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European Integration of Ukraine. What will be the Path to Full Membership and How will Military Operations Affect it?

Abstract. The urgency of the subject matter is primarily conditioned upon the desire of the Ukrainian people for economic and cultural integration into the European community of democratic states and the need for Ukraine to defend its European choice by military means. It is also worth paying attention to the fact that this topic is not sufficiently covered by other researchers, political scientists, and sociologists. In this regard, the purpose of the study is to reveal the topics of economic, political, and cultural integration of Ukraine into the European Union. Moreover, the objectives of this study are to reveal the problems on the way to full membership of Ukraine in the European Union and to investigate the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the integration process. The main methods of research are analysis, induction, deduction, and synthesis, which allow the study to describe and highlight the most important aspects of Ukraine's European integration. The paper investigates the process of integration of Ukraine into the economic, social, and cultural space of the European Union; defines the European Union, describes its power institutions; reveals the problems and difficulties of Ukraine related to the integration process; examines how the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine would affect the further development of the country's European integration. The materials of the study are of practical and theoretical value for political scientists, sociologists, other representatives of the scientific community and researchers on the topic of European integration of Ukraine, who are interested in the features and aspects of this process, investigate the problems that prevent the Ukrainian state from moving along the path of European integration

Key words: candidate status, war, European Union, economy, reforms

Introduction

Considering the process of Ukraine's European integration and the problems associated with this process, it is necessary to understand the very concept of the EU (European Union). A.M. El Agra and F. Al-Nasarella define the European Union as a political and Economic Union of 27 states located in Europe (Table 1). Researchers claim that the EU is a global player on the world stage due to its size and influence [1; 2].

A. Albi argues that the EU is much more than just a free trade association. The European Union is more like a federation, as it has attributes traditionally associated with sovereign states: the flag, anthem, and currency, and member states pursue a common foreign policy [3].

At the same time, S. Hicks and B. Hoyland suggest that the EU is neither an international organisation nor a

federal state. Unlike international organisations, the EU has its own legislative and judicial bodies, currency, and parliament. At the same time, the member states of the Union retain their sovereignty, national legislation, and state languages. Researchers define the EU more as a political system [4].

A.A. Prykhodko considers that since its foundation, the European Union has become a powerful political, financial and economic centre of the world. It is the foundation of European security, the core around which European standards are formed. The European Union unites countries on the basis of creating a closer association around common economic, political, and social goals. Members of the Union have stable economic growth, which is achieved by creating a space without internal borders, strengthening economic and social integration [5].

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Speaking about the European integration of Ukraine, T.S. Zakharchenko and I.V. Shepel note that this process is of particular importance in the context of Ukraine's economic relations with other players in the international market. According to the researchers, the greatest economic benefits for Ukraine are the following:

- An increase in the volume of agricultural exports (traditionally one of the main positions of Ukrainian exports) to the EU countries, which will be conditioned by duty-free access for Ukrainian agricultural goods.
- Increase in the volume of deliveries of goods and services of Ukrainian enterprises to the European Union countries, according to public procurement.

– Increasing the level of competition in the field of procurement, redistributing state resources in favour of more efficient small and medium-sized companies, which would reduce the level of monopolisation in the country [6].

YA.V. Kikhtenko claims that the priority given to Ukraine's European integration is conditioned upon Ukraine's cultural, geographical, and economic proximity to the EU. In addition, the researcher notes that European integration is a strategic civilisational choice, which would result in the establishment of the course of political, economic, and cultural development of the state, and strengthen its weight as a subject of geopolitical relations [7].

Table 1. EU member states and years of their accession

Country	Year of accession
Belgium	Founding country
France	Founding country
Germany	Founding country
Italy	Founding country
Luxembourg	Founding country
Netherlands	Founding country
Denmark	1973
Ireland	1973
Greece	1981
Portugal	1986
Spain	1986
Austria	1995
Finland	1995
Sweden	1995
Cyprus	2004
Czech Republic	2004
Hungary	2004
Lithuania	2004
Latvia	2004
Estonia	2004
Poland	2004
Slovakia	2004
Slovenia	2004
Malta	2004
Bulgaria	2007
Romania	2007
Croatia	2013

Source: compiled by the author

After analysing the findings of other researchers, it can be concluded that the topic of European integration of Ukraine is rather neglected, so in the future, this issue should be considered in more detail. Special attention should be paid to the investigation of problems related to the implementation of reforms necessary for further integration with the EU.

The urgency of the subject matter is primarily conditioned by the desire of the Ukrainian people for economic and cultural integration into the European community of

democratic states. In addition, this desire is of particular importance in our time, when Ukraine is forced to defend itself from Russian military aggression, since the Ukrainian people have chosen the European path of development, which determines the originality of this study.

Materials and Methods

The following methods were used in this study: theoretical (investigation and analysis of political and economic literature and articles on the importance of European integration

of Ukraine; analysis of the features of the impact of Russian military aggression against Ukraine on the process of further European integration; generalisation of theoretical material on the problem under study; logical method with a systematic approach to the investigation of this phenomenon; deduction, and classification method when highlighting the main strategic actions of Ukraine in the field of solving problems related to integration processes; system and structural method for revealing the phenomenon of European integration from different sides and determining priorities in this process; method of comparing approaches to theoretical understanding of the essence of the problem of the future of the Ukrainian state as a member of the European Union; comparison and systematisation of research on such a problem); diagnostic (investigation of scientific studies, findings of research, collection and grouping of empirical facts).

The study was conducted in three stages:

1. At the first stage, a theoretical collection and analysis of existing approaches in economics, history, political science, and the system of international relations on the issue of Ukraine's integration into the economic and political space of the European Union was carried out; the studies devoted to this problem, its features, and approaches to explanation were investigated; information data of books, electronic articles, monographs, conferences, dissertations were considered, in which the aspects and problems that Ukraine faces on the way to implementing the necessary reforms were deeply and comprehensively disclosed; the relevance of the study was revealed; brief reviews of the works of other scientists and researchers were presented; the following were determined: issues related to the stated topic were under-studied; the problem, purpose, forms, and methods of analysing this problem were highlighted, and a plan for conducting research was drawn up.

2. At the second stage, the research, analysis, and design of tools for investigating the problem of European integration of Ukraine was carried out; the features and aspects of this political and economic phenomenon were considered; the internal and external economic and political problems that Ukraine faces on the way to European integration were outlined; the consequences of signing and implementing the association agreement between Ukraine and the EU were revealed; the percentage data of Ukraine's foreign trade with the countries of the European Union were presented; the results of the analysis were revealed, which helped to identify the specifics of this problem; it was determined how Russian military aggression against Ukraine can affect the further process of economic and political integration of Ukraine into the European space; the prospects of Ukraine as a full-fledged member of the European Union were described; the conclusions obtained during the study were systematised.

3. At the final stage, using synthesis, a systematisation and classification of the material obtained during the analysis and study of theoretical research by other scientists were described; based on the results of the work done, the final conclusions were formulated, which were the final presentation of these materials and determined the main

trends in the process of economic and political integration of Ukraine into the European Union.

Results

Ukraine's path to European integration is very long and difficult. Since the late 1990s, Ukraine has demonstrated its determination to participate in the process of European integration, aspiring to join the European Union. However, foreign policy statements did not lead to the necessary internal reforms. Ukraine sought to join the EU, but not to make significant changes to its own institutions and the structure of national policy [8].

The process of European integration was most developed in 2012-2013, when the association agreement was initiated during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich. However, the Ukrainian government suspended preparations for signing the association agreement on November 21, 2013. Initially, the signing of the agreement was planned at the EU summit in Vilnius on November 28-29, 2013, but this did not happen. The decision to abandon the association has led to pro-European protests in the centre of Kyiv, and after attempts to brutally suppress them – to the Revolution of Dignity. As a result of the February 2014 events, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine removed President Yanukovich and his government from their duties.

Later, on March 21, 2014, Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatsenyuk signed the political part of the association agreement, and on June 27 of the same year, President Petro Poroshenko signed the economic part of the agreement. On September 16, 2014, the agreement was finally ratified by Ukraine.

The association agreement goes beyond purely economic and trade issues, it also affects the level of development of democratic institutions, public administration and the rule of law in the country. Thus, the implementation of all the points of the agreement should stimulate significant changes in the Ukrainian economy and the state as a whole.

In December 2014, the European Union opened its civil mission in Ukraine, the EU advisory mission, whose main purpose was to mentor and advise Ukrainian officials on civil security sector reform. Speaking about the fulfilment of the terms of the association agreement, Ukraine is following this path quite confidently. As of 2021, Ukraine has fulfilled and implemented about 63% of all points of the association agreement. The greatest success was achieved in the areas of humanitarian policy, freedom, security, justice, and human rights [9].

An equally important milestone in approaching European standards was the fight against corruption. In addition to increasing the percentage of the population that is not immune to corruption, anti-corruption institutions were established, all activities of which were focused on the fight against corruption at various levels, namely:

- Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecution Service.
- National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, which has certain investigative and law enforcement powers.
- National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, whose task is to expose the facts of corruption among high-ranking officials by tracking their tax returns and other data. Although the anti-corruption process is far

from complete, some results can be seen already. For example, the indicator of attitude to corruption in Ukraine has changed for the better from 25 units in 2013 to 32 units in 2021, which is a very good result [9].

Nevertheless, a crucial part of the association agreement is the deep and comprehensive Free Trade Area (FTA) – an economic zone that should contribute to the modernisation of the Ukrainian economy and its integration with the EU internal market. The main tool of this process is the adoption of European trade-related regulations.

Of all the benefits that Ukraine will receive from the FTA, the most significant are the following:

- Providing consumers with better access to a wider range of products and stricter quality requirements for products manufactured in the national market.
- Providing duty-free access to the EU market, which would create significant business opportunities.
- Closer to European Union standards, which would improve access to third-country markets, as European quality standards are internationally recognised. In addition, the introduction of EU norms in Ukrainian legislation would help create an attractive regulatory framework for foreign investors, which would increase the volume of foreign investment in the economy [10].

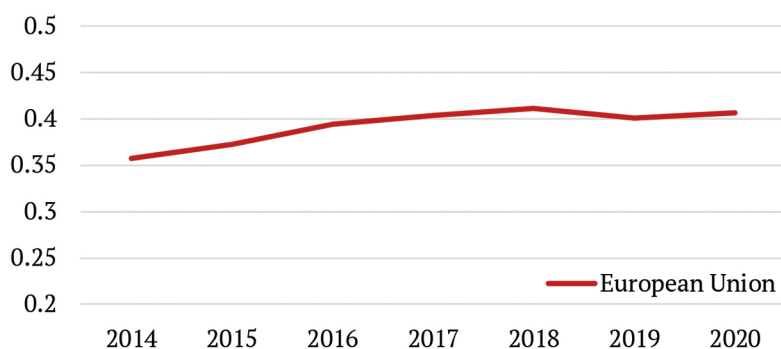


Figure 1. EU's share in Ukraine's foreign trade

From the above data, it can be seen (Fig. 1) that the EU countries play a significant role in Ukrainian foreign trade (40.7% in 2020), which was positively contributed to the establishment of the FTA. In general, there is a trend towards global reorientation from the markets of Russia and the former USSR countries to the markets of the European Union. For example, in 2013, Russia's share in Ukrainian foreign trade was about 30%, and in 2020 – only 7%. Thus, there are significant achievements in the process of Ukraine's economic integration into the EU.

Considering Ukraine's achievements on the path of European integration, it is impossible not to mention the granting of a visa-free regime with the member states of the European Union to Ukraine on May 11, 2017. This event was met with enthusiasm both among the population and representatives of the country's authorities. Among all the changes that have taken place since 2014, the people of Ukraine have felt the positive consequences of this achievement the most [11].

However, it would be unfair to consider only the positive aspects of Ukraine's movement towards European integration. At the same time, the implementation of this process is accompanied by certain difficulties, both external and internal. External difficulties are connected with the problems of the European Union itself, within which various contradictions accumulate (the opposition of national and transnational constitutions, the migration crisis, growing inequality between European regions) and Russia's military aggression. Internal problems include confrontations in government structures, insufficient development of transparency and independence of the judicial system, which is one of the key aspects for further European integration [12].

In addition to the problems associated with the judicial system, there are difficulties with privatisation and the introduction of a form of corporate governance in many state-owned enterprises. This creates conditions for monopolising the market.

Another problem is the presence of oligarchs in the country who have a significant influence on the country's political system, and therefore, are not interested either in reducing the level of corruption among politicians or in increasing internal economic competitiveness [13].

Moreover, the modern state of socio-economic development of Ukraine does not meet the criteria for EU membership. Ukraine's accession to the European Union at the current stage of the country's development may lead to increased internal economic instability and a decrease in the economic indicators of both Ukraine and the EU.

Thus, the possibility of Ukraine joining the European Union significantly depends on the level of development of the Ukrainian economy, its ability to effectively adapt to changes, and the degree of democratisation of the social and political system. In addition, Ukraine should make efforts to strengthen the national economy, focusing on the high level of social development in the EU and European standards [14].

Russian aggression against Ukraine began in 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea and the beginning of support for separatist militants in the South-Eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The first stage of this aggression led to the fact that Crimea was formally incorporated into the Russian Federation, which was not recognised by the international community, and certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts remained under occupation when the fighting turned into a state of frozen conflict.

In the autumn and winter of 2021-2022, there was a massive accumulation of Russian troops and military equipment along the borders of Russia and Belarus with Ukraine. During January and February, intensive diplomatic activities and frequent meetings of Western politicians with the Russian leadership were held, the purpose of which was to try to reduce tensions. Despite statements by Western intelligence agencies that repeatedly warned of a high probability of an attack, Russian officials continued to deny aggressive intentions. However, on the night of February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion of the territory of Ukraine [15].

On February 28, 2022, during the offensive of Russian troops on Kyiv, Ukraine signed an application for EU membership, asking it to be considered "according to special procedure". At the same time, Georgia and Moldova submitted their applications. The European Council responded quickly and on March 11, 2022, invited the European Commission to provide its opinion on this application in accordance with the relevant provisions of the EU treaties [16]. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the EU and Ukraine are "closer than ever" and that Ukrainians "belong to the European family". Already in April 2022, Ukraine completed and submitted all the necessary questionnaires to the European Commission for consideration.

At a meeting on June 23, 2022, the European Council granted Ukraine and Moldova the status of candidates for EU membership. The decision taken against the background of Russian aggression against Ukraine is considered by the Ukrainian leadership and governments of other Central and Eastern European countries as an important step in the right direction and as a manifestation of support for the Ukrainians who chose the European path during the 2014 Revolution of Dignity.

Ukraine and Moldova have joined the list of candidate countries seeking to join the EU. These include: Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey. The example of Turkey and Serbia is particularly significant, as accession negotiations with them have been going on since 2005 and 2014, respectively, and have not developed recently due to the political situation in both the EU and the two candidate countries.

At the same time, Ukraine's accession remains a difficult task, as the process of accession negotiations is based on strict compliance with the rules. Becoming a member of the European Union is not an easy task. The European Council drew attention to the conditions under which Ukraine and Moldova must meet the Copenhagen criteria, and "consider the EU's ability to accept new members".

Now that Ukraine has already received the status of a candidate for EU membership, it is extremely necessary to understand that Ukraine's admission to the EU will not take place at the same time. It will be several years before accession negotiations begin, which will mark the beginning of a new very difficult phase of the integration process. As the example of several Western Balkan countries shows, a significant period of time separating obtaining candidate status from obtaining the first concrete benefits from this demanding process can lead to disillusionment and Euroscepticism among society. In order for the process

of implementing admission preparation to be effective, an understanding of its time frame must be realistic.

An equally important factor influencing the prospects for further full-fledged membership is the huge economic losses from the war, which cause fair concerns about Ukraine's readiness to follow the long and difficult path of joining the EU. These concerns will add to the concerns of some other member states about the impact of Ukraine as a new member with a population of about 44 million on the functioning of the Union. Ukraine would be the 5th most populous EU member state, with a larger population than all the current candidate countries from the Western Balkans combined. Thus, Ukraine would have, for example, about 70 delegates in the European Parliament, which is a significant lever of influence.

Discussion

Considering the importance for Ukraine of gaining full membership in the EU, important is the opinion of V. Babenko, Ya. Biletska, and G. Pelyak that in case of EU accession, Ukraine can actively participate in the process of energy transit through its territory and defend its own national interests by establishing its own rules of the game in this market, because in this case, oil and gas pipelines will already belong to an EU member state. The researchers also suggest that after Ukraine joins the EU, other member states will become the most important market for Ukrainian goods and, thereby, will stimulate the development of the Ukrainian economy [14]. Thus, the conclusions of scientists regarding the consequences of Ukraine's accession to the EU are similar to the conclusions obtained by the author of this study.

N.I.M. Novichok believes that the launch of the EU advisory mission in Ukraine was one of the manifestations of opposition to Russia, since the Union at that time did not have the necessary "hard" tools of influence, except for economic sanctions. This was also a manifestation of the political support of the people of Ukraine and its government, which directly affected the ability of the Ukrainian state to withstand Russian influence [17]. Although the researcher touches on the topic of this study indirectly, it organically correlates with the conclusions obtained.

Speaking about the problems of Ukraine on the way to full membership in the EU, it is worth mentioning the work of M. Petrovych, in which he examines in detail the relations between Ukraine and the European Union since 2010. The researcher suggests that, despite the long development of mutual ties between both sides, Ukraine has always sought the prospect of real and full-fledged membership in the EU. The EU perceives Ukraine's request for EU membership as unreliable due to its own concerns about the stability, economic development of Ukraine, and ongoing war. They are concerned that such a request sets a precedent for other Eastern partners. The researcher claims that although Ukraine has received the status of a candidate for EU membership, this is unlikely to lead to rapid admission of the country to the EU, in particular, due to the complex decision-making process on membership [18]. Thus, the conclusions by M. Petrovych regarding the impact of Russian aggression against Ukraine on the process of its European integration, are similar to the findings of this study.

It would also be equally important to pay attention to M. Kralikov, who examined the specific conditions that affect the course and outcome of the spread of EU norms on the example of anti-corruption reforms in Ukraine after the Maidan. She argues that despite the support of the European Union and the successful introduction of legislative changes, the implementation of the reform has been limited. The reason for this was the consequences of implementing reforms for oligarchs and corrupt officials. The clash of EU norms with the prevalence of corruption and the unwillingness of top Ukrainian officials to implement real changes led to an imitation of reforms [19]. Based on this, the conclusions of the researcher on the problems of implementing reforms in Ukraine and the conclusions of the author of this study complement each other.

Paying attention to the prospects for future full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the EU, this study considers the examples of other candidate countries for EU membership. B. Buzan and T. Dies investigated the problem of possible membership of Turkey in the EU, which has had the status of a candidate for EU membership for 23 years. However, the EU is constantly postponing its decision on Turkey's application for full membership indefinitely. Researchers suggest that this only underlines the urgent need to develop an alternative project for future relations between the parties, since it becomes obvious that Turkey will not become a full member. The new architecture of bilateral relations should be based on mutual recognition that Turkey and the EU have many common interests, but there are also long-term contradictions, which would make Turkey's full membership in the European Union purely problematic for both sides. The way out of this situation is to find a more suitable position for Turkey: sufficiently integrated into the EU for some purposes and separate from it for others [20]. Thus, the conclusions made by the researchers can be used for a deeper and more detailed analysis of the problem revealed by the author in this study.

Revealing the topic of Ukraine's European integration, it is impossible to ignore the topic of the Revolution of Dignity in 2014. K. Volchuk, in his paper "State-building and European integration in Ukraine", considers Euromaidan as a factor that had a profound impact on relations between Ukraine and the EU. She believes that these events have led to further support for internal reforms in the country. It was after the events of 2013-2014 that the EU supported the Ukrainian people and the country's leadership in their intention to further economic and political integration. One of the manifestations of this process was the conclusion of the association agreement between Ukraine and the EU. Nevertheless, the researcher believes that the points of the agreement repeatedly exceeded the capabilities of Ukraine both in economic terms and in terms of the functioning of the state apparatus. Based on this, the European Union provided some assistance aimed at implementing public administration reform, which was supposed to help Ukraine implement the agreement. K. Volchuk concluded that since the Revolution of Dignity, for Ukraine, the process of European integration has become tantamount to a complete restructuring of state institutions. Thus, this process is of critical importance for

the Ukrainian state [21]. Thus, the presented information is an interesting analysis of the topic, qualitatively complementing the materials of this study.

Given that the topic of this paper is the European integration of Ukraine, it is worth considering the study by V. Zheltovsky, in which he explains the key aspects of European integration in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity. The researcher analysed the political, economic, and social reforms carried out in Ukraine, the attitude to the integration process of the European Union and Russia. As a result of the study, it was concluded that Ukraine in the future has three main ways of development, namely:

1. Successful comprehensive integration with the European Union and, as a result, full membership in the Union.
2. Successful integration with the European Union, but without further membership.
3. Changing the country's strategic political course [22].

The analysis of the process of European integration of Ukraine is an urgent task, as it allows drawing certain conclusions, due to which it is possible to objectively assess the scale of changes and reforms that the country has implemented. The study of this process is an important subject of research in science and arouses the interest of political scientists, sociologists, and representatives of other areas of scientific activity.

This study defined the concept of "European Union" and described its most significant institutions. The author's interpretation of the presented results can become the basis for a new hypothesis or theory within the framework of this discourse and in other directions. The path of the Ukrainian state to European integration was considered, and the main aspects of the association agreement between Ukraine and the EU were described. The problems and difficulties that prevent Ukraine from more effectively implementing reforms aimed at deepening the process of European integration were revealed.

The author of this study also investigated how exactly the military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022, will affect the further development of the process of economic and political integration into the European Union. It was noted that granting Ukraine the status of a candidate for EU membership, among other things, was caused directly by Russia's military aggression. Thus, the EU demonstrated its support to Ukraine at the highest level.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that Ukraine is successfully moving along the path of economic, political, social, and cultural integration into the European Union and has all the prospects of becoming a full-fledged member of the Union in the future.

This study outlined the main trends in Ukraine's European integration, defined the concept of "European Union" and described its most significant institutions, namely: the European Council, the European Commission, and the European Parliament. It was determined that the biggest impetus for the development and deepening of ties with the EU for Ukraine was Euromaidan, and later – the Revolution of Dignity of 2013-2014. The main problems, both internal and external, that prevent Ukraine from implementing the

necessary reforms for further European integration were considered. Among them, the most expressive are the high level of corruption in the country and the state's monopolisation of certain sectors of the economy. In addition, it was also analysed how Russia's military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, would affect the further process of Ukraine's European integration. It was concluded that granting Ukraine the status of a candidate for EU membership was a manifestation of high support from the European community, and in many ways was a reaction to Russia's actions.

The materials of the study can be useful and relevant for political scientists, sociologists, and researchers

who investigate the process of Ukraine's integration into the European Community. The data will also have a certain value for students and researchers interested in the problems and difficulties that prevent Ukraine from embarking on the path of more effective and decisive reforms.

It is worth continuing the research and conducting it in more depth, continuing to investigate the impact of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine on its European integration. The diagnosis does not exhaust all the features of this political problem and requires further consideration of such issues as Ukraine's cultural integration into the EU.

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Євроінтеграція України. Яким буде шлях до повноцінного членства та як на цьому відіб'ються воєнні дії?

Анотація. Актуальність заявленої проблеми, передусім, зумовлена прагненням українського народу до економічної та культурної інтеграції в європейське співтовариство демократичних держав та необхідністю України військовим шляхом відстоювати свій європейський вибір. Також варто звернути увагу на те, що ця тема недостатньо розкрита в роботах інших дослідників, політологів та соціологів. У зв'язку з цим, ціль роботи автора полягає в розкритті теми економічної, політичної та культурної інтеграції України в Європейський Союз. Також задачами цієї наукової роботи є розкриття проблем на шляху до повноцінного членства України в Європейському Союзі та дослідження впливу вторгнення Росії в Україну на процес інтеграції. Як основні методи дослідження проблеми виступають методи аналізу, індукції, дедукції та синтезу, що дозволяють описати та виділити найбільш важливі аспекти європейської інтеграції України. У статті представлено наступне: дослідження процесу інтеграції України до економічного, соціального та культурного простору Європейського Союзу; дано визначення Європейському Союзу, описані його владні установи; розкриті проблеми та труднощі України, пов'язані з інтеграційним процесом; досліджено яким чином військова агресія Російської Федерації проти України вплине на подальший розвиток євроінтеграції країни. Матеріали статті становлять практичну та теоретичну цінність для політологів, соціологів, інших представників наукового співтовариства та дослідників теми євроінтеграції України, що цікавляться особливостями та аспектами цього процесу, досліджують проблеми, що перешкоджають українській державі рухатися шляхом європейської інтеграції

Ключові слова: статус кандидата, війна, Європейський Союз, економіка, реформи