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UKRAINE'S EUROPEANIZATION IN TURBULENT TIMES: DEMOCRACY AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

ЄВРОПЕЇЗАЦІЯ УКРАЇНИ В ЧАСИ ТУРБУЛЕНТНОСТІ: ВИКЛИКИ ДЛЯ ДЕМОКРАТІЇ ТА БЕЗПЕКИ

Mikhel Romana

PhD in Economics,

Department of International Security and Strategic Studies,
Lviv National Ivan Franko UniversityORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8204-7600>**Struchok Natalyia**

PhD in Economics, Associate Professor,

Department of International Security and Strategic Studies,
Lviv National Ivan Franko UniversityORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6514-2523>**Міхель Романа Володимирівна, Стручок Наталія Миколаївна**

Львівський національний університет імені Івана Франка

The article explores the complex process of Ukraine's Europeanisation amid current geopolitical challenges. The authors examine theoretical approaches to the concept of 'Europeanisation', consider the model of 'external incentives', and discuss the idea of 'securitised Europeanisation'. The article highlights the link between democratic reforms and security challenges. In the realm of democracy promotion, Ukrainian society faces challenges caused by the war, such as restrictions on civil liberties and difficulties in conducting elections. In terms of security, Ukraine is enhancing cooperation with the EU, including military support through the European Peace Facility, training Ukrainian military personnel, and collaborating in cybersecurity. Consequently, the authors suggest introducing the term 'crisis Europeanisation' to describe the process in which existential threats alter internal receptiveness to external norms.

Keywords: Europeanisation, crisis Europeanisation, Association Agreement, security, Ukraine, EU.

Стаття присвячена дослідженню складного процесу європеїзації України, який поєднує демократизацію, безпекові та економічні виклики зовнішнього управління ЄС. В Україні цей процес особливо активізувався після Революції Гідності 2013–2014 років та підписання Угоди про асоціацію між Україною та Європейським Союзом у 2014 році. Після повномасштабного російського вторгнення в Україну в лютому 2022 року європеїзація здійснювалася в особливих умовах. Метою дослідження є здійснення оцінки процесу європеїзації України у сфері розбудови демократії та безпеки. В статті проаналізовано еволюцію поняття «європеїзація» з наголосом на переході від традиційних моделей «зовнішніх стимулів» до концепції «сек'юритизованої європеїзації», де безпека та демократія взаємопов'язані. За допомогою методу синтезу, порівняльного аналізу та аналізу нормативно-правових актів розглянуто прогрес України у здійсненні демократичних реформ в рамках імплементації Угоди про асоціацію, таких як реформа судової системи, розвиток громадянського суспільства та підтримка свободи слова. Водночас авторами здійснено порівняльний аналіз рейтингу громадянських свобод та прав людини в Україні у 2021 та 2025 роках, та наголошено на викликах, пов'язаних з війною, зокрема, обмеженнях громадянських свобод та труднощах у проведенні виборів. У сфері безпеки проаналізовано посилення співпраці між Україною та ЄС, зокрема надання військової допомоги через Європейський фонд миру, навчання українських військовослужбовців та співпрацю у сфері кібербезпеки. Розглядається роль Європейського агентства прикордонної та берегової охорони (*Frontex*) у забезпеченні безпеки та посилення контролю на кордонах України. Автори доходять висновку, що війна з росією стала каталізатором процесу європеїзації України, але водночас створила нові виклики в сферах демократії та управління безпекою. Запропоновано введення поняття «кризової європеїзації» як процесу, коли екзистенційні загрози змінюють внутрішню сприйнятливість до зовнішніх норм. У статті наголошено на необхідності збалансування нагальних потреб виживання з довгостроковою розбудовою демократичних інституцій.

Ключові слова: європеїзація, кризова європеїзація, Угода про асоціацію, безпека, Україна, ЄС.



Statement of the problem. Ukraine's Europeanisation is one of the most complex processes in contemporary European politics, intertwining democratisation, security dilemmas and the transformative power of the EU's external governance. Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine's trajectory has oscillated between its aspirations for European integration and the gravitational pull of post-Soviet geopolitical realities. The Euromaidan revolution of 2013-2014, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, and the war with Russia have finally defined Ukraine's priorities. On 28 February 2022, Ukraine applied for EU membership, and on 23 June 2022, the European Council granted it candidate status.

Ukraine's Europeanisation is inextricably linked to its security challenges. The Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, which was presented as a 'civilisational choice', inadvertently increased geopolitical tensions [3, p.43-66], provoking first a hybrid and then a full-scale war with Russia. These circumstances ultimately led to "de facto sectoral integration" – for example, the rapid connection to the EU's power grid and the elimination of tariffs on Ukrainian goods as practical manifestations of "integration through war."

Analysis of recent research and publications. Europeanisation, as a key concept in EU studies, examines the interaction between European integration and domestic adaptation to EU norms. The concept has undergone significant evolution since its first use by K. Ladrech in 1994 [11, p. 72]. If we consider Europeanization from the perspective of neofunctionalism and its later variants – supranational governance and multi-level governance [14, p. 163] – the concept of Europeanization is inspired by the concept of "loading" the internal social benefits at the EU level. On the other hand, within an intergovernmental approach, the Europeanization of EU institutions and policies is influenced by decisions made by domestic governments in light of their own European interests and the consequences.

F. Schimmelfennig and U. Sedelmeier, studying Europeanisation in the context of EU enlargement in 2004, note that Europeanisation practices in CEE are based on the model of 'external incentives'. This model imitates the external incentives and sanctions that the EU factors into the cost-benefit calculations of the accession countries. Its nature is underlined by the consequence logic, according to which 'the EU makes the adoption of its rules a condition that CEE countries must fulfil to receive a reward

from the EU' [16, p. 820-821]. The authors argue that, according to the external incentives model, a government accepts EU rules if the benefits of EU rewards exceed the domestic costs of accepting them.

Critics of Europeanisation, however, emphasise democratic deficits, loss of sovereignty and crises such as Brexit as a reflection of the reaction to the pace of integration [10, p. 133]. H.J. Bürkner argue that there is no such thing as a "single" form of Euroscepticism. People's attitudes toward the EU depend on whether they live on an internal border (between EU countries) or an external one (for example, the border between Poland and Ukraine). This gives rise to the concept of "reborderization": the reaction of Eurosceptics who call for "regaining control" and closing borders to protect national identity [2, 2020, p. 547].

When considering Europeanisation in times of crisis, T. A. Börzel notes that external threats can accelerate reforms by uniting elites and citizens around common goals [1, p. 28]. Conversely, martial law and security priorities can lead to centralisation of power, undermining checks and balances [12, 2022]. The revised priorities of the EU-Ukraine AA now emphasise the fight against corruption in defence procurement and transparency in wartime spending, reflecting the EU's adaptive conditionality [19, p. 36].

Highlighting previously unresolved parts of the overall problem. While until 2022, scholars widely analysed the role of the AA in catalysing anti-corruption reforms and bringing Ukrainian legislation in line with the *acquis communautaire*, the war has fundamentally changed the dynamics of Europeanisation, testing the strength of democratic institutions in the face of existential threats. The EU's role as a security actor in Ukraine remains controversial. Although the bloc provided non-military support until February 2022 (e.g., sanctions coordination, cyberdefense initiatives), its dependence on NATO for hard security reveals limitations in its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The EU's unprecedented military assistance to Ukraine after 2022 – through the European Peace Facility – signals a paradigm shift, combining security policy with the logic of enlargement [19, p. 17].

Existing literature often divides Ukraine's Europeanisation into separate democratic and security pillars, underestimating their interdependence. This article bridges the gap by arguing that Ukraine's EU integration process is an example of 'securitised Europeanisation', in

which democratic sustainability and security are mutually reinforcing.

Formation of the objectives of the article (task statement). The purpose of the article is to study the evolution of the concept of 'Europeanisation' and to assess the process of Ukraine's Europeanisation in the fields of democracy promotion and security in the context of current geopolitical challenges. The study employs a variety of methods, including systematic analysis, synthesis, comparative analysis, and analysis of legal acts, which enabled examination of the dynamics of cooperation and the identification of key trends and changes.

Summary of the main research material. Politically, Europeanisation changes governance structures by promoting administrative and legislative harmonisation. Economically, Europeanisation is manifested through the single market, participation in the eurozone, and fiscal coordination. Outside the EU, Europeanisation uses soft power through enlargement and neighbourhood policy and through association agreements that encourage reforms in candidate states.

The Russian invasion triggered unprecedented geopolitical and institutional shifts. The EU's swift granting of candidate status to Ukraine in June 2022 strengthened the conditionality criterion, linking accession prospects to judicial reforms, decentralisation, and minority rights. In turn, the EU has stepped up its support for Ukraine, providing financial, technical and political assistance to implement these reforms. However, the war has created a dual imperative: to support democratic governance and to mobilise efforts for national survival.

Within the framework of the Association Agreement, several key areas of convergence between Ukraine and the EU in promoting democracy after 2022 include: (1) reforms in the rule of law; (2) development of civil society; (3) support for freedom of speech and independent media; (4) backing for local self-government and decentralisation. Let us take a closer look at each of these.

Rule of Law Reforms. The rule of law is a core principle of democracy, and its reinforcement is vital for Ukraine. After 2022, the EU has actively supported reforms in the Ukrainian judiciary, including the creation of the High Anti-Corruption Court in 2018 and reforms to the prosecution service. Notably, the reform of the prosecution authorities began with the adoption of Ukraine's Law of 19.09.2019 No. 113-IX 'On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Priority

Measures for the Reform of the Prosecution Authorities' [13]. These measures aim to ensure the independence of the judiciary, fight corruption, and safeguard citizens' rights.

Development of civil society. Civil society is a vital component of a democratic society. The EU supports the development of Ukrainian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which play a key role in monitoring reforms, defending human rights, and enhancing transparency in public administration. Since 2022, EU funding for Ukrainian NGOs has risen significantly, allowing them to be more involved in decision-making processes.

'The EU Project for the Development of Civil Society in Ukraine' is a comprehensive programme aimed at supporting and strengthening civil society in Ukraine. It is funded by the European Union and aims to promote the development of an active and influential civil society that plays a key role in the country's democratic development [6].

The Council of Europe project 'Youth for Democracy in Ukraine: Phase III', in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine, is running a long-term programme, "Access to Youth Work," for newly formed NGOs working with young people. In February 2024, grant agreements were signed to support 10 grants to newly established CSOs totalling €70,000 [4].

Support for freedom of speech and independent media remains essential. Freedom of speech and media independence are crucial pillars of democracy. Since 2022, the EU has continued to support Ukrainian media, including funding initiatives aimed at enhancing journalism quality, fighting disinformation, and protecting journalists. This support is especially vital during wartime, when information security becomes increasingly critical.

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) is implementing several significant projects aimed at supporting Ukrainian media and journalists. These initiatives cover various aspects, including financial aid, the protection of journalists' rights, the combating of disinformation, and the improvement of journalism quality. Here are some examples of projects currently operating in Ukraine. The project 'Support for Independent Media in Ukraine' provides financial and technical support to independent media outlets operating during wartime. The project 'Safety Fund for Ukrainian Journalists' provides financial aid to Ukrainian journalists to cover basic needs such as housing, food and medical care [8].

Support for local self-government and decentralisation. Decentralisation is a crucial reform aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of local governance and promoting civic participation in decision-making. The EU supports this process by funding projects aimed at developing infrastructure, training local officials and engaging communities in governance. The funding for these projects is provided primarily through the European Neighbourhood Policy instrument and cross-border cooperation programmes.

An important source for assessing the state of freedom, democracy, and human rights in Ukraine is the Freedom House's 2025 report. This analysis helps us understand how the war with Russia, domestic reforms, and international support influence the country's democratic progress. According to the Freedom House report, in 2025, Ukraine received a score of 51 out of 100 points, which classifies the country as 'partially free' [9]. Compared to the pre-war period, Ukraine's overall score has slightly declined. The global freedom score in 2021 was 60 out of a maximum of 100 points (Fig. 1). This score reflects both advances in democratic reforms and issues related to the war and internal challenges.

In the area of political rights, Ukraine received only 23 out of 40 points in 2025. While there was significant progress in the reform and functioning of political institutions, it also highlighted the challenges posed by the war. In particular,

Ukraine is unable to hold competitive elections, as the war has created difficulties in organising voting in the occupied territories. There is intense competition among political parties in the country, but the war has limited opportunities for meaningful political activity. The issues of fighting corruption and bureaucracy also remain unresolved.

In the area of civil liberties, Ukraine received 28 out of 60 points. This score reflects both positive developments and serious challenges, particularly in the context of the war. The main aspects that influenced the score are the following criteria:

- Freedom of expression: Independent media continue to function, but the war has led to restrictions on access to information in the occupied territories. Disinformation and propaganda also remain serious threats.
- Freedom of assembly: Civil society remains active, but the war has limited opportunities for mass protests.
- Minority rights: Ukraine continues to take steps to protect minority rights, but the war has created additional challenges to this process.

A rating of 'partially free' reflects both the progress and challenges the country faces. Support from the international community, particularly the EU, is the key to the further development of democracy in Ukraine. The war with Russia remains the main factor affecting the state of freedom in Ukraine. This has resulted in restrictions on civil liberties in the occupied

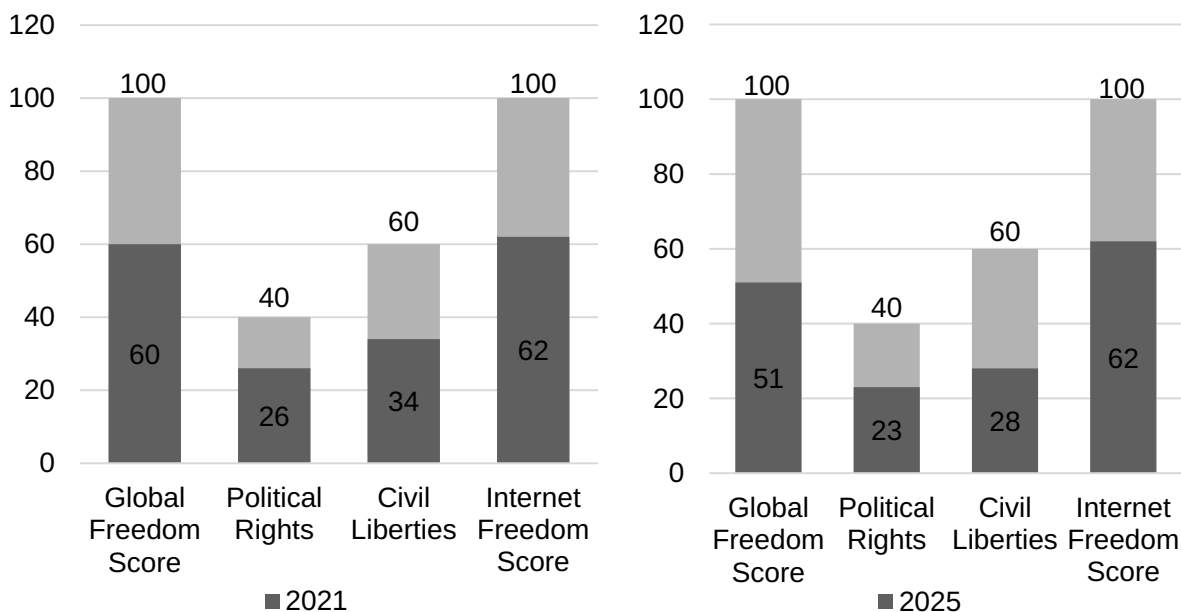


Figure 1. Indicators for assessing the state of freedom, democracy and human rights in 2021 and 2025

Source: compiled by the author according to the Freedom House database [9]

territories and an increased role for security in public life, which sometimes restricts human rights.

Ukraine's aspirations for EU membership have become a powerful incentive to bring its security policy in line with the EU standards. Until 2022, the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) served as the basis for defence cooperation and integration. Back in June 2018, the Law of Ukraine 'On National Security' (No. 2469-VIII), drafted with the support of European experts, was approved. It aims to implement reforms in Ukraine's security sector in line with EU and NATO standards and to introduce civilian control in the security sector. The law laid the foundations for strategic planning in the defence sector, in particular through the adoption of the National Security Strategy of Ukraine and other policy documents. In accordance with the law, several law enforcement agencies were reformed, including the National Police and the Security Service of Ukraine.

However, after 2022, the process of convergence between Ukraine and the European Union (EU) in the security sector has faced significant challenges. This period is characterised by intensified cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in defence, cybersecurity, countering hybrid threats, and security sector reform. As a result, a new instrument has emerged – the European Peace Facility. This is a fund worth more than €17 billion, financed externally from the EU budget for seven years (2021-2027), with a single mechanism to finance all activities under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in the military and defence sectors [7].

The European Peace Facility has proven to be an important tool that has enabled the EU to provide military assistance to Ukraine. Its key advantage is the ability to reimburse EU member states for the costs of providing military equipment, including lethal weapons, to Ukraine. This mechanism has made it possible to circumvent the political sensitivities that previously existed around direct EU funding for arms supplies and to significantly speed up the delivery of critical military equipment. Since the full-scale invasion, the European Peace Facility has been activated several times, providing €6.1 billion in support to cover a wide range of needs, from small arms and ammunition to heavy artillery, air defence systems, and tanks [17].

In addition to financial support under the European Peace Facility, the EU, through

its Common Foreign and Security Policy instrument, provides training and education to Ukrainian military personnel both in Ukraine and in EU member states through missions such as the EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM Ukraine). This training was established in October 2022 and aims to increase the effectiveness of the Ukrainian armed forces and enhance interoperability with the EU military. On 8 November 2024, the Council of the European Union decided to extend the mandate of the EU Military Assistance Mission Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) for another two years. This includes funding of almost €409 million for the period from 14 November 2024 to 15 November 2026 [5].

In addition, cooperation in intelligence sharing has intensified, which is important in anticipating and responding to Russian attacks. Although specific details are often kept classified, public statements acknowledge increased cooperation in this area.

In the context of the war with Russia, Ukraine is forced to develop and modernise its cyber defence system continually. The EU is also concerned about new trends in cybercrime. In 2019, Ukraine began to actively participate in EU cybersecurity programmes such as EU4Digital and CyberEast. These programmes are part of broader EU initiatives to support the Eastern Partnership countries in developing the digital economy, cybersecurity, and information technology.

In 2021, Ukraine adopted the Cybersecurity Strategy. This document was an important step in shaping the national cybersecurity policy and is in line with European standards, in particular the EU Directive NIS2 (Network and Information Security Directive), which was updated in 2020 and entered into force in 2023. The strategy envisages: the introduction of strict cybersecurity measures for critical infrastructure operators that meet the requirements of NIS2; the introduction of mechanisms for monitoring cyber incidents and mandatory reporting, which is a key element of NIS2; coordination between authorities [6].

Since 2022, Ukraine's cooperation with Frontex (the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the EU Member States) has significantly intensified due to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the large-scale movement of Ukrainian refugees to EU countries. Frontex plays a crucial role in securing the EU's external borders, managing migration flows, and fighting transnational crime.

Since 24 February 2022, millions of Ukrainians have been forced to flee the country due to the war. Frontex has been actively involved in managing these migration flows. The agency has assisted in registering and moving Ukrainian refugees across EU borders and has contributed its resources, including personnel and equipment, to ensure efficient border crossings [18].

As a result of the cooperation between Ukraine and Frontex, the following objectives were achieved. Firstly, more effective border management ensured that millions of refugees crossed the borders quickly and in an organised manner. Secondly, the skills of Ukrainian border guards have been improved through access to modern training methods and experience exchange. Thirdly, joint operations and technical support have contributed to enhanced security at Ukraine's borders.

Thus, we can conclude that the war challenges traditional theories of Europeanisation, which assume a stable environment for the spread of norms. Based on the above analysis of the security and democracy spheres in Ukraine and the EU's role in these areas, we can introduce the concept of 'crisis Europeanisation' – a process where existential threats change internal receptiveness to external norms, creating opportunities to speed up reforms but also risks of democratic compromises. For policymakers, it emphasises the need for a flexible framework that balances immediate survival needs with long-term institution-building.

Conclusions. The convergence between Ukraine and the EU in promoting democracy and security under the Association Agreement after 2022 is an important element of Ukraine's European integration process. Despite the

challenges, Ukraine has made significant progress in implementing democratic reforms, which confirms its commitment to European values. The EU's support, in particular through financial and technical assistance, is a key factor in the success of this process. In the future, further convergence between Ukraine and the EU in the field of democracy promotion could serve as the basis for Ukraine's full membership in the European Union.

The European Peace Facility and the Common Foreign and Security Policy play an important role in ensuring strong and effective security cooperation between the EU and Ukraine, especially after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Ukraine's cooperation with Frontex has become an important element in ensuring border security and managing migration flows. Despite the challenges posed by the war, this cooperation demonstrates significant potential for further development and integration of Ukraine into European security structures.

The war in Ukraine has posed a serious challenge to traditional theories of Europeanisation, which assume a stable environment for the dissemination of norms. However, the changing geopolitical landscape requires constant adaptation and innovation in EU-Ukraine cooperation in this area. While analysing the development of security and democracy in Ukraine, one can argue that the war has contributed to the emergence of the concept of 'crisis Europeanisation'. For Ukraine, as well as for its international partners, including the EU, it is important to balance between the immediate needs of the country's survival and the long-term development of democratic institutions and their further integration into European security structures.

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