

Oleh Poshedin*

 0000-0002-9253-5285

THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN AND EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION OF UKRAINE

ABSTRACT

The study's purpose was to examine the objectives of European and Euro-Atlantic integration defined in Ukraine's strategic documents and Annual National Programs under the auspices of the NATO-Ukraine Commission and to demonstrate the impact of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine on European and Euro-Atlantic integration policy. The article uses the method of document analysis to identify phrases and terms that characterise tasks of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine in the strategic documents since the beginning of 2020.

This article delves into the strategic documents of Ukraine, which serve as the guiding principles for its European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The EU and NATO documents defining their relations with third countries and Ukraine are studied in particular. The impact of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022 on European and Euro-Atlantic integration policies is analysed. Due to the methods of synthesis, the processed material is summarised and the final conclusions of the article regarding the future of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine are drawn. It was concluded that the success of European integration will depend on the determination of the Ukrainian government to carry out the necessary reforms. Regarding Euro-Atlantic integration, the prospects for NATO membership will be considered solely upon the conclusion of the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine. The paper aspires to be a part of the effort to fill the existing void in the scientific output on the realism of the tasks set by the Ukrainian authorities in the field of European and Euro-Atlantic integration before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, as well as the assessment of Ukrainian prospects for membership in the EU and NATO after 2022.

* The State Institution "Institute of World History of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine," e-mail: poshedino@gmail.com

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1. INTRODUCTION

A strategic course of Ukraine towards its membership in the European Union (EU) and NATO was enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine in February 2019 (VRU, 1996, 2019 version). Since then, issues related to the EU and NATO membership have been mandatorily included in all strategic documents of Ukraine, particularly the National Security Strategy of Ukraine, the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine, and the Strategic Defense Bulletin of Ukraine. It is worth emphasizing that there is a large number of scientific studies devoted to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, as well as the impact of Russian aggression against Ukraine on internal processes in the states of the European Union and NATO. Thus, European integration's influence on internal reforms in Ukraine was studied (Králíková, 2021; Wolczuk, 2019; Langbein & Wolczuk, 2011). The impact of Russian aggression against Ukraine on the transformation of the European Union was analyzed separately (Orenstein, 2023; Fiott, 2023). At the same time, there are virtually no scientific articles that would investigate the realism of the tasks in the field of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration that the Ukrainian authorities had before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and study Ukrainian prospects for membership in the EU and NATO after the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. This is the novelty of the proposed article.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The article uses the method of document analysis to identify phrases and terms that characterise the tasks of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine in the strategic documents since the beginning of 2020. The following phrases and terms are being researched: NATO membership criteria, NATO military membership criteria, implementation and further adaptation of the Association Agreement, integration of national economy into the European economy area, compliance of Ukraine with the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. In 2020, radical changes took place in developing the Annual National Program under the auspices of the NATO-Ukraine Commission (ANP). Since this year, ANP have been compiled using the results-oriented management methodology, which focuses on setting and achieving specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals. Therefore, the analysis of ANP starts specifically as of 2020.

This article delves into the strategic documents of Ukraine, which serve as the guiding principles for its European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Of particular importance to the research is the Association Agreement (hereinafter referred to as the AA), a cornerstone of Ukraine's integration strategy.

The documents exchanged among Russia, NATO, and the USA on the eve of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 were separately analyzed. These documents are important in the context of determining the future of the Euro-Atlantic integration because they characterize the expansion policy of the Alliance. The EU and NATO documents defining their relations with third countries and Ukraine are studied in particular. The Agreement on European Economic Area (The EEA Agreement, 2016) provides an understanding

of the European Economic Area. The NATO Membership Action Plan (NATO, 1999) defines what is expected of a state wishing to join NATO. The impact of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022 on European and Euro-Atlantic integration policies is analysed. Due to the methods of synthesis, the processed material is summarised and the final conclusions of the article regarding the future of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine are drawn.

3. THE AIMS OF EUROPEAN AND EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

The National Security Strategy of Ukraine 2020 (VRU, 2020, article 34) confirmed the strategic course of the state to obtain full membership of Ukraine in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The document outlines the need to fully implement and further adapt the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union/European Atomic Energy Community. It also emphasizes the importance of integrating the Ukrainian economy into the European economy area, in line with the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership (VRU, 2020, article 34).

Additionally, it highlights that implementing and further adapting the Association Agreement are important tasks for European integration. Every year Ukrainian Government published reports on the implementation of the Agreement. Relevant reports were also prepared by the European Union. The Government's Action Plan established the terms and responsibilities of the authorities concerning the implementation of the Agreement. In total, the Action Plan contained almost two thousand tasks (EU UA, 2019).

Although the implementation of the Agreement has encountered delays due to both objective and subjective factors, Ukraine has made notable progress in its execution. According to the estimation of Cabinet of Ministers, Ukraine has completed 63% of all tasks planned by the Association Agreement with the EU until 2024 (EU UA, 2022). It is worth mentioning that public organizations are traditionally rather reticent about these results (e.g., Gaiev-ska et al., 2020).

The Agreement anticipates the possibility to update or amend its Annexes, to conclude separate agreements in any area within the scope of the Agreement (EUR-Lex, 2014, article 463, 479). The Government of Ukraine focuses on the hereinabove areas to adapt the Agreement. The Association Agreement stipulated that a deep and comprehensive free trade area, linked to the broader process of large-scale legislation approximation, would facilitate further economic integration with the internal European Union Market (VRU, 2014, Preamble). Perhaps this was the objective the National Security Strategy of Ukraine 2020 concerning the integration of the national economy into the European Economic Area (EEA). At the same time, it should be noted that the European Economic Area unites the EU member states and three states of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) – Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway (The EEA Agreement, 2016). Thus, in order to integrate into the EEA, Ukraine must first become a member of either the EU or EFTA. Considering the above, the objective of the national economy integration into the European Economic Area was not quite correctly defined by the National Security Strategy of Ukraine.

As for the task concerning achieving compliance with the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership, it should be noted that Ukraine did not and could not fulfill the EU membership criteria. First of all, it was necessary to have a candidate status for EU membership, and

second, Ukraine did not have any plan to achieve the EU membership criteria. It should also be noted that the EU has never officially recognized such a prospect. The Association Agreement only noted that the European Union acknowledged the European aspirations of Ukraine and welcomed its European choice and observed that the Agreement will not prejudice and leave future developments in EU-Ukraine relations open (EUR-Lex, 2014).

With regard to the Euro-Atlantic integration, the National Security Strategy of Ukraine 2020 set the following objectives: to achieve in the shortest possible time the sufficient interoperability of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other components of the security and defence sector with the relevant structures of the Alliance states; to significantly enhance the reforms that need to be undertaken to achieve compliance with NATO membership criteria within the framework of the implementation of the Annual National Programme under the auspices of the NATO – Ukraine Commission; to receive an invitation to join NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). Unlike the EU, NATO has declared since 2008 that Ukraine will be a member of NATO (this decision was taken at the NATO summit in Bucharest, where due to the position of Germany and France, Ukraine's application for accession to the Membership Action Plan was rejected) (NATO, 2008, article 23). In 2021 at NATO Brussels summit, the Alliance reaffirmed the decision made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit that Ukraine will become a member of the Alliance with the Membership Action Plan (MAP) as an integral part of the NATO accession process (NATO, 2021, article 69). Therefore, the objective of the National Security Strategy 2020 of Ukraine to join MAP was absolutely justified and did not contradict the official position of the Alliance. The question arose only concerning the objective of the National Security Strategy 2020 of Ukraine in the area of compliance with the NATO membership criteria within the framework of the implementation of the Annual National Programmes (ANP) under the NATO-Ukraine Commission. Ukraine may have thought that the ANP was about achieving the criteria for NATO membership. As for Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership, the Annual National Programs of the Ukraine-NATO Commission play a pivotal role. These programs serve as the mechanism through which Ukraine implements the necessary reforms, bringing it closer to its goal of NATO membership (NATO 2021, article 69).

It is also worth pointing out that there is no fixed or rigid list of criteria for inviting new members to join the Alliance (NATO, 1995). The North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 notes that any European state capable of implementing the principles of the Treaty (democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law) and of contributing to security in the North Atlantic region (NATO, 1949) may become a NATO member. With certain reservations, one can assume that these principles are the political criteria that an aspirant country must meet to become a member of the Alliance. At the same time, it would be a mistake to assume that the compliance with these criteria is sufficient for the NATO membership. Consequently, to claim that the task of Ukraine is to meet the criteria for NATO membership is not correct. One cannot achieve something that does not exist.

The objective to meet the NATO membership criteria, defined by Ukraine's National Security Strategy, has been replicated in other Ukrainian documents, such as: The Military Security Strategy of Ukraine (VRU, 2021a); The Strategic Defence Bulletin of Ukraine, (VRU, 2021b); Decree of the President of Ukraine on the Ukraine-NATO Annual National Program under the auspices of the NATO-Ukraine Commission (VRU, 2021c). Thus, the provisions on the Annual National Programmes under the NATO-Ukraine Commission emphasize that the ANP is a systematic document developed annually that defines reforms to

be implemented in Ukraine in order to meet the NATO membership criteria defined in the MAP (VRU, 2021c). At the same time, the MAP explicitly notes that this programme cannot be considered as a list of criteria for NATO membership (NATO, 1999).

The ANP for 2021 states that it will bring the state closer to compliance with the basic principles embodied in the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, in particular its political, economic and military criteria (VRU, 2021d). As far as the political criteria are concerned, one can still agree, but there are no military or economic criteria specified in the North Atlantic Treaty. The misleading thesis that Ukraine has reached the military criteria was also disseminated at the level of officials of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine (e.g., Petrenko, 2021). The strategic objective of the ANP for 2021 was to meet the basic criteria for the full-fledged membership not only in the NATO, but also in the EU. It can be assumed that in this way it was emphasised that the political criteria for EU membership coincide to a certain extent with the principles defined in the North Atlantic Treaty. At the same time, the presence of the task for meeting the EU membership criteria in a document, which in its structure is similar to the MAP, is not logical.

At the same time, despite a certain confusion with the tasks, the Annual National Programmes under the NATO-Ukraine Commission were quite an effective mechanism, through which Ukraine promoted the necessary reforms. Since 2020, ANPs have been developed considering the Results-Based Management methodology (Government portal, 2019). The use of this methodology has significantly improved the quality of ANP processing. In 2021, NATO experts were for the first time involved in assessing the quality of the ANP implementation.

Many other tasks in the field of Euro-Atlantic integration had a concrete practical content and contributed to reforms of the security and defence sector of Ukraine. These objectives were implemented through various mechanisms, including the NATO-Ukraine Partnership Goals developed through the Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process (NATO, 2014). The NATO-Ukraine Partnership Goals were developed jointly with NATO, evaluated by NATO and were a certain indicator for measuring the success of the Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration. In this context, the Partnership Goals are comparable to the Association Agreement, the success of which is assessed not only by Ukraine, but also by the European Commission.

In 2020, the North Atlantic Council recognized Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunity Partner (EOP) (NATO, 2020). This status has become an additional mechanism for Ukraine to pursue the Euro-Atlantic integration objectives.

4. THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION ON EUROPEAN AND EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION POLICY OF UKRAINE

4.1. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

On February 24, 2022, Russia started a war against Ukraine. The war triggered events that dramatically affected Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski submitted an application of Ukraine to become a member of the European Union on the fifth day after the Russian invasion began (President of Ukraine, 2022). What seemed a distant prospect before the war, became a reality. The Eu-

European Council has acted swiftly and invited the European Commission to submit its opinion on the application in accordance with the relevant provisions of the EU Treaties (European Council, 2022a). The European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, during her visit to Ukraine on 8 April 2022, officially handed a questionnaire to President Volodymyr Zelenski. The completion of the questionnaire is a necessary step for granting a EU candidate status (European Pravda, 2022). The first part of the questionnaire was handed over to the European Commission in April, and the second part was handed in early May.

In May 2022, the European Council took note of the preparation of the Commission's opinions on the Ukrainian application for EU membership and would revert to the matter at its June meeting (European Council, 2022b). On June 17, 2022, the European Commission announced that Ukraine had achieved good results in strengthening democracy and achieving macro-financial and financial stability. On this basis, the Commission recommended giving Ukraine the possibility of becoming a member of the European Union. Namely, it is required to conduct seven blocks of reforms, which the European Council defined as a condition for the candidate status to remain: the reform of the Constitutional Court; continuation of judicial reform; anti-corruption measures, including the appointment of a new head of the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office; adopting a media law that aligns Ukraine's legislation with the EU audio-visual media services directive; changes in the legislation on national minorities (European Commission, 2022).

On June 23, 2022, the European Council decided to grant Ukraine the status of a candidate country and recognized the European perspective of Ukraine, noting that the future of Ukraine and its citizens lies within the European Union (European Council, 2022c). In December 2023, the European Union took a significant step, considering the possibility of starting the accession negotiations with Ukraine (European Commission, 2023a). This decision has the potential to reshape Ukraine's future. Prior to the Russian invasion, the topic of Ukraine's EU membership was not even a point of discussion. Although the path to negotiations is arduous, it is already evident that the prospect of EU membership will serve as a potent driver for the necessary reforms in Ukraine. This is substantiated by the fact that from 2022 to 2024, Ukraine has made several pivotal decisions that had been deferred for various reasons.

4.2. EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

In December 2021, the Russian Federation proposed to the United States and NATO draft treaties on security guarantees. Certain paragraphs of these drafts were directly related to the prospects of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration. The draft treaty sent to the United States proposed to prevent further eastward expansion of NATO to the east and to disallow the states of the former Soviet Union (USSR) to join the Alliance, and not to create military bases on the territory of the states of the former USSR that are not members of NATO (MFA Russia, 2021a).

It should be noted that the formulation of the question was incorrect because decisions in NATO are made by consensus. In general, this approach was in the spirit of Russian anti-American propaganda. One of the theses of such propaganda was the assertion that NATO was an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. The draft Agreement on measures to ensure the security of the Russian Federation and NATO member states provided for a ban on the expansion of the Alliance, including the entry of Ukraine and other states, as well as the refusal of

any military activity on the territory of Ukraine, as well as other States in Eastern Europe, in the South Caucasus and Central Asia (MFA Russia, 2021b).

On January 26, 2022, in parallel with the United States of America, NATO submitted written responses to the Russian proposals to Russia (Stoltenberg, 2022). The NATO reply stressed the right of each state to decide on its own future and foreign policy, free from outside interference, and reaffirmed commitment to NATO's Open Door Policy under Article 10 of the Washington Treaty. NATO suggested that Russia withdraw its forces from Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova, where they are deployed without the host nation's consent. The United States assured of their firm support of NATO's Open Door Policy. It stressed their willingness to discuss transparency measures and mutual obligations of both the United States and Russia to refrain from deploying ground-based missile systems and permanent forces with a combat mission in the territory of Ukraine (El País, 2022).

Russia justified its decision to wage war against Ukraine by the rejection of Russian offers by the United States and NATO and declared the West responsible for the outbreak of hostilities. When announcing the start of a special military operation, the president of the Russian Federation paid a lot of attention to the issue of NATO's expansion to the east, bringing NATO's military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders and stated that further expansion of the infrastructure and the increasing military presence of the North Atlantic Alliance in the Ukrainian territories is unacceptable for Russia. At the same time, attention should be paid to other aspects of the Russian president's address. Putin refers to Ukraine as a Russian historical territory and declares that the task of the special military operation is to protect people in the Donbass, who have been subjected to abuse, genocide by the Kyiv regime for eight years. To this end, Russia will seek to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine (Putin, 2022).

The program of denationalization of Ukraine is described in detail in an article that was published in the midst of the war and was posted on many Russian state information resources (Sergejcev, 2022). This fact demonstrates the support of the article's provisions at the state level. Here are just some of the article extracts. In the denationalization policy of Ukraine, the hypothesis that people are good and the government is bad - does not work. Recognition of this fact is the basis of the denazification policy and all its measures. The denazification of the population (which supports the Nazi leadership) includes re-education, which is achieved by ideological repression and strict censorship: not only in the political sphere, but also in the sphere of culture and education. Denazification can only be carried out by the victor, in this respect a denazified country cannot be sovereign. The name Ukraine apparently cannot be retained as the title of any fully denazified state entity on territory liberated from the Nazi regime. Denazification will inevitably equal to de-Ukrainianization, namely a rejection of the artificial inflation of ethnic self-identification component of the population of the territories of historical Malorossia and Novorossia, which was started by the Soviet authorities. The elite that support Bandera must be eliminated; it is impossible to reeducate them (Sergejcev, 2022).

Such a fate would have befallen Ukraine if it had capitulated when the war began, as certain foreign politicians advised. Both the military and political leadership, as well as the displaced citizens of Ukraine, were well aware of this. With this in mind, the Rand Corporation's conclusion, reached shortly before the Russian invasion, that given the scale of the potential threat to Ukraine and its forces, military assistance would at best be marginal in affecting the outcome of the crisis, and that the most effective way Washington D.C. can help

Ukraine is to work on finding a diplomatic solution (Charap & Boston, 2022). It was an external military aid multiplied by the determination of Ukrainians to defend their independence that became a key factor in the preservation of the Ukrainian state. In turn, the diplomatic solution from the point of view of the Russian Federation meant the recognition of Ukraine as a zone of Russian influence and the loss of Ukraine's foreign policy subjectivity.

That is why Russia accused the West of dragging the war into Ukraine because of the arms deliveries, as it could not win on the battlefield and force Ukraine to fulfill all Russian demands. The idea that it was wrong to supply arms to Ukraine was one of the theses of the Russian information campaign and at times had support in Western society (e.g., *Berliner Zeitung*, 2022). It is important to understand that Russia's attitude toward Ukraine as a state that has no right to exist is a balanced and consistent policy (e.g., Dickinson, 2022). Joining NATO was a matter of Ukraine's survival as a sovereign state, not a mere whim. Some NATO member states' politicians did not want to see this, blocking Ukraine's aspirations to become a member of the Alliance.

Support in Ukrainian society for the Alliance membership began to grow, especially after the occupation of Crimea and territories in Eastern Ukraine. According to one sociological study conducted in the spring of 2021, 71 percent of Ukrainians surveyed would participate in a referendum on NATO membership, and 54 percent of Ukrainians surveyed were willing to vote for accession to NATO (The Razumkov Center, 2021).

With the beginning of the Russian invasion in 2022, disillusionment with NATO policy spread in Ukrainian society. The Alliance, on the one hand, declared an "Open Door Policy," while, on the other hand, individual NATO member states had been blocking Ukraine's accession to NATO for years. The arguments were different, but the main reason was not to make Putin angry. Thus, after NATO's response to Russian proposals of December 17, 2021, which was accepted by all member states, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz suggested to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski to give up the prospect of NATO membership for Ukraine and accept neutral status in order not to provoke Putin (Gordon et al., 2022).

In such a situation, the position discussed by the Office of the President of Ukraine during negotiations with the Russian Federation was quite logical. In view of the fact that NATO enlargement was mentioned by Russia among the reasons for military invasion, Ukraine discussed issues of guarantees of security, neutrality, and nuclear-free status (Zelenskyy, 2022). Ukraine was ready to consider as an alternative to NATO a treaty that would reliably guarantee security and not turn into another Budapest Memorandum. Such an approach was also justified, because in order to stop the war with Russia, Ukraine on the one hand had to also respond to Russian demands regarding Ukraine not joining NATO. This is what some Western politicians called a condition of preserving the face of the Russian president and a demonstration to the Russian society that the goals of the military invasion of Ukraine had been achieved. On the other hand, only real guarantees of security and protection of Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence could compensate to some extent for not joining NATO.

Ukrainian citizens also supported the idea of refusing to join NATO while receiving security guarantees from certain countries. According to the results of a sociological survey held in May 2022, 42 percent of respondents believed that considering the war with Russia it might be acceptable to receive security guarantees from such NATO countries as the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, etc. instead of joining NATO, 39 percent insisted that only accession to NATO would be able to ensure Ukraine's security and therefore cannot be aban-

done (KIIS, 2022). Obviously, security guarantees for Ukraine should correspond to the content of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, when an attack on one NATO state is considered an attack on all members of the Alliance (NATO, 1949). However, there are doubts that Western states, primarily the United States, UK and France (as having nuclear weapons) will agree to guarantee Ukraine's security not only through the supply of military equipment and weapons, but also through direct participation in combat operations on the side of Ukraine (e.g., Bertrand, 2022; Reuters, 2022; Kyiv Independent, 2022).

However, as events have shown, Russia used NATO expansion only as a pretext to attack Ukraine. The main goal was to seize Ukrainian territories. This is already clear, given the pseudo-referendum on the occupied territories and all the actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. Ukraine's rejection of NATO could not satisfy Russia, which demanded territorial concessions from Ukraine. Therefore, the negotiations that took place with the outbreak of hostilities were doomed to failure from the very beginning. The fact that Russia needs new territories was confirmed by the president of the Russian Federation at a meeting with young entrepreneurs, engineers and scientists in June 2022. Without mentioning Ukraine, Putin, referring to Tsar Peter the Great's wars with Sweden, emphasized that Peter the Great did not seize territories in Sweden, but returned them to Russia and strengthened them. "Apparently, we also have to return and strengthen. And if we proceed from the fact that these basic values form the basis of our existence, we will certainly succeed in solving the tasks that confront us," summed up the Russian president (Putin, 2022b).

NATO 2022 Strategic Concept reaffirmed the decision taken at the 2008 Bucharest Summit and all subsequent decisions with respect to Georgia and Ukraine (NATO, 2022). For Ukraine, this positive fact means that the Alliance did not give in to Russia's blackmail and stands up for its values. It is also positive for Ukraine that the provisions of the Concept state that NATO will strengthen political dialogue and cooperation with those who seek to join the Alliance, will contribute to their sustainability and will strengthen practical support to advance their Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

The 2023 Vilnius NATO summit confirmed NATO's commitments made at the 2008 summit in Bucharest regarding Ukraine's future membership in the Alliance. For Ukraine, the most crucial decision of the summit was the recognition that it is no longer necessary to implement the Membership Action Plan on Ukraine's path to full Euro-Atlantic integration. Ukraine's success in implementing the reforms necessary for NATO membership will be evaluated by the heads of foreign affairs of NATO countries with the help of an adapted Annual National Program. The Alliance will be able to invite Ukraine to join NATO when the Allies' member states agree, and Ukraine fulfills the conditions necessary for NATO membership, according to the Final Communiqué of the Vilnius Summit (NATO, 2023).

At the same time, Russia's war against Ukraine, which has been ongoing since 2014, effectively made Ukraine's membership in the Alliance impossible. NATO member states will avoid a direct military conflict with Russia and will not dare to invite Ukraine to join the Alliance. In this context, the future of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration will largely depend on the results of Russia's war against Ukraine and the liberation of Ukrainian territories.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Despite certain contradictory objectives concerning the European and Euro-Atlantic integration included in the strategic guiding documents of Ukraine and the Annual National Programme, the Association Agreement, the Partnership Goals were those practical mechanisms that brought Ukraine closer to the European Union and NATO.

Until 2022, the EU did not want to negotiate Ukraine's membership prospects. The strategic goal of the EU membership, which was enshrined in Ukraine's constitution, was not confirmed by the EU. The prospects of Ukraine's membership in the EU remained uncertain.

Unlike the EU, NATO did not deny the prospect of Ukraine's membership in the Alliance through the Membership Action Plan. At the same time, the position of France and Germany, who did not want to impair its relations with the Russian Federation, made the prospects of Ukraine's membership of NATO look dim. Since 2014, when the Russian Federation occupied Crimea and triggered the conflict in Eastern Ukraine by supporting the separatists politically, economically and militarily, the prospect of Ukraine joining NATO has been indefinitely remote. The reason remained the same – the reluctance of a certain group of NATO member states to aggravate relations with the Russian Federation.

Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 had a significant impact on the development of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Ukraine has obtained candidate status for EU membership and is preparing to start accession negotiations. For Ukraine, this is a truly historic event. The EU has recognized Ukraine's European prospects for the first time. Previous statements in Ukrainian documents about the fulfillment of the EU membership criteria by Ukraine were given practical content. Moreover, the European Council Summit of June 23, 2022 (European Council, 2022 c) actually made an important geopolitical decision: it confirmed Ukraine's future in the European Union and, consequently, that the country does not belong to Russia's zone of influence.

The negotiation phase is a long process and takes several years. Moreover, the initiation of negotiations does not imply that Ukraine will certainly become an EU member state in the future. We should make preparations for demanding and painstaking tasks. The future of European integration will be mostly in the hands of the Ukrainian government.

As for the Euro-Atlantic integration, it is clear that we can discuss the prospects of NATO membership only after the war with the Russian Federation is over. In order for the prospect of Ukraine's membership in NATO, which the Alliance promised in 2008, to be fulfilled, NATO member states must accept as an axiom the fact that a functioning system of Euro-Atlantic security can be developed only together with Ukraine. An alternative to NATO membership could be reliable security guarantees such as Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. However, the U.S. and the UK did not offer this during Ukraine's nuclear disarmament, limiting themselves to the rather vague definition outlined in the Budapest Memorandum. It is difficult to imagine that they would do anything differently in the current circumstances.

NATO membership remains the best security guarantee for Ukraine. The decision of Finland and Sweden to join the Alliance despite economic and military threats from the Russian Federation is convincing proof of the effectiveness of NATO collective security guarantees. Inviting Sweden and Finland to join NATO without a Membership Action Plan also opens new opportunities for Ukraine. The fact that the Annual National Programmes under the auspices of the NATO – Ukraine Commission are structured similarly to the NATO Membership Action Plan also contributes to Ukraine's favour. Today, Ukraine's membership in

NATO depends solely on consensus among the NATO member states. Without EU and NATO membership Ukraine is doomed to exist under constant economic, ideological and military pressure from Russia. Ukraine alone will not be able to resist such pressure, since neither economically nor militarily wise can it compare to Russia.

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