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## SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT AS A FOUNDATION FOR UKRAINE-AFRICA ECONOMIC RELATIONS

### МІЖНАРОДНІ ЕКОНОМІЧНІ СТОСУНКИ УКРАЇНИ З ДЕРЖАВАМИ АФРИКАНСЬКОГО КОНТИНЕНТУ НА ЗАСАДАХ СТАЛИХ БІЗНЕС-ВЗАЄМОДІЙ

**Zharova Liubov**

Doctor of Economic Sciences,  
Kyiv-Mohyla School of Professional and Continuing Education  
of the National University «Kyiv-Mohyla Academy»;  
University of Economics and Humanities in Bielsko-Biala  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3568-775X>

**Khlobystov Ievgen**

Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor,  
National University «Kyiv-Mohyla Academy»  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9983-9062>

**Жарова Любов Валеріївна**

Києво-Могилянська школа професійної та неперервної освіти  
Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія»;  
Університет економіки і гуманістики в Бельсько-Бялій

**Хлобистов Євген Володимирович**

Національний університет «Києво-Могилянська академія»

The article examines the current state and future prospects of Ukraine's economic relations with African states, emphasizing sustainable business engagement as a strategic basis for long-term cooperation. It analyzes diplomatic outreach, trade dynamics, agricultural exports, investment opportunities, and the humanitarian impact of the "Grain from Ukraine" initiative. The study highlights the growing importance of education, science, digital innovation, and selected military-technical partnerships. Key obstacles – limited awareness of Ukraine, strong global competition, and logistical or regulatory constraints are identified. The authors conclude that a systematic, flexible, and partnership-oriented approach will enhance Ukraine's political, economic, and humanitarian presence across the continent.

**Keywords:** governance, strategic management, international economic relations, investments, economic safety.

Стаття присвячена комплексному дослідженням сучасного стану та перспектив розвитку міжнародних економічних відносин України з державами Африки на основі сталих бізнес-взаємодій у контексті інтенсифікації глобальної конкуренції та триваючої агресії Російської Федерації. Проаналізовано трансформацію української політики щодо африканських країн, зміст і значення стратегічних документів, зокрема Стратегії розвитку відносин України з державами Африки та Комунікаційної стратегії Україна – Африка 2024-2026, які визначають довгострокові пріоритети економічної, гуманітарної та безпекової взаємодії. Розкрито ключові напрями співпраці: дипломатичне розширення присутності, динаміку торгівлі, потенціал аграрного експорту, участь українських компаній у логістичних і технологічних проектах, а також роль освітніх і наукових програм у формуванні довгострокового партнерства. Особливу увагу приділено гуманітарній ініціативі «Зерно з України», яка сприяє зміцненню глобальної продовольчої безпеки та формує позитивний імідж України на континенті. Окремо проаналізовано перспективи цифровізації, інноваційного співробітництва та військово-технічної взаємодії, включно з модернізацією обладнання й підготовкою спеціалістів. Виокремлено головні виклики – недостатню поінформованість про Україну, конкуренцію з боку інших держав, логістичні та інституційні бар'єри, а також репутаційні ризики в чутливих секторах. Доведено, що системний і гнучкий підхід, зорієнтований на стійкі та взаємовигідні бізнес-моделі, здатен зміцнити позиції України в Африці та забезпечити формування довгострокових партнерських мереж. Ерспективні напрями подальшої співпраці охоплюють зміцнення про-

довольчої безпеки шляхом постачання високоякісного українського зерна та розвитку аграрних ланцюгів доданої вартості. Значним потенціалом вирізняється взаємодія у військово-промисловому комплексі, включно з модернізацією наявних зразків озброєння, виробництвом безпілотних систем та обміном технологіями. Додаткові можливості формуються у сферах видобутку корисних копалин, водопостачання й управління відходами, а також у реалізації спільних інфраструктурних і відбудовних проектів, здатних залучити африканські інвестиції в українську економіку.

**Ключові слова:** управління, стратегічний менеджмент, міжнародні економічні відносини, інвестиції, економічна безпека.

**Problem statement.** Ukraine's relations with the leading African states have intensified significantly since the onset of Russia's full-scale armed aggression. In the context of the war, Ukraine was compelled to seek ways to expand the geography of its international support. In particular, revising the approach to building relations with African states was identified as one of the key priorities in the country's foreign policy activities.

The situation regarding Ukraine's support on the continent remains complex, primarily due to the historical ties between African countries and Russia, as well as their aspiration to maintain "neutrality." No African state has imposed sanctions on Russia or supported the establishment of a special international tribunal to investigate Russian war crimes. Nevertheless, some African countries demonstrate a more favorable attitude toward Ukraine. Therefore, Ukraine does have potential allies, partners, and supportive states [1].

The root causes of tensions and complicated relations lie in the ongoing struggle for influence, given Africa's growing geopolitical and economic role. Several African countries rank among the global leaders in economic growth rates. It is a vast and young consumer market – according to the UN, by 2050, one quarter of the world's population will reside in Africa. The continent also possesses substantial deposits of mineral resources that are crucial for high-tech industries. Consequently, examining the relations between Ukraine and African states is highly relevant from the standpoint of socio-economic development and ensuring geopolitical support for Ukraine.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Retrospectively Ukraine has supported African decolonization and development efforts, positioning itself as a potential partner for African countries amidst intensifying global competition, particularly from Russia and China. With the recent geopolitical shifts following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the need for enhanced economic collaboration has become more pressing, especially in sectors like agriculture

and renewable energy that align with global sustainability goals [2, p. 570; 3, p. 57; 4, p.33].

The significance of this topic lies in the recognition that sustainable business engagement can serve as a catalyst for economic resilience and development in both regions. By leveraging Ukraine's advanced agricultural technologies and Africa's rich natural resources, there is potential for creating impactful partnerships that address critical issues such as food security, climate change, and social inequality [5; 6, p.78]. However, challenges remain, including navigating historical perceptions, geopolitical tensions, and varying levels of political stability across African nations [7, p. 20; 8, p. 2]. Moreover, there are opportunities for collaboration, particularly through initiatives that promote sustainable practices and economic diversification. The transition towards sustainable agricultural practices and renewable energy sources presents a framework for both regions to innovate and thrive while addressing shared global challenges [7, p. 441]. By aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), businesses can not only fulfill their social responsibilities but also tap into new markets, thereby enhancing economic ties between Ukraine and Africa [10; 11, p. 149].

Despite the promise of these partnerships, significant barriers must be overcome, including regulatory hurdles, economic constraints, and the need for enhanced community engagement. The path forward necessitates strategic governance, international partnerships, and a commitment to fostering an enabling environment for sustainable business practices. Through these efforts, Ukraine and African nations can establish a robust economic relationship founded on sustainability and shared prosperity.

Ukraine now aims to expand its diplomatic presence and influence on the African continent, counter Russian disinformation, and strengthen economic, political, and cultural cooperation [12]. The conceptual basis for intensifying Ukrainian-African relations was established through two state documents: the Strategy for the Development of Relations between Ukraine

and the States of Africa and the Ukraine-Africa Communication Strategy 2024-2026. In 2022, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy held numerous telephone conversations with African leaders, while the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine maintained diplomatic contacts at various levels [13].

Among the key challenges for Ukraine's African foreign policy vector are the lack of a longstanding tradition of cooperation, insufficient understanding of African problems and needs, disparities in political systems and normative values, passivity or low interest from certain African states, and an overall deficit of effective communication.

In June 2023, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy held a meeting with African leaders in Kyiv. For the first time, high-ranking representatives from seven African countries visited Ukraine, including the presidents of South Africa, Senegal, and the Union of the Comoros, as well as the prime minister of Egypt, and special envoys from the presidents of the Republic of the Congo and Uganda. During the meeting, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa presented an "African Peace Initiative" aimed at resolving the Russia–Ukraine war. Although Kyiv viewed the mission's potential impact with skepticism, it nonetheless created an opportunity to deepen bilateral contacts and communicate Ukraine's position. On April 24, 2025, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine paid his first working visit to the Republic of South Africa, where he met with President Cyril Ramaphosa. The primary purpose of the visit was to strengthen bilateral relations and engage South Africa in the peace process aimed at ending Russia's war against Ukraine.

Highlighting previously unresolved parts of the overall problem. Despite Ukraine's intensified diplomatic outreach and the rapid expansion of its presence across the African continent, several structural gaps in the understanding and conceptualization of Ukrainian-African relations remain insufficiently addressed. Existing studies rarely explore how newly established embassies translate into tangible political support, how African states perceive Ukraine's strategic messaging in the context of competing narratives, or why more than half of African countries continue to abstain from voting on key UN resolutions. The interaction between historical experiences – such as struggles with separatism – and contemporary alignment patterns also remains understudied, leaving unanswered questions about the real

determinants of solidarity with Ukraine. Moreover, previous research has paid inadequate attention to the asymmetry of expectations, the lack of sustained engagement from both sides, and persistent communication deficits that prevent Ukraine's foreign policy initiatives from transforming into stable, long-term partnerships.

Another unresolved dimension concerns the deeper political and diplomatic dynamics shaping African countries' differentiated responses to the Russia–Ukraine war, including the balance between neutrality, strategic hedging, and selective alignment with Western partners. Existing scholarship does not sufficiently explain the complex motivations behind inconsistent voting behavior at the UN, nor does it clarify the internal and external constraints influencing African leaders' positions, as illustrated by Egypt's selective support or Senegal's irregular participation in key votes. Likewise, the impact of high-level engagements – such as the 2023 visit of seven African leaders to Kyiv, South Africa's "African Peace Initiative," or the first official visit of Ukraine's President to South Africa in 2025 – has yet to be comprehensively analyzed in terms of their long-term contribution to trust-building, agenda-setting, and conflict-resolution efforts. These gaps highlight the need for a systematic assessment of Ukraine's diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, educational, and military-technical initiatives, as well as the broader factors shaping African positions amid Russia's ongoing aggression.

**Task statement.** The article aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the current state and future prospects of Ukraine's relations with African countries, evaluate the effectiveness of Ukraine's diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, educational, and military-technical initiatives across the continent, and identify the key factors shaping African states' support for Ukraine amid intensifying geopolitical competition and Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine.

**Summary of the main research material.** To begin with, it is essential to outline the geopolitical framework of interaction: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine has developed and adopted two key documents that govern the development of Ukraine's relations with African states.

The Strategy for the Development of Relations between Ukraine and the States of Africa was adopted by Order No. 23 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on January 14, 2022 – essentially on the eve of the full-scale military aggression launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. This is the first comprehensive strategy

dedicated to developing Ukraine's relations with African countries. Before its adoption, Africa had been mentioned only briefly in Ukraine's strategic documents, typically alongside the Middle East region. The Strategy reflects Ukraine's ambition to find effective formats for participating in strategic processes on the continent. Under the Strategy, Ukraine aims to strengthen multifaceted ties with African countries by expanding its presence

The Ukraine-Africa Communication Strategy (hereinafter referred to as the Communication Strategy)[14]. was developed by the Department of Public Diplomacy and Communications of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and approved in December 2023. This state document is part of a broader "New Horizons" policy aimed at intensifying Ukraine's diplomatic engagement with countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The Communication Strategy covers three years (2024-2026). It aims to deepen and expand Ukraine's communication channels with African states, raise awareness among target audiences in Africa about Ukraine, and counter Russian disinformation.

The key provisions of the Communication Strategy include:

- Raising awareness – systematic engagement with African societies to debunk Russian propaganda and shape a positive image of Ukraine.
- Political and economic resilience – strengthening diplomatic relations and expanding trade and cultural exchanges with African countries.
- Food security – enhancing cooperation with African states in the sphere of food supply, particularly through the "Grain from Ukraine" initiative [15].
- Analysis of regional specificities – the need to take into account the unique features of each African subregion, including prevalent anti-Ukrainian narratives and communication challenges.
- Expanding diplomatic presence – opening new Ukrainian embassies across African states to facilitate effective dialogue among all stakeholders.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the document is practical in nature. In addition to defining goals, tasks, target audiences, and communication channels, the Communication Strategy outlines key strategic narratives for shaping a positive image of Ukraine in Africa for the next three years. It also contains communication guidelines, matrices of local languages, and recommendations on strategic

communications in target countries [16].

Economic relations. One of the most promising areas for developing economic cooperation between Ukraine and African states is the agricultural sector, which encompasses both the promotion of Ukraine's agrarian potential and addressing food security challenges in Africa.

According to the State Customs Service of Ukraine, in 2024 trade turnover between Ukraine and African countries reached USD 4 billion, an increase of 65.8%. At the same time, exports increased by 75.2% to USD 2.9 billion, while imports rose by 43.4% to USD 1 billion (Figure 1).

Traditionally, Ukraine's export volumes to African countries have exceeded its imports from the region, resulting in a positive trade balance for Ukraine [18], which amounted to USD 1.9 billion last year. In 2024, trade in goods with African countries had not yet returned to the levels of 2021: trade turnover, exports, and imports were lower by approximately 42%, 48%, and 14%, respectively.

The share of African countries in Ukraine's total goods exports increased to 7% in 2024, compared to 4.6% in 2023. At the same time, the share of African countries in Ukraine's total imports also grew, from 1% in 2023 to 1.4% in 2024 (figure 2).

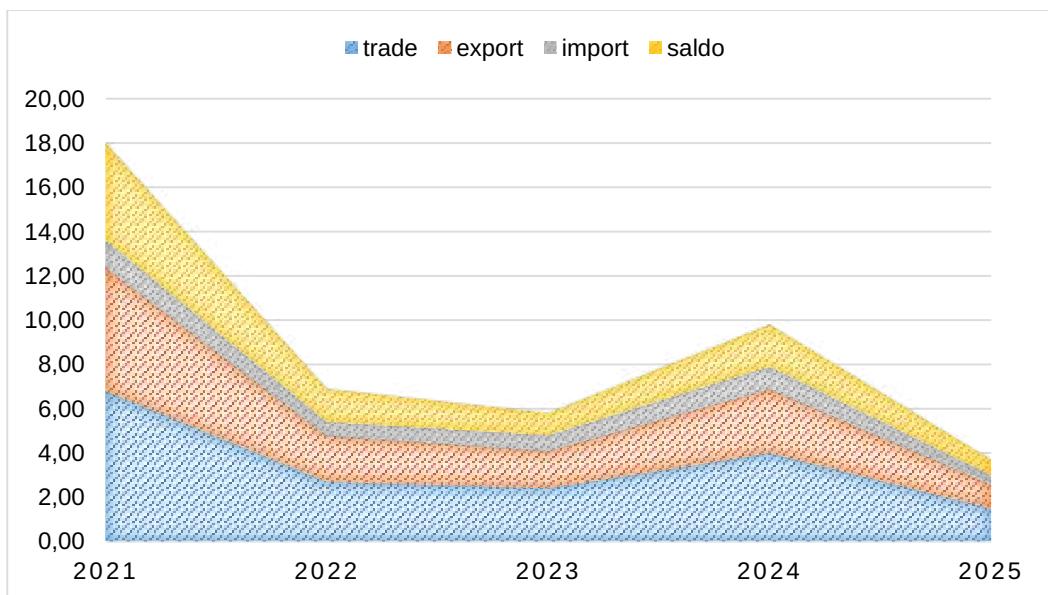
In the first half of 2025, foreign trade in goods with the region also showed positive dynamics. Compared to the same period of the previous year, there was growth in foreign trade indicators, as well as an increase in their share (8.5%) in total exports. At the same time, the share of these countries in total imports remained almost at the same level (1.7%).

According to 2024 data, African countries occupy the 3rd position among Ukraine's main regional trading partners in terms of exports, after the EU (USD 24.8 billion) and Asia (USD 9.8 billion), surpassing the CIS countries (USD 1.8 billion), the Americas (USD 1.2 billion), and other European countries (USD 1 billion).

In terms of import volumes, African countries rank 5th, after the EU (USD 35.7 billion), Asia (USD 25.7 billion), the Americas (USD 4.7 billion), and other European countries (USD 2.7 billion), leaving the CIS countries (USD 0.8 billion) behind.

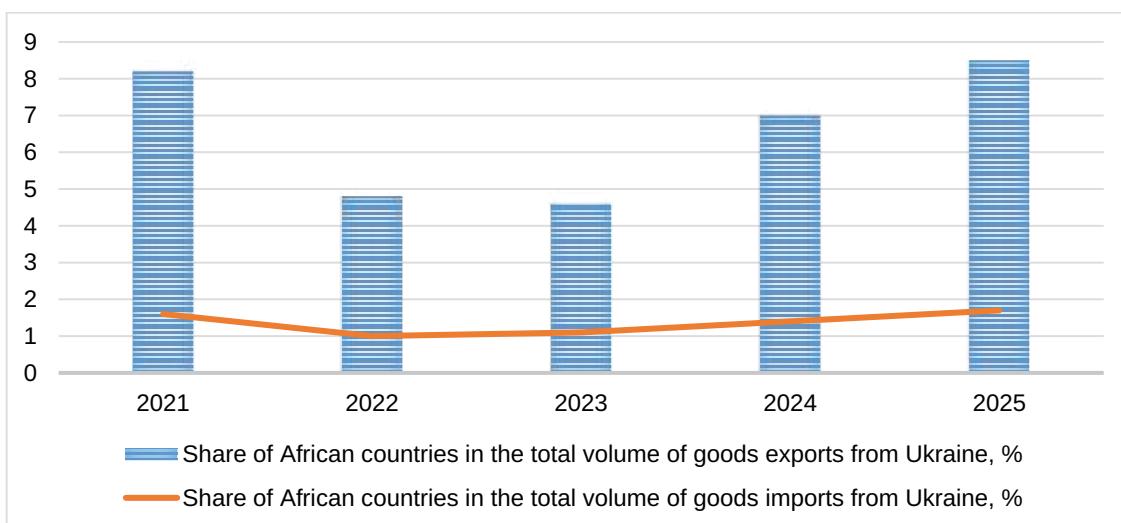
The commodity structure of exports and imports is shown in the figures 3-4.

"Grain from Ukraine" Initiative. Within the framework of this humanitarian program, between December 2022 and March 2023, the



**Fig. 1. Dynamics of bilateral trade in goods between Ukraine and African countries in 2021–2024 and January–July 2025, USD billion**

Source: formed by the authors based on official statistical data [17]



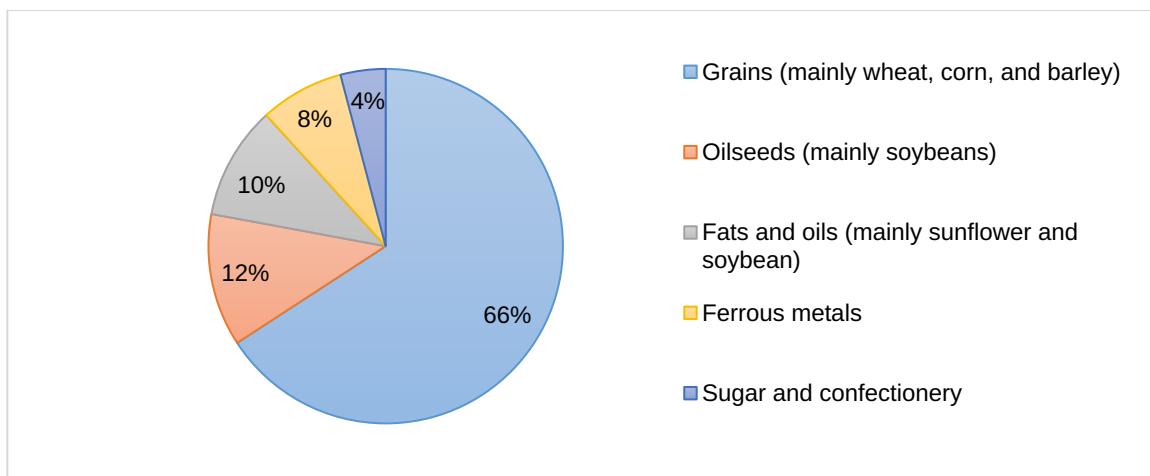
**Fig. 2. Share of African countries in total exports and imports of goods in 2021–2024 and the first half of 2025**

Source: formed by the authors based on official statistical data [17]

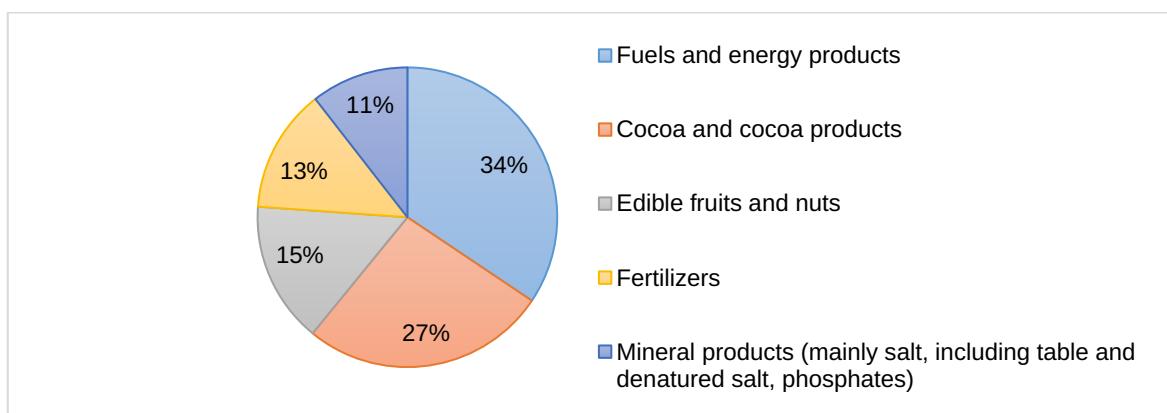
Ukrainian government sent six ships carrying 170,000 tons of wheat to Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen [15]. Ukraine recognizes its global responsibility for food security, especially toward countries in Africa and Asia facing humanitarian crises. Vessels chartered by the United Nations World Food Programme continue to deliver Ukrainian wheat to countries in need. By the end of March 2025, under President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's humanitarian

initiative "Grain from Ukraine", Ukraine had supplied over 280,000 tons of food, including to the following African countries: Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, and Chad.

Food Hub. Ukraine has proposed establishing a food hub in Oman to facilitate the entry of Ukrainian products into African markets.

**Fig. 3. Top 5 products exported from Ukraine to African countries**

Source: formed by the authors based on official statistical data [17]

**Fig. 4. Top 5 African products imported to Ukraine**

Source: formed by the authors based on official statistical data [17]

Other potentially promising areas of cooperation include:

**Manufacturing and industry:** Metals—Algeria is one of Ukraine's main trading partners in the region, importing a significant share of Ukrainian metal products. This experience could be expanded to other countries.

**Mechanical engineering and equipment:** Ukraine has potential to export agricultural machinery, food-processing equipment, construction equipment, and participate in infrastructure development projects.

**Pharmaceuticals:** Ukrainian pharmaceutical companies can enter African markets, offering high-quality and affordable medicines.

**Energy:** Africa has substantial oil and natural gas reserves, as well as potential for renewable energy development. Ukraine can offer technologies and expertise in extraction,

transportation, and processing of energy resources, as well as in alternative energy development.

**Information technology and digitalization:** African countries are actively developing their digital economies. Ukraine, with its strong IT sector, can provide solutions and services in e-government, cybersecurity, and digital solutions for business and education.

**Prospects for Development.** Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Ihor Brusilo held an online meeting with heads of Ukrainian diplomatic missions in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Mozambique, Botswana, and Mauritania. The meeting emphasized the importance of cooperation with African countries and their support for Ukrainians in the fight against Russian aggression. Ukraine expressed readiness

for constructive collaboration in agriculture, education, digitalization, and countering cyber and hybrid threats [9].

Particular attention was given to the "Grain from Ukraine" initiative, which has provided food for over 10 million people across 12 African countries. Cooperation in digital technology and transformation was also discussed, including leveraging Ukrainian experience to develop Africa's digital infrastructure. Education was highlighted as a priority, including expanding academic programs and exchanges to meet the needs of African countries in training qualified specialists in Ukraine.

*Education and Science.* Ukrainian–African cooperation in education and science can focus on several areas:

Student education: Ukrainian universities can attract more African students by offering quality education at competitive costs.

Scientific and technical cooperation: This can include experience exchange and joint research in fields such as agronomy, medicine, and engineering [19],[20].

*Military-technical cooperation.* Prospects for Ukraine's military-technical cooperation with African countries in the production and sale of weapons and military technology are promising, but come with challenges and ethical considerations. Historically, Ukraine supplied Soviet-era weapons to several African countries, which inherited substantial stocks (tanks, armored vehicles, helicopters, MANPADS, etc.) after the USSR's collapse. Modernization and maintenance of this equipment remain key needs for many African armies. Ukraine now has unique experience in using and modernizing weapons in contemporary warfare, making its defense industry attractive to countries seeking proven solutions.

In recent years, Ukraine's defense-industrial complex has significantly expanded, establishing production of a wide range of weapons – from UAVs to artillery systems and missiles—creating new export opportunities [21; 22]. Many African countries seek to diversify their arms suppliers and reduce dependence on Russia. Ukraine, successfully resisting Russian aggression, can become a reliable alternative partner.

The most promising areas for military-technical cooperation include:

- Modernization and maintenance of existing Soviet-era equipment.
- Training of personnel and technical staff.

- Comprehensive services related to production, use, and counter-UAV technologies.

For Ukraine, such cooperation means diversifying defense export markets, increasing revenue from new weapons exports, and enhancing political influence in Africa.

Summarizing, Ukraine and African countries have substantial potential for mutually beneficial relations. A systematic, flexible, and tailored approach, focusing on key areas such as food security, economic ties, and political support for international law and sovereignty, will enable Ukraine to strengthen its presence on the continent.

*Future Challenges in African Cooperation:* Passive positions of some African states due to low awareness of Ukraine, requiring constant Ukrainian initiatives to demonstrate concrete benefits of cooperation.

Competition with other global and regional players. Given the strong positions of Russia, China, the U.S., and some European countries in Africa, Ukraine needs to carve a unique niche based on mutually beneficial partnerships rather than dominance.

Logistics and transport, which require development of effective supply routes. Numerous conflict zones in Africa demand strict adherence to international norms, particularly regarding arms exports, avoiding deliveries to sanctioned countries or conflict zones where weapons could be used against civilians. Negative reputational consequences could significantly harm Ukraine's political interests.

**Conclusions.** African countries have been weakly involved in Ukraine's economic policies and international activities due to:

The traditional orientation of parts of the continent toward the USSR, and consequently its official successor, Russia.

Dependence on former colonial powers in foreign affairs and the emergence of new economic actors on the continent, such as China and Russia, the latter having conducted several successful political interventions in Central and West African states (including coups in Niger and Mali).

Insufficient attention to the continent by Ukrainian authorities, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economy; key documents on strategic cooperation have been developed and adopted only in recent years. For over 30 years of Ukraine's independence, African interests were largely outside the official focus.

A shortage of specialists in these matters; the only academic program in "African Studies" started at Taras Shevchenko Kyiv University only two years ago, and there have been no graduates yet.

Prospects for cooperation with African states lie in the following areas:

- Food security, particularly the supply of high-quality wheat and other grains.
- Military-industrial complex cooperation, including modernization of Soviet-era weapons and UAV production.
- Mineral resource extraction, including

rare-earth minerals and local hydrocarbon production (small- to medium-sized deposits).

- Water supply and wastewater management, using technologies suitable for arid climates.
- Solid waste management and recycling, based on relatively low-cost solutions.
- Participation in post-war reconstruction projects in Ukraine, aimed at attracting African investment in areas of mutual interest such as agriculture, food processing, industrial production, infrastructure repair, and climate adaptation initiatives.

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