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UKRAINE'S PATH TO THE EU: EXTERNAL CHALLENGES AND INTERNAL PROBLEMS

Expert Opinions and Assessments

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This expert report, prepared by the Public Council at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine with the support of the Hanns Seidel Stiftung, focuses on key external factors affecting Ukraine's progress towards the EU, as well as selected domestic trends shaping the country's European integration.[1] The study continues a series of Public Council projects implemented in 2024–2026 with the support of the Hanns Seidel Stiftung and devoted to the European dimension of Kyiv's policy.

Under current conditions, EU integration — together with united Europe's military-political, financial and humanitarian support — is of critical significance for Ukraine. The war is unfolding against a rapidly changing geopolitical backdrop in which the positions and influence of major global actors play an increasingly important role. The report highlights the American and Chinese factors, although the external influences affecting Kyiv's European integration are clearly far broader.

Meanwhile, domestic developments in Ukraine — particularly the effectiveness of pro-European transformations — remain equally important. Their significance has increased further with the launch of the final stage of European integration: accession negotiations with the EU, which are expected to formally begin in the near future.

SECTION I. EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING UKRAINE'S INTEGRATION INTO THE EU

Security Aspects of Kyiv-Brussels Partnership

EU-Ukraine: Joint resistance to russian aggression. Brussels' policy towards Ukraine currently rests on several pillars. *First*, since the start of the full-scale invasion, the EU and its member states have provided €193 billion in assistance to Ukraine. Financing for weapons procurement for the Armed Forces of Ukraine continues through NATO's PURL mechanism, while EU-Ukraine defence-industrial cooperation is being developed through the European SAFE instrument. Countries participating in the Ramstein group plan to allocate $60 billion in military assistance to Ukraine in 2026. In parallel, two-thirds of the EU loan package (€90 billion) is intended to cover Ukraine's wartime expenditure. *Second*, European financial assistance also remains critical for maintaining Ukraine's public finances and macroeconomic stability. One-third of the EU loan package will be directed towards Ukraine's budgetary needs, alongside funding provided under the multiannual Ukraine Facility programme. *Third*, the EU continues to demonstrate political solidarity with Ukraine on international platforms, promoting pro-Ukrainian resolutions and statements within the UN, OSCE, PACE, G7 and other institutions. The EU has also helped to establish the Coalition of the Willing, the International Tribunal for investigating crimes of russian aggression, and an international platform focused on returning Ukrainian children abducted by the aggressor.

Europe's strategic autonomy and defence preparedness. Older models of international relations based on economic interdependence are gradually losing effectiveness,

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forcing the EU to evolve into a more independent geopolitical and security actor. Europe now faces a strategic choice: remain dependent on external security guarantees and internally fragmented or accelerate the development of its own strategic autonomy and defence capabilities.

The growing US disengagement from European security issues, combined with increasingly sceptical attitudes towards NATO, has revived debate within the EU over geopolitical self-sufficiency, while the European establishment has begun reassessing strategic priorities and launching large-scale reforms across multiple sectors, from security to humanitarian policy.

During 2025–2026, the EU launched several major defence initiatives. Brussels presented the White Paper for European Defence — Readiness 2030, which explicitly identifies russia as a strategic threat to Europe. The ReArm Europe Plan entered into force, providing for the mobilisation of up to €800 billion to strengthen the EU's defence capabilities. The EU also launched the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) financing instrument and presented the Preserving Peace — Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030, which envisages the development of an air shield, a space shield and enhanced protection for the EU's eastern flank.

This marks the beginning of a new phase of European integration centred on security and defence. This shift is unfolding amid broader changes in transatlantic relations. European political circles are increasingly debating the need to reduce critical dependence on the United States in the security sphere, while discussions on creating a European «nuclear umbrella», joint EU armed forces and independent satellite intelligence systems are becoming more prominent.

The EU's path towards strategic autonomy, however, continues to face serious obstacles. According to an expert survey conducted in March 2026, participants identified several factors weakening the EU, including a lack of determination to counter russian aggression and external hybrid threats, as well as an unfavourable geopolitical and economic environment. European security programmes also remain burdened by bureaucratic procedures and are largely designed for the medium term. Europe, meanwhile, continues to depend on US support in key areas, such as missile technologies and space-based intelligence. Discussions within the Coalition of the Willing have likewise exposed the difficulties of deploying a joint military contingent.

A further structural weakness lies in the consensus principle governing strategic decision-making. The veto mechanism has repeatedly allowed individual member states to block sanctions decisions, financial assistance to Ukraine and joint security initiatives. Under current geopolitical conditions, such a system increasingly appears both outdated and dangerous.

Ukraine as part of the European security system. Russian aggression has demonstrated that European security is indivisible and that Ukraine's defence is inseparable from the security of the EU itself. Today, it is the Ukrainian army that is containing one of the gravest military threats facing Europe, so it is no coincidence that EU documents describe Ukraine as the «first line of Europe's defence».

Ukraine has de facto become an integral part of Europe's emerging defence architecture. This is reflected not only in the Ukrainian military's combat experience, but also in unique advances in drone warfare, air defence, digital command systems, cybersecurity and military medicine. For this reason, integrating Ukraine's defence sector into broader European programmes is mutually beneficial.

The changing geopolitical environment has also intensified debate over the formation of a broader coalition of democratic states capable of jointly countering authoritarian regimes.

For the EU, the choice is becoming increasingly stark: either evolve into an effective geopolitical actor or risk remaining vulnerable to external centres of power. In this context, strategic autonomy is no longer merely a political concept but an increasingly practical condition for preserving the European project.

For Ukraine, a strong, united and security-capable EU represents both a safeguard for Ukrainian statehood and the prospect of a just peace. At the same time, Ukraine itself is

becoming one of the central pillars of Europe's new security architecture.

The American Factor: Key Trends and Features

Features of US foreign policy. Several developments shaped US foreign policy between autumn 2025 and spring 2026.

The overall direction of Washington's external strategy was formalised in the National Security Strategy published in November 2025. As noted in previous analytical reports by the Public Council, the document reflects a stronger transactional approach, greater pragmatic realism, growing commercialisation of foreign relations, and a shift away from global leadership towards narrower economic and security interests. The US National Defence Strategy released in January 2026 similarly prioritised border security, countering migration threats and restoring American military dominance in the Western Hemisphere. At the same time, both documents suggested a more detached US approach towards the Ukraine war.

From autumn 2025 onward, Washington's foreign policy became increasingly confrontational. The United States employed coercive measures, political pressure and economic leverage across multiple directions. US forces captured the Venezuelan president during a military operation in Caracas, launched military action against Iran together with Israel, and imposed additional sanctions on Cuba after designating it a threat to US national security. More broadly, US actions in the Middle East reinforced perceptions of an increasingly personalised and less predictable American foreign policy, contributing to heightened geopolitical tensions and economic instability.

Autumn 2025 and spring 2026 were also marked by a new wave of «tariff wars» initiated by the United States. The White House increasingly used tariffs not only against China, but also against partners and allies.

The last remaining arms-control agreement between the United States and russia — New START — expired in February 2026. In the absence of a replacement framework, the world's two largest nuclear arsenals effectively found themselves outside formal international legal constraints for the first time in decades.

Tensions also increased within NATO. Following statements by President Donald Trump, public debate intensified over the possibility of US withdrawal from the Alliance, restricted application of Article 5 to countries spending less than 5% of GDP on defence, and even the potential «suspension» of member allies such as Spain, which did not support US military action against Iran. Trump also raised the possibility of withdrawing American troops from Italy, Spain and Germany; according to reports, a corresponding decision regarding Germany was adopted in early May.

Growing strains in US-EU relations. Relations between Washington and Brussels have entered a period of strategic uncertainty marked by growing tensions and declining trust. US policy towards the EU is increasingly shaped by economic competition, prompting Brussels to accelerate efforts to strengthen its strategic, security and economic autonomy.

The situation surrounding Greenland escalated into a major diplomatic crisis after the Trump administration signalled its intention to establish control over the island, triggering sharp tensions within both the EU and NATO.

Additional friction arose from Washington's public backing of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. This further widened divisions between the US administration and EU leadership, highlighting Washington's willingness to support right-wing populist forces aligned with American interests.

The conflict involving the United States, the Holy See and Italy in April 2026 created additional strains in relations with European partners. More broadly, throughout April 2026 the US president damaged relations with several European leaders, affecting both the attitudes of European elites and broader public perceptions of the United States within the EU. For many in Europe, these developments reinforced arguments in favour of reducing dependence on Washington.

The White House increasingly appears to be moving towards a model in which relations with partner countries are based less on shared values than on economic and political

loyalty — including purchases of American goods and weapons, as well as support for US foreign-policy actions. Such an approach risks damaging America's international image and intensifying domestic tensions ahead of congressional elections. It also complicates relations with allies, undermines the authority of NATO and the EU, and indirectly encourages the expansionist ambitions of authoritarian states.

The American factor in Ukraine. Recent months have seen further changes in the nature of US support for and influence on Ukraine. Since 2026, US assistance has been limited exclusively to funds already allocated in the federal budget. This year, Washington allocated $400 million for Ukraine — dramatically less than in previous years — and even these funds were temporarily frozen. The US budget for 2027 currently contains no assistance for Ukraine. American weapons are now supplied to Kyiv exclusively through NATO's PURL mechanism, under which the purchases are financed by European allies.

US influence on Ukraine has become increasingly pragmatic and instrumental. Washington has largely shifted the financial burden of supporting Ukraine onto European countries while retaining some important levers of influence over Kyiv. This has created an «asymmetric dependence», in which Ukraine is expected to comply with increasingly tough US conditions despite the reduction in direct American support.

These changes in US policy have inevitably affected public attitudes in Ukraine. According to Razumkov Centre's surveys in March 2026, public trust in the United States among Ukrainians fell below 50% for the first time in four years.

The state and prospects of negotiations involving the United States. Between autumn 2025 and spring 2026, the US role in the settlement process appeared to shift from neutral moderator to a participant closer to russia's position. This was evident, in particular, in the so-called 28-point peace plan, which was in fact russian rather than American in substance.

The limited understanding of Ukraine's position was also reflected in remarks by US Vice President JD Vance, who dismissed «bargaining» between Ukraine and russia over «a few square kilometres» as pointless. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, for his part, stated that peace diplomacy between Ukraine and russia had reached a deadlock, but that the United States would be ready to mediate again if an opportunity arose.

As the White House distances itself from the war in Ukraine, European leaders have become more active in seeking a stronger EU role in peace talks. On 9 May, in his Europe Day address, European Council President António Costa said the EU was ready in principle to negotiate with russia. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas stressed the need for Brussels to formulate a clear negotiating position towards russia. Ukraine, meanwhile, has shown readiness to continue negotiations with US participation and stronger EU involvement.

After the so-called «May ceasefire», the occupying state intensified its genocidal war against Ukraine, stepping up mass attacks on critical infrastructure, residential areas and Ukraine's energy system. The future of the negotiation process remains uncertain, but its outcome will clearly depend on a strong, consolidated position by Ukraine and its allies, greater political and diplomatic pressure on the aggressor, and tougher sanctions.

China in Europe: Partner, Competitor or Rival?

China's European policy: methods and instruments. The EU remains China's principal economic and technological partner. Bilateral trade reached $828 billion in 2025, although the trade surplus in China's favour rose to $291 billion, compared with $268 billion in 2024. Beijing's strategic objective in relations with the EU is therefore to preserve the status quo despite persistent European efforts to reduce these imbalances.

Another strategic objective for Beijing is to discourage the EU from following the US approach towards China. Speaking in March 2026 during the so-called «Two Sessions», Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi described Europe as an important partner in China's

modernisation and called on European countries to view China not as a competitor, but as a global partner.

Beijing continues to pursue its interests through bilateral relations with selected European states, broadly following a «divide and rule» approach. China has developed particularly close ties with Poland, Hungary and Slovakia — three countries bordering Ukraine. Rapid strengthening of relations with Spain has been another notable trend.

Features and prospects of Brussels-Beijing relations. In recent years, tensions between the EU leadership and China have continued to grow. This is largely due to Brussels' efforts to reduce risks in relations with Beijing and address persistent trade and economic imbalances. According to EU strategic documents, China is viewed simultaneously as a cooperation partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival. At the same time, the EU emphasises that its policy is aimed at de-risking rather than decoupling. As part of this approach, the European Commission presented A Competitiveness Compass for the EU in January 2025. Economic challenges for Europe linked to China continue to intensify amid slower Chinese economic growth and broader global instability. These challenges include trade imbalances, unfair competition — particularly through state subsidies — and, above all, industrial overcapacity.

In response, the European Commission presented a draft Industrial Acceleration Act in March 2026. The explanatory note accompanying the document placed particular emphasis on strengthening the competitiveness of European high-tech products relative to Chinese alternatives. Beijing reacted extremely negatively to the initiative. Trade and economic tensions between China and the EU are therefore likely to deepen even further, placing additional strain on political relations. It is difficult to disagree with French President Emmanuel Macron, who stated in April 2026: «We should not underestimate that this is a unique moment where a US president, a russian president and a Chinese president are dead against the Europeans. This is the right moment for us. Wake up.»

China and negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. The Russia-Ukraine war and prospects for its peaceful settlement have become an increasingly important topic in EU-China dialogue. EU institutions and leaders of member states have repeatedly urged Beijing to end its economic support for russian aggression and to play a more active role in the peace process. Following the EU-China summit in July 2025, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen stated: «How China continues to interact with putin's war will be a determining factor our future relations going forward.»

A certain shift in China's position became visible after the peace process intensified in November 2025. Following talks with Emmanuel Macron in December 2025, Xi Jinping stated that Europe should be involved in peace negotiations. The Chinese leader reiterated this position during a meeting with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in late February 2026.

Kyiv-Beijing relations: current state and prospects. Ukraine-China relations remain contradictory. China is Ukraine's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching $21 billion in 2025 — above the pre-war 2021 level. The imbalance in trade, however, continues to deepen. Ukrainian exports totalled only $1.8 billion, down by $600 million compared with 2024, while imports from China reached $19.2 billion, leaving Beijing with a trade surplus of $17.4 billion. Current 2026 trends suggest these disparities will continue to grow.

Political relations are no less problematic. The asymmetry in contacts between the Chinese leadership and the Ukrainian and russian presidents is particularly striking. Since 2022, Xi Jinping and putin have held more than a dozen in-person and online meetings, whereas Xi has spoken with Volodymyr Zelenskyy only once — in a telephone conversation in April 2023. Ukrainian diplomacy has repeatedly stressed the need to intensify high-level dialogue.

Since early 2026, however, some signs of a possible adjustment in China's position have emerged. Following talks between Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in February 2026, Ukraine's Foreign Ministry stated that the sides had moved beyond formal exchanges towards more concrete planning of bilateral

contacts. Regarding a possible leaders' summit, the Ukrainian side reportedly received a «neutral-positive response». Preparations are currently under way for a visit by Sybiha to China.

In recent months, Beijing has also expressed interest in participating in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, including in coordination with other international partners. Chinese Ambassador to Ukraine Ma Shengkun stated this explicitly in an article published in the Ukrainian media. Chinese interest in expanding trade and economic cooperation with Ukraine has likewise become more noticeable.

Political dialogue between the two countries nevertheless remains limited. As long as the «hot phase» of the russia-Ukraine war continues, major changes in China's position towards Ukraine are unlikely.

SECTION II. UKRAINE'S PATH TO THE EU: INTERNAL PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

The State of EU-Ukraine Relations in Current Conditions

Specific features of EU-Ukraine relations during the war. Several features currently define relations between Kyiv and Brussels. *First*, as noted above, Europe continues to provide Ukraine with substantial military and political support. Closer EU-Ukraine security cooperation is also developing alongside broader transformation of the EU's defence sector.

Ukraine is expected to receive the first tranche of a new EU loan in the near future. Since 2024, Kyiv has already received more than €26.7 billion under the Ukraine Facility programme. Part of this funding — particularly budget support — is provided under a «money for reforms» mechanism designed to encourage further pro-European reforms.

Second, a distinctive feature of Ukraine's wartime European integration is that it continues under prolonged martial law. This creates several serious challenges: a) Ukraine has been forced to introduce certain restrictions on rights and freedoms; b) russian aggression has made democratic elections impossible due to security and operational constraints; c) mechanisms of public oversight over the authorities have weakened; d) political competition has declined, while political parties have focused primarily on supporting the Armed Forces and volunteer activities; e) labour and staffing shortages remain a serious problem both for the country as a whole and for state institutions in particular. Notably, in May 2026 the Ukrainian government launched the national internship programme for people aged 50+ entitled «Experience Matters».

Internal problems and trends within the EU. The EU's broader «problem case» is also shaped by such factors as the escalation of russian expansionism on the European continent, mounting socio-economic pressures, turbulence on energy markets caused by the war in the Middle East, growing social divisions and migration pressures fuelling xenophobic sentiment.

Taken together, these developments are contributing to the growing popularity of far-right and populist forces in Europe. The broader rightward shift in public attitudes across the EU was reflected in the 2025 election campaigns in Germany, Romania, Portugal, Poland, Czechia and the Netherlands, among others. These trends have continued into 2026.

Experts argue that social democratic parties in several Central European countries — long regarded as pillars of their political systems — remain in decline. The growing activity of right-wing movements increasingly takes the form of right-wing populism, national conservatism and political isolationism. This is affecting both the foreign-policy positions of individual states and the broader mood within the European political establishment.

The growing influence of right-wing forces across the EU poses challenges for the Union's common foreign policy and is increasingly affecting member states' positions on the war in Ukraine, including political, military and financial support for Kyiv, as well as the broader state of bilateral relations.

The chronic problem of consensus-based decision-making and abuse of veto powers may also become more acute in light of the broader rightward shift in the political landscape of several European countries.

A New Stage of Integration: Features and Prospects

Achievements and challenges on the path to the EU. Ukraine's pace of European integration received a generally positive assessment across most negotiating chapters in the European Commission Progress Report published in November 2025. Key achievements included completing — in record time — the complex screening process assessing Ukrainian legislation for compliance with EU standards; adopting the National Programme for the Adaptation of Ukrainian Legislation to European Union Law (EU acquis), which envisages nearly 1,850 measures aimed at harmonising more than 1,600 EU legal acts; adopting by the Verkhovna Rada a package of important pro-European legislative acts; and submitting to parliament draft Anti-Corruption Strategies for 2026–2030 based on the framework legislation prepared by the National Agency on Corruption Prevention.

Despite these positive developments, however, pro-European reforms have slowed in several areas. This concerns judicial reform, improving the functioning of the governance system, and strengthening the institutional and legal foundations of anti-corruption bodies. Ukrainian experts have also pointed to unsatisfactory implementation of the reform programme outlined in the joint statement by Marta Kos and Taras Kachka issued in December 2025.

Unfortunately, another troubling signal comes from surveys conducted by the Razumkov Centre, indicating that Ukrainian citizens largely distrust the state apparatus, the prosecutor's office, the courts and anti-corruption institutions.

Specific features of the new stage of European integration. In late 2025 and early 2026, Ukraine's European integration entered a new phase after the European Commission provided Kyiv with the benchmarks required to close all negotiating clusters. Yet even without the «Orbán factor», the negotiation process is already revealing new complications and sensitivities. Previously latent demands, conditions and claims from individual EU member states are likely to become more visible as negotiations progress.

First, concerns about difficult negotiations with European partners on several chapters appear well founded. This applies particularly to the «Agriculture» cluster. Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland — all of which previously imposed strict embargoes on Ukrainian agricultural products — may seek to slow Ukraine's agricultural integration into the EU. More broadly, these Eastern European countries increasingly view Ukraine's accession as a serious competitive challenge to their positions on European markets.

Second, the negotiation process will inevitably be affected by bilateral tensions between Ukraine and several Eastern European EU member states. Relations with the Slovak leadership remain difficult, while dialogue between Warsaw and Kyiv is also far from smooth. Additional complications continue to affect relations between Kyiv and Prague. The new ruling coalition in Bulgaria led by Rumen Radev can likewise hardly be described as particularly friendly towards Ukraine.

Third, the accelerated pace of Ukraine's European integration has not generated enthusiasm across all European capitals. Several EU member states did not support the European Commission's proposed «reverse enlargement» mechanism for Ukraine. At the same time, Berlin's proposals to grant Ukraine the status of an «associate member» have failed to attract support in Kyiv.

As noted in the Public Council's previous study, one source of tension between Kyiv and Brussels is Ukraine's insistence on defining a concrete date for EU accession. EU leadership, however, continues to avoid committing to a fixed accession timeline, while several European capitals remain sceptical about Ukraine's rapid entry into the Union.

Accelerated integration into the EU will ultimately depend on the systematic implementation of effective pro-European reforms envisaged under the negotiating clusters. Successful domestic reform remains both the key prerequisite and the strongest

argument supporting Kyiv's ambitious European integration agenda.

EU-Ukraine Relations: The Humanitarian Dimension

Russia's war against Ukraine has become a major humanitarian challenge for the entire European space. Today, the humanitarian dimension is an important component of relations between Ukraine and the EU.

EU-Ukraine partnership in the humanitarian sphere. UN estimates that more than 14 million Ukrainians have been forced to leave their homes since the start of the full-scale war, while around 6.5 million people have left Ukraine altogether. For the first time in its history, the EU activated the Temporary Protection Directive, allowing millions of Ukrainians to legally reside, work and access social services in EU member states.

Since 2022, the EU has become one of Ukraine's principal humanitarian partners. Through European Commission mechanisms, UN agencies, international humanitarian funds and national programmes of member states, unprecedented volumes of assistance have been mobilised for Ukrainian citizens

According to Eurostat, around 4.4 million Ukrainians were living in EU countries under temporary protection as of 2026. The largest numbers were hosted by:

- ✓ Germany — more than 1.26 million people;
- ✓ Poland — around 966,000;
- ✓ Czech Republic — nearly 400,000;
- ✓ Spain — more than 230,000;
- ✓ Italy — around 170,000 people.

Millions of Ukrainians currently living in EU countries have become active participants in European public life — studying, working, opening businesses, integrating into local communities and helping to shape new forms of international cooperation.

A new Ukrainian diaspora in the EU. The current wave of Ukrainian migration differs significantly from previous migration processes. Whereas earlier Ukrainian labour migration was driven primarily by economic factors, since 2022 it has largely taken the form of forced displacement caused by the war. In effect, this has led to the emergence of a new Ukrainian diaspora across the EU.

According to Eurostat, women account for more than 43% of Ukrainians living in EU countries, while children make up more than 30%. As a result, the current migration has a pronounced gender dimension. Women have effectively become the foundation of this new migration wave, assuming responsibility for helping families adapt, integrating children into new environments, ensuring economic stability and providing psychological support for relatives.

International studies show that more than 57% of Ukrainians living in EU countries are already employed, although nearly half work below their qualification level. This applies particularly to women with higher education who, due to language barriers or childcare responsibilities, are often forced to accept less qualified jobs.

Surveys among Ukrainian women living in EU countries show that the key factors influencing decisions about returning to Ukraine are the security situation, children's education, access to housing, employment opportunities, psychological stability and the level of social support.

Surveys also point to the gradual transformation of Ukrainian communities abroad. Ukrainians are becoming increasingly involved in volunteering, humanitarian initiatives, international advocacy for Ukraine and cultural diplomacy.

Prospects for the reintegration of Ukrainian migrants. Mass migration caused by the war has become both a major challenge and a critical problem for Ukraine, which is already experiencing an acute labour shortage. Preserving and restoring human capital is essential both for resisting russian aggression and for post-war recovery.

Most Ukrainians continue to maintain close social and emotional ties with their homeland. However, studies by the OPORA Civil Network show that willingness to return is gradually declining. Around 25–35% of

Ukrainians already consider the possibility of remaining permanently in EU countries, although more than 60% of respondents say they would like to return once the security situation stabilises.

Security clearly remains the main condition for reintegration. Other important factors include economic conditions in government-controlled territories, housing construction and social infrastructure, employment opportunities, and access to education and vocational training. Changes in the legal status of Ukrainians in European countries, socio-economic conditions in host states, and evolving attitudes towards Ukrainian migrants will also shape future migration trends.

More broadly, the current humanitarian crisis is reshaping relations between Ukraine and the EU. In this context, systematic engagement by Ukrainian state institutions and civil society organisations with Ukrainian refugees abroad is becoming increasingly important, including in support of Ukraine's broader foreign-policy objectives.

Ukrainians in Europe represent not only a challenge for Ukraine, but also a strategic resource for the country's future development. Maintaining ties with citizens abroad, developing balanced reintegration policies together with partner states, and involving the Ukrainian diaspora in the country's recovery process will remain important tasks for Ukraine.

SECTION III. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL OBSERVATIONS

Ukraine's path towards the EU continues amid rapid geopolitical change and shifts in the global economic environment. Ukraine's European integration policy will therefore need to adapt to these new realities. This increases the importance of analysing and anticipating international trends and developing preventive measures across a range of areas.

Security. During the war, expanding Ukraine's defence partnership with European countries remains critically important. Key priorities include securing stable financing for weapons procurement for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and broadening Kyiv's participation in EU defence programmes and initiatives.

Promising areas of cooperation between Ukraine's defence industry and European partners include: a) developing a network of export hubs for Ukrainian defence technologies across Europe and launching joint production under the large-scale Drone Deal programme; b) opening R&D centres in Ukraine by European defence companies and establishing joint production facilities in EU countries; c) implementing joint projects within the multinational defence-support coalition CORPUS; d) expanding European Commission and Ukrainian Ministry of Defence programmes aimed at investing in innovative technologies.

Despite the difficult situation within NATO, strengthening cooperation with the Alliance remains important for Ukraine. This includes deeper military integration, broader participation in NATO operational planning, modernisation of Ukraine's security sector, and greater use of NATO financial and logistical support instruments.

The American factor. Relations between Ukraine and the United States remain volatile and increasingly unpredictable. Ukrainian diplomacy therefore faces several key tasks. *First,* maintaining pragmatic dialogue and communication with the White House administration at different levels. *Second,* preserving US participation in the negotiation process while strengthening Europe's influence and role, including by promoting a unified European position on fair conditions for ending the war and reliable security guarantees. *Third,* ensuring stable supplies of American weapons and military equipment. *Fourth,* attracting US investment into Ukraine's advanced defence enterprises and securing access to the latest American technologies. *Fifth,* promoting economic cooperation, including through the US–Ukraine Investment Fund.

The Chinese factor. China will most likely continue to avoid direct involvement in efforts to end the war in Europe while maintaining formal neutrality that, in practice, remains largely favourable to russia. Political dialogue between Kyiv and Beijing remains limited despite attempts by Ukrainian diplomacy to intensify contacts. In the near future, the main priority will likely be organising a visit by Ukraine's foreign minister to China. As long as the «hot phase» of the russia-Ukraine war

continues, major changes in China's position towards Ukraine remain unlikely. At the same time, Beijing has clearly signalled its interest in participating in Ukraine's post-war recovery, which should lead to more active political engagement between the two countries.

Internal factors shaping European integration. Europe remains Ukraine's principal ally and continues to provide critically important military, political, financial and humanitarian support. At the same time, the EU is facing a number of mounting pressures linked to the escalation of russian expansionism on the continent, growing socio-economic strains, migration-related tensions and the rising influence of right-wing forces.

The humanitarian dimension has also become an important component of EU–Ukraine relations. Ukrainians living in Europe represent not only a challenge, but also a strategic resource for Ukraine's future development. Kyiv therefore needs to maintain close ties with citizens abroad, work jointly with partner states on effective reintegration policies, and involve the Ukrainian diaspora in the country's recovery process.

Ukraine's European integration record already includes a number of significant achievements, particularly in adapting national legislation to EU norms and adopting a range of important decisions and measures, which received a favourable assessment in the European Commission's 2025 annual report.

Ukraine's pro-European reforms, however, have slowed in several areas. Key priorities on the EU–Ukraine agenda include implementing judicial reform, strengthening the institutional and legal foundations of anti-corruption bodies, and improving the functioning of the governance system.

A distinctive feature of the current stage is that, with the «Hungarian factor» no longer dominating the agenda, the negotiation process is exposing previously latent demands, claims and conditions from individual EU member states towards Ukraine. Negotiations will clearly be influenced both by domestic political dynamics and electoral considerations in several EU countries, and by continuing difficulties in Ukraine's relations with certain Eastern European states.

For Ukraine — which is defending the EU's eastern flank and suffering enormous human and economic losses — a lengthy and slow-moving accession process following the Balkan model is unacceptable. EU accession is viewed both as part of Ukraine's future security guarantees and as an important source of motivation for Ukrainian society and the authorities. Yet the accelerated format of Ukraine's European integration currently lacks support from some European capitals.

This situation, however, should not become a source of tension between Kyiv and Brussels. Current realities highlight the need to strike a reasonable balance between, on the one hand, the security and geopolitical imperative of EU enlargement and, on the other, the formal procedures developed during a period of geopolitical stability and relative security comfort in Europe.

Accelerated integration into the EU will depend above all on the systematic implementation of effective pro-European reforms. Successful domestic transformation strengthens Ukraine's negotiating position and provides the basis for Kyiv's ambitious European integration agenda.

In strategic terms, Ukraine's full integration into the EU would serve not only as an important guarantee of the country's security, sovereignty and statehood, but would also strengthen the Union itself — enhancing its defence potential, geopolitical weight and international influence.