THE CASE OF UKRAINE'S CANDIDACY TO THE EU:

PROGRESSIVE POLICY TOWARDS THE EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD AS A CORNERSTONE OF THE EU'S STABILITY AND SECURITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The future of Europe as a stable, democratic, prosperous, peaceful, valued-based community that is embedded in a well-functioning multilateral system of global governance depends on the success of Ukraine's post-war transformation into a modern, resilient democracy, which eventually succeeds in its full European integration. While I strongly believe Ukraine's European path must lead to another (eastern) enlargement, such an outcome is not predestined. Across the two main sections of the policy study, I argue that a stronger progressive mindset and actions will be needed to turn Ukraine's recovery into an EU membership success story, instead of fuelling frustration on both sides, which will ultimately play into the hands of populists and Eurosceptics, undermining the EU's internal stability and its credibility as a global actor.

In Section 2 of the policy study, I look at the socio-political dimension of Ukraine's post-war recovery process. In particular, I argue for the importance of strengthening those "progressive" elements of Ukraine's "imperfect" model of democracy, which make it likely to succeed not only in recovery but also on its accession path to EU membership, despite what might seem at the moment as insurmountable obstacles. While Kyiv will have to fulfil the EU accession criteria and deliver on its far-reaching plans laid out in a number of strategic recovery documents, the EU in its own regard must implement a new vision of enlargement and neighbourhood policies to meet Ukraine's ambitions, as well as the changing needs of its eastern neighbours. As a result, Section 3 discusses elements that should serve as building blocks for the relations with its (eastern) neighbours and contribute to the EU's new approach to enlargement policy. Each of the sections is concluded with a number of observations on the recommended way forward.

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHY THE PROGRESSIVE PERSPECTIVE MATTERS IN THE EU'S EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

24 February 2022 marked a turning point in the history of European integration. The unprovoked attack on a sovereign state for its aspirations to be part of the European democratic family is inexcusable. The pain and suffering it brought are unmeasurable. The long-term impact of Russia's aggression will be felt for generations, transcending Ukrainian borders. A Ukraine native, having studied the EU for the larger part of my professional life, witnessing firsthand the EU's 2004 "big bang" enlargement unfold, I found myself in an unexpected moment. Russia's aggression, which met Ukraine's fierce resistance, has had an unintended transformative moment for the latter's relations with the EU.

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It took a brutal war to bring down many mental barriers in the minds of European decisionmakers, regarding the future of Ukraine and the eastern neighbourhood. For the first time, Brussels' geostrategic interests are almost perfectly aligned with those of Ukraine's. Accession to the EU is no longer an option but an existential necessity for Ukraine – not only a path to recover[1] from war, but also a chance for modernisation and transformation. A full-scale war at the heart of Europe became an equally defining moment for Brussels. The values most cherished by Europeans, such as democracy, human rights and freedom of speech, are being defended by Ukrainians against a ruthless authoritarian regime that has little to no respect for human life and citizens' rights.

As a result, Russia's outright assault on European values is a moment that must lead to the birth of a geopolitical union, ready to welcome new members to the family. The stakes are very high. A secure, democratic, free and stable EU is not possible without further enlargement, which must include eastern neighbourhood countries.

The declarations coming from Brussels, other European capitals and Kyiv confirm awareness of the "historic" nature of the moment. Yet, the EU's recent track record related to the accession process of the western Balkans has an immediately sobering effect. Moreover, Ukraine's democratic development and reforms have been inconsistent. Thus, emotions and symbolism aside, the sheer status of candidate country granted to Ukraine is only the beginning of a very demanding path for both Kyiv and Brussels. The human, political and economic costs of achieving sustainable peace in Ukraine are already enormous and will keep growing with every day of the war. In June 2022, Kyiv School of Economics estimated that $165 billion would be needed to rebuild the country.[2] In July, at the Lugano Recovery Conference, the government of Ukraine assessed its total funding needs at around $750 billion.[3] Since the start of the invasion, EU institutions pledged €12.3 billion in financial assistance, €1.42 billion in humanitarian aid and €2.5 billion in military assistance.[4] Team Europe,[5] assembled initially to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive response between the EU and its member states to the COVID-19 pandemic, informs that it has mobilised €19.7 billion to support Ukraine since the start of the full-scale war. Following the European Council meeting of 20-21 October 2022, the European Commission has proposed another major support package of €18 billion in 2023 for Ukraine.[6]

Although I strongly believe that Ukraine's European path must lead to another (eastern) enlargement, such an outcome is not predestined[7]. While being a cautious optimist throughout this policy study regarding Ukraine's future, I want to mark my awareness about the importance of analysing alternative scenarios, which might not necessarily see Ukraine developing into a strong, robust democracy. I encourage others to proceed with such an analytical task

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because I see it as being useful in making sure that certain pathologies and shortcomings in the case of Ukraine can be prevented or at least mitigated. Moreover, even if Ukraine joins the EU one day, the success or effectiveness of integration should not be taken for granted. Since the start of the war, Brussels showed support in its official communication, military assistance, macro-financial assistance, humanitarian and development aid. By granting candidacy status, the EU made an important symbolic move. Yet, one has to remember that, in absolute numbers, and in the separate categories mentioned above, the EU's assistance is visibly less than that of the USA (€52.3 billion as of October 2022). Furthermore, although Brussels openly supports the wish of the Ukrainian people to become part of the European family, the EU did not promise, nor guarantee, membership to Kyiv. One should expect the latter to depend on Ukraine's ability to meet membership criteria. Consequently, in Sections 2 and 3 of the policy study, I argue that a stronger progressive mindset and actions will be needed to turn Ukraine's recovery into an EU membership success story, instead of fuelling frustration on both sides, which ultimately plays into the hands of populists and Eurosceptics, undermining the EU's internal stability and credibility as a global actor.

One might ask what warrants this specific focus on Ukraine's progressive path to EU membership. Firstly, I see it as being important to step away from overly triumphant narratives about the granting of candidacy status as the *finalité* of Ukraine's European aspirations. Or position EU membership as almost an accomplished fact as soon as it wins the war. In this regard, the fulfilment of the accession criteria should not be seen as a technocratic process that would delay a political decision on Ukraine's membership. It has an important role to play in strengthening the resilience of Ukraine's democracy against ongoing and future challenges. Therefore, fast-tracking this process might seem an appealing concept to use for one's political campaign in the next elections, but it is hardly beneficial for Ukraine's development from a long-term perspective. Furthermore, a fairly recent (October 2022) EU-funded scenario forecasting exercise,[8] which gathered 64 Ukrainian experts,[9] resulted in only one out of five possible scenarios foreseeing

successful full integration into the EU. For Ukraine's sacrifice not to be futile, one should start an in-depth discussion immediately about the required practical steps of the journey that will take Ukraine to the "European promised land". Accession criteria can be used in this case as a beacon, navigating Kyiv's path. More importantly, while doing so, we should be able to overcome the "collective West's" shortcomings in what Peter Pomerantsev describes as "the inability to find Ukrainian voices to talk about the Ukrainian experience". I do hope this analysis can at least partially remedy the situation.

Secondly, Ukraine constitutes the centrepiece of the new peace and security architecture in Europe. The future of the EU as a stable, democratic, prosperous, peaceful, valued-based community, which is embedded in a well-functioning multilateral system of global governance, depends on the success of Ukraine's transformation into a prosperous, modern, resilient democracy. Thirdly, Ukraine's recovery and its potential membership of the EU will impact on future democracy, as a form of governance in Europe and beyond, and its resilience against anti-democratic regimes.[10] This is why, throughout my discussion of Ukraine's progressive path to an EU member, I regularly draw conclusions from observations on how to foster resilient democracies in the 21st century based on a high-level exercise facilitated by FEPS (referred to in the policy study as the Progressive Alliance study 2022).[11] Its participants have analysed the main concerns and formulated recommendations for how progressive democrats around the world can repel challenges to democratic systems. Finally, the progressive perspective offers Ukraine a meaningful contribution in a number of key areas for its democratic, political and socio-economic development, all of which are discussed in the policy study.

Furthermore, as the largest candidate country to join the EU since the 1980s, Ukraine can have a significant impact on the legal-institutional outlook of the community.[12] With qualified majority voting in place, it will possess a similar voting power to Poland, while in the European Parliament it is likely to get a number of seats between those of Poland (52) and Spain (59); not to mention representation in the European Commission and other European institutions, as well

as the ability to shape the EU's agenda and priorities. The progressive path starting from Ukraine's recovery and following its modernisation as part of the EU accession process has the potential to lead to a more mature democracy that is able to withstand nationalistic and/or populist tendencies, takes care of its population in an inclusive manner, and has a constructive role in shaping the future of multilateralism, which obviously has failed the country terribly in recent history. Ultimately, Ukraine has the potential to offer a meaningful contribution to an exercise that progressives have already embarked on – strengthening resilient democracies in Europe and beyond.

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The alternative scenario is less optimistic but very much plausible. What might not be discussed enough is that, under the surface, at this very moment, Kyiv is grappling with competing approaches to Ukraine's future development. Many citizens are in favour of the Europeanisation of their country because it offers them more security and freedoms. In a similar context, one wouldn't expect that many in Ukraine would oppose active participation in supranational decision-making. Sharing the approach of the Baltic states, which is the fear of being left out, Ukraine would be in favour of a

community approach and deeper integration. At the same time, the country has already developed a very strong relationship with Washington DC. It could also have a less optimistic perspective on the EU's capability to deliver in certain policy areas. Moreover, for a country that is fighting a war for independence, there will be a considerable number of those who would be very cautious about delegating their sovereignty, which was won with blood, sweat and tears, to Brussels. Furthermore, Ukrainians are utterly disappointed in global institutions, such as the United Nations system. If the recovery is not transparent, inclusive, democratic and progressive in spirt, it's not out of the realm of plausibility that Ukraine could join those states that have allowed nationalistic, far-right and populist forces to flourish. If we go a step further and imagine that, at the same time, in one of Ukraine's close allies, Eurosceptic tendencies prevail (e.g. Poland, Slovakia, Czechia – all of which fight their own democratic battles at the moment), such potential coalition (partnership) would hardly be called beneficial for the European integration project. Hence, the progressive path of Ukraine already emerges as a very topical discussion to have today.

A number of outstanding issues remain at the time the policy study was written. An ongoing war is the single most unpredictable element shaping Ukraine's recovery and its path to EU membership. The war has a direct, crucial impact on questions pertaining to its sovereignty, statehood and territorial integrity. Until they are addressed conclusively, membership of the EU is unlikely. At the same time, the aforementioned uncertainties do not exclude Ukraine's recovery, which, in reality, has already started. Moreover, these issues do not prevent Ukraine from starting its accession path to the EU, while hopefully being able to address the described issues along the way. Yet, for Ukraine's membership aspirations not to remain in the realm of wishful thinking and theoretical considerations, its post-war recovery, modernisation and transformation should incorporate a number of the progressive elements discussed in the following sections of the policy study. Not to neglect the importance of economic development and/or green, sustainable transformation, for the purpose of this policy study, I have chosen to look at the socio-political realm through a progressive lens.

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2. FROM RECOVERY PROCESS TO EU MEMBERSHIP: SKETCHING OUT UKRAINE'S PROGRESSIVE PATH

2.1 ACCESSION TO THE EU AS AN EXISTENTIAL NECESSITY

Ukraine's bid to join the EU during a full-scale war was taken by many (Euro)sceptics as overambitious and unrealistic. Ukrainian experts, decisionmakers and civil society representatives reacted to address hesitations and reservations coming from European partners.[13] I share their reasoning, which can be summarised as follows. (1) Candidacy is only the first step to membership, and Ukrainian stakeholders understand the demanding path ahead. While Ukraine might not be ready to become a member of the EU yet, it certainly has shown enough progress to begin the accession process. Ukrainians do not want any favours and are ready to follow a merit-based approach. (2) The decision to grant candidate status to Ukraine will not have negative repercussions for the EU's own reform process. On the contrary, it can reinvigorate the EU's neighbourhood and enlargement policies, so that they are better adapted to the changing international landscape. (3) Although it lies beyond the scope of this analysis, it is nevertheless important to add that Ukraine should not be seen as merely a consumer but also a provider and a contributor. In addition to possessing qualified human capital, natural resources and a large market, it has already proved its immense potential as a hub of innovation, a "regulatory sandbox" and a security provider for the EU.

Drawing parallels between how Ukraine conducts the war "with bravery, intellect, innovation and real skill/honour/grace, suggests that this nation can be truly successful".[14] In the spirit of "deeds, not words", showcasing Ukraine's potential to deliver, and its capability not only for reform and reconstruction, but also for modernisation and transformation, is important. Bringing the last two into the spotlight is significant because "reconstruction offers a unique opportunity to radically upgrade Ukraine's productive capacity to bring it close to the technological frontier, lay foundations for long-term growth, and integrate Ukraine even more tightly into the global economy".[15] We can expect that Ukraine's development and prosperity will only take root when the country is able to successfully innovate.[16] This is why it will need to modernise and transform itself as soon as possible, preferably

even before the war ends. When it comes to previous waves of enlargement, the biggest progress in reforms has been achieved during the actual accession process of the candidates.[17] The case of Ukraine is peculiar – a country defending itself in a large-scale war, while simultaneously trying to embark on an EU accession path. At the same time, Ukraine's approximation towards European standards before and during Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 allows for cautious optimism. Should the circumstances allow, the existing track record, ongoing momentum and societal demand could serve as an impetus not to put aside the necessary reforms once the war ends, but to lay strong foundations for future success now. Indeed, "don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today" should serve as a guiding principle of Ukraine's reform and transformation.

In a nutshell, the road to improvement in approximation of European standards has been patchy. Nevertheless, it has been characterised by progress, mainly due to the far-reaching and positive impact of the Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) on Ukraine's development. The Eastern Partnership Index[18] confirms that Ukraine made measurable progress in narrowing the normative gap with European standards prior to Russia's invasion in 2022. In the last edition (2021), Ukraine shared the leading position with Moldova in the legal and normative approximation with the EU compared to other Eastern Partnership (EaP) members. The authors of the index point to the fact that the aggregate score of Ukraine on policy convergence has risen since 2017, particularly in the spheres of freedom, security and justice, and the environment and climate. The Ukrainian Centre for European Policy assessed in June 2022 that Ukraine had implemented 49% of its obligations (including intermediary steps) under the framework of the AA in the first half of 2021.[19] On the brink of Russia's full-scale invasion, in January 2022, Denys Shmyhal, Prime Minister of Ukraine, spoke of fulfilling the AA with the EU by 63%.[20] Before the eighth meeting of the Ukraine-EU Association Council on 5 September 2022, Olha Stefanishyna, Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, mentioned 70%.[21] These figures show that Ukraine's demonstrated European

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track record already makes a difference.[22] It allows us to look into the future with cautious optimism. Moreover, following implementation of the AA and DCFTA, Ukraine has put itself in a more advanced position to meet the accession criteria, in comparison with the situation for the countries in the western Balkans.[23]

Article 49 of the Treaty of the European Union states that any European state which respects European values and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the EU. Ukraine's commitment to Article 49 has stood the test of war, which is nearing its ninth year. Professor Adam Daniel Rotfeld, former Foreign Affairs Minister of Poland, used to say that joining an alliance served as means to achieve a strategic end goal, hardly ever an end goal in itself. Those who argue that Ukraine has been given false hope due to the actual membership decision being dependent on political will across European capitals forget that end goal. In a race against time, for Ukraine, candidacy status represents a beacon in a very turbulent sea. It offers a path to emerge victorious out of a war with Russia and for the state to be able to remain functional at a crucial moment for Ukraine's future.

Additionally, I join in the consensus of experts who argue the importance of linking Ukraine's recovery and its accession path to EU membership. Those who want the spirit of the Marshall Plan to be revived position Ukraine's membership of the EU as an overarching goal.[24] The authors of the "Blueprint for the reconstruction of Ukraine" arrive at a similar conclusion, pointing out the fact that only the accession process can offer a framework and resources for the recovery to be truly transformative and successful.[25] Finally, the position of the European Commission at the most recent International Expert Conference on Recovery in Berlin suggests that Brussels sees the "need to firmly embed Ukraine's reconstruction efforts as part of its path towards the European Union".[26] Not to forget that the EU is Ukraine's largest trade partner.[27] Summing up, the process leading to EU accession is a tangible path that is most likely to offer an optimal framework and the necessary resources to rebuild and transform Ukraine into a modern, democratic and prosperous country.

Kyiv's perspective in this regard is essentially the same. The pursuit of EU membership, which in Ukraine falls under the urgent need to rebuild and modernise the country during and after the war, is currently characterised by unprecedented public support (close to 90%, according to the latest polls).[28] The public campaign that rallied for EU accession in spring 2022 has shown previously unseen unity among decisionmakers, civic society organisations (over 100 signatories) and average citizens. It demonstrated their ability to mobilise resources under one message to achieve the desired goal. Such examples speak highly of the mobilisation potential of Ukrainian society as a whole, especially when it comes to some of the urgent challenges, like tackling corruption.[29] In a nutshell, Ukraine has been "shadowing the accession process to a substantial extent",[30] which included the AA, DCFTA and visa-free regime. Its membership of the EU emerges as a rational, calculated decision. This is why it has been viewed as a "strategic imperative" in Ukraine's national recovery plan presented in Lugano.[31]

Summing up, since the start of full-scale war in 2022, members of the Ukrainian expert community (in which I would also include myself), representatives of civil society and government officials have all shared similar views pertaining to the rationale to become an official candidate for joining the EU.[32] The latter has distinct moral and practical anchors. The EU has a duty to lend a helping hand to a country in dire straits. For Ukraine, whose people have paid the highest price for their desire to be part of the European family, it has become a matter close to a moral imperative. Or to paraphrase Dabrowski,[33] we can call it a decision to remedy historical injustice and address recent shortcomings of its eastern neighbourhood policy (discussed in detail in Section 3). Candidacy is a gesture of great symbolic value, a powerful signal of support for Ukrainian society to continue resisting and eventually win the war for freedom and democracy. This does not overlook the importance for European decisionmakers to respond to a sense of solidarity with Ukrainians, which continues to be shared among majority of the European citizens many months after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion.[34]

On a more practical note, accession is close to an existential necessity, as it offers the best available roadmap to rebuild and reform the Ukrainian state. Moreover, for an ambitious society and its political elites, it provides incentives and guidelines for modernisation and transformation during and after the war. Ukrainian experts point out that in the two months since the historic EU summit that granted candidacy, Ukraine had already demonstrated visible progress on a number of recommendations, which were linked to the decision regarding candidacy.[35] This observation is proof that the status of candidate country can already serve as an important impetus for reform and progress in the country. The mobilisation of Ukrainian society and its belief in success, whether it is winning a war or joining the EU, is unprecedented. This support makes it important and timely to make the best use of this momentum to rebuild, reform and transform Ukraine into a modern, resilient democracy.

2.2 THREE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY: ANTI-CORRUPTION, DECENTRALISATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Since it gained independence in 1991, political and judicial obstruction, as well as systemic corruption and clientelism, have plagued Ukraine.[36] Consequently, any offer that Ukraine has received (e.g. accession to the EU) or will receive (e.g. a new version of the Marshall Plan) will be conditional on Ukraine's progress in addressing its most persistent challenges. Accounting for country-specific conditions, previous experience of comprehensive recovery efforts (e.g. Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina) leaves no doubt – a strong anticorruption ecosystem is critical for effective cooperation with potential donors, for attracting foreign investments and for promoting the democratic development of a country.[37] In the case of Ukraine, anticorruption is inherently linked to the need for deoligarchisation. A healthy, robust anti-corruption ecosystem is also important because there will also be many in Europe and throughout the globe who would be interested in striking lucrative deals when it comes to Ukraine's post-war recovery.

Pre-invasion, corruption was among the top concerns for Ukrainians.[38] The situation in the country can best be summarised through a statement in a report from the European Court of Auditors: the "existing environment in Ukraine puts the sustainability of anti-corruption institutions at risk, as they still rely on the unreformed judicial, prosecution and law-enforcement sectors".[39] In other words, the establishment of much-needed anticorruption institutions[40] has been followed by political interference and attempts to undermine their independence and institutional capacity. The European Commission, in its opinion[41] on Ukraine's candidacy to the EU, summarises well the actions that would positively impact on the effectiveness of the anti-corruption ecosystem. The independence of institutions is an essential requirement for anticorruption to succeed. On a more practical note, the heads of the relevant institutions (in particular, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU)[42] and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecution (SAP)[43]) must be selected as soon as possible on a transparent and competitive basis. The repressive arm of the system needs strengthening – the number of high-profile cases being effectively resolved remains low, due to the lack of impartiality of law enforcement and political interference. Finally, due attention should be given to protecting whistleblowers, preferably by adopting best European practices (e.g. EU Directive 2019/1937).[44]

In September 2021, deoligarchisation in Ukraine started to gain pace due to the introduction of the law "on [the] prevention of threats to national security associated with excessive influence of persons who have significant economic and political weight in public life (oligarchs)".[45] The process leading to its adoption was full of heated debate and the decision in parliament was taken hastily. Pertaining to the new legislation, the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine is designated to determine who should be regarded as an oligarch in the country. The political opposition of Volodymyr Zelenskyi have criticised the law for the lack of a practical implementation mechanism, calling it a populist move. Public opinion in Ukraine was also somewhat sceptical, linking the campaign to the desire of the president to improve his ratings, as well as an attempt to take control of

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TV channels.[46] Some of them, for example, those owned by Rinat Akhmetov and Petro Poroshenko, were openly critical of the president, his team and his party (Servant of the People).

The discussed piece of legislation awaits an opinion from the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.[47] What is important is that the European Commission asked for the law to be implemented in accordance with the aforementioned recommendations. Following adoption of the law, authorities went on a proverbial deoligarchisation rampage[48] – Viktor Medvedchuk, for years described by experts as "Putin's main man in Ukraine", was arrested (exchanged with Russia for Ukrainian prisoners of war in September 2022); President Zelenskyi went into a full confrontation with Ukraine's wealthiest man, Rinat Akhmetov (the president alleged he was plotting a *coup d'état*); while former president Petro Poroshenko was accused of treason and the financing of terrorism. A complete overhaul of the media landscape became the trademark effect of Zelenskyi's deoligarchisation campaign. Many influential media outlets were sanctioned, sold or their ownership transferred.

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When the full invasion commenced, the vast majority of individuals who could fall in the category of oligarchs fled the country. Exceptions were few. For example, Petro Poroshenko, the main opposition figure, remained politically active and has been supporting the army,[49] while Rinat Akhmetov has been involved in relief efforts.[50] It does seem that most oligarchs made a calculated decision to sit out the full-scale war in a comfortable, secure location.[51] Although the full-scale war might have robbed them of previous political influence, it should be expected that they will attempt to retake at least some control as soon as the situation in Ukraine settles down.[52] For Ukraine to embark on a progressive recovery path, both anticorruption and deoligarchisation should be located at the epicentre of the recovery efforts.

In its 2022 study, the Progressive Alliance rightly speaks of the importance of identifying actors that are integral to the success of democracy to strengthen its resilience. In Ukraine, three types of actors play the aforementioned role – in addition to those who are part of the anticorruption ecosystem, one should include in this category local authorities (local communities) and civil society organisations (CSOs). Decentralisation is often referred to in expert circles as one of the most successful reforms in Ukraine since 2013. It contributed to "territorial consolidation and the establishment of direct inter-budgetary relations"[53] between Kyiv and the periphery, providing much-needed resources to the latter. Yet, the impact on the development of participatory democracy is arguably its most impressive achievement.[54] It allowed the development of a strong sense of (local) community ownership, the exemplification of which the world has observed during Ukraine's successful resistance to Russia's invasion. If local communities have already shown enough resilience to resist an invasion, they are very likely to contribute significantly to the success of Ukraine's recovery and accession process to the EU.

The multi-ethnic fabric of a political nation, which is being currently formed in Ukraine, backed by effective instruments of self-governance, is arguably one the strongest assets in its democratic toolkit. Strong local governance can also boost the development of new political leadership that is crucial for Ukraine's long-term democratic development. To ensure effective and sustainable solutions, Ukraine's transformation and modernisation will have to take place as close

to citizens as possible. The way the current war is being fought allows a growing sense of societal ownership about the future of the country to be projected on all levels of governance. Therefore, considering Ukraine's uneven democratic track record, Brussels must ensure that the decisions which will be taken in Kyiv (centrally) are justified. Members of progressively minded groups should see decentralisation as a platform for an effective application of subsidiarity and proportionality principles in Ukraine. Furthermore, a stronger and functional self-governance can create an environment for Ukrainian citizens and decisionmakers to get a better grasp of the essence of multi-level governance before the country actually joins the EU.

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The main challenge in the case of decentralisation lies in strengthening trust and partnership between local authorities and local civil society actors.[55] In the context of democratic resilience, the Progressive Alliance study 2022 speaks of the importance of delivering palpable policies due to civil society involvement, which often is not the case. Having spent considerable time on activities supporting local governance, I could observe that the authorities often saw CSOs as the ones predominantly undermining their legitimacy. Moreover, the authorities had a tendency to be rather fixated on civil society's control function, which, in their eyes, took the form of criticism and bringing to

light any attempts at mismanagement on the local level. In many cases, they failed to recognise that CSOs can not only strengthen their democratic legitimacy, but also improve the quality of public policies. On the other hand, in my experience, civil society too often sees authorities as untrustworthy, protective of their position and (administrative) resources, and highly prone to corruption. Although through decentralisation reform the situation has started to change, the problem persists and will have to be addressed for Ukraine's democracy to be more mature and resilient.

Coming back to the role of CSOs, in its 2022 study, the Progressive Alliance draws attention to the extensive further potential that the involvement of CSOs brings to political decision-making. Moreover, European progressives have already taken note of the need to consider them as peer interlocutors and partners,[56] when it comes to enlargement policy and particularly the stalled western Balkan accession. The situation in Ukraine, also in the context of new potential eastern accession, is no different. Should one look at the reports analysing the state of Ukraine's democracy (but also in Moldova and Georgia), the strength of its civil society and its power to facilitate positive change are conclusions hardly contested within the expert community. USAID's CSO Sustainability Index[57] for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia positions the Ukrainian non-governmental sector as the most effective and stable in the region. Freedom House describes Ukrainian civil society as "vibrant and committed to democratic reform".[58] The European Commission, in its recent opinion regarding EU candidacy for Ukraine, speaks of "an active and empowered civil society as a defining feature of Ukrainian democracy", while emphasising that CSOs play "an active role in the promotion and oversight of reforms".[59]

Even for those who did not take a keen interest in the region before 2022, the war with Russia provides the best possible illustration of the potential for Ukrainian civic engagement domestically and abroad. Although in 2022 the proverbial "collective West" provided tangible financial, humanitarian and military support to Ukraine, civic mobilisation has been widely regarded as a key factor contributing to the successful resistance against Russian invasion.[60] The war revealed to

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the wider European public a feature that had already been well documented before the full-scale invasion – the immense potential of civil society actors to join forces and coordinate their efforts while mobilising vast resources to advance positive change.

Furthermore, volunteers, activists and CSOs hold the keys to effective democratic oversight in the framework of Ukraine's recovery, modernisation and transformation processes, during and after the war. The Civil Society Manifesto,[61] which was published on the occasion of the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano, and signed by over 100 organisations, sets out a number of red lines and priorities, which CSOs intend to closely monitor during Ukraine's recovery and development. It is important to note that the framework for the future, which is being described in the document, has a distinctly progressive flavour. Its signatories want to pursue a transparent, democratic and inclusive system of governance, which encourages the participation of citizen groups, promotes freedoms, and protects cultural and ethnic diversity.

A number of factors can potentially deplete Ukrainian civil society of its ability to support positive change. Over the years, its representatives have gradually fought their way into policymaking and have been effective in their oversight and advocacy roles. The pre-invasion environment looked relatively promising when it came to CSOs making an increasingly positive contribution to the quality of public services through consultations and by delivering expert input. However, attempts to (over-)regulate the dynamic development of civil society followed as well.[62] Pre-invasion financial viability constituted a major challenge, as CSOs were highly dependent on external financial resources. Donor support was not distributed equally and very often prioritised organisations that were able to show a track record of successfully implemented grants. The latter, however, became conducive to the spread of NGOcracy[63] – a phenomenon that sees a closed group of non-state actors forming an insulated elitist environment. Its members act primarily as service providers, yet, due to their almost complete dependence on external funding, they grow increasingly detached from the actual needs of average citizens. In this regard, microgrant facilities and other financial mechanisms, which would allow for capacity

building and maintaining of the emerging and maturing non-state actors, should find an important place in the support offered by the international community and the EU in particular.[64]

Finally, constructive cooperation between the team of the current president and CSOs was modest to say the least. The outcome document of the Ukraine Recovery Conference "Lugano Declaration",[65] while sending an invitation for non-state actors to partner with the government, does not mention specific mechanisms for engaging them in the recovery efforts. This can be taken as certain scepticism toward the active involvement of activists and civil society, characteristic of the president's team in the past. Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, the relations between the ruling political elite and army veterans and volunteers generated much controversy and raised concerns about growing polarisation in the country.[66] In the context of an ongoing war, one could mention that the preparation of a national recovery plan became "a top-down exercise driven by officials from the ever-powerful Presidential Office",[67] which raised criticism towards the inclusiveness and transparency of the process. It is crucial that these disagreements are addressed through dialogue and consultations because, for those who study Ukraine closely, it is clear that civil society should be involved from day one in efforts to support Ukraine's recovery and its further democratic development, thus leading to the prospect of EU membership in the not too distant future.

2.3 INCLUSIVENESS AT THE HEART OF UKRAINE'S RECOVERY AND ITS EU ACCESSION PROCESS

The findings from the Progressive Alliance study 2022 emphasise that "meaningful, inclusive deliberation and participation are integral to democratic decision-making". Furthermore, the same study draws conclusions about the importance of building "societies that foster intrinsic ideas of mutual solidarity, responsibility, and participation". I believe the latter should have a significant role in Ukraine's resilient model of democracy. The conduct of war is a perfect example of Ukraine's potential for

transformation and modernisation being heavily dependent on the degree of inclusiveness any recovery process will offer. The effectiveness of common efforts grows exponentially, as soon as everyone feels included and has a decent understanding of their role. Without the full-scale mobilisation of Ukrainian society, where everyone received clear instructions on how to contribute, the resistance against Russia's invasion would have been far less effective. Without a proper strategy of citizen involvement, recovery and accession processes can quickly become a "Eurosceptic's or populist's dream" – controlled from the capitals, detached from society. The inclusiveness of Ukraine's recovery, and its transformation from a candidate to an EU member state can also have far-reaching implications for the EU's democratic legitimacy. Since 2004, I have been an eyewitness of Poland gradually moving from a poster child of integration into an EU laggard. The rise of conservative and far-right political forces in the country after 2015 has been attributed by many commentators to the fact that certain societal groups (e.g. those living in rural areas) felt left out of Poland's integration process. It is in the interest of progressives to make sure inclusivity lies at the heart of Ukraine's future development.

For years, Russian propaganda has attempted to show the radicalisation of Ukrainian society, claiming that swarms of ultra-nationalist and far-right groups terrorise the country. Ukraine's version of nationalism, in most cases, looked for Kyiv to develop and follow a separate path from its neighbours, most notably Moscow. Thus, the Kremlin strove to portray Ukrainisation efforts as an existential threat to Russian culture and Russian speakers. The reality could not be more different, as the Russian minority in reality became a majority in the public space after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia's neo-imperialistic (foreign) policy has led to a strong socio-economic, political and cultural grip on Ukraine's society. Since Ukraine gained independence, nationalistic movements failed to become part of the political mainstream due to modest societal demand to articulate nationalistic slogans in the public space. Furthermore, even after the relative success of the Orange revolution (2004), top-down Ukrainisation, attempted by former

president and face of the revolution, Viktor Yushchenko, ultimately failed, as there was no nationwide consensus on its form, speed and the overall need for such a process.

The situation has started to change since the start of the Russo-Ukrainian war, which prior to 2022 was concentrated in two eastern regions of Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula. Russia's unprovoked aggression has led to a process of deep self-reflection in Ukrainian society, which started to increasingly manifest itself in cultural (growing demand for content in the Ukrainian language), religious (autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine) and political realms (pro-Russian political forces pushed to the margins of the political scene). Oleksii Haran aptly describes this phenomenon as "grassroots Ukrainisation" – a bottom-up, nationwide process of strengthening common values, which, in this case, simultaneously stand in opposition to the so-called *russkij mir* (Russian world). As a consequence, the demand for nationalistic symbols grew noticeably in the last decade. The most recent example includes the presidential campaign of Petro Poroshenko against the current president, Volodymyr Zelenskyi. Poroshenko ran against the latter using a nationalistic slogan "Army, Language, Faith", which is a representation of the need to remedy the situation, which Larysa Denysenko, human rights activist and writer, described as "though Ukrainians became the majority, they still felt themselves a minority".[68] Since the first days of Russia's full-scale invasion, the demand for the Ukrainisation process to continue has grown exponentially. Thus, it could be expected that nationalistically leaning movements will play a more prominent role in the political life as soon as the war ends.

In general, Ukraine stands out positively in comparison to many European countries, with its inclusion of various minorities – people of different ethnic and immigrant origins – in political, cultural, media and business realms.[69] Since gaining independence, Ukraine has made impressive progress towards building a multicultural and inclusive society.[70] The latter concerns the ruling elite and average citizens. Pertaining to the former, researchers have noticed positive trends, such as growing tolerance in society.[71] In the

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case of the second group, the Jewish descent of Volodymyr Zelenskyi has already been widely commented on during the war. Yet, it hardly constitutes a novel development for a country that has seen the representation of Jewish,[72] Tatar,[73] Afghan,[74] Korean[75], Georgian,[76] Lithuanian[77] and Armenian[78] ethnicities serving in top political positions at the central and local levels. What is symbolic is that, during the largest protest movement in the history of Ukraine, the Revolution of Dignity (also known as Euroimadan), two Georgians, two Armenians, two Belarusians and a Pole gave their lives for Ukraine's European aspirations. Moreover, Ukraine is widely considered a country with one of the highest levels of religious pluralism.[79] In the context of an ongoing war, it has to be noted the Ukrainian Armed Forces include Chechen, Belarusian, Georgian and Jewish battalions.

Not all is perfect. As Vitalii Portnikov, a Ukrainian journalist and political observer, noted – since 2014, the actual start of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Ukrainian presidents have had two choices: flee the country, similar to Viktor Yanukovych, should they show any appeasement towards Russia; or become a modified version of Petro Poroshenko later in his political career (described above). Furthermore, the socio-political climate of war can be susceptible to the dissemination of conservative, nationalistic and even radical ideologies.[80] Such tendencies can grow, if the escalation from Russia continues and/or Ukrainians feel that the "collective West" or its members fail to deliver on one occasion or another – be it in the supply of arms or political decisions. Freedom House[81] and OSCE (ODIHR)[82] have reported in recent years on the issue of hate crimes committed by far-right and conservative groups against minorities and different ethnicities. The available statistics show the number of reported cases as comparably low; however, according to ODIHR, "Ukraine's hate crime recording and statistics do not sufficiently distinguish hate crimes from other crimes".[83] Should Ukrainian society decide to prioritise national security along the lines of a militarised democracy, it is in the best interest of the progressive European family to ensure that this path does not lead to exclusion and marginalisation of certain groups of citizens. In the context of an ongoing nation-building process, the sustainability

and resilience of Ukraine's democracy will depend on the ability of its citizens to assume responsibility and show respect for other minorities. Ukraine's strength lies in diverse, collective action. In this regard, additional observations are worth pointing out.

Looking ahead, a lack of human capital could become a serious problem for the development of the country and the process of rebuilding. Various estimates indicate approximately eight million people might have left Ukraine since the start of the full-scale war in 2022. However, the key strategic documents being presented by the government do not foresee active functional mechanisms of diasporic engagement and cooperation. In the national recovery plan, the government recognises the need to return its citizens as an important priority.[84] In supporting documents, the youth is targeted as a separate group, which is key for social recovery. At the same, Ukraine's diaspora and its migrant communities abroad are not recognised a standalone actor and an important partner in recovery. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has confirmed the immense potential Ukrainian migrant communities possess, in terms of their advocacy role and in their ability to mobilise human, financial and political resources to support the democratic development of the country. In the past, I have contributed to scholarly initiatives,[85] which pointed to the importance of thinking and including diaspora in Ukraine's identity-building process and its democratic development. Functional mechanisms for engaging the Ukrainian diaspora – which will grow in numbers after the war ends – must be seen as an indispensable element of Ukraine's commitments to inclusiveness and multi-stakeholder engagement. European progressives, on the other hand, should be ready to recognise diasporic groups as an important partner for Ukraine's recovery and democratisation, and as a stakeholder who should be consulted and actively involved in Ukraine's recovery, its modernisation and transformation. As the authors of the "Blueprint for Reconstruction of Ukraine" add: "the massive refugee flow of students, researchers and other high human capital workers from Ukraine to the EU and the reconstruction offer a chance to forge long-lasting relationships in research and development".[86]

Another important area in the context of a progressive perspective worth discussing is the underrepresentation of Ukrainian women in decision-making positions, both at the local and central levels. Ukraine continues to be a country where women are very active in various grassroots initiatives and CSOs, yet do not have strong representation at the decision-making level. Only 20% of acting parliamentarians in Ukraine are women. We find only 14% of women among ministers and 30% among members of local deliberative bodies.[87] Certain progress could be noted during the last parliamentary elections.[88] Yet, the role of women in Ukraine's recovery and modernisation must not only be declared but guaranteed. In particular, the challenge of gender-sensitive policymaking could become even more serious relatively soon, due to the fact that primarily women have left Ukraine since the start of the full-scale war. One of the core Lugano recovery principles speaks of gender equality and inclusion. European partners should ensure that it becomes an integral principle of Ukraine's recovery and modernisation.

2.4 SAFEGUARDING POLITICAL COMPETITION AND PROMOTING EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING

After 2022, society and political elites formed what seems to be a rather strong social contract, which implied a consolidated effort towards victory in the war. The agreement stipulated that the time and opportunity for reckoning should come after the war.[89] In extreme conditions of war, Ukrainians switched on a national TV marathon with a unified message; political squabbles were brushed under the carpet and criticism of authority was considerably reduced in the public sphere. However, the longer the war drags on, the more frequent old animosities resurface. Not to mention critical questions regarding the preparation and conduct of war, which are likely to enter the public discourse with full force as soon as the conditions allow.

A few examples can help to explain why I draw such conclusions. Revelations like an article from *The Washington Post*[90] on the events preceding Russia's invasion of Ukraine has already started to raise questions about the political accountability of the president's team.[91] Ukraine's political opposition and activists will not concede in their efforts to understand why Russia's forces were able to occupy southern regions of Ukraine (Mariupol and Kherson, in particular) with relative ease. Since the notorious Wagnergate,[92] Andriy Yermak, Chief of Staff at President's office, has been accused of alleged sabotage and serving the interests of Russia (most recently by US Congresswomen Victoria Spartz).[93] At the end of August 2022, media reported that the State Security Bureau had opened a criminal case against General Serhiy Kryvonos regarding the defence of Kyiv Zhuliany airport.[94] It is important to add that, at the end of 2020, General Kryvonos was dismissed as Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council for what some believe to be criticism of the president.[95]

Although the Ukrainian government has succeeded in ensuring the provision of basic services to the population and even successfully innovated (e.g. the widely praised e-governance ecosystem "Diia"), it must also learn to address its previous shortcomings and temptations. On the wave of a landslide victory in the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019, Voldymyr Zelenskyi and his party, Servant of the People, turned on "turbo mode", unprecedented in the history of Ukraine.[96] Parliament, or more concretely a monomajority consisting of parliamentarians from the Servant of the People, introduced a large number of legislative acts within a relatively short period of time, without comprehensive deliberation and consultation. What can be defined as an "intrusive governance model" has quickly led to friction in Ukraine and resulted in criticism abroad, despite the alleged good intentions of the government to introduce reforms, which the country needed. Zelenskyi's "controlling" style of governance, which heavily relied on loyalty and results, has led to the removal of Andriy Bohdan, former chief of staff, and Rada Chairman Dmytro Razumkov, together with a large number of dismissals at the regional level (14 heads of the 25 regional administrations since the last elections). The prosecution of the ex-president, Petro Poroshenko – Zelenskyi's main political adversary – has also raised concerns of growing political interference.[97] Political

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prosecution, as such, has left a bitter taste in the mouth of the Ukraine's population. In the past, it was associated with "dark times" for Ukrainian democracy, such as the rule of the ousted runaway president, Viktor Yanukovych.

The war has completely changed the image of Volodymyr Zelenskyi, and perhaps even his conduct as a statesman, although the latter can be assessed best in retrospect, during peaceful times. Accusations of inexperience, his comedic background and political interference, which were not uncommon since his election, have turned into widespread praise of his leadership skills and bravery. Ukrainians united under the flag, which was certainly not unusual due the external threat. However, one has to be reminded that the war did not get rid of the Ukrainian leadership paradox.[98] In short, despite growing support for democracy as a form of governance, the longing for a strong ruling hand remains. The president, his team and military leadership are very likely to keep enjoying unprecedented (90%+) levels of support, which will contribute to a strong political mandate in the foreseeable future. A mandate that could be used to proceed with further consolidation of political power. Close to 70% of the population believes Ukraine can join the EU in five years,[99] 85% by 2030[100], while decisionmakers assess that Ukraine is capable of fulfilling the necessary criteria after three years.[101] Feeling the pressure of time and looking at "merciless" public opinion, the infamous turbo mode could make a return. Moreover, the post-war political climate could tempt the authorities to cleanse the Ukrainian political scene of alleged traitors and foreign agents. Coupled with the need to proceed with deoligarchisation, it could lead to a situation "where everything goes" and/or the "winner takes all", with the democratic safety switch being (temporarily) turned off. The progressive path must ensure that the ambitious path to EU membership, under the pressure of time, does not have a negative impact on the quality of policymaking, or prevent democratic control or fair and equal political competition.

2.5 MILITARISATION OF UKRAINIAN DEMOCRACY AS AN OVERARCHING CHALLENGE

The Economist Intelligence Unit made an important observation before the full-scale invasion. It mentioned Ukraine's steep decline in its democracy ranking, albeit attributing this negative tendency predominantly to the growing militarisation of the public sphere due to a threat from Russia. The COVID-19 pandemic, as reported in many other regions in the world, exacerbated the securitisation of the public sphere, which could have a detrimental impact on the quality of democratic governance.[102] The securitisation of Ukraine's public sphere has grown exponentially since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion in 2022. A war resulted in martial law, which implies top-down governance via regional military administrations. A state of war leads to wide restrictions of freedoms and rights. Such a tendency, if it persists, can seriously weaken the cornerstones of Ukraine's resilient democracy – horizontal social links, decentralised governance, and a vibrant civil society and private sector. Safeguards against such developments are of paramount importance in the recovery stage, not to mention for EU membership.

The people of Ukraine have full agency when it comes to making decisions about the future of the country. Yet, it is in the best interest of progressive actors to raise awareness about the dangers and challenges a particular path might entail. Ukraine's militarised democracy is increasingly seen by experts and decisionmakers as a viable and even necessary model for its development.[103] Similarly, CSOs (in the Civil Society Manifesto presented at Lugano) position national and human security at the top of their list of priorities. The constant threat from its neighbour (Russia) coupled with the recent experience of the brutality of war is likely to turn the strengthening of defence and security sectors into a hallmark feature of Ukraine's recovery.[104] A growing number of experts and decisionmakers feel that, without a high level of state security, comprehensive recovery and modernisation simply won't be possible.[105] Moreover, Ukrainian authorities see military tech as a driver of modernisation and transformation of the economy.[106] As a result, proposals to follow the path of countries like Israel have already made the rounds in the media,

albeit often presented through an idealistic lens without an in-depth context analysis and assessment of potential challenges.

In 2022, amidst an ongoing war, one could argue about the existential necessity of such a model for Ukraine. There is also the other side of the coin. Historically situated in a region that Timothy Snyder[107] described as bloodlands, Ukraine was not given the chance to develop instruments and structures for an effective dialogue between different societal groups and levels. It simply went from one stage of repression, trauma and violence to another. Since the start of the war in the eastern regions of Ukraine in 2014 and the annexation of Crimea by Russia, I have personally taken part in activities run by organisations that have turned their attention to the importance of developing a genuine culture of dialogue in the country.[108] The latter can be understood as the ability to understand and address varying needs and expectations of different societal groups through non-violent means and instruments (e.g. dialogue and non-violent communication). Silence, distrust, distancing and other remnants of the Soviet legacy have often served as instruments to deal with difficult situations and emotions. Having no time, nor opportunity, to properly address past traumas, the Ukrainian nation is now going through yet another major outbreak of violence and destruction.[109]

In the period from 2014 until early 2022, incidents (sometimes lethal) involving war veterans and civilians made the news on several occasions. In 2022, a considerable number of citizens from all walks of life (including those very visible in public life, such as politicians and musicians) will have witnessed and felt the brutality of war. They will bring this experience to their professional and personal lives. All the while, overarching issues such as addressing cases of domestic violence remain an important task as well. A relatively advanced legal framework in Ukraine, which includes the Istanbul Convention (albeit ratified only at the end of June 2022), unfortunately does not yet lead to a direct change in the socio-economic reality and practices, which continue to lag behind European standards. During the full-scale invasion, the number of those who support the right to own firearms has more than doubled.[110] In a traumatised society that never had a comprehensive policy regarding firearms, it could lead to further problems – for example, when the demobilisation of (volunteer) armed groups who fought in the war is put on the agenda. If the described phenomena are downplayed and/or neglected, such developments, like the growing circulation of weapons,[111] war trauma and the lack of a genuine culture of dialogue, are very likely to keep tearing apart the social fabric of Ukrainian society. Moreover, experience from other regions/countries shows that vulnerable groups (e.g. women, minorities) run the disproportionate risk of ending up on the receiving end of this violence. Ukraine's democracy, be it more or less militarised, will be difficult to sustain if these challenges are left unanswered.

2.6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

1) By granting EU candidacy, Brussels received a powerful instrument to guide Ukraine's recovery, modernisation and transformation in accordance with best European standards and innovative solutions. Conducting them in a **progressive spirit increases the likelihood of building a strong resilient democracy in Ukraine, and therefore, also increases its chances for membership of the EU**.

   – A progressive approach should entail **staying ambitious, albeit not naive**.

   – While the European Commission and European Parliament seem to be very supportive and understanding of Kyiv's needs, the **Ukrainian government "should [also] prioritise strong and functional bilateral relations with all EU capitals in addition to working on the technical membership criteria"**.[112]

   – Fast-track membership might emerge as an appealing concept due to the pressure of time, yet its practical impact on Ukraine's recovery and democratic development is doubtful. Kyiv and Brussels should **focus on the quality of the**

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recovery process to improve the resilience of its democratic model and strengthen the democratic culture in its society, both of which will significantly improve the chances of Ukraine's membership of the EU.

- The success of Ukraine's recovery and its potential for modernisation and transformation will depend on the **clarity of benchmarks and expectations between Kyiv and Brussels**.

- **Bottom-up engagement is necessary** during the provision of financial assistance and launch of infrastructural projects to tap into Ukraine's potential to strengthen an inclusive system of governance on its path to EU membership.

- **Strengthening societal ownership of the recovery process and investing in its inclusive and transparent character should start as early as possible**.

- Ukrainian society has every right to decide on the future trajectory of the country's development. If Ukrainians choose to proceed with the militarisation of their democracy, **steps should be made to lay its foundations around human security, which prevents radicalisation and polarisation of society**.

2) Although Ukrainian democracy is far from being flawless, it showed a high degree of maturity and resilience against the biggest challenge since the country gained independence. **A progressive path from recovery to EU membership should entail the ability to address the existing shortcomings, while making the best use of democratic strongholds.**

- **Decentralised governance, an active and committed civil society, and an agile and innovative private sector form the cornerstones of Ukraine's widely praised resilience.** These characteristics, should they become a centrepiece of the recovery framework, make its "imperfect" model of democracy likely to succeed in recovery, and later EU membership, despite what might seem to be insurmountable obstacles in 2023.

- CSOs are a powerful ally to guarantee Ukraine does not wander off the democratic path. **Their structured engagement, as opposed to ad hoc cooperation in recovery, and their key role in the pursuit of EU membership is essential for both to succeed.** For this to happen, **CSOs in Ukraine should not only be seen as a watchdog, but increasingly as a sled dog**. Or to quote Olena Halushka, board member of the Anti-Corruption Action Centre in Ukraine:

  > instead of merely including civil society as a monitor and observer of the reconstruction process, **civil society should be empowered to help shape the structure, influence the priorities, and hold the government accountable for implementing reforms needed for EU accession**[113]

- After the Revolution of Dignity (2013) and until the full-scale invasion, many civic initiatives ceased to exist due to the burning out of their members and lack of sufficient capacity to undergo gradual professionalisation of activities. Ukraine's recovery and its accession process to the EU should aim for **an active, structured exchange between local CSOs and their European counterparts to support the establishment of sustainable civic infrastructure in the country**. Until some of the bureaucratic barriers are addressed (e.g. EU web portals receive a Ukrainian language version), members of the Ukrainian diasporic community in the EU can facilitate the exchange to improve its effectiveness.

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A continuation of deoligarchisation and anti-corruption efforts will be critical to ensure that Ukraine can be rebuilt and transformed into a modern resilient democracy.

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- **A continuation of deoligarchisation and anti-corruption efforts will be critical to ensure that Ukraine can be rebuilt and transformed into a modern resilient democracy.** Legal solutions introduced in Ukraine must correspond to the recommendations of relevant international bodies, such as the Venice Commission. Furthermore, these processes should strive for transparency and not turn into a tool for political retaliation in the post-war environment, nor disincentivise potential investments.[114]

3) Multi-stakeholder participation and partnerships, as a key element in Ukraine's recovery and its pursuit of EU membership. must translate from official declarations into practical actions:

  - **Functional mechanisms for including the voices of different groups (youth, women, minorities, etc.) in society should be developed and implemented early on.**

  - **"Engagement with the opposition, civil society and other interested national stakeholders (trade unions, etc.) must exclude political criteria."[115]**

  - **Platforms for multi-stakeholder engagement, which create opportunities for authorities and civil society to work closely, should be encouraged and promoted.**

- European cities and local communities have already played an important role in terms of humanitarian assistance since the start of the full-scale invasion. Therefore, **cooperation between them and their Ukrainian counterparts can be further strengthened to include an exchange of best practices pertaining to good governance, rule of law and sustainable development**.

- The UN assesses that at least 12 million Ukrainians have left their homes – either through internal displacement or being forced to travel outside the country. Ukraine urgently needs soldiers to win the war, but it also needs human capital for successful recovery and transformation during and after the war. Therefore, **a comprehensive reintegration policy must become one of the core elements of Ukraine's recovery process**. Moreover, the **challenges and opportunities for reintegration should start to be addressed before the active phase of the war ends**.

- Women, children and the elderly constitute the majority of those who are affected by displacement. As a result, **gender and age-sensitive policymaking is no longer "a progressive option", but an existential necessity** to secure a future for the Ukrainian nation. Both must become an integral element of the support measures for Ukraine.

- Kyiv strives to fulfil all the recommendations and necessary criteria in a relatively short period of time. Such a strenuous exercise will require considerable technical expertise and human resources. European progressives can certainly offer valuable expert input to support Ukraine's recovery and its EU accession process. Yet, Ukraine itself should also be encouraged and assisted in efforts to **widen (e.g. through training) its pool of qualified personnel** – on the regional and local levels, and outside big agglomerations in particular.

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3. CANDIDACY STATUS FOR UKRAINE: THE TIME IS RIPE FOR A PROGRESSIVE POLICY ON THE EU'S EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

3.1 THE EU'S (EASTERN) NEIGHBOURHOOD NEEDS A NEW APPROACH

The success of Ukraine's post-war recovery and its ability to deliver on its own promises and meet European ambitions will determine whether the country can join the EU in the foreseeable future. At the same time, the recent experience of the western Balkans has shown that European aspirations, even if backed by actual progress in reforms, do not necessarily translate into political will among EU members to accept new members. For the EU to ensure its stability and security, as well as promote value-based integration, the recent conservative approach has to change.

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At the inception of its neighbourhood policy,[116] the EU wanted to prevent division; it hoped to promote stability and prosperity along its borders. When the first major test came in the form of Russo-Georgian war (2008), the EaP[117] was launched in response. When the EU and Russia were referring to one another as strategic partners, the initiative possessed a degree of geopolitical relevance. Today, it looks like a remnant of a long-lost era. The EU, in principle, has transferred ownership over the EaP to member

countries. On one hand, this allowed the "European credentials" of those who were willing to do more in terms of democratic development – Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, two of which are now candidates countries – to be strengthened. In the case of others, it did not change the resilience of local regimes nor facilitate the expected democratisation of societies. Furthermore, the resurgence of animosity between EaP members (e.g. war over Nagorno-Karabakh), the outright democratic backsliding of its members (Belarus) and Russia's constant escalation of violence in the region, which culminated in its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, have led to the actual demise of the initiative in its current structure. Moreover, the EU's *Ostpolitik* based on "cooperation instead of exclusion, and de-escalation instead of confrontation"[118] failed to deter Russia's aggressive foreign policy, as marked by numerous attempts to reorganise the post-WWII peace and security architecture. Following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a decision should be made to prioritise eastern enlargement over alternative, looser formats of cooperation. At the same time, the modified EaP, as well as other initiatives (e.g. European Political Community), could still offer a valuable contribution to maintain constructive cooperation with those countries that would not be eligible for the EU's enlargement in the foreseeable future.[119]

The granting of candidacy to Ukraine and Moldova has already started to change the nature of relations between Brussels and its Eastern European partners. It will have an impact on the future shape of the European integration project as well.[120] The unintended effect of Russia's invasion may well become a blessing in disguise for the future of value-based integration in Europe. As a point of no return, it must lead to the birth of a genuinely geopolitical Europe, which is based on strategic engagement and responsibility, as opposed to being confined to (geo-)strategic ambiguity. Even though the Russo-Ukrainian war is still in the active phase, it is already clear that the EU's eastern neighbours need a new offer, a new type of engagement.

As of today, there is no clear agreement on how to proceed. Some experts believe that the AA and DCFTA continue to offer the optimal framework to

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strengthen relations with eastern neighbours, also in the new role of an EU candidate country.[121] Others want improved solutions that would allow deeper integration and improved convergence to the highest possible levels, preceding actual accession (e.g. partnership for enlargement).[122] There are also those who want to see a further revamp of the European Commission's revised methodology, which introduced thematic clusters into the accession process. The latter is intended as a staged integration process, which would entail "progressive policy, financial and institutional integration with the EU".[123] It is important to note, in this context, that Ukrainian experts appeal for a merit-based full integration of their country into the single market and four freedoms, which can happen irrespective of the status of negotiations and closing of chapters.[124] In any case, the long-term interest of candidate countries like Ukraine or Moldova lies in concretising the requirements with Brussels by agreeing on clear instructions and benchmarks (e.g. regarding access to specific funds).

A progressive eastern neighbourhood policy means staying ambitious, albeit not naive. The accession path of eastern neighbourhood countries, Ukraine in particular, promises to become a very resource-demanding and time-consuming relationship for the parties involved. Above all, Ukraine needs military assistance to restore territorial integrity, and it needs all the support it can get to rebuild itself during and after the war. The EU accession process is a framework that will require a lot of determination, political will and sacrifices. In the spirit of a joint venture and mutual benefit, the EU should make the best use of Ukraine's desire to make the process as transparent, democratic and fair as possible. Yet, Brussels is right to be very cautious about the possibility of fast-tracking membership, which would immediately face political and economic, not to mention legal, hurdles (treaty changes). Moreover, for a democracy in the process of rebuilding, a fast-tracked accession path is likely to have a doubtful impact on the quality of the attempted modernisation and transformation of the country, not to mention the resilience of its democratic model of governance.

3.2 THE EU ACCESSION PROCESS NEEDS A NEW PROGRESSIVE FOUNDATION

Previous waves of enlargement have helped to advance the European integration project and, in many ways, solidified the EU's international stance. In 2023, a more critical look at the EU's recent approach, which is very technical, bureaucratic and politically driven, is important. More so because it has been held hostage by the political decisions of some of the recent candidate countries (e.g. Albania and North Macedonia).

> *Further enlargement should not be approached as a liability, rather as an impetus for coordination and integration, which contributes to peace, security and the prosperity of Europe.*

Above all, it needs an overarching commitment to a more progressive philosophy, regarding the further purpose of enlargement amid Russia's onslaught, on the very idea of a peaceful, democratic and secure Europe. Further enlargement should not be approached as a liability, rather as an impetus for coordination and integration, which contributes to peace, security and the prosperity of Europe. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, strategic ambiguity as an instrument of the EU's foreign policy toolkit can no longer co-exist alongside the "Europe of political values".[125] In response, strengthening of a geopolitical union would be conducive to a value-based foreign policy and could improve the likelihood of the effective mobilisation of

EU member states around common goals in external action. Both could contribute to the effectiveness of the renewed approach to the EU neighbourhood.

> *Ukraine's candidacy should become a wake-up call for a much-needed reality check in the EU's approach to its potential members in the western Balkans and Eastern Europe.*

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine created unintended, but nevertheless much needed, momentum for the overdue change to occur. The decision to grant candidate status to Ukraine amid an ongoing war could become a turning point in the EU's enlargement policy and its approach to its neighbours.[126] Since the "big bang" in 2004, the pace of enlargement has slowed down considerably. It has been marked by strong reservations from member states and growing challenges inside the community. Stalemate instead of progress ensued. Merely a year ago, members of the progressive family discussed the need to invest politically to bring enlargement back on the EU's agenda.[127] Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the prospect of further enlargement gained political saliency in a matter of months, if not weeks, and is now openly discussed by leading European figures, representing different political families. This time, however, by just keeping it on the agenda, without the necessary interventions and reforms, the EU could soon be back where it started – fervently talking the talk, yet barely treading and stumbling along the walk.

Ukraine's candidacy should become a wake-up call for a much-needed reality check in the EU's approach to its potential members in the western Balkans and Eastern Europe.[128] In principle, it should strive to avoid false promises, thus avoiding unfulfilled expectations and frustration. The ongoing, two-decades-long accession journey of the western Balkans is the most distinct reminder of the flaws ingrained in Brussels' approach to enlargement. In early 2020, the European Commission, in the context of the stalled accession of the western Balkans, already proposed a reviewed methodology for accession negotiations,[129] calling for a more credible, dynamic, predictable process with a strong political steer and more clarity regarding the application of conditionality. If the EU intends to be a peaceful, stable, democratic community, Brussels must put "one's money where one's mouth is".

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

1) Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a decision should be made to **prioritise further enlargement over alternative, looser formats of cooperation with the EU's neighbours**:

   – The time is ripe to **abandon strategic ambiguity in favour of a strategic partnership and engagement** as the EU's main foreign policy approach to its neighbours and potential members.

   – Russia's aggression is a wake-up call and reminder of the progressive appeal for **a value-based enlargement process, which allows for genuine engagement with the EU's eastern and southern partners.**

   – Initiatives like the Eastern Partnership, albeit trimmed and modified to current needs, could still offer a valuable contribution to the maintain constructive cooperation with those countries that would not be eligible for enlargement of the EU in the foreseeable future.

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– **The progressive approach should address the diversity of southern and eastern neighbourhoods** through integration and best-practice exchange (whenever possible between candidates, as well as between candidates and current members), building mutual understanding and support networks among all those involved (including activists, members of civil society and the expert community).

2) The EU's answer to a changing geopolitical landscape should entail sufficient flexibility for "**long-term strategic calculation to prevail over short-term objections about mismatches with EU standards**".[130]

– In the wider framework of the EU's neighbourhood policy, ambition and determination have too often been met with political reservations and bureaucracy. Following the conclusions of an expert roundtable organised by FEPS in 2021, it should be reiterated that the EU requires "**a more political, more outspoken and more empathic approach**" towards partners and potential EU candidates. High ambitions should not be met with contempt and disbelief. Progress in reforms should not be halted by political games in Brussels and/or EU capitals.

– Prior to the largest enlargement to date in 2004, Romano Prodi, addressing reservations regarding new members, coined the term "everything but institutions". The accession process should strive to ensure that **ambitious candidate countries can be rewarded for progress**, while not yet having full rights to shape the EU's agenda as a member state. Credible incentives, backed by financial assistance, should allow for accession, which "may offer a solution that rewards for progress in reforms, while acknowledging the EU's internal sensitivities vis-à-vis enlargement".[131]

– In 2022, the process leading to Brussels' decision on the new accession trio (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia) has shown a degree of political bias, which can be understood given the circumstances of the Russian full-scale invasion.[132]

Yet, from a long-term perspective, the accession process must be characterised by **strong and robust criteria**, allowing **favouritism, which is very likely to drive geopolitical rivalry in the whole of the EU neighbourhood, to be avoided**. The latter can contribute to socio-economic instability and fuel political volatility, creating a fertile ground for populism and nationalism to grow. At the same time, clear criteria should constitute an insurance policy for the candidate countries that the EU expectations will not change over time.[133]

> **"**
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> *The EU's renewed eastern neighbourhood policy has to address, not avoid or delay, the question of future relations with Russia.*
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> **"**

3) **The EU's renewed eastern neighbourhood policy has to address, not avoid or delay, the question of future relations with Russia.**

– While Ukraine will remain at the centre of Europe's attention, **the EU should actively develop plans and scenarios for how its policy should address Russia**.

– Whatever approach is taken, it has to account for an **active role in shaping policy for those EU members that have consistently shown they possess a broad understanding and expertise pertaining to Russia** – Central Europe and the Baltic States leading the way, while Ukraine must be given enough space and agency to be able to voice its concerns and proposals throughout this process.

4) **If the EU is serious about a larger union,[134] it also has to be serious about reforming it.**

   – Ukraine's path to membership reiterated the importance of the EU putting its own house in order.[135] A full-scale war in Europe reminded us that the EU is ill-equipped to deal with the multifaceted nature of modern warfare and hybrid threats. For too long, instead of making the weather, Brussels has been preoccupied with weathering one storm after another.[136] Following the decision to welcome new candidates into the European family, Maria João Rodrigues, FEPS president, accurately pointed out that "**a larger European Union cannot afford to run the risk of being paralysed in its internal decisions** precisely when the world order is being redesigned and humankind confronted with planetary and existential challenges".[137]

   – At the same time, **Ukraine and other candidates should not become hostages to claims about the need for the EU to reform itself before others can join**. The EU is sometimes compared to a ship that is being repaired at sea ever since its departure from port. Others should be able to board the vessel if they share common values and show a genuine determination to make it reach its final destination. Furthermore, convergence and consolidation in the EU should not be seen as a polar opposite process to its enlargement.[138] Complementarity can and should be pursued because both of the above are "two sides of the same coin".[139]

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4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: BUILDING BACK BETTER – ADDRESSING SHORTCOMINGS AND MAXIMISING ACHIEVEMENTS

Ukraine's model of democracy has been described as "unstable" and "flawed"; its system of governance as "hybrid". Freedom House's "Nations in Transition", "Freedom in the World" and "Democracy Index", prepared by the Economist Intelligence Unit, resonate with the recent opinion from the European Commission on the EU's perspective for Ukraine – a problem with the rule of law remains as a major obstacle to its development. In the history of Ukraine individual interests – most often closely associated with oligarchs – with relative ease, were able to bypass, hijack and manoeuvre around the existing democratic process and institutions.

Prior to the full-scale invasion, the integrity of the judges in the Constitutional Court was questioned; interference in the judiciary system was common; the anti-corruption ecosystem was incomplete and slow to react; and the media landscape was characterised by a lot of vested (oligarchic) interest.[140] Since Ukraine gained independence, it has consistently struggled to eliminate the shadow economy, which allowed for corruption to spread, weakened the investment climate and created conditions for workers' rights to be violated. The state did not possess the necessary institutional mechanisms and enough political will to effectively eliminate these malicious practices, nor to effectively protect the rights of different groups of its citizens, vulnerable ones in particular. In many cases, it had to rely on civic activism and grassroots initiatives as a safety net. As a result, it should not come as a big surprise to those studying Ukraine that fairly recently (2019) its citizens had a world-low (9%, according to Gullap) trust in their government.[141]

Ukraine will have to address these problems, as part of its recovery, and certainly before it can join the EU. But one begs to wonder, how does a country facing such serious challenges manage to successfully withstand invasion from Russia and show consistent progress on its path to join the EU? In spite of its shortcomings, Ukraine's model of democracy has always shown a dynamic side. Adaptability is one of the defining features of resilience.[142] The study by the Progressive Alliance (2022) concludes that the "dynamic character of democracies implies that democracies must adapt to new challenges in an ever-changing global world". Ukraine's path of development has seen an almost regular interchange between achievements and

pitfalls. The country has learned to adapt and improve along the way. Critics and sceptics turn their attention to the time that has been lost and opportunities wasted due to this rollercoaster ride of democratic development for more than three decades. What they have missed is that this bumpy journey, to date, has produced an incredible learning curve for a society, which, prior to 1991, had never had a real opportunity for democratic nation building. And Ukrainian society has already demonstrated it can reap the benefits from such learning opportunities.[143]

This policy study was written during an active phase of war – the ultimate test of resilience, adaptability, dedication and bravery that a nation can face. Ukraine's military emerges as the epitome of its ability to modernise and transform under the pressure of time and despite unfavourable circumstances. The Ukrainian armed forces in 2013 (start of the war in eastern regions of Ukraine) constituted "forces in flip-flops"[144] and an "army in ruins" (to quote Chief of General Staff Viktor Muzhenko)[145] due to obsolete structures and a lack of basic resources. The system was corrupt, overly bureaucratic and ineffective. In 2022, the Ukrainian army not only effectively resisted but even launched successful counteroffensives while at war with allegedly the second army in the world, which is in possession of prevailing military resources. This example can serve as a good testimony of Ukraine's willingness and actual ability to adapt, transform and modernise under western guidance and assistance.

We could stay overly focused on the challenges Ukraine has to deal with, yet, simultaneously, it would be hard to oppose the fact that opportunities to advance reforms have been a frequent feature (since the 2013 Revolution of Dignity in particular). Thus, EU candidacy, viewed as a window of opportunity for the lack of a better word, is not entirely unique or unprecedented. However, it constitutes the biggest, long-term stimulus the country has ever had. For this stimulus to bear fruit, Ukraine's recovery and accession processes must rely on the cornerstones of progress and resilience, which hold the social fabric together, despite the problems inherent in the country's legal-institutional system. I have argued throughout the analysis that the resilience of Ukraine's democracy should be ascribed to "decentralised governance,

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the strong agency of civil society, and an agile and committed private sector", while "horizontal social links – rather than hierarchical centralised command – are the main organising feature of social culture".[146] Yet, previous recovery experiences from around the globe, and above all history, suggest that even these features will not suffice to rebuild and reform, modernise and transform Ukraine if the rule of law is not prioritised and strengthened.[147] This is why building a strong anti-corruption ecosystem and successfully concluding deoligarchisation are essential steps for Ukraine to succeed.

"

Ukraine's recovery process will either lead to a stronger, more democratic and more secure EU or leave the integration project divided, and likely on the margins of global affairs.

"

Last, but not least, while Ukraine has already embarked on a generational task to rebuild after the war, it is in the EU's core interest that the sacrifices and progress are not rewarded with empty promises and political indecisiveness. In principle, it requires "a more political, more outspoken and more empathic approach"[148] approach to the EU's neighbours and on the value and purpose of such an enlargement. Ukraine's recovery process will either lead to a stronger, more democratic and more secure EU or leave the integration project divided, and likely on the margins of global affairs. With the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a new eastern enlargement should become the cornerstone of Europe's peace and security architecture. For a value-based union in pursuit of geopolitical relevance, a progressive eastern neighbourhood policy is therefore no longer a theoretical exercise, but an existential necessity.

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ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

1   In my opinion, the term "recovery" reflects better Ukraine's future prospects as opposed to "reconstruction". The first could include possible transformation and modernisation, while the latter will no longer be possible in many localities throughout Ukraine due to Russia's purposeful attacks on civilian infrastructure and its scorched-earth military policy. Therefore, throughout the analysis, the focus is made on the term "recovery", albeit sometimes "reconstruction" is used in a similar context, in particular while referencing other authors. Taking the above into account, I would recommend the progressive family consider using vocabulary that more accurately describes the reality facing Ukraine and its future prospects.

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134 In a widely commented on speech at Charles University in Prague on Monday, 29 August 2022, Federal Chancellor and SPD leader, Olaf Scholz, also expressed a strong commitment to further enlargement and highlighted the importance of laying the foundations for the process to succeed. "Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague on Monday, 29 August 2022". The Federal Government, 29 August 2022.

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FEPS is the European progressive political foundation and the think tank of the progressive political family at EU level. Our mission is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training and debates to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe.

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The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is Germany's largest and oldest party-affiliated foundation. It is committed to the fundamental values of social democracy and is active worldwide in support of freedom, solidarity, and social justice. In Ukraine, the FES focuses on four fields of work that fit the values of social democracy into the Ukrainian context: reducing social inequality, sustainable economic policy, strengthening the democratic rule of law, and security cooperation in Europe.

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Kalevi Sorsa Foundationis is a social democratic think tank established in 2005 and based in Helsinki, Finland. The foundation's objective is to promote public debate on equality and democracy and to produce research and publications.

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ON SIMILAR TOPICS

TERRA INCOGNITA
EXPLORING THE LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

SUMMARY

The war in Ukraine carries extensive implications that intersect with multiple long-term trends and variables shaping international affairs. What lies ahead is terra incognita – a strategic landscape that eludes ready historical analogies. Strategic foresight is essential to be able to explore this territory, make sense of potential developments, and guide action.

This policy brief argues that the war in Ukraine affects the future in different ways. For one, it has accelerated patterns of change that predated it, including great power competition, middle power activism, and the crisis of multilateralism. For another, Russia's aggression has introduced major discontinuities, such as triggering a global energy crisis, fracturing the European security order, and sparking nuclear threats by Russia. In addition, the war has diverted focus from critical challenges, such as sustainable development and climate change, while aggravating these challenges both directly and indirectly.

The war in Ukraine has compounded the drift towards a fragmenting and polarised international (dis)order, but the future is not preordained. Long-term developments will at least in part depend on the outcome of the conflict, which cannot be predicted. This policy brief outlines some of the factors that will drive change alongside the ongoing war. They include the evolution of the rivalry between the US and China and of the partnership between China and Russia, the risks facing the global economy, the prospects for the clean energy transition and its strategic implications, and the rising costs of failure to address shared challenges through cooperation. By tackling geopolitical challenges and managing multi-dimensional competition, while seeking to advance a rules-based international order, leadership can make a decisive difference in shaping distinct pathways to the future.

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

WAR IN UKRAINE, REFUGEES, INCLUSION AND HUMAN MOBILITY
THE CHALLENGES FOR A PROGRESSIVE EUROPEAN UNION POLICY

ABSTRACT

After summarising the main EU decisions on the reception of Ukrainian refugees, with reference to the decision to grant them temporary protection, this policy brief analyses the migration profile and problems of reception and integration. The flows from Ukraine are largely composed of women and children, posing pressing needs for integration into schooling and the labour market, addressing the problems of brain waste and segregation.

The latter are also discussed in the light of the different geopolitical scenarios and therefore with respect to short-term and medium-to-long-term needs. The importance for the EU to equip itself with a flexible capacity to foresee and respond to migratory flows, combining measures for social and economic integration with measures that enable the mobility of people, overcoming existing discrimination in the treatment of different nationalities, is highlighted. This requires more solidarity among EU member states and territories. More generally, the proliferation of protracted crises around Europe calls for a new risk-management policy outside and inside the Union. Growing tensions must be prevented and governed with a progressive policy based on the recognition of human rights, investing in universal welfare and social and territorial cohesion, as well as on the nexus between migration and development in Ukraine.

Finally the Pact on Migration and Asylum should provide for more, diversified and intertwined safe channels of entry and mobility.

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IN CONJUNCTION WITH
CeSPI

THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR: AN INFLECTION POINT FOR SUSTAINABLE ENERGY TRANSITIONS

SUMMARY

Russia's war on Ukraine has led to a reorientation of EU energy policy towards phasing out Russian fossil fuel imports. This, in turn, has necessitated an ambitious and highly complex restructuring of EU energy systems, markets and infrastructures. For this reason, a considerable number of new policies are in place to accelerate clean energy production and usage within the EU, but the knock-on effects of the EU's new focus on security of supply is making high-carbon energy phase-out more complicated, whilst EU coal usage is expected to grow in 2022.

High energy prices within the EU are being addressed through a series of social policies that focus on certain EU energy justice concerns, but greater coordination and support for EU-wide demand-side policies would do much more to insulate citizens from high energy costs in the long term. EU policies on supply security also raise important questions about North-South energy and climate change relations – not least by placing the EU in direct competition with Global South countries for liquefied natural gas (LNG) and by contributing to high global prices.

In recognition of the complex global knock-on effects of its policies, this Policy Brief proposes that the EU's global climate diplomacy strategy should include measures to assuage Global South countries – like increased commitment to loss and damage, and support for renewable energy development. Furthermore, the European Commission should use this moment of crisis to develop EU-level coordination on high-carbon energy phase-out.

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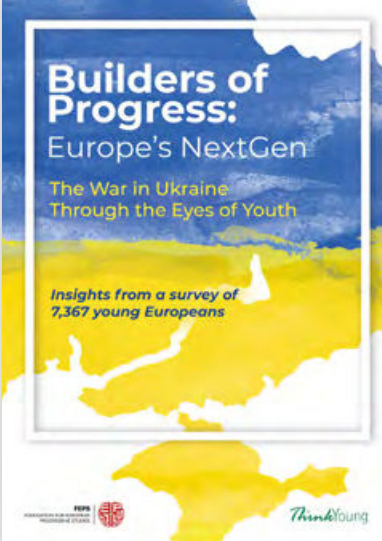Reader in International Political Economy, University of Warwick

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PROGRESSIVE PATHWAYS TO EUROPEAN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY
HOW CAN THE EU BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT IN AN INCREASINGLY CHALLENGING WORLD?

ABSTRACT

The debate on European strategic autonomy (ESA) has gained new momentum with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, even though the idea of European autonomy has been present throughout the history of EU integration. The main idea behind the concept of ESA is the EU's ability and means to enhance its freedom from a set of external dependencies – and also to enhance its freedom to conduct its policy autonomously and in line with its fundamental values and interests. Yet does the EU have the capacity and agency to set priorities and make decisions autonomously in its external action? What political, institutional, and material steps are needed to achieve strategic autonomy? Guided by these questions and in search of a progressive answer to them, FEPS, the Fondation Jean-Jaurès and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung conducted a research project looking into three policy domains in which it is vital for Europe to attain the necessary freedom and wherewithal to pursue this objective of ESA: security and defence, economy and trade, and digital and technology. This policy brief summarises the main findings of our ESA research project. Overall, Europe must adapt to the new and challenging global realities. To do this, the EU needs to act with more unity and coordination in different domains, as well as to build resilience and reduce its external dependence on certain fundamental resources.

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STRATEGIC AUTONOMY series

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The future of Europe as a stable, democratic, prosperous, peaceful, valued-based community that is embedded in a well-functioning multilateral system of global governance depends on the success of Ukraine's post-war transformation into a modern, resilient democracy, which eventually succeeds in its full European integration. While I strongly believe Ukraine's European path must lead to another (eastern) enlargement, such an outcome is not predestined. Across the two main sections of the policy study, I argue that a stronger progressive mindset and actions will be needed to turn Ukraine's recovery into an EU membership success story, instead of fuelling frustration on both sides, which will ultimately play into the hands of populists and Eurosceptics, undermining the EU's internal stability and its credibility as a global actor.

In Section 2 of the policy study, I look at the socio-political dimension of Ukraine's post-war recovery process. In particular, I argue for the importance of strengthening those "progressive" elements of Ukraine's "imperfect" model of democracy, which make it likely to succeed not only in recovery but also on its accession path to EU membership, despite what might seem at the moment as insurmountable obstacles. While Kyiv will have to fulfil the EU accession criteria and deliver on its far-reaching plans laid out in a number of strategic recovery documents, the EU in its own regard must implement a new vision of enlargement and neighbourhood policies to meet Ukraine's ambitions, as well as the changing needs of its eastern neighbours. As a result, Section 3 discusses elements that should serve as building blocks for the relations with its (eastern) neighbours and contribute to the EU's new approach to enlargement policy. Each of the sections is concluded with a number of observations on the recommended way forward.

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