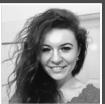


Ukraine's Bid to the EU: What Is to Be Expected?



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ŠOUP

The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has repeatedly expressed her support for Ukraine and its path to the European Union (EU)¹. However, at the same time, she pointed out how long and difficult this path will be. Russia's aggression against Ukraine accelerated Ukraine's efforts to join not only the EU, but also NATO. Nonetheless, membership in both these institutions – in addition to carrying out a number of reforms and aligning with the required standards – requires the consent of all member states. Due to the wide spectrum of far-reaching impacts on the entire European Union, the path to the EU and the course of the entire process may be much more complicated for Ukraine than admission to NATO.

In addition to Ukraine's readiness itself, there is the question of the need for internal reform of the EU, i.e. European institutions, policies, and finance that would be necessary for such an expansion. Enlargement by a country the size of Ukraine would fundamentally change the distribution of funds from the EU budget and the functioning of key EU policies, including agricultural and cohesive policy. In the context of future functioning of the enlarged EU, some parties also mention a proposal to replace unanimous decision-making with qualified majority decision-making – for example, with regard to taxation or foreign policy, which can be particularly problematic for smaller member states with a more complicated path to the blocking minority.

¹ European Commission (2023) *President von der Leyen Discussed with Leaders EU Support for Ukraine, the Middle East Conflict, Competitiveness, and Migration, During This Week's European Council Summit*. Available [online]: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/AC_23_6013

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ENLARGEMENT
BY A COUNTRY
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BUDGET AND THE FUNCTIONING
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POLICIES

As part of the discussion on ensuring the so-called 'absorption capacity' of the European Union and strengthening the credibility of the enlargement process, the issue of institutional reform of the EU is also mentioned. This could lead, for example, in the direction of two-speed EU integration. The core group would form a fiscal union and the outer group would include new member states and states that do not prefer deeper integration. However, such a move could also mean a split in the EU, a loosening of relations between the two groups, and a feeling of second-class status for some states without a common currency – among which the Czech Republic currently ranks.

Ukraine's potential accession to the European Union is a complicated process that requires not only the fulfillment of many



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criteria and the implementation of reforms by the candidate country, but also concrete steps and structural changes in the EU.

THE UNIQUE NATURE OF UKRAINIAN ASCENSION

Ukraine is in a very complex military, political, and economic situation, which no acceding country to the EU has had to deal with in the history of enlargement. The only country that joined the EU with a territory partially militarily occupied by a foreign state was the Republic of Cyprus during the enlargement in 2004. But the security reality in Cyprus during the accession negotiations with the EU certainly did not resemble the fierce fighting in eastern Ukraine that we know today. Let us also keep in mind that the cancellation of Ukraine's associa-

tion agreement with the EU *de facto* led to the Euromaidan and the emergence of a war in eastern Ukraine in 2014².

This exceptional position of Ukraine is also reflected in its position as a candidate for EU membership. States currently seeking to join the EU can be divided into three basic categories:

1. **The closest to accession:** In the first case, these are candidate countries such as **Albania**, **North Macedonia**, and the long-term unsuccessful **Turkey**. These states are characterized by a less developed economy with below-average performance compared to the EU average, a weak state and weak law enforcement, corruption, or elements of defective democracy. However, due to the war in Ukraine, they are anchored in the North Atlantic Alliance, which gives them solid security guarantees. Accession to the EU is thus primarily a matter of economic restructuring, i.e. a path that has become a recipe for membership in the European Union in the past 20 years³ – whether for the states of the former Eastern Bloc (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria), former republics USSR (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) or the republics of the former Yugoslavia (Slovenia and Croatia). These countries are closest to accession⁴.

2. **States somewhat close to ascension:** The second category of states are **the Balkan countries** that applied for membership before Russian aggres-

² <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/10/24/ukraine-s-accession-poses-unique-conundrum-for-eu-pub-90838>

³ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/2023-communication-eu-enlargement-policy_en

⁴ Ibid.

sion in Ukraine, but their security strategy did not yet include NATO membership or their accession was not possible, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina (2016), Montenegro (2008), and Serbia (2009)⁵.

3. **States farthest from ascension:** The last category form the **former USSR states** that applied for entry due to the acute security threat from the Russian Federation, which accelerated after the Russian invasion of Ukraine⁶ – i.e. **Georgia** (March 3, 2022), **Moldova** (March 3, 2022), and **Ukraine** itself (February 28, 2022). These states, in addition to classic ailments in the form of weak infrastructure and the rule of law or high corruption, are troubled by an acute (Ukraine) or frozen military conflict (Moldova in Transnistria and Georgia in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) with the Russian Federation, which is the main engine, but also the brake of the entire integration process⁷.

MAIN CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

As for the main obstacles and challenges regarding Ukraine's possible accession to the EU, the first circumstance is the security situation. Accession negotiations are a complex process that in the post-Soviet space requires concerted action by specific governments and extensive reforms in the administrative, economic, and political spheres of the given state. Fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria, which include *"institutional stability, a functioning market economy and the ability to copy with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU, the ability to take on the obligations of membership"*, including the ability to effectively implement the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.



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rules, standards and policies that constitute the set of legal EU regulations, and compliance with the goals of the political, economic and monetary union, is challenging even for states without an ongoing military conflict⁸. Ukraine's position is doubly complicated. On the one hand, it must make enormous efforts in the form of military operations and a war economy.

⁸ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/167/the-enlargement-of-the-union>

On the other hand, it must prove to the EU member states that it is willing to pay for the promise of future entry into the European Union with a military victory (or maximum stabilization of the situation) in the east and south of the country.

This phenomenon is also related to the expectations that the current EU members place in negotiations with Ukraine. After Russia's attack, the enlargement of the European Union is once again primarily connected with the EU's security policy on the eastern flank. Security integration tendencies in the territory of the EU have so far been limited to the strengthening of NATO's northern wing with Finland and Sweden. A similar process of security unification is expected in the post-Soviet space, as the viability of expanding in this way was tested mainly in 2004 – more or less successfully⁹.

CONSEQUENCES FOR MEMBER STATES

Ukraine's approach is primarily a matter of security. If the fortunes of war turned against the Kyiv regime, countries such as the Czech Republic, being the destination of a large portion of Ukrainian refugees, would be hit by a major wave of migration similar to the first weeks of the Russian invasion. Moreover, the expansion of the Russian sphere of direct influence would clearly worsen the security situation in the accepting countries itself. In the case of successful integration of Ukraine into the EU, the center of gravity of security threats would fundamentally shift further to the east¹⁰.

⁹ <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-nato-will-change-if-finland-and-sweden-become-members>

¹⁰ Cesifo Forum (2022) *How Can Europe Handle the Ukrainian Refugee Challenge?*. Available [online]: <https://www.cesifo.org/en/publications/2022/journal-complete-issue/cesifo-forum-042022-how-can-europe-handle-ukrainian>



IN THE CASE OF SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF UKRAINE INTO THE EU, THE CENTER OF GRAVITY OF SECURITY THREATS WOULD FUNDAMENTALLY SHIFT FURTHER TO THE EAST

One should also not overlook the prevailing narrative of the enlargement of the European Union as a tool to weaken the position of Russia and China in Europe. In addition to the promise of economic development, access to the free market, or access to European funds, EU membership now has another value – a safe harbor for the states that are directly threatened militarily by the Russian Federation and, economically, by China¹¹. This package of positives can thus force hesitant European states (mainly Serbia) to embark on the path of accelerated integration. For the current Kyiv regime, this is the only possibility for the direction of foreign policy, which includes freedom and independence.

¹¹ https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/index_en

Another circumstance is the position of the Czech Republic within the EU and the opinion on its expansion. In the updated program statement of Petr Fiala's government, it is stated in the Foreign Policy chapter: *"We will actively participate in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, which will not only be a reconstruction, but a comprehensive modernization, with the aim of enabling Ukraine to join the European Union"*. Reconstruction is thus understood by the Czech government as modernization with the goal of Ukraine's later accession to the EU, when, in the words of Petr Fiala, *"candidate status has a huge moral and symbolic meaning"*. It is therefore about the overall transformation of Ukraine before joining the European Union and not *ex post*¹².

Ukraine's approach would also fulfill the ambitions of Czech foreign policy, which has long been based on the further expansion of the EU to include the Balkan states and other former republics of the USSR¹³. The logic is that by expanding the European Union, the Czech Republic balances out the excessive influence of the founding or previously acceding and wealthy states of the EU, which naturally have other problems than the center and east of the Union. By accepting other states from the so-called 'former Eastern Bloc', the Czech Republic theoretically gains new allies in important issues such as the security architecture of Central Eastern Europe, migration policy, or cohesion policy.

From an economic point of view, the danger is Ukraine's strength in the field of agriculture. Huge and fertile Ukraine with low labor costs is a significant competitor to the farmers in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary,

¹² Government of the Czech Republic (2022) *Policy Statement of the Government*. Available [online]: <https://vlada.gov.cz/en/jednani-vlady/policy-statement/policy-statement-of-the-government-193762/>

¹³ Ibid.



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and the Czech Republic. In the case of Ukraine's accession to the EU, there would have to be a fundamental reconstruction of the agricultural policy, which would have to be agreed upon by all states – mainly France and the Netherlands, which is considered by some experts to be the main obstacle to Ukraine's accession to the EU. As we witnessed in April of 2023, Poland, although in other respects a stable supporter of Ukraine, proceeded to restrict the import of Ukrainian grain into its territory¹⁴. All this happened in a situation where the export of agricultural commodities is key for Ukraine. This attitude shows how

¹⁴ ČTK (2023) "Po Polsku zakázalo dovoz ukrajinského obilí také Maďarsko", [in]: *Novinky.cz*. Available [online]: <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/ekonomika-po-polsku-zakazalo-dovoz-ukrajinskeho-obili-take-madar-sko-40428764> [in Czech]

complex the debate on the possible reform of EU agricultural policy will be¹⁵.

APPROACH OF THE MEMBER STATES TO EU REFORMS

The first step of both the EU states and the European Union as a whole is to present the enlargement plan itself. Although experts consider Ukraine's accession to the EU in the next decade unlikely, a plan needs to be prepared that will describe the important and necessary steps that the European Union must take so that the EU can absorb Ukraine and other states with open access interviews or candidate status. The steps are quite simple: have a clear plan, start the preparations early enough, and set the final goal that EU enlargement should achieve¹⁶.

The first step is an agreement on whether and when the EU should expand. During his presidency of the European Commission in 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker made it clear that *"there will be no further enlargement in the next five years"*¹⁷. This is a similar definition of *what* will happen (and *when* will it have to happen) after the next European elections in 2024 and in the new Commission. The member states should play an active role in this process, i.e. insist on a clear timetable for further expansion. An appropriate approach seems to be the determination of a fixed and more distant date during the next budget period, let us say 2030. A time-ambitious plan, but for the states that participate in the common market, who have accepted obligations arising from the climate agenda or receive money from EU funds, it is realistic enough.

¹⁵ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/agricultural-obstacles-may-complicate-ukra-ines-path-toward-eu-membership/>

¹⁶ <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-union-membership-enlargement-turkey-albania-north-macedonia-montenegro-ukraine-moldova/>

¹⁷ <https://www.economist.com/europe/2014/09/27/in-the-queue>



IN THE CASE OF UKRAINE'S ACCESSION TO THE EU, THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE A FUNDAMENTAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE AGRICULTURAL POLICY, WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE AGREED UPON BY ALL STATES

This approach will create a target date that can act as a motivation for the candidate countries as well as for the EU itself to make the necessary reforms so that enlargement can actually take place.

Of course, this does not mean that the European Union must accept everyone in 2030 – it is a question of readiness and fulfillment of the criteria. Accession must still take place based on the fulfillment of the conditions set in Copenhagen. This means that even if Ukraine is in an exceptional situation, the EU cannot, in principle, reduce the criteria it requires of other countries. Abandoning the meritocratic approach would unsettle other states and support

the narrative that the EU does not measure all candidates equally¹⁸.

The second step is to put order inside the European Union itself and use the experience of the largest enlargement in 2004, which, despite criticism and initial skepticism, showed that the EU can successfully integrate states with a non-capitalist past (the case of Ukraine). On the contrary, history has shown that the maneuvering position of the United Kingdom leading to the exit from the EU in 2016 eventually became a problematic point of European integration¹⁹. The expansion by ten new members in 2004 was based on the revision of the previous European policies summarized in the Agenda 2000 document, which mainly reformed the agricultural and EU cohesion policy²⁰. Given that the agenda was based on the recommendations of the European Commission initiated in 1998, it is high time to formulate a similarly visionary and fundamental reform if we want to catch up with EU enlargement at the beginning of the 2030s.

The expansion can thus take place during the new financial period between 2028-2034, i.e. the period on which negotiations will begin shortly. During the Polish presidency in the European Commission in the first half of 2025, the member countries could, therefore, support the adoption of the similarly ambitious Warsaw Agenda 2030²¹ – i.e. a comprehensive plan on how



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to adapt EU policies and finances to enlargement, define the path to its fulfillment, and announce the plan at the December EU summit. After next year's European Parliament elections, the new European Commission should provide an impact assessment and policy recommendations to support these steps. In parallel, a process of institutional reform needs to be enacted with the goal of completion by 2030.

Due to the current global circumstances, it is important to accept the fact that the enlargement of the European Union is one of the most important tools for the EU to strengthen its influence in its immediate surroundings. It is crucial to promote the idea that all European countries should ultimately belong to the EU – including Kosovo, Belarus, and eventually also Russia (or its European part).

¹⁸ EUR Lex: Prístupová kritéria (kodaňská kritéria). Available [online]: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/CS/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:accession_criteria_copenhagen [in Czech]

¹⁹ European Parliament (2018) *The Impact of the UK's Withdrawal on EU Integration*. Available [online]: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604973/IPOL_STU\(2018\)604973_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604973/IPOL_STU(2018)604973_EN.pdf)

²⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/agenda-2000-for-a-stronger-and-wider-union.html>

²¹ <https://ecfr.eu/article/vision-2030-four-steps-towards-the-new-eu-enlargement/>



DURING THE POLISH PRESIDENCY IN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2025, THE MEMBER COUNTRIES COULD, THEREFORE, SUPPORT THE ADOPTION OF THE SIMILARLY AMBITIOUS WARSAW AGENDA 2030

EU'S GEOPOLITICAL AMBITIONS AND ITS ABILITY TO ABSORB NEW MEMBERS

The main geopolitical ambitions of the European Union can be considered to be the promotion of peace, stability, democracy, and the rule of law – not only on the European continent, but also in the world. These aspirations can also include support for the development and stabilization of regions geographically close to the EU. Furthermore, ambitions certainly include expanding its influence, increasing security, and strengthening its position

as a global player that could compete with other world powers²².

All the mentioned goals have a great influence on how the EU is able – and especially willing – to integrate new members. This ability is influenced by several factors, such as economic stability, political consensus, as well as the willingness of existing member states to accept a new one. There are lively and sensitive political debates about the decision on enlargement, which are largely influenced by these geopolitical ambitions²³.

Moreover, the geopolitical context can play a decisive role in whether the EU will actively seek new members at all. In the case of various regional and global challenges, it can seek stable partners in neighboring areas and be open to expansion. It initially offers various forms of cooperation and assistance to the countries on the eastern and southern edges, which can become the first step towards future membership.

GEOPOLITICAL AMBITIONS AND ABSORBING NEW MEMBERS

In 2004, the European Union expanded to include a number of Central and Eastern European states that were previously part of the Eastern Bloc. This enlargement was in line with the EU's geopolitical ambitions, which included the promotion of democracy and stability in the region, as well as aiming to strengthen democracy and market economies in these countries and expand the EU's sphere of influence to the east²⁴.

²² <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-union-membership-enlargement-turkey-albania-north-macedonia-montenegro-ukraine-moldova/>

²³ https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/eu-enlargement_en

²⁴ Ibid.

The European Union has expressed its interest in enlargement to the Western Balkans, which would serve geopolitical ambitions to strengthen stability and democracy in a region that has historically experienced conflict and instability²⁵. Moreover, it maintains a European perspective for Ukraine as well as Moldova and supports their reforms with the aim of bringing them closer to EU standards²⁶, which also coincides with ambitions aimed at strengthening relations with these Eastern European states and contributing to their democratic and economic development. Also, the support of Ukraine during the war with Russia and the willingness to open a dialogue for acceptance is motivated by geopolitical ambitions too.

Conversely, Brexit was a negative example of geopolitical developments that affected the EU's ability to expand. The UK's departure meant that the European Union lost one of its largest members and a country whose geopolitical influence is, undoubtedly, vast in many ways²⁷.

EU ENLARGEMENT POLICY COULD BE TRANSFORMED AND MORE EFFECTIVE

It is possible to consider greater financial and technical support for countries that are trying to carry out reforms and adapt their legal systems and economies to the necessary standards. It can be done in the form of support for strengthening institutions, fighting corruption, and improving the legal system – for example, financing projects for training judges or improving the transparency of public procurement.

²⁵ European Commission (2023) *COM(2023) 314 final*. Available [online]: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10638-2023-INIT/en/pdf>

²⁶ EUR Lex (2022) *Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*. Available [online]: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX-3A52022DC0528>

²⁷ <https://warsawinstitute.org/brexit-geopolitical-perspective/>



IT IS CRUCIAL TO PROMOTE THE IDEA THAT ALL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES SHOULD ULTIMATELY BELONG TO THE EU – INCLUDING KOSOVO, BELARUS, AND EVENTUALLY ALSO RUSSIA (OR ITS EUROPEAN PART)

The enlargement process itself could be made even more transparent, while making the decision-making as accessible as possible to the public (in both member and candidate states), which can help build trust. This could be achieved by means of, for example, regular meetings with civil society and publication of reports on the progress of negotiations²⁸.

Moreover, the studies that are commissioned before the enlargement to include new members and which analyze the economic and social impacts on the member

²⁸ European Ombudsman (2010) *European Citizens' Right to Know - Complaints about Lack of Transparency*. Available [online]: <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/speech/en/5314>

states and on the new members, should be well presented and accessible to the public. Citizens will thus be well informed about cost and benefit estimates for both parties²⁹.

Greater and more active communication with citizens of member states and candidate countries would be key. Thorough education and awareness of citizens about the benefits and risks of enlargement can help reduce Euroscepticism and fears. The EU could also invest more in campaigns that inform citizens about the benefits of enlargement and make objective information about the process available, in turn, reducing fears and mistrust of proliferation. The involvement of civil society and non-governmental organizations in the enlargement process can help increase legitimacy and democratic control over the process – for example, through consultative forums or dialogue with civil society³⁰.

Apart from that, the European Union could be more flexible in assessing the progress of candidate countries and allow a longer transition period for those states that face particular challenges and need more time to adapt to EU standards. The answer to this question may be a multi-rate integration model³¹.

A MULTI-SPEED MODEL OF EU INTEGRATION: ADVANTAGES AND DRAWBACKS

Ukraine has a long-term interest in EU integration and strives for political and economic reforms in accordance with Europe-

²⁹<https://www.transparency.org/en/news/low-political-integrity-throughout-the-european-union-gcb-eu-2021>

³⁰ Devesa, D.R. (2022) *Report on the Implementation of Citizenship Education Actions: A9-0060/2022*, European Parliament. Available [online]: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0060_EN.html

³¹ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/2023-communication-eu-enlargement-policy_en



THE GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT CAN PLAY A DECISIVE ROLE IN WHETHER THE EU WILL ACTIVELY SEEK NEW MEMBERS AT ALL

an standards. However, the country faces a large number of technical and institutional obstacles that prevent it from fully implementing EU regulations and policies. The war and a complex geopolitical situation made these problems even more complicated, and the process of rapprochement with the EU more difficult³².

However, it is clear that Ukraine enjoys extensive support in some member states and European institutions, and so does the very idea of integration into the EU, which would take into account its specific situation and needs. The solution could be precisely the two-speed model, which is perceived as a possible solution for European integration due to the disparity and differences of individual member and candidate states³³.

³² Ibid.

³³ Šidlová, T. (2022) "EU chce otevřít dveře Ukrajině. Morální význam je pro ně obrovský", řekl Fiala", [in]: *Seznam Zprávy*. Available [online]: <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-eu-chce-otevrit-dvere-ukrajine-moralni-vyznam-je-pro-ne-obrovsky-rekl-fiala-207106> [in Czech]



UKRAINE HAS
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PEAN STANDARDS

POTENTIALLY POSITIVE ASPECTS

The multi-speed model allows member states to continue integration at their own pace based on their own needs and preferences. In this way, it can offer candidate countries, as well as Ukraine, flexibility in the process of rapprochement with the European Union. Ukraine could proceed in line with its own reform efforts and capabilities, allowing the state to make the necessary political, economic, and institutional changes at a customized speed.

The states that are willing and able to go further in integration could thus act without waiting for the approval of all other member states. This change would allow them to respond more quickly to current challenges and be able to implement policies and projects faster. At the same time, the model could provide additional motivation for the implementation of further

reforms in the candidate countries, which may see a reward for their efforts in deeper integration.

For Ukraine and other candidate countries, the multi-speed model could open the possibility to develop closer relations with the EU based on their needs and priorities. The model would provide this advantage to all member states – multi-speed integration can respect the historical, economic, and cultural diversity of all states and allow them to retain a certain autonomy, where they can adapt their participation in the European Union to their needs with regard to national identity.

Furthermore, in the case of candidate states facing military conflicts, the model could help promote a peaceful solution. Enhanced cooperation between the EU and these states could bring economic and political benefits and thereby help stabilize conflict-affected regions.

The model can also help preserve the unity of the EU – even if some states go deeper in integration than others, they remain part of the EU. In the case of the existence of a certain form of this model, the United Kingdom, for example, would not have had to leave – as it wanted to participate in some policies together with the EU, but not in all of them and to a different extent.

Finally, two-speed integration could be the answer to some of the existing issues, such as the Eurozone or common defense. The states that want to participate in these policies would be allowed to do so, while others could stay away and join at any time later.

THREATS AND CHALLENGES

The main threat based on the multi-speed Europe model is not only the disintegration of the unity of Ukraine, but also the



THE MULTI-SPEED MODEL ALLOWS MEMBER STATES TO CONTINUE INTEGRATION AT THEIR OWN PACE BASED ON THEIR OWN NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

disintegration of the European Union. Should some states forge closer ties with certain regions of Ukraine or entities seeking independence, this can only fuel separatist tendencies and create even greater political tensions. A similar threat applies to the entire EU – if some states go faster than others in integration, standards and rules can only deepen, which as a result can reduce the unity of the entire union.

The model may also encounter the question of democratic legitimacy. If some EU member states were to have more influence on the decision-making processes regarding Ukraine, as well as on the creation of EU policies, it may trigger debates about equality, representation, and the fairness of such a system.

A big threat is the increase in social and economic inequalities, which again applies both to Ukraine itself and to the entire EU. Two-speed integration could lead to closer relations with only some regions of Ukraine

and leave others out of cooperation. The same applies to inequality between member states – those that are moving faster in integration could have greater access to the benefits of the European market and cooperation, as opposed to those that are lagging behind. As a result, Ukraine and other candidate countries could lose the incentive to undertake the further extensive reforms needed for full membership if the two-speed model allows them to enjoy some of the benefits of European integration, thereby essentially turning Ukraine away from full membership.

It is obvious that the management and coordination of this model would be very demanding. The European Union, even in its current form, often receives strong criticism about the extraordinary complexity of the entire bureaucratic apparatus, which the two-speed model could complicate even more. The functionality of the model would require great organizational efforts and the cooperation of all authorities and states, including Ukraine.

The model could also further increase political tensions across the region, as certain member states have different interests vis-à-vis Ukraine, which can create complications in diplomatic relations and decision-making processes. At this point, it is also necessary to emphasize the reaction of Russia, which will certainly criticize any form of integration of Ukraine into the European Union and see it as an attempt by the EU to expand into its traditional sphere of influence.

OTHER VARIANTS

In addition to the multi-speed model, there is the option of the traditional enlargement model, where candidate countries become full members of the EU after meeting the set criteria and conditions. This model can strengthen EU unity, but it requires careful

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IT IS IMPORTANT TO FIND A BALANCE BETWEEN MAINTAINING THE UNITY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND RESPECTING THE SPECIFIC CONDITIONS AND NEEDS OF INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES

monitoring and evaluation of reform processes. It is appropriate to discuss whether Ukraine would not meet a similar fate as Turkey, which has been in the status of a candidate country in the traditional enlargement model for over twenty years.

Another possibility is the use of association agreements, where the EU can conclude agreements with candidate countries enabling closer relations in some policies without them becoming members (which, on the contrary, two-speed Europe is counting on). These agreements may include commercial, political, and institutional aspects.

The choice of a specific approach depends on the specific circumstances, the needs of Ukraine and the candidate countries, and the political will of the EU member states. It is important to find a balance between

maintaining the unity of the European Union and respecting the specific conditions and needs of individual countries.

It is clear that in terms of Ukrainian ascension, multiple courses of action can be taken to help improve Ukraine's chances of being admitted to the European Union. Regardless of the approaches taken towards EU enlargement, it is important to understand the benefits that EU growth will bring. To ensure security and prosperity, the EU must gain a greater influence in surrounding areas to promote its core values. Spreading democratic values across the continent is a crucial step towards building a greater European Union.



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