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## IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE IN UKRAINE\*

*The article examines the effectiveness of implementing the Eastern Partnership (EP) initiative in Ukraine using the SWOT analysis methodology. It is noted that from the EP the participating countries expect new opportunities for economic development, reforming the internal political sphere, attracting investment, resolving regional conflicts, and so on. The strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of reforms in Ukraine in the context of the implementation of the European integration course and the implementation of the association agreement with the EU are highlighted. It is determined that the strengths of Ukraine as the addressee of the EP are an extensive system of coordination of efforts in implementing reforms and their support by the European Union. Attention is focused on the weak (systemic, institutional and situational) aspects of the implementation of this initiative. Based on the EP Index data, the state of implementation of reforms in Ukraine is assessed.*

*It is concluded that the effectiveness of the implementation of the EP initiative in Ukraine is insufficient, because it is taking place in the conditions of: first, Russia's opposition to this process; second, the growth of political and economic instability, slow reforms and democratic backwardness, corruption, etc.; third, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in eastern Ukraine. Recommendations were developed to improve the effectiveness of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU within the framework of EP. Contradictory conflicts between these factors, their interrelation and interdependence slow down the implementation of Ukraine's declared European integration aspirations. Consequently, the prospects for further scientific research will be to find out the specifics of promoting reforms in the “Associated trio” format, as the countries that are the recipients of EP initiative, which today demonstrate the most progressive dynamics in terms of ongoing reforms and relations with the EU.*

**Keywords:** European Union, Eastern Partnership, European integration, Association Agreement.

One of the ways to achieve Ukraine's strategic goals is its cooperation within the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership (EP) initiative, which contributes to the implementation of internal reforms and strengthening the integration of our state with the EU. For Ukraine, the importance of EP lies, first of all, in the fact that the initiative is a kind of “link” with the EU enlargement policy. Hence, among all EP member countries, Ukraine strives to maximize the use of this format and potential for cooperation. Also, Ukraine's approach to EU standards will have a positive impact on other post-Soviet EP countries and strengthen cooperation in the European region as a whole.

It is noteworthy that within the framework of EP, the participating countries mainly count on new opportunities for economic development, energy independence from the Russian Federation, reform of the internal political sphere, financial assistance, as well as the involvement of EU countries in resolving regional conflicts. For its part, the EU strongly supports the aspirations of the EP's partner countries. Increased cooperation between the participants contributes to their adaptation and readiness for new challenges and problems, in particular in the geopolitical dimension [5]. The purpose of the article is to study the implementation of the EP initiative in Ukraine by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of such a process, as well as proposals to strengthen its effectiveness.

The problem of functioning of EP as an important component of the European Neighborhood Policy is studied by many foreign and Ukrainian scientists. Here it is worth highlighting the achievements of such scientists as: A. Lehutska [18], B. Heremek [21], T. Kapusniak [17], D. Milcharek [20], S. Dolynska [1],

V. Dudko [2], H. Maksak [5], I. Nahorniak [6], M. Rabinovych [8], S. Blokman [12], Ya. Turchyn [9]. In their works, they focus on the study of the history of the creation of the EP as a whole, the features of its development, as well as the influence of external factors on the need for its modernization. But the available research does not fully take into account the peculiarities and problems of Ukraine in cooperation with the EU. In the light of a comprehensive consideration of this issue, it is advisable to use the most up-to-date analytical documents on Ukraine in EP, data from EP indices, as well as other statistical data.

Since the beginning of the multifunctional dialogue of Ukraine within the framework of EP, there have been numerous positive developments and results of reforms, as well as many omissions. In order to find out the effectiveness of the implementation of the EP initiative in Ukraine, based on the SWOT analysis methodology, we will consider the strengths and weaknesses, as well as threats and opportunities for cooperation between Ukraine within the EP.

The most significant achievement of Ukraine in the framework of EP policy was the conclusion of the “association agreement” with the EU, which entered into force in September 2017 and is an effective tool for bringing the EP countries closer to European standards and norms. The agreement includes such components as common foreign and security policy; justice and internal affairs; deep and comprehensive free trade area (FTA). European institutions have already provided Ukraine with financial assistance in the form of grants and loans in the amount of about 16 billion. euro, which is aimed at supporting the reform process. It fixed a new format of relations between Ukraine and the EU based on the principles of “political association and economic integration”, defined a list of social and economic reforms in Ukraine for rapprochement with the EU [2].

Despite the political difficulties, several socially important reforms were launched in 2017, in particular: 1) pension-stabilization of the solidary (first) level of the pension system; 2) educational – new principles of teaching and managing schools, inclusive education; 3) medical; 4) transparent financial reporting for foreign investors; 5) legislative exclusion of unjustified pressure from law enforcement agencies on persons whose rights are restricted during pre – trial investigation [10]. In 2018, notable achievements in Ukraine were: 1) depoliticization of the civil service; 2) Electronic Declaration System; 3) access to the Horizon 2020 program, which finances research and innovation [2].

According to the document of the EP “20 expected achievements until 2020” published during the Brussels 2017 Summit, which is closely related to the tasks of the Association Agreement, Ukraine partially managed to fulfil the tasks in the areas of Economy; Public Administration; relationships and society, which are simultaneously the main ones within the four thematic platforms of EP. In general, Ukraine has made progress in 19 of the 20 tasks outlined in the above-mentioned document [13].

Based on the analysis of numerous expert assessments, we can say that among the strengths of Ukraine as the addressee of EP as a whole is the developed coordination of efforts on reforms and their support by the EU. Ukraine demonstrates success in the areas of decentralization and administrative services, and even an example for other countries in the region and beyond. At the same time, the development of cooperation with donor countries in the security, trade and economic spheres is a strong point. It is also worth pointing out that the EU provides humanitarian aid in eastern Ukraine (681 million euro were provided). euro [13].

Among them, we can note the following, such as: EU4Business (business development through lending for EU funds and grants); EU4Energy (energy infrastructure); EU4Digital (cybersecurity, digitalization); Erasmus+ (educational opportunities abroad); EU4PAR (Public Administration reform strategy), etc. Consequently, Ukraine’s participation in these programs increases its involvement in European processes under the auspices of the EU.

Similarly, summing up the achievements of Ukraine in the framework of EP, Ya. Lytvynenko and A. Mashthaler generally note positive aspects [11]: 1) strengthening of interaction between EP countries with the EU without the participation of the Russian Federation; 2) signing of the Association Agreement with the EU, increasing trade volumes between them; 3) introduction of EU standards in the internal legislation of the addressee countries; 4) introduction of visa-free travel; 5) access to EU programs (mentioned above); 6) increasing awareness of the EU in Ukraine; 7) increasing European identity among Ukrainians; 8) creation of EP institutions for intergovernmental, inter-parliamentary, business cooperation (Inter-Parliamentary Assembly “Ukraine-Moldova-Georgia”, Conference of local and regional councils, EP Business Forum); 9) creation of a civil society forum of the EP member countries in order to influence national governments and EU institutions; 10) EU support involvement of non-governmental organizations and citizens of partner countries in the implementation of the EP policy.

This is confirmed by the data of the EP Index, which reflects and compares the achievements of each of the partner countries based on two criteria for approaching the EU-the implementation of standards and relations with the EU. Thus, according to the 2017 EP index, according to the first criterion, Ukraine,

Georgia and Moldova have been leaders of European integration in implementing the provisions of the Association Agreement since 2014. In particular, Ukraine became the first in terms of implementing European norms and international standards. The index of Ukraine in this aspect was 0.73. In turn, for Armenia this indicator is 0.66, Moldova – 0.65, Georgia – 0.64, Azerbaijan – 0.56, Belarus-0.52. Ukraine won the Championship as a result of approaching EU standards in ensuring freedom of speech, security and justice, equal opportunities, environmental protection, climate policy and transport. But according to the criterion of relations with the EU at the level of business, citizens and governments, Ukraine ranked third after Moldova and Georgia [14]. According to the EP Index for 2021, according to the first criterion, the leaders are Ukraine and Moldova, each of them has a score of 0.70, followed by Georgia (0.65). Armenia received a pleasant result in terms of developing democracy and governance, but significantly less in terms of the policy of approaching the EU, so it took fourth place (0.63). In this aspect, there is a small gap between Armenia and Georgia (0.65). The fifth and sixth places are occupied by Belarus (0.49) and Azerbaijan (0.44) [15, p. 4]. Accordingly, according to the second criterion – relations with the EU, Ukraine ranks 2nd with a score of 0.77. The first according to this criterion is Moldova – 0.80, the third – Georgia (0.70) [15, p. 43]. So, according to the EP indices, Ukraine is still a leader in certain areas.

Despite the positive steps taken by Ukraine towards European integration, it should be understood that its cooperation within the framework of EP also contains weaknesses, which is explained by a number of reasons that should be divided into systemic, institutional and situational [8].

Among the negative systemic factors that slow down European integration in Ukraine, it is worth highlighting 1) a high level of corruption; 2) oligarchic influences; 3) political pressure; 4) economic difficulties, in particular due to the pandemic; 5) the formation of public opinion on European integration under the influence of Information TV channels with a negative view of approaching the EU (ZIK, NewsOne, 112); 6) an increase in the level of insecurity of citizens (an increase in the number of contract killings, harassment, etc.); 7) an increase in distrust of the authorities on the part of society. It is obvious that EP will not solve many systemic problems in Ukraine (mainly the presence of oligarchic power and a high level of corruption), but it definitely contributes to the development of pluralism of opinions and modernization, initiating reforms and activating citizens to participate in them. And this, in turn, is a powerful transformational force.

At the institutional level, it is worth highlighting 1) weak dialogue with the EU to resolve the military conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine; 2) insufficient involvement of stakeholders (stakeholders) in the implementation of reforms; 3) unsatisfactory state of anti-corruption policy (low efficiency and discrediting of anti-corruption bodies); 3) lack of deoligarchization and deoffshorization; 4) insufficient reforms of the judicial system.

Situational reasons include 1) the elections in Ukraine and the revision of the reform agenda and communication strategy with the EU by the new government); 2) the global quarantine, which made it impossible to “live” communication with partners and led to the postponement of the implementation of many projects.

As already noted, the least results in Ukraine were achieved in the energy sector. This is due to 1) the construction of the geopolitical project of the Russian Federation “Nord Stream-2”; 2) the introduction of changes to the energy legislation took place without prior consultations with the Energy Community; 3) the delay of the Russian Federation in the negotiation process with Ukraine and the EU on the conclusion of a new transit agreement based on European legislation [7].

A negative trend of reform in Ukraine as a whole may be the illusory nature of changes, a certain regime of “extinguishing fires” through a fictitious orientation to development and a significant rush in its implementation, which can turn state reforms into “fake” [8].

At the same time, it is worth noting that the weaknesses of implementing the goals of EP in Ukraine are closely related to certain shortcomings of the EU policy within EP as a whole. In this aspect, S. Blokman identifies three strategic omissions of EP. They are 1) lack of consensus within the EU regarding the ultimate goal of EP; 2) the EU does not seek to strengthen security support in the region; 3) different vision of EU member states of relations with the Russian Federation [12]. According to S. Blokman, the EU should respond more clearly to these strategic challenges and not compromise its own values, endangering the security and socio-economic progress of the EP member states. The same opinion is shared by expert H. Maksak, referring to the weaknesses of the SP 1) the unwillingness of the EU to recognize the prospect of membership for states that have declared such ambitions; 2) the presence of political differences in the positions of 6 partners, weak cooperation between them; 3) the unjustifiability of the multilateral format of cooperation, which in terms of dynamics and resource content significantly inferior to the bilateral level of cooperation with the EU [12].

New initiatives and concepts within the framework of EP, which provide Ukraine with great opportunities on its European integration path of development, are becoming increasingly relevant. Worthy of attention, in our opinion, are such as: 1) “Associated Trio”; 2) “Trio Strategy 2030”; 3) “Marshal’s plan for Ukraine”.

It should be noted that the “Associated trio” is a fairly successful format of cooperation between Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which, according to the EP Index, show the most positive developments on the way to European integration. The trio believe that official Tbilisi, Kishinev and Kyiv now have every reason to officially get the prospect of joining the EU, which should be the ultimate goal of their cooperation within the framework of EP. Issues of greater “promotion” often remain only the subject of discussion at the level of the EU’s political leadership.

Regarding the second initiative – “Trio Strategy 2030”, we note that this is a document of the Lithuanian delegation to the European people’s party, which sees promising the introduction of a “Trio process” in relation to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova like the “Berlin Process” (2014), which contributed to the rapprochement of the countries of the Western Balkans to the EU. In 2020, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution calling on the EU to adopt this strategy. It is a positive example of a differentiated approach that can contribute to the deepening integration of “associate” partners with the EU. The governments of the three countries in public communications should emphasize the introduction of symmetrical approaches to the states of the Western Balkans and the leaders of EP.

The third initiative is the economic “Marshals plan for Ukraine”, approved in 2017 by the relevant resolution of the European people’s party. One of its authors, Lithuanian A. Kubilius, said that over 5 years, 25 billion dollars should be invested in the Ukrainian economy. This, according to experts, would raise its growth to 6-8% from the current 2%. In addition, the plan provides for the allocation of about 30 billion euro for Ukraine. It is likely that the same economic assistance plans will be formed for Georgia and Moldova, which may become a new economic tool of the strengthened “Eastern Partnership plus” [6].

According to the results of the 6th EP summit, which took place on December 15, 2021 in Brussels, a new agenda of the initiative was fixed, which sets out such goals for the recipient countries as 1) increasing trade, accelerating economic growth and creating jobs in the participating states, strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law, supporting the transition to “green” and digital technologies, as well as supporting fair, gender-equal and inclusive societies. There is also an economic and investment plan for 2 2.3 billion. euro and investments of more than 17 billion euro [4].

For their part, within the framework of this summit, the trio of participating countries presented a joint statement in which they noted the following positions on further opportunities for cooperation: 1) approved the Economic and Investment Plan; 2) expect the EU to recognize the European perspective for the trio countries; 3) noted the importance of the common security and defence policy (CSDP) and the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) [16].

On the one hand, Ukraine, as an associate partner of the EU, more resolutely defends its European integration aspirations and achieves considerable results on this path, and on the other hand, instability in the Donbas and the loss of Crimea by Ukraine for EP are new threats to which there are no unambiguous counteractions. This creates some future uncertainty and gives grounds to theorize about the likely trajectories of Ukraine’s cooperation in EP as a whole. In view of these circumstances, international experts presented 4 scenarios for the development of Ukraine as a member of EP [22]: 1) “quiet integration”, which does not provide for the prospects of Ukraine’s membership in the European Union, but only Economic Cooperation, which will certainly be beneficial to Russia; 2) “Russian hegemony”, that is, the actual return of Ukraine to the full influence of Russia, the realization of the “imperial dream” of the latter; 3) “cooperation between the EU and Russia”, which provides for their unification in contrast to the global leadership of China, and Eastern European countries will turn into components of the geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation; 4) “Resolute civil society or civil impulse”, when thanks to citizens it will be possible to integrate the region into the EU. The latter scenario is the most optimal and allows EP to become a full-fledged and independent subject of international relations, and the participating countries, in turn, to move to the level of self-reliance, that is, the ability to independently finance their development goals.

At the same time, it should be noted that these scenarios are rather abstract, since they do not take into account various regional and global trends. Polish analyst P. Havlicek noted on this occasion: “trends range from domestic political events in 6 EP to the Russian Federation and the EU, from regional and global geopolitics to the participation of the United States and China, from security and energy issues to economic dynamics, technological changes, demographic problems and from the information space to social problems” and they cannot be predicted [23]. In particular, in his opinion, there is another scenario – “dark”, according

to which the EU will be drawn into itself – experiencing a period of chaos, and will accept the status quo of its foreign relations.

According to many scientists, the prospects for the development of EP now significantly depend on a clear definition of the boundaries of this European project. The EU should clearly define its borders where EP begins and only then form its long-term strategies with partner countries. Avoiding this only changes the views of Eurosceptic people and increases criticism of the EU itself. However, it is too heterogeneous internally and such ambitions still remain unfulfilled. In this situation, Ukraine expects gradual integration into the CES, which will give a more concrete form to the original idea of a neighbourhood policy with the East, which Romano Prodi described as “everything but membership” [22].

Summing up, we should focus on recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the implementation of EP initiative, in particular in Ukraine. Thus, experts I. Ciolan and A. Paul give the following recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the EP [19]: 1). “Soft pillar of security” – in its future strategic compass, the EU should focus on the importance of stabilizing the eastern neighbourhood and start a dialogue on security and defence issues, strengthen its participation in protracted conflicts; 2). “Eastern Partnership at two speeds” – the EU should promote integration processes with the Associated troika with the simultaneous involvement of other EP states. “Improved EU strategic communication” – the EU should improve informing recipient countries about the achievements and benefits of the joint venture; 4). “Increased resistance to disinformation” – official Brussels should strengthen measures to counter online disinformation campaigns and help partner states create sustainable strategies to combat disinformation and fake news.

Similarly, Ukrainian experts focus on such recommendations [3] 1). The EU should replace the practice of “carrot and stick” in favour of carefully defining political goals, establishing balanced relations with EP partner countries and giving them greater responsibility for policy implementation; 2). The principle of “variable geometry” should be applied to EU joint venture countries, which provides for various formats of cooperation depending on the goals set; 3). Civil society, in particular the national platforms of the EP Civil Society Forum, should become equal participants in the implementation of reforms; 4). The next roadmap should take into account all the shortcomings and be clearer and more ambitious.

Thus, based on the analysis, we present a table of SWOT analysis of the implementation of the EP initiative in Ukraine:

	<i>Positive impact</i>	<i>Negative impact</i>
<i>Internal environment</i>	<p><i>Strength:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conclusion of the Association Agreement;</li> <li>• growth in trade volumes;</li> <li>• legal compliance between Ukraine and the EU;</li> <li>• implementation of reforms (pension, educational, medical);</li> <li>• depoliticization of the civil service;</li> <li>• developed coordination of cooperation on reforms;</li> <li>• decentralization;</li> <li>• cooperation between the EU and Ukraine in various fields in accordance with thematic platforms;</li> <li>• visa-free regime with the EU;</li> <li>• establishment of a civil society forum</li> </ul>	<p><i>Weaknesses:</i></p> <p><i>system:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high level of corruption,</li> <li>• oligarchic influences,</li> <li>• political pressure;</li> <li>• economic difficulties (due to the COVID-19 pandemic);</li> <li>• information propaganda about the Russian media;</li> <li>• low level of protection of citizens;</li> </ul> <p><i>institutional:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low level of diplomatic negotiation;</li> <li>• failure of anti-corruption policy, deoligarchization and deoffshorization;</li> <li>• dependence of the judicial system</li> <li>• situational issues:</li> <li>• suspension of reforms for the election period;</li> <li>• global quarantine</li> </ul>
<i>External environment</i>	<p><i>Opportunities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Associated trio”;</li> <li>• “Trio Strategy 2030”;</li> <li>• “Marshal’s plan for Ukraine”;</li> <li>• joining the EU and NATO</li> </ul>	<p><i>Threats and challenges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Russian military operations in Ukraine;</li> <li>• instability of energy supplies;</li> <li>• disintegration processes in the EU;</li> <li>• annexation of Crimea;</li> <li>• information propaganda of the Russian Federation</li> </ul>

We can say that Ukraine's long-term membership in EP has led to positive changes and results, but de facto, the goals of EP are not realized due to the presence of internal and external determinants. Ukrainian and international experts are also unanimous in the fact that the implementation of EU norms and values in Ukraine is taking place: first, simultaneously with Russia's opposition to this process; secondly, in the context of growing political and economic instability, slow reforms and democratic backwardness, corruption, etc.; third, in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the East. These factors significantly reduce the effectiveness of the implementation of EP initiative in Ukraine.

Thus, the effectiveness of the implementation of EP initiative in Ukraine depends on three key factors – internal problems, regional security and the EU's determination. Contradictory conflicts between these factors, their interrelation and interdependence slow down the implementation of Ukraine's declared European integration aspirations. Consequently, the prospects for further scientific research will be to find out the specifics of promoting reforms in the "Associated trio" format, as the countries that are the recipients of EP initiative, which today demonstrate the most progressive dynamics in terms of ongoing reforms and relations with the EU.

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**Турчин Я. Б., Івасечко О. Я., Юринець О. Б. Підвищення ефективності реалізації ініціативи Східного партнерства в Україні**

*У статті досліджується ефективність реалізації ініціативи «Східне партнерство» (СП) в Україні за допомогою методології SWOT-аналізу. Зазначається, що від СП країни-учасниці очікують нових можливостей для економічного розвитку, реформування внутрішньополітичної сфери, залучення інвестицій, вирішення регіональних конфліктів тощо. Висвітлено сильні та слабкі сторони впровадження реформ в Україні в контексті реалізації курсу на євроінтеграцію та реалізації угоди про асоціацію з ЄС. Визначено, що сильними сторонами України як адресата СП є розгалужена система координації зусиль щодо впровадження реформ та їх підтримка Європейським Союзом. Акцентується увага на слабких (системних, інституційних та ситуативних) аспектах реалізації цієї ініціативи. На основі даних Індексу СП оцінюється стан впровадження реформ в Україні.*

*Зроблено висновок, що ефективність реалізації ініціативи СП в Україні є недостатньою, оскільки вона відбувається в умовах: по-перше, протидії цьому процесу Росії; по-друге, зростання політичної та економічної нестабільності, повільності реформ і демократичної відсталості, корупції тощо; по-третє, російсько-українського конфлікту на сході України. Розроблено рекомендації щодо підвищення ефективності співпраці між Україною та ЄС у рамках СП. Суперечливі протиріччя між цими факторами, їх взаємозв'язок та взаємозалежність гальмують реалізацію задекларованих євроінтеграційних прагнень України. Отже, перспективами подальших наукових досліджень буде з'ясування особливостей просування реформ у форматі «Асоційоване тріо», як в країнах-реципієнтах ініціативи СП, які сьогодні демонструють найбільш прогресивну динаміку в плані реформ, що проводяться, та відносини з ЄС.*

**Ключові слова:** Європейський Союз, Східне партнерство, європейська інтеграція, Угода про асоціацію.