

Volodymyr Rozvadovskyi

candidate of law, associate professor, head of the department of constitutional, international and administrative law of the Educational and scientific Law institute of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian national university

Vitalii Knysh

doctor of law, associate professor, professor of the department of constitutional, international and administrative law of the Educational and scientific Law institute of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian national university

MAIN STAGES OF THE INTEGRATION OF UKRAINE INTO THE EU

On June 23, 2022, Ukraine received the status of a candidate for membership of the European Union, and in February 2023, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced

European integration — in short, it is the process of economic and political and legal rapprochement of Ukraine with European interstate structures, which should end with the accession of Ukraine to the European Union.

The main stages of Ukraine's integration into the European Union can be systematized as follows:

1) the declarative stage (1993-1994), during which Ukraine announced its intentions to join the EU. In particular, for the first time the Verkhovna Rada declared Ukraine's intention to become a member of pan-European structures back in July 1993.

2) the stage of Ukraine's primary agreements with the EU (1994-2007). In June 1994, Ukraine and the EU signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. By the way, this was the first agreement concluded by the European Union with the states of the former USSR. However, its ratification took almost four years, so the document entered into force only on March 1, 1998.

3) the stage of negotiations on association with the EU (2007-2019). In particular, in 2007, the Ukrainian government began negotiations on the conclusion of an association agreement. It was supposed to be signed in November 2013, but at the last moment Viktor Yanukovich decided to put the process on hold. It was after this that mass protests began in Kyiv, which later turned into the Revolution of Dignity [1].

As a result, Yanukovich fled the country, and the new government signed the Association Agreement. On September 16, 2014, the Verkhovna Rada and the European Parliament simultaneously ratified the document. However, the process of ratification by EU member states stretched over two years — the Netherlands was the last to approve the agreement in June 2017. Finally, on September 1, 2017, the agreement entered into force.

4) the stage of constitutional changes regarding European integration (2019-2022). At this stage, in February 2019, the Verkhovna Rada adopted European integration amendments to the Constitution. According to them, the preamble of the

basic law prescribed "the irreversibility of Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic course", and the Verkhovna Rada, the Cabinet of Ministers and the president were instructed to do everything necessary to obtain Ukraine's full membership in the EU and NATO.

5) the stage of acquiring the status of a candidate for EU membership (2022). After the full-scale Russian invasion, the European integration process accelerated dramatically. On February 28, 2022, Ukraine officially applied for membership in the European Union, and already on June 23, the European Council granted our country the status of a candidate for accession.

6) the stage of negotiations on joining the EU (2023). At this stage, President Volodymyr Zelenskyi expects that they will begin by the end of 2023. In the meantime, our country must fulfil the seven requirements of the European Commission, set in June 2022, necessary to maintain candidate status:

- a) complete the reform of the selection of judges of the Constitutional Court;
- b) to continue the judicial reform, including checking the integrity of the members of the High Council of Justice (HCJ) and conducting the selection of candidates for the High Qualification Commission of Judges (HCJC);
- c) continue the fight against corruption, appoint the head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAP) and the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU);
- d) continue the fight against money laundering and law enforcement reform;
- e) fight against the influence of oligarchs;
- e) bring the mass media legislation into line with the European audiovisual legislation;
- f) amend the legislation on national minorities [1].

To fulfill these demands, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a number of new laws — on the media, on national communities, on the reform of the procedure for selecting judges of the Constitutional Court, etc. — although not all of them were accepted by society unequivocally. In particular, the media law was criticized by many journalists, and the law on the selection of judges by the Venice Commission.

On March 6, after the appointment of the NABU director, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said that Ukraine had fulfilled all seven EU recommendations. However, the analytical center "New Europe" in partnership with other specialized organizations as of January estimated the average level of compliance with EU requirements at 5.8 points on a 10-point scale (4.7 points in November).

The final verdict must be given by the European Commission. Its interim conclusion is expected in the spring of 2023. If everything goes according to plan, it is quite possible that already in October, the European Commission will support the start of accession negotiations with Ukraine at a meeting on EU enlargement. Then this decision must be unanimously approved by the Council of the EU, in this case — the leaders of all member states).

During the subsequent negotiation process, the candidate state must adapt its national legislation to the *acquis communautaire* (from the French "community property", a set of all EU legal acts).

Acquis communautaire consists of 35 chapters, which are included in six clusters: basics; internal market; competition and inclusive growth; "green" agenda

and permanent communication; resources, agriculture and cohesion; foreign relations [2].

The European Commission monitors this process, and the EU Council has a unanimous decision to approve the implementation of each of the six clusters. After all EU members unanimously approve the successful conclusion of the negotiations, the parties sign the Accession Treaty. First, it must be ratified by the European Parliament, then by the national parliaments of the candidate state and all member states. And only after that the candidate officially becomes a new member of the Union.

Acquiring the status of candidate for accession to the EU is an important step in the process of European integration, but does not mean guaranteed acquisition of full membership in the near future. In addition to Ukraine, six more countries currently have candidate status - Albania, Turkey, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Moldova. If Moldova received it at the same time as our country, others much earlier. The first was Turkey, back in 1999.

However, President Volodymyr Zelensky believes that Ukraine can become a member of the European Union in two years. Prime Minister Shmyhal is of the same opinion.

At the same time, European leaders usually avoid specifics on this issue. For example, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said at the Ukraine-EU summit on February 3, 2023, that "there is no clear time frame, but there are goals that must be achieved by the candidate member."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, in response to the question whether Ukraine will become a member of the EU by 2024, spoke about the requirements for joining. And to clarify whether Kyiv can count on "combat encouragement" due to the war with Russia, he noted that the criteria are the same for all candidates [2].

On average, EU members went from the beginning of the negotiation stage to accession in 4 years and 10 months. Austria, Finland and Sweden overcame it the fastest — in a little less than two years. Croatia went the longest — almost eight years.

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