes.

However, the creation of an autonomous European security system is constrained by several factors. Security programmes are burdened by bureaucratic procedures and designed for the medium term, whereas the escalation of Russian intervention is ongoing. Europe remains dependent on certain types of American military aid. As a result, European leaders are forced to align themselves with Washington's position on various strategic issues. Furthermore, debates within the Coalition of the Willing have also highlighted the challenges of creating and deploying even a small joint military contingent.

In her annual [State of the Union Address](#) in September 2025, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen outlined a comprehensive package of political, security and socio-economic reforms intended to ensure the EU's competitiveness and autonomous capacity on the global stage.

In turn, the new global realities assign to the EU an immense civilisational mission. In view of the United States' withdrawal from its role of a global defender of democracy, the EU has become the principal and only global centre for promoting and defending democracy, freedom, justice, and human rights – that is, the fundamental civilisational values.

Internal challenges and issues within the European community. The accumulation of «resource fatigue» from the prolonged war, coupled with the growing critical attitudes towards refugees, and ethnic and demographic factors are fuelling populism and political turbulence, reinforcing Eurosceptic and xenophobic sentiments and creating societal demand for «strong leadership». This is one of the factors contributing to the above-mentioned increase in popularity of far-right forces across the EU.

The Balkan region also presents challenges for the EU, including internal political conflict and the complexity of European integration processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia and others. The Balkans remain the focus of Russia's hybrid aggression, which seeks to cultivate pro-Russian attitudes, stir political confrontation, provoke inter-ethnic conflicts and support separatist sentiments.

The EU's consensus-based decision-making mechanism is another chronic internal issue. Various EU leaders have repeatedly called for solutions, and the problem is regularly mentioned in the [annual addresses](#) of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. The transition from unanimity to qualified majority voting remains on the EU's agenda but, regrettably, no progress has been made to date.

Achievements and challenges of Kyiv-Brussels partnership. Since the onset of Russian military intervention, the EU has acted actively and resolutely in support of Ukraine. In 2025, official Brussels [allocated €20.5 billion to Ukraine's budget](#), and since the beginning of full-scale aggression, the EU and its Member States have provided €177.5 billion in support. A document adopted at the October meeting of the European Council [emphasises](#) that «the European Council commits to address Ukraine's pressing financial needs for 2026–2027, including for its military and defence efforts». At the same time, the question remains open regarding the European Commission's proposed «reparation loan» for Ukraine financed from the aggressor's frozen assets.

The European integration process is currently progressing across several areas. A key stage – the screening of Ukrainian legislation for compliance with EU standards – has been virtually completed. Ukraine has

done its «homework» required to open accession negotiations. The decision of both the EU and Ukraine to extend the liberalisation of road transport («transport visa-free regime») should be regarded as a positive development. In October 2025, a new EU-Ukraine trade agreement entered into force. While it provides certain potential for duty-free export of Ukrainian goods, it considerably modifies tariff quotas compared to previous autonomous trade measures, including imposing limits on the export of certain agricultural products sensitive for Ukraine.

Ukraine's bilateral relations with individual EU Member States also have their specific characteristics. Unfortunately, difficulties persist, particularly with neighbouring Eastern European countries. Relations with Hungary have deteriorated significantly due to the Orban government's extensive anti-Ukrainian campaign based on fake and distorted information about Ukraine. Dialogue with Slovakia's leadership is complicated by noticeable pro-Russian sentiment within society and Bratislava's refusal to provide military assistance to Kyiv. With the election of Karol Nawrocki as President of Poland, relations between Warsaw and Kyiv have become more challenging. Recent electoral victories of populist forces in the Czech Republic have also added uncertainty and tension to the Kyiv-Prague dialogue.

Overall, the problematic nature of relations between Ukraine and some Eastern European nations is attributable to a variety of factors. Among other things, these countries perceive Ukraine's European integration as a serious competitive threat to their positions in European markets, particularly in the agricultural sector.

Some domestic developments in Ukraine have also complicated relations between Kyiv and Brussels. Recent attempts by the authorities to restrict the powers of, and assume control over, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) triggered negative reactions, which were later mitigated following prompt corrective actions. In November, a high-profile corruption scandal erupted around the exposure of a criminal scheme at Energoatom. Such developments will hardly have a positive impact on the atmosphere of the Kyiv-Brussels dialogue.

Meanwhile, the prospects for opening negotiations on Ukraine's EU accession remain uncertain. In its annual enlargement report of 4 November 2025, the European Commission gave **fairly high marks** to Ukraine's pace of European integration across most negotiation chapters and confirmed readiness to open Clusters 1, 2 and 6. However, the start of negotiations is being hindered by the Orbán regime's openly anti-Ukrainian policy, which uses hostile rhetoric towards Kyiv as a basic component of its propaganda campaign in the run-up to the April 2025 parliamentary elections. As a result of this stalemate, the EU leadership has informally prepared options for a «technical» launch of negotiations. According to unofficial information, the **Frontloading** plan is currently on the agenda; it envisages the introduction of informal accession talks without formally opening a negotiation cluster. Obviously, this is a forced compromise to avoid losing time while waiting for possible changes in power in Hungary.

The European integration process demonstrates clear positive dynamics, while also presenting challenges and complications. However, given the United States' uncertain position, partnership with the EU and accession to the European community are acquiring particular weight and significance and constitute a strategic priority for national diplomacy.

III. THE AMERICAN FACTOR: SPECIFICS AND DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Impact of the domestic political situation on Washington's foreign policy. US foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy, which is currently marked by intense political confrontation between representatives of the conservative political current (President Trump, MAGA, a significant part of the Republican Party) and proponents of liberal ideology (the Democratic Party). As a result, the domestic situation shows a certain level of instability and rising political tensions – between pro-presidential forces and a large part of society, between Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, Reaganites and MAGA supporters.

Controversial actions of the US President aimed at reducing the number of federal employees, implementing a hardline migration

policy, and deploying National Guard troops to individual states have intensified the confrontation among Americans with different political views. Against the backdrop of the September 2025 murder of prominent MAGA activist Charlie Kirk, some experts have openly discussed the possibility of civil war in the United States.

Political confrontation also resulted in the inability of the US Congress to approve government funding on time. The federal government temporarily shut down. The [record-long shutdown](#) in modern American history lasted from 1 October to 13 November 2025.

On 18 October 2025, a [second wave of mass protests](#) swept across the United States under the slogan «No Kings», directed against the political course of the sitting President. According to organisers, between 4 and 6 million people took part in 2,700 protest actions held across all states.

Against this backdrop, in October 2025, according to a [Reuters](#) poll, Donald Trump's approval rating stood at 42%, which is quite low by historical standards. Trump retained strong support among Republicans (90%), although his overall approval rating was lower than in January 2025 (47%). At the same time, an indication of growing dissatisfaction with Trump's current policies may also be seen in the [victory of Democrat Zohran Mamdani](#) in the New York mayoral election in November, and the parallel wins of Democratic candidates in the gubernatorial elections in Virginia and New Jersey.

It is evident that such a domestic political situation inevitably affects the foreign policy course of the United States. Internal instability triggers instability in foreign policy implementation.

Specifics and features of the new US foreign policy. In the context of new world order formation and the emergence of global threats and challenges, the US President and his team have attempted to shape a new foreign policy strategy radically different from that of their predecessors.

This involves *replacing the previous liberal course – which focused on promoting democratic values worldwide – with a rigidly pragmatic, aggressive pursuit of American*

national interests, as understood by the current US leadership. This has led to the following consequences.

First, the introduction of new trade tariffs (the so-called «tariff pressure») for 185 countries starting in April 2025, including key US allies, has already complicated Washington's relations with Canada, Mexico, Denmark and Latin American countries. The dollarisation of foreign policy has had similar consequences in relations with international institutions.

Second, as part of the commercialisation of foreign policy, Washington abolished the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Such steps limit the United States' ability to exert informational and humanitarian influence worldwide, which is dangerous in the context of escalating global hybrid aggression by authoritarian states.

Third, a number of action and statements by the new US leadership have de facto disavowed the system of fundamental values of the collective West. Washington's America-centric business diplomacy is changing the principles and foundations of partnership with allied countries. There is a real threat of erosion of Euro-Atlantic political and ideological unity and solidarity within NATO.

US foreign policy is drifting towards dollarisation (commercialisation), where success is measured by a single criterion – how favourable the deal concluded by the US is, and how many billions of dollars it brings. At the same time, the country's long-term strategic interests, which cannot always be quantified in billions, are often disregarded; instruments of soft power, such as USAID, are being eliminated; and the US is withdrawing from humanitarian organisations.

US policy towards Europe. The commercialisation of US foreign policy has led to significant changes in relations with the EU and within NATO. New approaches to relations with Europe were outlined in the notorious [speech](#) by US Vice President J. D. Vance at the Munich Security Conference in 2025. The speech reflected isolationist ideas promoted by Trump's core electorate (MAGA). In effect, Europe was accused of betraying democratic values. Vance also stressed that the United States would no longer defend the European continent solely at its own expense.

The introduction of higher US trade tariffs in early 2025 prompted retaliatory measures by the EU, leading to an economic conflict. As a result of tense negotiations in July 2025, the US and the EU signed a framework trade agreement setting new trade rules and tariffs. The agreement is intended to restore stability and predictability in transatlantic trade. At the same time, cooperation between the US and the EU on security issues, support for Ukraine and countering common threats remains important, as confirmed by meetings between representatives of both sides, including within the framework of the Coalition of the Willing format in October 2025.

Overall, the EU and the US have managed to maintain their partnership and cooperation in ensuring international security and providing military-technical assistance to Ukraine.

Washington's position in the peace negotiation process. The meeting between the US President and the Russian dictator in Alaska in August 2025 brought obvious dividends to Russia. However, following the Anchorage meeting, contacts and consultations between the two countries were temporarily suspended. In mid-October 2025, information emerged about a possible sale of American Tomahawk cruise missiles to Ukraine. This caused concern in Russia and prompted Putin to call Trump. As a result, Trump announced plans to hold a US-Russia summit in Budapest, while the sale of Tomahawks to Ukraine was dropped from the agenda. According to media reports, the meeting between Trump and Zelenskyy on 17 October was difficult.

However, the agreements between Trump and Putin failed to materialise due to the aggressor's ultimatum demands, which were unacceptable to both the United States and Ukraine and effectively rendered another Trump-Putin meeting pointless. The summit was formally postponed (in fact, cancelled), and the negotiation process was once again frozen.

This prompted Washington to increase economic pressure on Russia. On 22 October 2025, the US Department of the Treasury **announced** additional sanctions due to Russia's lack of serious commitment to the peace process. Against this backdrop, Rosneft shares fell by 3%, causing a loss of \$1.56 billion. Lukoil shares plummeted by 7.2%, resulting in losses of **\$3.66 billion**.

The US-initiated peace negotiation process to end the war in Ukraine, launched in February 2025, has not yielded positive results and is effectively frozen. Russia, while simulating peace initiatives, is using the talks as a smokescreen to ramp up its aggression, with no intention to stop the fighting and stepping up terror against Ukraine's civilian population.

Specifics of US-Ukraine relations at the present stage. Ukrainian diplomacy is forced to operate in challenging conditions due to the personalised nature of US policy and the specific positions of the American leader. Against this background, strengthening the institutional foundations of Ukraine's cooperation with the United States is of particular importance – specifically, developing the mechanism for arms procurement through NATO under the PURL format and the operation of the new US-Ukraine Investment Fund.

On 8 May 2025, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine **ratified** an agreement with the US on cooperation in the field of mineral resources. The agreement provided for the creation of a bilateral investment fund for the restoration and development of Ukrainian subsoil resources (hereinafter – the Fund). In September 2025, the Fund held its first meeting. The American side announced an initial contribution to the authorised capital of \$75 million. In turn, Ukraine committed to contribute another \$75 million, bringing the **start-up capital of the Fund** to \$150 million. During her visit to the US in early October 2025, Ukraine's Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko discussed issues of cooperation and the launch of the Fund's first projects.

On the one hand, recent months have seen active US-Ukrainian dialogue at various levels. The American side participated in the October meeting of the Ramstein Group. The US Senate approved a bipartisan defence budget bill for 2026, which includes \$500 million for the Ukraine support initiative. Ukraine is also advancing a number of large-scale joint projects with the US, particularly in defence and energy. However, the content and atmosphere of engagement between Kyiv and Washington remain generally unstable due to Donald Trump's contradictory and largely unpredictable stance, including his wait-and-see approach to the negotiation process to end the war in Ukraine.

The inconsistency and personalised nature of current US policy towards Ukraine must be compensated for by strengthening the institutional foundations of cooperation, including effective use of the PURL arms procurement mechanism and the US-Ukraine Investment Fund.

IV. STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE AND WEIGHT OF EURO-ATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP

NATO in the global security architecture.

In the current system of geopolitical relations, NATO remains the key security institution. This is ensured by its strong **deterrence mechanism** (nuclear arsenals of the United States, United Kingdom and France), integrated command structure, flexibility and adaptability, and a broad network of partnerships (the Alliance cooperates **with more than 40 countries**, including Ukraine, Japan, Australia, South Korea, New Zealand and UN/EU organisations).

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Alliance effectively returned to its original mission of deterrence and defence. Key aspects of this policy include strengthening of the eastern flank (creation of **additional combat groups** in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia; increased troop presence in the Baltic States and Poland); reforming the response model (the NATO Response Force replaced by a new 300,000-strong high-readiness force); and large-scale defence investments (at the NATO summit in The Hague on 24-25 June 2025, all allies committed to reaching defence spending at 5% of GDP – an objective almost unthinkable a decade ago).

In line with evolving threats, the Alliance is developing mechanisms to counter hybrid and cyber threats. NATO has recognised cyberspace as the **fifth domain** of warfare – alongside land, air, maritime and space – where actual hostilities are already taking place. To respond to these challenges, NATO has established CyOC – the Joint Cyber Operations Centre, introduced intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and launched active cooperation with the private sector in AI.

The Alliance has also reshaped its policy towards Russia and China. The former has been **officially designated** as the «most serious and

direct threat» to security, and the latter as a «systemic competitor» capable of influencing global stability through economic and technological expansion.

Energy and critical infrastructure of the Euro-Atlantic region are receiving increased attention. NATO has created the **Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell**, tasked to protect undersea gas pipelines and cables – key vulnerabilities for Europe. Innovation and new technologies are also a priority. **NATO DIANA** (Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic) and the NATO Innovation Fund bring together governments and start-ups to advance artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, autonomous systems, biotechnology and defence against unmanned platforms, thus establishing the Alliance's long-term technological shield.

The Alliance's agenda: challenges and threats. NATO faces a range of systemic challenges complicating the effectiveness of its responses to threats, primarily from Russia. The **delayed response** to Russian aggression is evident. One of the most critical challenges has been the chronically slow pace of political and military decision-making observed in recent years. 2008 – war in Georgia: NATO limited itself to political statements without offering any systemic deterrence mechanisms. 2014 – occupation of Crimea and Donbas: the Alliance's response was largely political, while a real **build-up of forces** only materialised in 2016-2017. 2022 – full-scale invasion of Ukraine: despite warnings from US and British intelligence, much of Europe maintained a «cautious» **approach**. These cases highlight strategic inertia, with the Alliance often responding to crises post factum rather than proactively countering threats.

In practice, internal political constraints and the consensus-based decision-making model reveal its limitations. As mentioned earlier, one of NATO's biggest structural challenges is the unanimity rule, which makes the Alliance dependent on the domestic political interests of individual allies. Modern crises clearly demand a shift from consensus to qualified majority decision-making, formats such as Coalition of the Willing, and special mechanisms for rapid response to threats.

Differences in threat perception across the Alliance also complicate strategic cohesion. NATO's eastern and northern flanks (Poland,

the Baltic States, Scandinavia) view Russia as an existential threat; western and southern members are more likely to focus on migration flows, terrorism, and instability in the Middle East. This disparity creates a strategic divide in approaches to deterring Russia.

Another challenge lies in Europe's limited defence industrial potential. For years, the European defence industries were in *stagnation*: low ammunition production capacity, slow supply chains, outdated procurement procedures, and dependence on the US for air defence, aviation and high-precision weaponry. This poses the risk of ammunition shortages in the event of large-scale crises.

A key source of uncertainty remains the unpredictable US foreign policy, with the United States being NATO's principal security guarantor. Internal political fluctuations in Washington and isolationist tendencies raise concerns among allies regarding the long-term reliability of American security commitments.

NATO-Ukraine partnership. Since the 1990s, Ukraine's cooperation with the Alliance has evolved through several stages, but real integration began after 2014 and intensified following 2022. Ukraine is *transitioning to NATO standards* (up to 300 regulatory documents implemented), conducting joint drills and training, and the NATO-Ukraine Council has been established. Achieving interoperability in weapon systems is a priority.

Support for Ukraine amid the war is crucial. NATO is not a party to the conflict, but it has initiated the largest aid package in history for a partner country – a multi-year training programme, creation of logistics hubs, and a long-term defence and recovery fund (up to \$60 billion). Ukraine is seen as a critically important element of European stability.

As regards NATO membership, although no clear timeframe has been set, the general consensus is that Ukraine will become a member following the end of the war or once acceptable political conditions are met. Ukraine's integration is already happening *de facto* – in military, technological, and political formats – and the transition of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to Western equipment is creating an unprecedented level of interoperability.

Ukraine's growing defence potential is also worthy of note. Kyiv has received modern weapons (air defence systems, long-range precision missiles, UAVs, artillery, tanks, F-16 aircraft), undertaken technological modernisation of its defence industry, and gained access to training facilities for tens of thousands of military personnel at NATO bases. This has elevated Ukraine's defence capability to a historic maximum. Kyiv is integrating into European and global security chains. Ukraine is gradually *becoming a provider of security*, not merely a recipient: it is already a key state on the eastern flank in the future defence architecture in Europe and a deterrent against Russian aggression for the entire region. Ukraine's victory will also be a victory for the Euro-Atlantic security model.

In 2025, the above-mentioned NATO collective mechanism, PURL (Priority Ukraine Requirements List), was introduced to systematise and coordinate military assistance to Ukraine. For Kyiv, this is the first ever instrument to provide standardised and regular military assistance, embedded within NATO's official budgetary commitments. In fact, it serves as a bridge to full integration into the Alliance's defence planning.

Ukraine's cooperation with NATO is twofold. Kyiv is receiving an unprecedented level of practical support – from air defence systems to multibillion financial packages – while the political prospect of membership remains vague. For Ukraine, this necessitates demonstrating its ability to act not only as a recipient, but also as an active participant and contributor to collective security.

V. SUMMARY

Foreign policy must adapt to new geopolitical realities and crises, seeking answers to existing and potential challenges and threats. This underscores the importance of analysing and forecasting external trends and designing a set of preventive countermeasures across various directions. With this in mind, the implementation of the following steps and measures in several priority areas appears appropriate.

European vector. Given the results of the EU's annual enlargement report (November 2025), the following steps should be taken on the European integration track.

First, focusing priority efforts on implementing reforms under the «fundamentals» – democratisation, rule of law, effective public administration and anti-corruption. In particular, this implies conducting effective investigations and adopting relevant court decisions on high-profile corruption cases; preventing interference with anti-corruption bodies (NABU, SAPO); ensuring the meaningful participation of independent experts in judicial appointment procedures (High Qualification Commission of Judges); improving the selection of Supreme Court judges; filling vacancies in the Constitutional Court; and introducing competitive selection procedures for positions in the prosecutor's office, among others.

Second, introducing a simplified priority procedure in the Verkhovna Rada for adopting draft laws, including those developed within the *Ukraine Facility* programme. These include, inter alia: reinstatement of competitive recruitment for civil service; optimisation of legislation on local state administrations and on declarations of integrity of judges; legislative regulation of compliance with SEPA criteria (European Payments Council), etc.

Third, adopting by the end of the year the National Programme for the Adaptation of National Legislation to EU Acquis, which should serve as the core reform roadmap.

Fourth, jointly with European partner countries, initiating in December 2025 or early 2026 the introduction of informal (technical) accession negotiations without the formal opening of a negotiation cluster.

US-Ukraine partnership. The following tasks are priorities for Ukrainian diplomacy on the US track.

First, ensuring pragmatic dialogue with the US President, considering his psychological traits and interests. Expanding communication with the White House administration at different levels is important, as is conveying objective information and Kyiv's positions regarding the achievement of a stable and just peace for Ukraine to Donald Trump's inner circle.

Second, promoting, in relations with the US, approaches shared with European partners and a consolidated European position aimed at ensuring fair conditions for ending the war

and providing reliable and effective security guarantees for Ukraine.

Third, ensuring a stable delivery of US weapons and equipment financed by European partners (the PURL initiative); expanding these supplies in terms of quantity and quality; creating conditions for obtaining American weapons paid for from Ukrainian funds and lifting restrictions on their use on the aggressor's territory.

Fourth, attracting US investment in Ukraine's advanced defence enterprises and obtaining access to cutting-edge US technologies and necessary stockpiles for producing modern weapons. In turn, the US side would gain access to Ukrainian defence «startups», with the ability to test them in combat conditions.

Fifth, facilitating economic cooperation within the framework of the Agreement on the Establishment of the US-Ukrainian Investment Fund. The Fund's activities could be used both for joint investments and as a mechanism for financing the supply of modern American weaponry.

Euro-Atlantic dimension. To strengthen Ukraine's partnership with NATO, efforts should focus on the following areas.

Deepening military integration and expanding Ukraine's participation in NATO operational planning. This includes embedding Ukrainian officers within NATO command structures, participating in the development of regional defence plans, and establishing joint command centres, which would ensure a higher level of interoperability.

Implementing a long-term programme for modernising Ukraine's security sector to NATO standards. Such a programme could include joint exercises, transformation of military command structures, development of defence technologies, cyber defence, and enhanced cooperation between Ukraine's defence industry and NATO member states.

Deploying long-term instruments of financial and logistical support for Ukraine. This refers to a trust fund or mechanism under the NATO-Ukraine Council, which would guarantee stable supply of armaments, ammunition, air defence and logistics regardless of political cycles in individual member states.