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FOUR REVOLUTIONS – ONE VECTOR: UKRAINE'S EUROPEAN ORIENTATION THROUGH THE LENS OF CIVIC MOBILIZATION

Abstract: The article analyses the evolution of Ukraine's European choice through the prism of four key waves of civic mobilisation: the Granite Revolution (1990), the Orange Revolution (2004), the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) and the consolidation of the pro-European course in the conditions of war after 2022. The author presents the historical, political and value context of each of these events, identifying their impact on European integration and the shaping of Ukraine's political identity. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of mistakes, missed opportunities, and internal and external factors that influenced the dynamics of this process. The final part presents scenarios for development in 2025–2030 and discusses recent events, including the change of government and mass anti-corruption protests in July 2025, in the context of Ukraine's Europeanisation.

Keywords: Ukraine, European integration, civic mobilisation, revolutions, foreign policy, democracy

CZTERY REWOLUCJE – JEDEN WEKTOR: EUROPEJSKA ORIENTACJA UKRAINY W PERSPEKTYWIE MOBILIZACJI OBYWATELSKIEJ

Streszczenie: Artykuł analizuje ewolucję wyboru europejskiego Ukrainy przez pryzmat czterech kluczowych fal mobilizacji obywatelskiej: Rewolucji na Granicie (1990), Pomarańczowej Rewolucji (2004), Rewolucji Godności (2013–2014) oraz konsolidacji proeuropejskiego kursu w warunkach wojny po 2022 r. Autor przedstawia kontekst historyczny, polityczny i wartościowy każdego z tych wydarzeń, identyfikując ich wpływ na integrację europejską i kształtowanie tożsamości politycznej Ukrainy. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono analizie błędów, niewykorzystanych szans oraz czynnikom wewnętrznym i zewnętrznym, które wpłynęły na dynamikę tego procesu. W części końcowej przedstawiono scenariusze rozwoju na lata 2025–2030 oraz omówiono najnowsze wydarzenia, w tym zmianę rządu i masowe protesty antykorupcyjne w lipcu 2025 r. w kontekście europeizacji Ukrainy.

Słowa kluczowe: Ukraine, European integration, civic mobilisation, revolutions, foreign policy, democracy

ЧОТИРИ РЕВОЛЮЦІЇ – ОДИН ВЕКТОР: ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКА ОРІЄНТАЦІЯ УКРАЇНИ КРІЗЬ ПРИЗМУ ГРОМАДЯНСЬКОЇ МОБІЛІЗАЦІЇ

Анотація: У статті досліджується еволюція європейського вибору України крізь призму чотирьох ключових хвиль громадянської мобілізації: Революції на граніті (1990), Помаранчевої революції (2004), Революції гідності (2013–2014) та консолідації проєвропейського курсу в умовах війни після 2022 р. Автор розглядає історичний, політичний і ціннісний контексти кожної з цих подій, визначаючи їхній вплив на європейську інтеграцію та формування політичної ідентичності України. Особлива увага приділяється аналізу помилок, втрачених можливостей, а також внутрішніх і зовнішніх чинників, які впливали на динаміку цього процесу. У завершальній частині подано сценарії розвитку на 2025–2030 рр. та розглянуто найновіші події, зокрема зміну уряду та масові антикорупційні протести у липні 2025 р. у контексті європеїзації України.

Ключові слова: Україна, європейська інтеграція, громадянська мобілізація, революції, зовнішня політика, демократія

Introduction

The past year, 2024, was marked by three key anniversaries symbolizing the historical milestones of Ukraine's European choice: the 30th anniversary of the Budapest Memorandum, the 20th anniversary of the Orange Revolution, and the 10th anniversary of the Revolution of Dignity. Yet the origins of this strategic vector go back to 1990 – the Revolution on Granite, which for the first time brought to the forefront in Ukrainian society the ideals of freedom, dignity, and civic responsibility, embedded in the European political code.

The signing of the Budapest Memorandum (1994) was meant to secure Ukraine's progress toward Western integration by renouncing nuclear weapons in exchange for sovereignty guarantees. However, the Memorandum turned out to be not a tool of protection, but the beginning of a long period of illusions regarding the effectiveness of international security commitments.

The three subsequent revolutions – in 2004, 2013–2014, and de facto after 2022 – expressed, in different ways, the same aspiration: to integrate into the space of Western democracy. Yet as of May 2025, this strategy once again found itself under threat. The return of Donald Trump to the White House marked a radical revision of U.S. policy toward Ukraine. His determination to "end the war at any cost" through diplomatic pressure and coercion into compromises on Moscow's terms poses unprecedented challenges for Ukraine's European integration course.

In this context, Ukraine's European choice emerges as an existential issue, not merely a geopolitical option. The purpose of this paper is to trace why this choice has remained incomplete over the past three decades, what mistakes and omissions have hindered its implementation, and what makes it non-negotiable now – against the backdrop of new Western attempts to "freeze" the conflict at the expense of Ukraine's sovereignty.

Let us now examine these main stages of Ukraine's Europeanization in more detail.

Revolution on Granite: The First Value-Based Breakthrough toward Europe

First, about the first "revolution". The Revolution on Granite, which took place in October 1990 (October 2–17, 1990) in Kyiv, was the first mass act of civic resistance in Soviet Ukraine. It was organized by students from various regions, primarily Lviv, Kyiv, and Dnipro, who opposed the preservation of the Soviet system and political subordination to Moscow. The action began on October 2 in the center of the capital, on October Revolution Square (now Independence Square), where several dozen students declared a hunger strike under the slogan: "I am starving for Ukraine!"

The main demands of the protesters included the resignation of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, Vitaliy Masol; rejection of the signing of a new Union Treaty with the USSR; nationalization of Communist Party and Komsomol property; guarantees that conscript military service would only be performed on Ukrainian territory; and the holding of new free elections to the Verkhovna Rada. The students demanded genuine political independence and democratization – in effect, it was the younger generation's refusal to accept the model of development imposed by Moscow.

The protest quickly gained nationwide resonance. New participants joined the hunger strikers, supported by Kyiv residents and civic organizations. After two weeks of pressure, on October 17, 1990, Masol's government was forced to resign. This was an unprecedented example of peaceful resistance triumphing over authoritarian power in Soviet conditions.

Although there was no explicit discussion at the time about joining the European Union or NATO, the Revolution on Granite had a distinctly pro-European character. Its participants advocated freedom, political responsibility, respect for human rights, and national sovereignty – precisely the values at the core of European political culture. Moreover, Ukrainian students drew inspiration from examples of peaceful revolutions in Central Europe, notably the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia and anti-communist protests in Poland.

The Revolution on Granite was not only the ideological prelude to Ukraine's independence, proclaimed in August 1991, but also set a model of non-violent resistance to which the country returned in 2004 and 2013–2014. Its historical significance lies in its role as the first value-based break with the Soviet past, laying the foundations of Ukraine's European choice long before its institutional formalization.

The historical significance of the Revolution on Granite described above is reflected in a number of scholarly works that allow for a deeper understanding

of both its political context and value content. Among the most recent studies is the article by M. Kruhliak and A. Kuchanskyi (2024), in which the authors analyze the Revolution on Granite as a form of expressing the worldview orientations of Ukrainian students during the late perestroika period. Based on a discursive analysis of the protesters' demands and behavioral patterns, the researchers conclude that the driving force of student actions was a value-based rejection of the Soviet hierarchy and the conviction of the necessity of national sovereignty, freedom of choice, and democratic procedures as tools of political change.

In this same context, the work of O. Sych (2017) is worth noting, as it traces the transformation of ideas initiated in 1990 in subsequent waves of protest, particularly during the Orange Revolution (Sych, 017). The author emphasizes that although the student movement initially lacked a clear nationalist connotation, the Revolution on Granite created an ideological platform that was later institutionalized in new forms of political mobilization. This approach makes it possible to trace the continuity of civic resistance ideas and their evolution toward a coherent ideology of democratic nationalism.

A separate body of research is represented by institutional historical projects, particularly the materials of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory and the Maidan Museum (Maidan Museum, 2020). The published chronicles and documents not only compile the factual basis of the events of October 1990 but also attempt to interpret them as the first instance of a "Maidan-type" protest in Ukraine. Notably, emphasis is placed on the phenomenon of the tent camp, self-organization, non-violent resistance actions, and demands that were partially met through the resignation of the government.

Finally, an important complement to the purely academic analysis is provided by the memoirs of direct participants in the events, published on platforms such as *Istorychna Pravda*, *Zbruč*, and other media outlets (Donii, 2020). These accounts add a narrative dimension to the understanding of the protest, revealing not only its political demands but also the psychology of resistance, the atmosphere of solidarity, and the hope that prevailed among the youth of that period. In this dimension, the Revolution on Granite appears not merely as a historical fact, but as a value matrix to which Ukrainian society has returned at critical moments in its modern history.

Thus, the body of scholarship devoted to the Revolution on Granite confirms its role as both a symbolic and practical starting point of Ukraine's European modernization trajectory – one that turned out to be longer and more complex than it seemed in October 1990.

Although the overwhelming majority of publications on the Revolution on Granite have been produced by Ukrainian authors in Ukrainian, the English-language academic discourse also contains material on this event as the symbolic beginning of the post-Soviet protest cycle in Ukraine. In most cases, these are works by Ukrainian authors writing in English or in collaboration with foreign scholars. For example, in Olga Onuch's (2017) publication, the Revolution on Granite is examined as an early example of non-violent civic resistance in an authoritarian context, which set a precedent for later mobilizations in 2004 and 2013–2014 (Onuch, 2017). This perspective is complemented by the study of O. Boyko and M. Kamionka (2023), who analyze the Revolution on Granite as a potentially "missed opportunity" for democratic transformation, noting the limited institutional impact despite its cultural and value significance (Boyko & Kamionka, 2023).

Also noteworthy is the research by G. Bolin (2023), where the Revolution on Granite is mentioned in the context of forming new meanings in the late Soviet space. The author interprets it as one of the first points of political articulation for post-totalitarian society in Ukraine (Bolin, 2023).

The most comprehensive treatment, however, can be found in the two-volume collective monograph *Three Revolutions: Mobilization and Change in Contemporary Ukraine* (Kowal, Mink, Reichardt, & Reichardt, 2019), in which the events of 1990 are analyzed as a key part of a triune revolutionary tradition – alongside the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity. The book contains interviews, memoirs, and analytical essays that present the Revolution on Granite as the starting point of a new political style in Ukrainian history. Thus, English-language scholarship increasingly integrates the Revolution on Granite into the broader body of studies on civic resistance, post-communist transformations, and the formation of political identity in Ukraine.

Of special note is the publication by Polish scholar Liana Hurska-Kowalczyk – a graduate of the Department of Political Science at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Doctor of Sciences, and researcher at the Institute of Security and Political Science,

University of Szczecin. Her academic interests focus on opposition movements, volunteerism, and protest mobilizations in Ukraine. In the article *Studencka „Rewolucja na granicie" w kontekście przemian społeczno-politycznych w Ukraińskiej Socjalistycznej Republice Radzieckiej* (Hurska-Kowalczyk, 2014), published in *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne*, she examines the phenomenon of student resistance in Kyiv in the autumn of 1990. The author considers the Revolution on Granite a turning point in the formation of the political agency of Ukrainian youth, as well as the first mass peaceful protest with a pro-European orientation, symbolically launching Ukraine's democratic transformation process. The article provides a detailed analysis of the protesters' demands, the mechanisms of their mobilization, and connections to similar processes in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland.

The Budapest Memorandum (1994): Geopolitical Compromise or Miscalculation?

Regarding the Budapest Memorandum, it should be recalled that after the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine found itself with the third-largest nuclear arsenal in the world. Yet in 1994, in Budapest, it agreed to full disarmament, joining the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) as a non-nuclear-weapon state. In exchange, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia provided guarantees of Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in its internal affairs.

For the Ukrainian leadership, this was an act of goodwill and an attempt to legitimize its independence within the architecture of the new European security order. Hopes that nuclear disarmament would pave the way for closer integration with the West were sincere, albeit, as time has shown, overly optimistic.

The key flaw of the Budapest Memorandum was that it was not a legally binding international treaty – it was a political document that lacked mechanisms for direct protection or sanctions in case of a breach. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and then launched a war in the Donbas, thereby violating all major provisions of the memorandum. Western parties, while expressing support for Ukraine, refrained from providing direct military assistance or taking strong measures at the early stage of the conflict.

This disillusionment was the first major blow to Ukraine's trust in "paper" international security guarantees. Ukrainian society and elites realized that no agreement could replace the ability to defend oneself, and the European and Euro-Atlantic vectors began to be viewed as tools for survival, not merely modernization.

The Budapest Memorandum became a symbol of a lost geopolitical opportunity and diplomatic naivety. Its failure brought to the forefront the issue of Ukraine's security integration with NATO and the EU, stimulated the development of its own defense capabilities, and radicalized the perception of Russia as a systemic threat.

By 2022, during the full-scale invasion, it became clear that only institutionally formalized alliances and systematic defense capacity could ensure the state's security. Thus, the lesson of Budapest today is understood as the ultimate recognition of the inevitability of NATO membership and the fundamental necessity of building relations with the West not on the basis of declarations, but through formal commitments, institutional integration, and real interaction.

Analysis of the Budapest Memorandum and its consequences occupies a significant place in Ukrainian political and legal discourse, as reflected in numerous scholarly works. Interest in this topic intensified after the annexation of Crimea and the creation of the so-called DPR and LPR in 2014 – marking the de facto start of the Russian-Ukrainian war – and grew even sharper with the onset of full-scale war in 2022.

Among Ukrainian authors, one of the most thorough studies is the article by a group of scholars led by Yuliia Sedliar (2023), *Political and legal assessment of the Budapest Memorandum: From Ukraine's renunciation of nuclear weapons to the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula*, which provides a comprehensive political and legal evaluation of the memorandum's effectiveness. The authors stress that the Budapest Memorandum was a political act, not a legally binding treaty, which allowed Russia in 2014 to violate its commitments with impunity. Sedliar emphasizes that the absence of clear security mechanisms proved critical in conditions of external aggression (Sedliar et al., 2023).

A substantive legal analysis of the Budapest Memorandum's status is presented in the work of T. Didych and A. Shevchenko (2023), who conduct a comparative legal assessment of the document as an international

obligation. They emphasize that the memorandum does not have the force of an international treaty under the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, as it was not ratified by the parties and did not provide binding implementation mechanisms or sanctions in the event of violation. The study highlights the vagueness of terms such as "assurances" and "consultations," which made the document vulnerable to political interpretation and, as a result, allowed the signatory states to avoid legal responsibility after 2014. The authors also criticize the absence of subsequent Ukrainian efforts to revise the security guarantees format or secure their binding status in a more obligatory form (Didych & Shevchenko, 2023).

In a study by T. Kuzio – written in English but focusing on Ukrainian perceptions (the author being a British-Canadian political scientist of Ukrainian descent) – it is noted that the memorandum fostered false expectations regarding the West's reaction in the event of a security breach. The author links the document's failure to the lack of strategic interest in Ukraine on the part of the U.S. and the UK at the time, which explains the weak response to Russian aggression (Kuzio, 2022).

In international scholarship, David Yost's (2015) work is frequently cited, examining the Budapest Memorandum as a key episode in the crisis of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The author stresses that violations of the guarantees create a precedent that could reduce other states' motivation to uphold NPT principles.

Within U.S. strategic analysis, special attention should be paid to the work of Steven Pifer (2011, 2024), who participated in the negotiations on Ukraine's denuclearization. In his publications, Pifer clearly distinguishes between "security assurances" (promises) and "security guarantees" (guarantees), noting that the former did not impose an obligation on the U.S. and UK to provide military assistance to Ukraine in the event of aggression. In this context, Pifer argues that the memorandum was more of a political gesture than a deterrence mechanism.

Complementing this analysis is the Harvard Belfer Center review (Budjeryn & Bunn, 2020), which notes that the memorandum gave Ukraine an illusory sense of security without being accompanied by the development of a real security partnership with NATO.

The Orange Revolution (2004): A Declaration for Europe Without Consequences

The Orange Revolution was the second major turning point in the history of post-Soviet Ukraine – following the Revolution on Granite and amid disillusionment with the Budapest Memorandum. In November–December 2004, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians took to the streets to protest massive falsifications in the presidential elections. At the heart of the protest were not only demands for an honest vote count, but also a value-based opposition to the authoritarian model of development that had been gradually consolidating under President Leonid Kuchma.

From the outset, the revolution carried strong connotations of democracy and freedom. This in itself evoked European values. EU symbolism was widely used. Participants equated democracy, transparency, and freedom with the European civilizational model. Thus, the Orange Revolution became a public declaration of a strategic choice in favor of the West, continuing the value-based trajectory initiated by the Revolution on Granite.

Unlike the period after the Budapest Memorandum, when Ukraine sought to integrate into the European security architecture through disarmament and diplomacy, 2004 was marked by a civic breakthrough – society itself began to shape the foreign policy agenda. However, this bottom-up mobilization was not backed by top-down political will.

Following Viktor Yushchenko's victory, it seemed the path to Europe was open. Yet the subsequent years proved disappointing. Political uncertainty, internal power struggles, populism, and flawed reforms all contributed to a gradual erosion of trust both within the country and among European partners. The political elites proved unable to institutionalize the civilizational course proclaimed by the Maidan.

The missed window of European integration between 2005 and 2010 was as painful as the failure of security guarantees in 1994. Whereas after Budapest Ukraine still hoped for international support, after the Maidan it lost the initiative through its own inaction. Although the Orange Revolution did not immediately lead to a pro-Russian revanche, the internal exhaustion of the European course resulted in the return of authoritarian tendencies – culminating in Yanuko-

vych's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU in 2013.

Thus, the Orange Revolution was a vivid manifesto of the European choice, but without systematic political consolidation. It was a revolution of expectations that did not materialize. In this sense, it stands as a symbol of the unrealized potential of Ukraine's Europeanization – unlike the preceding revolution, which set the direction, and the subsequent one, which defended that choice.

Ukrainian scholars devote considerable attention to the Orange Revolution's role as a key stage in the country's transformational dynamics. In several publications, it is examined in connection with other pivotal moments in Ukraine's recent political history – the Revolution on Granite and the Revolution of Dignity. At the same time, many scholarly works are devoted exclusively to this event. Romanova (2008), for example, argues that the Orange Revolution significantly altered the trajectory of Ukraine's political regime, eroding authoritarian structures and prompting the emergence of a new configuration of political actors. Vyhovska (2005) highlights the revolution's cultural and societal significance as a moment of the civic community's awakening to its own responsibility and unity. In her view, the Orange Revolution contributed to the formation of an active civic identity and the strengthening of democratic thinking in Ukraine.

The Orange Revolution was also addressed "in the heat of the moment" in a dedicated section of the proceedings from the nationwide academic conference organized by the Center for Political Studies (Lviv), *Ukraine After the Presidential Elections: The Establishment of Democracy and the Development of Civil Society* (Lviv, September 24, 2005) (Romaniuk & Skochylias, 2005). The conference materials include numerous publications analyzing the Orange Revolution and its accompanying events. In particular, Yurii Matsievskyi examines the revolution through the lens of interdisciplinary social research; Oksana Dashchakivska analyzes the process of legitimizing Ukraine's political elite after the revolution; Oleksandr Romaniuk explores prospects for the country's transformation process; Yurii Tyshkun interprets the events through Max Weber's modernization theory; Mykola Buchyn views the revolution as a societal reaction to the use of administrative resources in the 2004 presidential elections; and Vitalii Lytvyn examines the role of ethnic factors in the political process after those elections.

Foreign scholarship offers a broader comparative perspective. Lane (2008) views the Orange Revolution as an example of popular resistance within the framework of "color revolutions", while at the same time questioning the actual degree of its transformative effect. In the "Journal of Democracy" analytical review, Kuzio (2005) stresses that the opposition's mobilization was rooted in the values of democracy and transparency, which became central to the protest movement's demands and ultimately ensured a peaceful transfer of power.

The Polish perspective is presented in Legucka's (2006) article, which analyzes the foreign policy challenges following the revolution and its impact on Ukraine's international positioning. The researcher emphasizes that Ukraine's choice in favor of Europe acquired a geostrategic dimension, but remained informal in foreign policy practice due to the absence of institutional consolidation.

The Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014): The Point of No Return

The events of autumn 2013 to winter 2014 marked a turning point in Ukraine's modern history. After a period of lost European integration momentum, characteristic of the post-Orange Revolution era, Ukrainian society once again took to the streets – this time not only as a protest against injustice, but as a determined defense of the value-based course toward European integration. The refusal of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov's government and President Viktor Yanukovych to sign the Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013 was the spark that ignited the outrage of millions.

Unlike the Orange Revolution, where European rhetoric played a symbolic role, the Revolution of Dignity placed European integration at the very center of the protest, making it a clear political marker and line of division. Indeed, "Euromaidan" – the protest's initial name – directly signaled that the European vector had ceased to be an abstract goal and had become a core element of national identity.

A distinctive feature of the Revolution of Dignity was that civil society acted not only as the driving force of the protest, but also as an actor in shaping foreign policy. The lack of trust in state institutions,

the inertia of parliament, and the aggressive behavior of the security forces triggered the self-organization of the protest movement, encompassing every sphere – from self-defense to diplomatic representation of the Maidan's interests. This period saw the emergence of the phenomenon of "horizontal politics" – without traditional parties, without centralized leadership, but with a powerful shared value denominator.

The violent suppression of protests and the mass killings of peaceful citizens in February 2014 became the final straw – transforming public demand into a revolutionary renewal of power. Yet the Maidan's triumph was also the prologue to a new stage of Russian aggression.

By March 2014, Russia had annexed Crimea, and by April, it had launched hybrid warfare in the Donbas, combining military force, informational propaganda, political destabilization, and economic pressure. Thus, the Revolution of Dignity became the point of no return not only for Ukraine's domestic politics but also for its geopolitical orientation. Renouncing the European course was no longer seen as an option – it was considered a betrayal of the Maidan's values.

This period also marked a radical rethinking of Ukraine's international status. The loss of trust in Russia, the final collapse of illusions about the Budapest Memorandum, and a new quality of relations with the EU and NATO were the logical consequences of this revolution. If before 2013 European integration had been regarded as a strategic goal, after 2014 it became a necessary condition for the survival of the state and the preservation of its sovereignty.

The protest of 2013–2014 is understood in Ukrainian academic and museum-research contexts as a multilevel process of civic mobilization that evolved into long-term transformations of memory, institutions, and policies. Comprehensive collections of scholarly works, such as *The Revolution of Dignity: On the Way to History*, mark a shift in focus from the "event-protest" to its historiography and the methodologies for studying it (oral history, microhistory, political sociology), and demonstrate how Euromaidan has become the subject of systematic academic reflection in Ukraine (*Collection of Scientific Papers*, 2018; National Museum of the Revolution of Dignity & *Krytyka* magazine, 2020). A significant empirical base is provided by oral history archives (*Maidan: Oral History*) and representative surveys on public attitudes toward the revolution, which offer material for interpreting the social bases of protest and dynamics of support (National Museum of the Revolution of Dignity, 2021; Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, 2016).

International English-language scholarship presents clearly defined thematic clusters. First, the sociology of participants: analyses in *Journal of Democracy*, based on Ukrainian Protest Project data, depict the profile of protesters, the waves of participation, and differences from the Orange Revolution (Beissinger et al., 2014). Second, the role of media and information tools: the anthology *The Maidan and Beyond* examines in detail how both traditional and new media influenced escalation and de-escalation, including the "dictatorship laws" of January 16 as a trigger for radicalization (Dyczok, 2014; Onuch, 2015). Third, digital mobilization: big-data studies (Twitter/Facebook/blogs) describe digital coordination patterns and narratives that sustained the protest's resilience (Brantly, 2019). In addition, comparative studies explain how Euromaidan evolved from a protest into long-term civic activation, becoming embedded in the broader process of democratization and anti-corruption reforms after 2014 (Krapfl, 2023).

Polish academic discussion emphasizes two aspects. First, the interpretation of Euromaidan as the *Rewolucja Godności* ("Revolution of Dignity"), which revealed a core of values (dignity, freedom, equality) and changed the framework of Ukraine's foreign policy; this is evident both in journal articles (Olszański, 2015; Kutyło, 2016) and in collective volumes and series such as *Poznańskie Studia Wschodoznawcze* (Skrukwa & Studenna-Skrukwa, 2015). Second, the institutionalization of consequences: the edited volume *Rewolucja w imię godności. Ukraiński Euromajdan 2013–2014* synthesizes the political, legal, and social dimensions (changes in electoral law, the role of the opposition, regional differences) and serves as a landmark work in Polish Ukrainian studies on Euromaidan (Skrukwa & Studenna-Skrukwa, 2015). Additional studies trace the connection between the European integration choice and the "long durée" of Ukrainian modernization debates (Hnatiuk, 2015).

War as a Point of No Return: The 2022 Invasion and the Final Consolidation of the European Course

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022 was not merely an escalation of the armed conflict that had been ongoing since 2014. It was an existential trial that placed under threat the very existence of Ukrainian statehood, sovereignty, identity, and the physical survival of the nation.

Russian aggression finally destroyed any remaining illusions about the possibility of "neutrality" or balancing between geopolitical blocs. Whereas the previous revolutions (2004 and 2013–2014) had merely declared the European choice, the war of 2022 transformed this choice into the only viable strategy for preserving the state and its people. To be part of Europe now means to have a chance at survival; to be outside of it means to fall within the sphere of Russian terror.

Against the backdrop of destruction, bombings, crimes against humanity, and genocidal practices in the occupied territories, Ukrainian society demonstrated unprecedented consolidation around a European identity. The values of freedom, dignity, human rights, and self-governance – once largely abstract – became elements of daily struggle. Europe ceased to be merely a symbol or a promise, becoming instead a concrete vector of resistance to imperial violence.

At the same time, the European course received institutional consolidation for the first time. In June 2022, Ukraine was granted EU candidate status and intensified strategic cooperation with NATO. Sweeping reforms were launched in the defense sector, energy, justice, digital transformation, and anti-corruption policy – not only as a prerequisite for accession, but as an urgent necessity dictated by wartime realities.

It is important to emphasize that after 2022, the European vector in Ukraine ceased to be a matter for debate. Whereas in the 1990s and 2000s the question of EU integration depended on political fluctuations or the ideological preferences of leaders, today European integration is perceived as a strategy of national self-preservation requiring no additional legitimization.

Ukrainian-language sources document the activation of civil society, which has taken on roles in defense, assistance, and reform. The collective monograph *Ukrainian Society in Wartime* underscores deep mobilization, while analytical reports by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the Razumkov Centre demonstrate how perceptions of the EU have become a matter of societal survival. Even during wartime, the European integration agenda has remained a priority thanks to candidate status and the tangible implementation of reforms in key sectors (Holovakha et al., 2022; Razumkov Centre, 2023; Komakha, Orliv, & Ruban, 2024).

English-language sources frame the war in the context of accelerated state-building and the strengthening of ties with the EU as a reaction to existential threat. Tomasz Grzegorz Grosse analyzes the war as a factor in state development, while other works highlight how the EU has focused more intensely on issues of defense, economy, and energy security (Grosse, 2023; Börzel, 2023). Analysis by Chatham House underscores the role of civil society in the country's recovery during wartime (Lutsevych, 2024).

Studies by Polish authors emphasize the political, security, and societal dimensions of Ukraine's European integration in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Fiszer analyzes Poland's official position on Russian aggression, viewing it as an important factor in advancing Ukraine's aspirations for EU and NATO membership (Fiszer, 2024). Grosse examines the war's implications for European Union policy, particularly changes in the realms of security, energy, and integration strategy (Grosse, 2023). Palagnyuk focuses on public opinion in Ukraine regarding European integration during wartime. Based on sociological surveys, she shows how support for EU membership has risen to a historic high since 2022 (Palagnyuk, 2025).

Lost Opportunities and the Challenges of Irreversibility

Three decades of Ukraine's European choice is a history not only of progress, but also of lost trust, unrealized opportunities, and harsh lessons of history. From the student tents on Granite in 1990 to the trenches of Bakhmut and Avdiivka in 2022–2025, Ukrainian society has repeatedly had to prove its commitment to European values through struggle rather than under conditions of stable development.

The failure to realize the potential of the Orange Revolution, institutional weakness after 1994, systemic corruption, and the inability of political elites

to maintain a consolidated course opened windows of opportunity for Russia, which consistently used pauses in Ukraine's European integration dynamics to intervene, destabilize, and wage hybrid aggression. At the same time, Western passivity – particularly in the 1990s and 2000s – as well as policies of appeasing the Kremlin, contributed to the accumulation of risks that ultimately exploded into war.

Yet it has been civil society – from the students of 1990 to the volunteers and soldiers of 2022 – that proved to be the true agent of historical change. Time and again, it corrected the mistakes of the political class, laying the foundation for what can today be called the irreversibility of Ukraine's European course.

At the same time, 2025 brings a new wave of challenges that allows no room for complacency. Donald Trump's return to power in the United States has been accompanied by attempts to force Ukraine into ending the war on terms close to the Kremlin's ultimatums – effectively denying Ukraine the right to strategic self-determination. In certain Central and Eastern European countries, notably Hungary, Slovakia, as well as Romania and partially Poland, far-right and anti-Ukrainian political forces are gaining strength, appealing to war fatigue, national interest protection, and "realism" in relations with Russia.

In such a context, Ukraine's European choice is no longer a movement toward Europe, but a struggle for a place in a Europe itself increasingly experiencing a crisis of solidarity. Ukraine is not merely seeking to join Europe – it must prove that its presence in the European political and security space is vital not only for itself, but for the very project of the EU as such.

For its part, the EU – through its key members, including France, Germany, Italy, as well as many other Western and some Eastern European states – has, since the outset of the full-scale war, demonstrated unity with Ukraine not in words and declarations, but in deeds, supporting it politically, financially, and militarily. It has also provided support through migration and social instruments, offering refuge to millions of Ukrainian refugees. In this regard, special credit and thanks are due to Poland, which has contributed the most to political and migration assistance.

Scenarios for the Development of Ukraine's European Course (2025–2030)

Optimistic Scenario: "Integration Amid Challenges"

- Despite changes in U.S. policy under Donald Trump's administration, the main EU countries (Germany, France, the Nordic states, the Baltic countries) maintain long-term support for Ukraine.
- Ukraine carries out structural reforms: judicial system, energy sector, anti-corruption institutions.
- Defense integration intensifies: joint projects with NATO, participation in Western military-industrial initiatives.
- Between 2028 and 2030, Ukraine opens accession negotiations with the EU or signs a new expanded agreement with political membership guarantees.
- The war does not end completely but becomes controlled and positional, without loss of territory.
- **Realistic Scenario: "Controlled Uncertainty"**
- The U.S. reduces direct military assistance but maintains a strategic presence in Eastern Europe.
- The EU remains divided: one part supports Ukraine, another (Hungary, Slovakia, partially Poland, Italy) blocks key decisions or delays political enlargement.
- Ukraine implements some domestic reforms, but institutional instability persists amid war and economic difficulties.
- The war continues in a format of "periodic escalations," with Russia retaining occupied territories but without launching new large-scale offensives.
- The European course remains a strategic goal, but EU accession is postponed beyond 2030.

Pessimistic Scenario: "A Compromise at Ukraine's Expense"

- At Trump's initiative, the U.S. reaches a deal with Russia to "freeze the conflict," effectively recognizing Russian control over part of Ukraine's territories.
- The EU, under pressure from new governments in Poland, Romania, and prevailing political forces in Slovakia and Hungary, withdraws

from active support, citing "war fatigue" and economic difficulties.
- Ukraine faces internal protests, destabilization from attempts at political revanche by pro-Russian forces, and divisions over security and foreign policy.
- Civil society loses initiative amid mobilization fatigue, emigration, and demoralization.
- The European course is de facto dismantled, and Ukraine shifts into a geopolitical "grey zone."

Postscript: Recent Developments

At the time this material was being prepared as a conference paper, the author concluded it with the scenario-based analysis presented above. However, subsequent events – both in Ukraine and on the international stage (particularly involving Donald Trump) – prompted the inclusion of the latest developments. Regarding domestic events relevant to screening Ukraine's European integration prospects, two in July 2025 were of particular significance.

The first was a change of government. This matters for the topic of this publication because it revealed a number of factors indicative of the state and level of democracy in Ukraine, as well as the influence of the European factor on domestic politics.

- First, questions were raised about how consistent, transparent, and lawful the process was. Overall, there were several concerns: there was no significant public demand for a change of government, and the process was determined within the ruling elite, remaining opaque to the public.
- Second, some appointments were initially planned but later changed, indicating a lack of strategic planning.
- Third, although Ukraine is currently a parliamentary-presidential republic – meaning the prime minister's candidacy should be determined by the parliamentary majority – in practice, the president played the decisive role rather than parliament. While the parliament is dominated by a pro-presidential majority, meaning the outcome would likely have been the same, public messaging conflicted with formal procedures.
- Fourth, there was no opportunity for debate in the political arena during ministerial appointments, as the new government was approved as a package.

These nuances led critics to claim that Ukraine still operates under an "Asian" model of governance, in contrast to a Western (European) model, where decisions (including personnel) are made collectively rather than by directive. In mitigation, it should be recalled that Ukraine is in the midst of an open, large-scale war, which necessitates swift decision-making to avoid political unrest.

The second event, explicitly likened to the three previous revolutions and even partly given the traditional protest label "Maidan," was the wave of anti-corruption protests. On 22 July 2025, the Verkhovna Rada adopted, and President Zelensky signed, Law № 12414, which effectively stripped the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAP) of their independence, placing them under the control of the Prosecutor General's Office. The amendments included provisions allowing the prosecutor to issue binding instructions, close investigations, and otherwise interfere in NABU and SAP operations (Wikipedia, 2025).

From 22 to 31 July, mass protests were held in Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, Dnipro, and other cities – with between 10,000 and 16,000 people gathering in the capital alone. The protests were peaceful, and the authorities did not intervene. Most participants were young people, including teenagers. As a result, protest signs often included profanity. In some respects, the action resembled a flash mob or performance. Yet substantively, alongside anti-corruption slogans, pro-European messages were frequently seen on the cardboard placards.

The broader public largely supported the protests and criticized the government's decision. A significant factor in pressuring the authorities was the unified expression of concern by European politicians and institutions, given that the independence of anti-corruption bodies is a key commitment within the European integration framework.

However, other perspectives were voiced. The government justified the law as a measure against Russian influence, portraying it as a safeguard for anti-corruption infrastructure. On social media, some influential voices

argued that the protests risked destabilizing Ukrainian society – undesirable in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the need for national unity. Others pointed out that for many participants, especially younger ones, the protest lacked a substantive foundation and was more an opportunity for self-expression and participation in a large social gathering of peers.

Ultimately, under both internal and external pressure, the authorities reversed course. President Zelensky first announced the drafting and prompt adoption of a law to restore NABU and SAP's independence. Soon after, on 31 July, the Verkhovna Rada adopted, and Zelensky signed, Law № 13533, which restored their independence. As to the decisive factors behind this reversal, a full determination would require further analysis. However, based on surface observation, the key driver was not domestic protest alone, but Western pressure. Without European support, the Ukrainian government would lose the means to resist Russia, leading to catastrophe. Domestic protests complemented and reinforced this pressure. Therefore, this was the result of a combined influence of both factors.

This episode once again demonstrated that Ukrainian civil society remains active and effective, even during wartime – capable of defending hard-won democratic achievements.

Max Boot, a Russian-born American military historian and currently the Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Senior Fellow for National Security at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, wrote in his column *"Ukrainians remind Zelensky what democracy looks like"* in *The Washington Post* that the mass protests against limiting the independence of NABU and SAP were a landmark example of living democracy. He noted that – unlike authoritarian regimes – Ukraine's authorities did not resort to repression but instead listened to the people: the president stated he heard their concerns, after which a bill was introduced to restore the institutions' independence. In Boot's view, this reaction confirms the deep-rooted nature of Ukrainian democracy, even in wartime.

Thus, the anti-corruption episode showed that European partners play an important role in Ukraine's democratic progress, but that influence is effective only because of Ukrainians' internal commitment to democracy and Western political standards (transparency, accountability, responsibility). The event provided strong confirmation of Ukrainians' determination to continue integrating with the EU and, despite some maneuvering by the authorities, their intent to maintain Western support – and therefore the inevitability of adhering to Western standards in key areas.

It should be added that the core of this article was written in mid-June, that is, before the idea and plans for a Trump–Putin meeting emerged, when the third scenario was considered purely hypothetical.

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