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## Ukraine

The Russian aggression against Ukraine was effectively launched at the turn of 2013 and 2014 with the Russia annexing Crimea and supporting separatist tendencies in the east of the country. The conflict has reached its most intense phase yet in February this year as the Russian army launched its full-scale invasion of Ukrainian territory. In European history, the territory of a neighbouring country was invaded for the first time after the end of the Cold War.

However, the open Russian aggression of spring this year has had a significant effect on Ukraine's aspirations for EU membership. Soon after the invasion, Ukraine applied to join the Union. It is the first country to apply to join the Union in times of open military aggression. The European Parliament was the first to take an active stance on this request, calling on the EU institutions to grant the country candidate status in its [resolution](#) of 1 March. The Union has options to actively improve its relations with Ukraine in these circumstances, namely in the field of economic recovery, strengthening of the political partnership and ensuring security; these are continuously discussed depending on the dynamics of mutual relations and the development of the conflict.

The EU-Ukraine partnership has been governed by the [Association Agreement \(AA\)](#), which has provided for political dialogue between the two sides since 2017, and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), provisionally implemented since 2016. The Association Agreement and the DCFTA together provide a framework for deepening political and economic relations, which should ultimately enable the launch of the reform agenda in the country and convergence with the Union's legal environment and access to the European single market. In the latest [Association Implementation Report on Ukraine](#), the EEAS states that the Ukrainian side focused on prioritising the association and further integration with the Union in accordance with the AA in the last reference period from December 2020 until the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine this year. The Ukrainian government itself has drawn up its own report on the state of the association and set out priorities for its further progress. Despite the persistent problems in some areas of social and economic life, the report of the EEAS is positive about the country's overall direction and the determination of the political representation and civil society to deepen integration with the Union.<sup>1</sup> The report also highlighted that the reform agenda of the Ukrainian government is focused on areas demanded by the Ukrainian people themselves.

The [2022 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy](#), issued in October, focuses on the whole enlargement process only on the basis of the former candidate countries (Western Balkans and Türkiye). In this Communication, the European Commission stressed that, in addition to prosperity, membership of the Union also brings security and peace.

According to [opinion polls](#) in Ukraine, 33% of respondents in a June survey believe that joining the Union should be the country's main goal in the next 10 years; this intention is mostly supported by the younger generation

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<sup>1</sup> The report also states that in 2021, Ukraine's foreign policy was 79% aligned with the CFSP position.

under 35 (around 36%).<sup>2</sup> According to these polls, the European Union is clearly the preferred form of economic integration for which Ukrainian citizens would vote; 80% of respondents would vote to join and even in the eastern regions of the country, 76% of respondents declared they would vote in a referendum.<sup>3</sup> This trend was confirmed by other opinion polls conducted in August and October. According to the August [public opinion survey on identity, patriotism and values of society](#), a “European” future is one of the most frequent priorities; likewise, the younger generation identifies itself as European. An October [survey on the country’s foreign policy orientations](#) showed high support for joining the Union; in a referendum, 86% of citizens would vote to join across generations and regions. Further investigations among stakeholders also suggest that EU support to Ukraine under the Association Agreement is of a medium- and long-term nature and has clear positive impacts on the country’s environment and its citizens.<sup>4</sup>

As interviews with stakeholders show, Ukraine’s integration process into the Union is also associated with certain challenges/concerns. The longer the process takes, the more the disillusionment of a part of Ukrainian society will grow and it will become a target of possible hybrid campaigns claiming the inadequacy and disadvantages of this step, i.e. the country’s entry into the Union. This is a strategic challenge for both the Ukrainian political representation and the EU. It should ensure that clear rules are set for the process – benchmarks that the country must meet and targets it would automatically achieve if it meets the benchmarks. The Communication [Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans](#), which provides a framework methodology for the enlargement of the Union, should also provide guidance for the process in the case of Ukraine, taking into account all the related criticism.

War entails a number of costs for the country’s reconstruction after it ends. The Union has found itself in a situation where there is a need for an economic and political plan to rebuild the country and to harness the determination of the Ukrainian political representation and the Ukrainian people.

In its Communication [Ukraine Relief and Reconstruction](#), the European Commission outlined a strategic recovery plan, *RebuildUkraine*, which will be implemented under the responsibility of the Ukrainian authorities with the prior consent of the EU institutions and international partners who will join the country’s recovery. The plan will be set fully within the existing framework of cooperation under the Association Agreement, taking into account existing EU legislation as well as all initiatives and elements of cooperation to which both sides have committed themselves (e.g. sustainability and environment and cyber cooperation). The plan itself does not contain points for further political convergence with the Union.

In addition to economic recovery, there are calls for enhanced political and security cooperation between the Union and Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> The political partnership should maintain the significant support of Ukrainian society for the country’s direction, including the reformist commitment, while preventing voices for accelerated integration from growing. Such political cooperation would also have the potential to draw Ukraine into decisions about the future of the region. The partnership aiming at enlargement will help to set new objectives for cooperation between both sides and contribute to an overall stronger Eastern Partnership. Cooperation with Ukraine appears to be not only a question of values, but also a geopolitical and geostrategic one, given the changing structure of the international system. Representatives of Ukraine also participated in the [first ever meeting of](#)



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<sup>2</sup> This was a multiple choice survey. The priority of restoring the country’s territorial integrity ranked first and measures against corruption came second. The country’s entry into the European Union was more popular than its entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, support for a customs union with the Russian Federation, Belarus and Kazakhstan has been declining in aggregate over time.

<sup>4</sup> RABINOVYCH, M. The Development Dimension of the Eastern Partnership following the 2015 EaP Review: Successes, Challenges and Prospects. Kyiv School of Economics, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> LANG, Kai-Olaf, BURAS, Piotr. Partnership for Enlargement: A new way to integrate Ukraine and the EU’s eastern neighbourhood. ECFR. 17 June 2022. Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/partnership-for-enlargement-a-new-way-to-integrate-ukraine-and-the-eus-eastern-neighbourhood/>.



[the European Political Community](#), which took place on 6 October in Prague as part of the Czech Presidency. The Community has the potential to help countries seeking to join the Union to commit to and then implement the necessary reforms that form the core of the accession negotiations.

Member States have been significantly involved in bilateral aid to Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict. In addition to immediate assistance, it is also necessary to look to the future and start cooperating on the country's reconstruction at all levels. At the parliamentary level, cooperation initiatives are being launched to ensure the preparedness of the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) for the challenges of the pre-accession period, in particular the alignment with EU law. However, it is also important to keep that the assisting states must coordinate their efforts to ensure the consistency of such cooperation. The Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic concluded a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with the Verkhovna Rada in the margins of the First Parliamentary Summit of the International Crimea Platform in Zagreb at the end of October 2022.

*Prepared by the Parliamentary Institute, Office of the Chamber of Deputies*