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Yurii Fedkovich Chernivtsi National University, Ukraine

## European Union and European Integration Aspirations of Ukraine: Lost Possibilities and Sceptic Moods

**Abstract:** The article deals with the problems of European integration. The Eurosceptic moods of the EU concerning the European integration of Ukraine are researched. The polls on European citizens' opinion concerning enlargement are investigated. The interviews of European leaders concerning the enlargement are analyzed.

**Keywords:** EU enlargement, Euroscepticism, European integration, European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership

Already more than 20 years have passed since the time Ukraine documented its desire to join the European Union. However, while the crisis of the '90s rejected foreign policy goals on the back burner, in the early 2000s one of the main slogans of the event, called the "Orange Revolution" was the popularization of European values and promises of "new government" to soon join the EU became the idea of the decade. This topic has been the subject for all political forces to manipulate voters for the last 10 years. But the present socio-political events further demonstrate the relevance of problems of Ukrainian European integration research. As recent polls show, about 55% of Ukrainians aspire to join the EU. However, neither the will of the people nor the pro-European government are a sufficient factor for the guaranteed joining of the EU. Extremely important in this context is also the willingness and capacity of the EU to expand in the immediate future to the east and thus accept new members. Even the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU is not a guarantee of membership. In such a way, Turkey, for example, has signed an association agreement back in 1996; the EU has Association Agreements with such countries as Algeria, Mexico, South Korea

and South Africa. It is unlikely that these countries will become members of the EU one day. Therefore, the aim of this research is to analyze the attitude of the EU enlargement to the east and to the Ukrainian European integration in particular, against a background of growing Euroscepticism in Europe.

Large EU enlargement in 2004 created a common border with Ukraine. This situation required a response from both the EU and Ukraine. Thus, on the eve of Poland's accession to the EU, candidate for President of Ukraine and the editor of the Polish edition of "Gazeta Wyborcza" in the pages of the Spanish edition of "El Pais" appealed to Europeans to draw attention to Ukraine. Specifically, they said: "In this historically important moment we appeal to European leaders, so that they are opened towards Ukraine – that great European nation whose needs and aspirations can not be ignored when creating a new Europe. We believe that the European Union should not be limited with the concept of the 'new neighborhood'. It should be an unequivocal statement of the right of Ukraine to join the EU and NATO". According to Yushchenko, such a statement was made to become the signal for the democratic forces and Ukrainian citizens that Europe appreciates the desire of Ukrainians to join the European Union. Moreover, Yushchenko said that Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe are an example for Ukraine, showing how a clear definition of the prospects of joining the EU can significantly affect the victory of reform and increase support from the community<sup>1</sup>.

However, the expected response did not follow. Within a few days, Romano Prodi, then President of European Commission said that Ukraine has no prospects of ever becoming a member of the European Union. Mr Prodi said that the seats in the EU are almost gone and said: "The EU will accept Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, as well as Serbia and Croatia, but even this enlargement – it is not a near future". However, he suggested the creation of so-called "circle of friends" of the EU. According to Prodi, the EU will actively cooperate with the countries of the zone in the economy and in the area of immigration. He emphasized that the "Friends of the EU" will not have an office in either the European Parliament or the European Commission<sup>2</sup>. In this vein, another interview of R. Prodi is also relevant. He said that the fact that Ukrainian or Armenians feel Europeans does not mean for him that there are reasons to talk about a potential entry into EU<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Michnik, V. Yushchenko, *Por una Europa común*, El Pais, 2004, [http://elpais.com/diario/2004/04/30/opinion/1083276008\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/2004/04/30/opinion/1083276008_850215.html), (accessed 10.05.2014).

<sup>2</sup> *Prodi promised that Ukraine will never join the EU*, Ukrainskaia Pravda, 2004, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2004/05/4/4378362/>, (accessed 10.05.2014).

<sup>3</sup> *There is no basis to access EU in Future*, Ukrainskaia Pravda, 2002, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2002/11/27/4370599/>, (accessed 10.05.2014).

A similar statement at the same time was made by the European Commissioner for Enlargement Gunter Verheugen. “Ukraine’s chances of joining the EU are the same as Mexico’s to become 51<sup>st</sup> state of the USA” – said the Commissioner<sup>4</sup>. At a press conference, he also said: “We are clearly told that in the context of our relations with Ukraine, even though its accession is not in our plans, it does not mean that it can not be in the plans of the Ukraine itself”. In this way, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement urged Ukraine to move towards the EU. He also said that the door is not closed for Ukraine, although the EU cannot make promises they cannot fulfil soon. It is clear that such statements by top EU officials could not reflect the overall EU policy towards Ukraine’s European integration.

The cool attitude of the EU towards Ukraine was also noted in the pages of the American magazine “The Wall Street Journal”. In the article “Cold Comfort for Ukraine”, the author notes that if the EU really wants to see Ukraine as a consistently developing neighbour Ukraine should at least be provided with a formal membership perspective and EU should not openly declare that Ukraine is unlikely to ever join the EU. In addition, among EU errors, an unwillingness to neither make concessions in the trade area nor introduce a soft visa policy was noted and so was ignoring the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens who work illegally in the EU, as giving them legal status would solve many problems. The author also criticizes the European Neighbourhood Policy adopted immediately after the enlargement. It is noted, in particular, that in this document the correct goal was formulated – “to promote prosperity and stability” of neighbouring countries along the EU’s new eastern border. However, in this paper, there are no direct references to the possibility of Ukraine’s accession to the EU. This fact deprives the European Union of an important lever of influence on developments in Ukraine and strengthens the position of the forces that actively advocate for reform<sup>5</sup>.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed in 2004 to prevent new barriers between the EU enlarged and countries that are its neighbours. In addition, the ENP’s aim was to strengthen prosperity, stability and security of all stakeholders. Therefore, this policy also expressed the strategic objectives that were identified in December 2003 as a part of the European Security Strategy. As noted herein, the EU needs extension of the benefits of economic and political cooperation with its neighbours in the East, solving political problems there and expan-

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<sup>4</sup> Die Ukraine bleibt draussen, Berliner Zeitung, 2003, <http://inosmi.ru/world/20030912/193243.html>, (accessed 10.05.2014).

<sup>5</sup> K. Wolczuk, R. Wolczuk, *Cold Comfort for Ukraine*, Wall Street Journal (Europe), 10–12.09. 2004, p. 10.

sion should not create dividing lines in Europe<sup>6</sup>. Adoption of ENP has established an overall strategy for neighbouring countries to create a “circle of friends” around the EU and marked a step towards a more harmonious approach, but it was a general structure and, as such, it did not help to solve specific challenges in the neighbouring eastern countries.

As it was noticed by the Ukrainian researcher Tetiana Sydoruk, the main reason for “low attractiveness” of the proposals of the EU for the partner countries in the Neighbourhood Policy are differences in seeing aims and mission of the ENP by each of 27 member states. ENP does not have consensus concerning cooperation priorities with eastern and southern neighbours and trade and financial stimulus which can be proposed to them<sup>7</sup>.

Overall, the EU policy towards the East covered 12 countries, which could be divided into four categories of countries: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, the three South Caucasus countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and five CIS countries in Central Asia. The EU offered to neighbouring countries a privileged relationship, built on mutual quest for common values (democracy and human rights, legislature, proper management, market economy principles and sustainable development). Thus, the ENP went beyond existing relationships and offered to deepen political relations and economic integration. The level of intensity of this relationship was dependent on how neighbouring countries will share these values. Under the terms of the contract, the ENP has been separated from the process of expansion and in respect of the EU neighbouring countries do not give estimation on the future development of their relations with the EU<sup>8</sup>.

This policy, as an alternative mechanism developed to offer interconnected policy-making process in terms of international relations with strategically important neighbours, did not rely on new tools and offered a way to integrate existing tools through a “soft” framework program (including conclusions of the European Council and European Commission policy documents) to enhance security and stability in the periphery<sup>9</sup>.

According to the Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, “ENP is not a policy of expansion. It does not close the door to European countries, which in the future

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<sup>6</sup> *European Union European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in Secured World*, 2003, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>, (accessed 10.05.2014).

<sup>7</sup> T. Sydoruk, *European Union Neighbourhood Policy in Eastern Europe: Integration without Membership*, Lviv 2012, p. 84.

<sup>8</sup> L. Linkiavichus, *EU European Neighbourhood Policy Concerning Ukraine*, Lithuanian foreign policy review, 2008, No. 21, pp. 64–91.

<sup>9</sup> N. Copsey, A. Mayhew, *European Neighbourhood Policy: the Case of Ukraine*, SEI Seminar Papers Series, 2006, No.1. Sussex European Institute, p. 21.

may wish to join the EU, but it also does not provide an exact prospect of accession". It is not expected to expand the EU for these countries, politicians do not see them in Europe, but the EU has a strong interest in establishing a framework program with which it is assumed to export the same effect on a world that had EU expansion<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the formation of EU policy towards the countries of the region is complicated by their close ties with Russia, which intends to keep the former Soviet territory in its sphere of influence.

Recognition by the European Union the inadequacy and limitation of ENP for European neighbours, including Ukraine, had become the nomination of the Eastern Partnership initiative as a better response to the conceptual shortcomings of the ENP and the integration ambitions of its European partners.

The Eastern Partnership is a policy of the European Union, which aims to strengthen relations with its Eastern neighbours and which is a continuation of the eastern direction of the existing European Neighbourhood Policy. Participants in this program became 27 EU member states, as well as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Through this program the EU offered its partners new association agreement, which may include agreements on free trade zone for those countries that are able and eager to do so; gradual integration into the EU economy; easier travelling to the EU through gradual visa liberalization, accompanied by measures to deal with illegal immigration.

The partnership was also aimed to promote the democracy support, strengthening of energy security, stimulation of economic and social development, carrying out sectoral reforms, environmental protection, and the promotion of intercultural dialogue. In addition, the Eastern Partnership is proposing additional funding for projects aimed at addressing socio-economic imbalances and increasing stability in partner countries. The program provided both bilateral and multi-lateral measures for enhanced cooperation. As a result, the Association Agreement had to be signed. Usually, the EU concludes an association agreement in exchange for a commitment to political, economic, commercial and judicial reforms in the country. In return, the signatory countries can gain access to tax-free access to some or all EU markets, agricultural products, etc., as well as financial or technical assistance. Association agreements can include a free trade agreement between the EU and third countries.

However, this EU initiative can hardly be called a success. Among 6 states-participants up to the summit in Vilnius, Belarus withdrew from the program

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<sup>10</sup> *EU Crisis Response Capability Revisited*, Europe Report, No. 160, 17 January 2005, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/-/media/Files/europe/160\\_eu\\_crisis\\_response\\_capability\\_revisited\\_edit.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/-/media/Files/europe/160_eu_crisis_response_capability_revisited_edit.ashx), (accessed 10.05.2014).

completely, Azerbaijan and Armenia – partly, and only Moldova and Georgia successfully reached the symbolic finish of the program. Therefore, the signing of an association agreement with Ukraine was crucial for the EU leaders because otherwise this situation would mean the failure of the Eastern Partnership. However, taking into consideration the conditions in which the Association Agreement was signed, the European Union amended the European Parliament Resolution on the situation in Ukraine to give it EU membership prospects in the future. Recent dramatic events in Ukraine were directly witnessed by many European parliamentarians, who at last convinced the MEPs of the need to grant Ukraine the prospect of EU membership in the future; however, the specific timing of the resolution is not indicated, leaving space for manipulation by the governing bodies of the EU.

It is equally important to note that European citizens, who have not yet fully recovered from the economic crisis, including increasing spreading of Eurosceptic moods, criticized the foreign policy of their leaders in the eastern direction, because it is being actively funded.

Attitudes of European citizens towards further enlargement of the EU in general and the accession of Ukraine, in particular, have always been controversial in nature. For its thorough research it is useful to analyze the results of regular opinion polls carried out by the European Commission – Eurobarometer. So, just before the large-scale expansion of the 2004, the survey of European citizens' opinion concerning further expansion showed the following result: 47% of respondents supported the further enlargement of the EU, 36% opposed<sup>11</sup>. Just after the expansion, the number of opponents increased slightly and became as high as 39%, but also the support of the expansion increased to 49%. However, it should be noted that support for enlargement among the “old” EU member states was 44%, and this result was achieved due to support by the newly annexed countries. Thus, on the question of Ukraine's accession to the EU European citizens are equally divided: 43% opposed it while 42% supported Ukraine's accession to the EU in 2005. However, the support among the “old” EU member states was 38% and among the “new” – 57%<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, from the 2005 survey it was clear that after the expansion to the east Ukraine got a chance to lobby their interests in the EU with the help of the new members. However, the number of opponents of further enlargement has increased in 2006 and became 42% on average and

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<sup>11</sup> *Eurobarometer 60 Public Opinion in the European Union*, 2003, p. 75, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb60/eb60\\_rapport\\_standard\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb60/eb60_rapport_standard_en.pdf), (accessed 10.05.2014).

<sup>12</sup> *Support for Future Enlargement Eurobarometer 64 Public Opinion in the European Union*, 2005, pp. 29–32, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb64/eb64\\_first\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb64/eb64_first_en.pdf), (accessed 1.05.2014).

45% of opponents of Ukrainian accession<sup>13</sup>. In 2009, the number of opponents of the expansion became even 4% more and was generally 46%<sup>14</sup> and in autumn 2013 the number of opponents of further enlargement of the EU has increased to 53%<sup>15</sup>. As you can see, the number of supporters of further EU enlargement decreases every year, and the number of Eurosceptics rises in Europe. Of course, this is one of the most important negative factors that could affect the European integration of Ukraine.

Such Eurosceptic attitude towards Ukraine's accession, according to researchers, is caused by many other factors. Among them the following are the most important:

- Ukraine does not meet the criteria for membership.
- there are serious concerns about the ability of the Union to absorb a constantly growing number of members. There are fears that the EU simply will not be able to operate with more than 30 member states (including the Western Balkan countries, which are considered to be potential participants).
- the Union has accumulated significant “enlargement fatigue”, with the feeling that the focus now should concentrate on countries that are still candidates and the development of the existing policies and structures.
- the EU, especially some large member states are concerned on the attitude and reactions of Russia<sup>16</sup>.

This can be easily explained as Ukraine occupies a buffer position, separating the European borders of Russia from direct confrontation with NATO and has a developed infrastructure that connects Europe with Russia. In addition, the territory of Ukraine is a home to a large number of ethnic Russians who support Russia. In this context, the question concerning Ukraine's joining the Customs Union (CU) with Russia should be resolved. After all, Europe and Russia secretly put Ukraine to make a choice: either EU or CU. This very position had led Ukraine to a deep crisis. Since 21 November, the Cabinet of Ministers headed by Mykola Azarov decided to refuse to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. The then

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<sup>13</sup> *Support for Future Enlargement Eurobarometer 66 Public Opinion in the European Union* (2006), pp. 218–223, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_en.pdf), (accessed 01.05.2014).

<sup>14</sup> *Eurobarometer 71 Future of Europe*, 2009, p. 160, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb71/eb713\\_future\\_europe.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb71/eb713_future_europe.pdf), (accessed 1.05.2014).

<sup>15</sup> *Standard Eurobarometer 80 Public Opinion in the European Union. Report*, 2013, p. 122, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80\\_publ\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80_publ_en.pdf), (accessed 1.05.2014).

<sup>16</sup> G. Gromadzki, R. Lopata, K. Raik, *Friends or family?: Finnish, Lithuanian and Polish Perspectives on the EU's Policy towards Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*, Helsinki 2005, pp. 16–17.



President Viktor Yanukovich explained such decision with the very strong pressure from the Russian side.

And indeed, neither revolutionary developments nor partial Association Agreement have stabilized the situation in Ukraine. The fight for Ukraine between Russia and the EU continues. Unfortunately, the protracted political crisis has caused the situation in which Ukraine is currently perceived by the world society not as a subject but as an object of international politics. Annexation of the Crimea, the military provocation in the east of Ukraine, the information war with Russia got very restrained response from the European Union. In this context it should be noted that neither Russia nor the EU are interested in Ukraine as a strong state. Indeed, apart from the official rhetoric of the EU, which explains the lack of prospects for Ukraine's membership with an insufficient democracy level and economic problems, there are purely pragmatic reasons. If Ukraine becomes a member of the European Union, it will get about 50 votes in the European Parliament. In this case there is a chance that Ukraine will work and vote in the European Parliament with the Polish deputies, or even establish friendly relations with other members of the Visegrad Group, having thus a significant number of votes. As a result, the position of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe will be strengthened and it does not fully meet the interests of the leaders of the "old Europe"<sup>17</sup>.

At the same time, some European countries have begun to use the situation to advance their interests. Thus, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in his speech in parliament said that Hungarians living in Ukraine must obtain autonomy and dual citizenship. According to Orbán, the situation of Hungarians in Ukraine is very important for Budapest. "The situation of 200,000 ethnic Hungarians living in Ukraine, makes this issue particularly acute. Hungarian community there needs to get dual citizenship, all rights of the national community, and it should get the opportunity to self-government. It is our clear expectations from the new Ukraine, which now appears" – he said. Even sharper statements were made at the PACE session, where the Hungarian delegate supported the representatives of the Russian delegation. Hungarian representative then said that Ukraine is an "artificial state", which, apart from everything else, includes the Zakarpattia, which for many years belonged to Hungary<sup>18</sup>. Such statements were previously made by some representatives of Romania concerning the Chernivtsi oblast. There is a danger that the EU really wants to unite Ukraine with the EU,

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<sup>17</sup> Y. Vyshnevskiy, *EU not about to Split*, Kyiv Weekly, 2012, No. 27, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> *Hungary Requires for Hungarians Autonomy and Double Citizenship*, Ukrainskaia Pravda, 2014, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/05/13/7025158/?attempt=1>, (accessed 1.05.2014).



but not as a unitary, strong and equal partner, but as separate regions, following, by the example of Russia, the interests of individual member states to regain the imperial territories lost in different political circumstances. Therefore, the new Ukrainian policy should be internally oriented, aimed primarily at building a strong, stable unitary state, which could become an equal partner in international relations.