

## **MAJOR OBSTACLES TO UKRAINE'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO AND THE EU, RELATED NARRATIVES OF MEMBERSHIP OPPONENTS AND WAYS TO COUNTER THEM**

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Since February 2022, Ukraine has redefined its international standing. The country has demonstrated that it is part and defender of the Free World, paying a high price for its civilizational choice in resisting Russian aggression. Commitment to the values of democracy, freedom and human rights, long years of work on the implementation of the Association Agreement and support for European integration by the citizens have shown to the European institutions that Ukraine deserves to be a candidate for EU membership. The efficiency of actions of the Ukrainian Defence Forces against Russian invaders, establishment of stable cooperation with Western partners on arms supplies and in the security sphere in general have demonstrated that Ukraine is fit to be a NATO member in many respects.

However, Kyiv's practical steps towards these organizations in 2022 do not yet guarantee further success or acceleration of integration into them. In particular, the challenge is posed by numerous opponents of Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO, who have adjusted their rhetoric and position since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion. Under certain conditions, they can become more active in the international arena, hindering Kyiv's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

### **Origins of narratives against Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO**

Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2014 triggered a political and academic debate in the United States and the European Union about the context, preconditions and motives of Russia's behavior, as well as ways to address the situation. The full-scale invasion of February 24, 2022 has given a new impetus to this debate. Nowadays, when representatives of the international political and academic community are trying to model further development of the situation, identify levers of influence on Moscow, comprehend and regulate changes in

the international environment, create safeguards against further escalation or recurrence of flagrant violations of human rights, international law and humanitarian law, the course of this discussion is of particular importance. Depending on its results, the basis of the new world order will be formed, existing and new international structures and mechanisms will be reformed, the content of activities and composition of international organizations, associations and alliances will change. Also, the place and role of Ukraine and Russia in the new world order, their status and belonging to the global centers of political, economic and security gravity will be determined.

Kyiv's key interest in such conditions is to preserve its subjectivity, sovereignty and territorial integrity, to recognize Ukraine's right to participate in international structures and associations such as the EU and NATO, as well as to guarantee benefits from Ukraine's participation in international mechanisms and regimes, including the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

In its turn, Russia, as the main existential antagonist of Ukraine, is interested in denying Ukrainian subjectivity, permanent rejection of Ukrainian sovereignty, challenging the right of the Ukrainian state to exist within internationally recognized borders, and banning Kyiv's participation in the EU and NATO. Thus, on the one hand, Moscow seeks to label Ukraine as a "failed state", which seems to legitimize Russia's attempts to deprive Ukraine of the attributes of statehood. On the other hand, Russian elites use the current context to promote their own strategic goal—to place their country in the "club of great powers". Moscow denies the economic, social and political degradation that has unfolded in Russia due to the inability to embark on the path of democratization, to introduce effective economic reforms, to abandon the resource-based type of economy, and the corresponding establishment of the Russian Federation as not one of the global leaders, but a purely regional state with unjustified claims to leadership. The Kremlin explains the lack of economic and political influence on international processes by resistance from competitors in the "great powers club" (primarily the United States) and tries to compensate for this by military potential and nuclear intimidation.

At the same time, the restriction of Ukrainian sovereignty, the ban on the formation of a sovereign foreign policy, the possibility of influencing the internal Ukrainian political agenda are considered in Moscow to be attributes that will consolidate Russia's status as one of the global leaders. In addition, the creation of the "Ukrainian precedent"—unpunished violation of international principles and norms—is seen by Russia as the key to new gains, as Moscow will further be able to offset the lack of economic advantages, inability to form a positive political agenda, and therefore integration unattractiveness, by force and nuclear blackmail.

For the success of its strategy, Russia is obviously trying to promote its own narratives, where, along with challenging Ukraine's subjectivity and right to foreign policy choices, aggressive

policy of Russia is explained by attempts to deter the United States, the senseless use of military means is justified by its own existential security interests, and aggressive revolutionary expansionism is interpreted as innocent attempts to maintain the balance of power and achieve the formation of a multipolar international system.

In advancing such narratives, Moscow seeks support in the community of proponents of the school of realism, such as Henry Kissinger, John Mearsheimer, Richard Sakwa, Noam Chomsky and others, whose narratives are in tune with those promoted by Moscow. They are based on sentiments for Russia, anti-Americanism, ignoring moral arguments and justifying the use of force to influence states outside the club of great powers.

The interplay of Russian propaganda theses and scientific examinations of the classics of the theory of international relations hides the danger of forming an academic justification for the theses imposed by Russia, whitewashing Russian aggressive policy with arguments about the “balance of power”, which is partly a manifestation of veiled or even outright anti-Americanism. There is also a danger of creating an intellectual construct that will allow political elites in some NATO and EU countries to ignore the rights and interests of Ukraine and block Ukraine’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration in favor of the Russian interests or pressure, while saving face. Therefore, the agenda pushed by representatives of the academic club of so-called “realists” should not be ignored.

When it comes to support for Ukraine’s accession to the EU in the European institutions and among the member states, today there is no explicit opposition to this idea from any of these parties. At least at the level of the highest leadership. Nevertheless, a number of circumstances may lead to such opposition in the future.

In June 2022, concluding that Ukraine should become a candidate for EU membership, the European Commission proposed to put forward a list of seven steps to official Kyiv. Their implementation will determine whether the Ukrainian state will preserve its position on the path of European integration and whether it will manage to advance to the opening of membership negotiations. As it is known, some of the member states pushed for the requirements to be included in this list. In particular, representatives of Hungary [linked](#) their support for Ukraine’s further movement towards the EU with the adoption of new Ukrainian legislation on the rights of national minorities. Representatives of the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden were also [skeptical](#) about Kyiv’s readiness for candidacy. Since the decision to grant candidate status was supported by all member states within the European Council, one can expect that each of them will monitor how official Kyiv adheres to its commitments and build its further support or opposition to Ukraine’s integration into the United Europe based on this.

This research is particularly aimed at studying the positions on Ukraine’s accession to the EU

among the leadership of European institutions and some countries of the bloc. The focus is placed on the relevant narratives in the governments and parliamentary coalitions of the European countries, where parliamentary elections have been held after the full-scale Russian invasion (respectively, the authorities' views on Kyiv's European integration could have changed): Hungary, France, Sweden, Italy, Bulgaria and Denmark<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the article pays special attention to the position of German political leaders who are actively [promoting](#) the EU reform proposals.

The picture of NATO member states' attitudes towards the prospects of Ukraine's membership in the Alliance is more complicated than that regarding EU integration. At the summit in Bucharest in 2008, the North Atlantic Allies [confirmed](#) that the Ukrainian state would become a member of their organization. However, the same meeting was a demonstration of their unwillingness to effectively launch Kyiv's integration. In particular, this was done to satisfy the demands and blackmail from Russia, which already then declared the former Soviet Union countries as its zone of influence. Since that time, Moscow has only stepped up its blackmail of Western countries, using hybrid levers of influence against them. Another element of pressure on them was the direct aggression against Ukraine (which sought and still seeks to destroy the Ukrainian state and nation), unleashed in 2014 and brought to the peak of brutality in 2022.

Against the backdrop of these processes, NATO as an entity and a community of countries did not dare to provide Ukraine with a Membership Action Plan, although a special form of cooperation with the North Atlantic Allies—Enhanced Opportunities Partnership—was developed for the state. In recent years, representatives of the Alliance most often explained the lack of progress in the actual integration of Ukraine into NATO mainly by the [noncompliance](#) of the Ukrainian political, defence and administrative systems with the standards of the organization. Official reports did not mention geopolitical factors as a reason for this. Within the framework of increasingly close formats of actual cooperation between Kyiv and the Alliance, there were also obstacles from individual members. In particular, Hungary for a long time blocked Ukraine's interaction with NATO and the country's accession to the bloc, connecting it with attempts to [influence](#) Ukrainian ethnopolitics and [responding](#) to certain conflicts with the Ukrainian government.

The full-scale Russian invasion has underscored that NATO membership is vital to Ukrainian statehood. At the same time, as noted above, the crisis has reinvigorated the Russian narrative in public discourse that the Alliance itself provoked the aggression by “expanding eastward despite previous promises”. Thus, for NATO and its member states, Ukraine's integration

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<sup>1</sup>*During this period, elections were also held in the Czech Republic—a vote for one third of the upper house of parliament. Since this voting did not concern a simultaneous change in the entire legislative and executive branches, and did not result in the defeat of the current government coalition, we did not take into account the elections in the Czech Republic.*

into the Alliance could become not only a question of the applicant's compliance with the bloc's requirements, but also of the willingness to participate in guaranteeing the security of a country under constant existential threat. This potential concern was partly reflected in the position of the Ukrainian leadership regarding the course of joining the Alliance. In June, Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Ihor Zhovkva [stated](#) that official Kyiv would not take steps to accede to NATO, as they would be futile. Yet, the position has shifted. After Russia's attempted illegal annexation of four more Ukrainian regions (in addition to Crimea), on September 30 Ukraine officially applied for membership in the Alliance under the accelerated procedure. Later, Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov stressed that the de facto integration into the North Atlantic Alliance has already begun: Ukrainian defence structures [cooperate](#) closely with NATO, the Ukrainian army uses Western weapons and effectively [resists](#) Russian invaders, thus demonstrating compliance with the requirements of the bloc.

The article further analyzes the position on Ukraine's application for membership in the Alliance by the leadership of the organization, as well as representatives of the political leadership of individual countries of the bloc. In particular, the United States as a state with a key [role](#) in ensuring NATO's defence capabilities, as well as the United Kingdom, Germany and France as the largest contributors to the Alliance's collective security in Europe were chosen for analysis. Besides, attention is paid to Hungary's position on Kyiv's integration into the Alliance as a country that previously deliberately blocked the respective process.

### **Framing the discourse against Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO**

In their arguments and explanations of Russia's behaviour in the international arena, representatives of the academic community (first of all, the aforementioned classics of international relations theory and their followers) appeal to both Western states in general and individual governments. At the same time, some theses are adjusted to resonate with the political elites of the United States as a state whose position partly determines the overall strategy of NATO, France and Germany, which are the locomotives of the European Union's development engaged in shaping an updated vision of the Union's evolution, as well as individual EU and NATO states, which, not having a decisive role in these structures, have the ability to block Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO by resorting to the veto.

The main arguments aimed at influencing American policy are based on appeals to the necessity of preserving the balance of power in the international arena. In the works of Henry Kissinger, John Mearsheimer, Richard Sakwa, one can find statements that the end of the Cold War was not accompanied by the formation of a multipolar world and the integration of Russia into it.



On the contrary, the Russian Federation was humiliated, forced to recognize the supremacy of the United States, partially isolated (which is generally not true, given the unprecedented investments in Russia, providing it with the latest technology and know-how, its inclusion in the Group of Eight and the Group of Twenty, which did not raise any objections from representatives of Western elites). All this combined seems to have led to Russia's strategic fear of NATO enlargement, Moscow's latent resentment and irritation over the U.S. and Europe's failure to comply with their alleged commitments not to extend NATO's borders towards Russia, as well as the U.S. support for the Orange Revolution, Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity. In promoting such narratives, academics often echo Russian propaganda, ignoring both the subjectivity of the peoples and elites of Central Europe and the people of Ukraine, who were the main drivers of these historical events. The role of Russia is also neglected. It is presented as an observer of the processes in Central and Central-Eastern Europe, without taking into account the fact that Moscow was also an active player that tried to foster corruption, economic and energy dependence of the states of the region, and in the case of Ukraine openly supported pro-Russian forces.

Thus, the blame is laid solely on Washington, which is accused of provoking the Russian reaction (especially noticeable in the theses of John Mearsheimer, Richard Sakwa, Noam Chomsky) and which representatives of the academic community warn against further escalation, as it can lead to the expansion of the conflict and increases the likelihood of its escalation into a world war with the possibility of using nuclear weapons.

Another argument in favor of the need to give in to Moscow and stop the expansion of NATO and the EU (even through territorial concessions) is the speculation that the absence of such steps by the West will certainly lead to deepening of allied relations between Russia and China (the relevant narratives are visible in the theses of Henry Kissinger).

Despite the fact that the current White House administration is inclined to support Ukraine, the arguments for refraining from providing Kyiv with a clear prospect of membership in the North Atlantic Alliance remain relevant, especially as the influence of supporters of neo-isolationism and a hyperbolic form of realism, embodied, among others, by supporters of former President Donald Trump, is still strong in the United States.

When appealing to EU states, especially France and Germany, representatives of the so-called realist school resort to adjusted strategies. Along with John Mearsheimer's theses about Western guilt, which became the root cause of Russian aggression, Richard Sakwa and Noam Chomsky also speculate on the topic of anti-Americanism. They compare Russia's behaviour with the U.S. actions in the former Yugoslavia and Iraq—cases that are still controversial in the European environment. Moreover, NATO in the current conditions is labeled as an instrument of U.S. influence at the global level.

Implicit anti-Americanism can find a response among supporters of the “strategic autonomy”

of the European Union, especially in Berlin and Paris. And in conjunction with the imposed theses about the need to avoid escalation with Russia, it can have a negative impact on the process of Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, which, in the light of the publications of John Mearsheimer, Richard Sakwa, Noam Chomsky, is perceived not only as an irritant for Russia, but as a factor of strengthening the United States in Europe. However, Russia itself, by its aggression and the use of the entire arsenal of levers of pressure on the EU, has demonstrated to Europeans that the idea of “strategic autonomy” is currently premature and not supported by the proper resource potential of the European Union, and to some extent contradicts the principles of Euro-Atlantism, the relevance of which has grown significantly in the current security environment.

It is noteworthy that the messages of the nominal realists are communicated mainly in scientific publications and through the media. However, in some cases, there is also direct communication with political leaders. One of such cases is the recent visit of John Mearsheimer to Budapest and his three-hour communication with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The fact of such interaction shows that there is a demand for arguments produced by experts like John Mearsheimer among political elites (especially in the states that are highly dependent on Russia in economic and energy dimensions). At a time when transmitting the arguments and narratives of Russian propaganda does not seem to be an acceptable way to explain one’s position, academics provide an opportunity to argue pro-Russian, and therefore anti-Ukrainian positions in an elegant wrapper of scholarly debate. Moreover, the very status of the latter limits the ability to counter Russian narratives intertwined with the analytical and academic work of Western scholars. This can be speculatively interpreted as attempts to restrict freedom of thought and freedom of speech, be considered an attack on scholarly authority, and be interpreted as harassment of academics—a practice that is taboo in the civilized world.

Given this context, it is highly likely that the mentioned cohort of scientists will keep on advocating their points, appeal to “realism” equating it with the only possible “common sense”, deny the imperial essence and ideological motives of Russia, explaining Russian aggression exclusively by logical and rational challenges that Moscow allegedly faces. This will create additional obstacles to Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration and undermine its chances of joining NATO.

However, it is indicative that supporters of nominal realism lack arguments against Ukraine’s membership in the EU. The theory that Ukraine’s accession to the EU empowers the United States does not stand up to criticism among European elites, so Kyiv has a wider window of opportunity in the field of European integration.

The EU summit in March 2022 was a testament to the solidarity of the United European States

and recognition of Ukraine's European prospects. As a result, the Council of the EU asked the European Commission to provide its opinion on Kyiv's membership application of February 28. However, right during this meeting some European leaders expressed their reservations about Ukraine's accession. For instance, French President Emmanuel Macron [pointed out](#) that the EU cannot accept a country in a state of war into its membership. Yet he reassured that the United Europe should not close its doors to Kyiv, otherwise it would be unfair. Later, in May, Emmanuel Macron [stated](#) that it would take decades for Ukraine to be accepted into the EU, inviting the country to join a "parallel European community" in the interim.

Participants of the March EU summit also discussed the idea of the French leader to create a European Political Community, which should unite all democratic (or those that can claim such status) states of the continent. Along with the emergence of this format, there was a fear that Emmanuel Macron would lobby for a format of relations with EU candidates and neighboring countries in the same way as he once defended the idea of "Europe of different speeds". This option could be presented as temporary, but with the procedural difficulties that the United Europe may face during large-scale enlargement, no one could guarantee its longevity. Eventually, the first summit of the European Political Community took place in early October. The meeting [was not about](#) replacing EU integration with participation in this format, as it was attended by those states that do not seek to join the United Europe.

We should add that after the March EU summit, the presidential and parliamentary elections in his country awaited Emmanuel Macron. The current French leader and his political force won both of them. However, in the parliament, Emmanuel Macron was left without a majority in the lower house of the National Assembly. In fact, today France is run by a parliamentary minority government as fundamental disagreements in the opposition made such a format possible. The party of Marine Le Pen, Emmanuel Macron's rival in the presidential election, the National Rally, has considerably strengthened its position. This force [advocates](#) the abolition of the primacy of EU legislation over French legislation, seeks the country's independence from European institutions and the termination of the state's contributions to the joint budget of the United Europe. This may undermine domestic support for Emmanuel Macron's ideas of "strategic autonomy of the EU" and the European Political Community. At the same time, in the long run, Marine Le Pen and her party may become the French voice for the enlargement of the United Europe, which would mean greater political and economic responsibility of France within the expanded and unstable organization.

Also, shortly after the EU summit in March, Hungary held parliamentary elections, which were won by the party of the current Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Neither during the election campaign, nor after it, the Hungarian ruling political force expressed any reservations about Ukraine's accession to the EU. Moreover, Viktor Orban has repeatedly [stated](#) that his government supports the accession of all the countries of the Western Balkans, Moldova and



[Georgia](#) to the United Europe. However, the Hungarian Prime Minister, as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter Szijjarto, opposes the EU reforms, advocated by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. In particular, the German leader proposes to abolish the rule on the mandatory unanimous support of decisions in foreign policy issues of the EU. The Hungarian government considers this idea as contradicting the community treaties.

Official Budapest uses its veto power in some issues to affect the position of Brussels in negotiations with Hungarian authorities on other topics. Given this, we can expect that the dispute over the German Chancellor's proposal, sparked by Hungary, may slow down the movement of the current candidates to the EU in the future. It is also possible that the Hungarian government itself will be able to exchange its approval of these countries' accession for certain privileges from the European institutions. In addition, it should not be forgotten that Hungary insisted on the requirement to adopt a law on the rights of national minorities to be included in the agenda of Ukraine's European integration. The European Commission stipulated that new Ukrainian regulations in this area will be evaluated by the Venice Commission, so the EU member states will have no influence on the content of the document. However, it is also possible that official Budapest will resort to negotiations within the EU and block other decisions if it is not satisfied with the new law in Ukraine.

In autumn, Swedish citizens also elected a new parliament. It could be expected that after the formation of the coalition and the new government, the country would refine its foreign policy course. Changes in power gave grounds to expect such transformations, because the former government Social Democratic Party failed to form a majority under its leadership. Instead, the coalition was created by centrist and conservative forces, with the support of the non-systemic and right-wing Sweden Democrats (this party does not have ministerial portfolios, but can influence the decisions of departments).

Indeed, changes have taken place: the new government [announced](#) the rejection of "feminist foreign policy," which means pragmatization of foreign activities, concentration on work within the Baltic-Nordic regional initiatives, the EU and NATO, instead of focusing on the UN. At this, the [priorities](#) are work on Sweden's accession to NATO, decisions within the framework of the presidency of the EU Council and stepping up assistance to Ukraine in both social and military dimensions. It is worth mentioning that the second priority is related to the third one: official Stockholm seeks to enhance security mechanisms for European citizens, including through support to Kyiv. Accordingly, it should be expected that Sweden will not impede Ukraine's movement towards the EU, which will open new opportunities for assistance to the Ukrainian state. Nevertheless, given the fact that Swedish partners were [skeptical](#) about the idea of granting candidate status and fast-track accession to Ukraine (albeit under the previous government), one should anticipate that Stockholm will closely monitor the implementation of European integration reforms by Kyiv. This is especially true

considering that the new Swedish government has announced a reduction in public spending on development assistance to foreign partners.

In early autumn, Italy also experienced a large-scale political transformation. The elections to the upper and lower chambers of the national parliament were won by the right-wing Brothers of Italy party, which formed a coalition with the forces of long-time sympathizers of dictator Putin, Matteo Salvini and Silvio Berlusconi—the League and Forza Italia, respectively. Nevertheless, the new Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni continued the course of military support for Ukraine and preservation of sanctions against Russia, initiated by the previous head of the government, technocrat Mario Draghi. This can be explained by the fact that the Brothers of Italy and the League are parties that expressly support their country's participation in joint NATO actions.

Simultaneously, the current parliamentary coalition in Italy is [skeptical](#) about the ideas of reforming the EU, expressed by the leaders of Germany and France, especially regarding the adjustment of the decision-making mechanism by unanimous voting. Giorgia Meloni and her allies see this as a threat to national sovereignty and instead [propose](#) to focus on financial reforms of the United Europe. At the same time, the current coalition agreement between the Brothers of Italy, the League and the Forza Italia states that these parties seek to strengthen Europe on the global stage, first of all politically. Although no explanation is provided for this clause of the manifesto, it can be assumed that the current Italian government will support strengthening the resilience of states within the EU and creating a stable environment in the neighborhood. However, the coalition agreement is silent on the parties' position on EU enlargement, although in [general](#) these forces are not too optimistic about the admission of new members to the United Europe. Accordingly, one can assume that the current Italian government will not obstruct the integration of Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkan countries, but will not act as a promoter of their interests, demanding compliance with the accession requirements.

In early October, Bulgaria also held parliamentary elections, the fourth in the last two years. The country is going through a prolonged political crisis caused by the inability of political forces to form a stable coalition and, as a result, a government. After the October vote in the National Assembly of Bulgaria, a majority has not yet been formed. The country is ruled by the government appointed by President Rumen Radev, who is opposed by all parliamentary factions except one, the smallest. Despite the instability, the leaders of the state demonstrated support for Ukraine's accession to the EU throughout the year. Thus, on February 28, Rumen Radev [joined](#) the statement of the heads of the Central European countries, in which they called on the European institutions to grant Ukraine the candidate status and start negotiations on accession. The same support was expressed by former Prime Minister Kiril Petkov, the leader of We Continue the Change, the second largest faction in the parliament. It should be noted that currently the GERB party of the long-term head of the government Boyko Borisov

has the largest representation in the National Assembly of Bulgaria. This political force is clearly pro-European and pro-Western, recently it initiated a vote in the parliament for the provision of weapons to Ukraine. Accordingly, one can expect that this party will also support Kyiv's European integration aspirations. In this context, we should add that Rumen Radev, while supporting Ukraine's accession to the EU, [denies](#) the possibility of integration of Ukraine into NATO. The Bulgarian President insists that it is necessary to “peacefully resolve the conflict between Kyiv and Moscow” first.

However, the position of official Sofia on Ukraine's accession to the EU may be challenged by internal instability in Bulgaria. The country had [problems](#) with receiving the next tranche from the EU fund for economic recovery after the pandemic. After long delays with the reforms demanded by the European Commission, the interim government managed to achieve the indicators set by Brussels. The funds should arrive in December—they have become critical for the state in the face of economic difficulties and political crisis. However, the Bulgarian interim government refuses to adopt the budget for the next year, waiting for the formation of a coalition in the parliament and the appointment of a new management team. If a majority is not formed, which is a very credible prospect after more than a month of fruitless negotiations, Bulgaria will hold a new early vote in the coming months. Under these conditions, it will become increasingly difficult for the state to fulfill the requirements of the European Commission (and not only to receive money from the EU Pandemic Recovery Fund), so the Bulgarian leadership may well find itself in conflict with European institutions, which could affect Sofia's position on the bloc's common foreign policy. In addition, political instability contributes to the strengthening of the non-systemic right-wing party Revival, which in particular advocates Bulgaria's withdrawal from NATO, the abolition of the supremacy of EU law over national legislation and rapprochement with Russia. This political force has already reached its historical record by having the fourth largest faction in the parliament. It is likely that as Bulgarian voters grow disillusioned with other parties, support for Revival will rise. This may lead to the political force gaining influence on Bulgaria's foreign policy decisions—and they will most likely go against Ukraine's interests.

The closest recent elections in Europe were the Danish parliamentary elections. The center-left bloc led by the Social Democrats retained the majority in the legislature. However, its leader, former Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, [said](#) that she would form a broad coalition with the center-right parties, fulfilling her election promises. Most likely, this circumstance will not affect the foreign policy of Denmark, which in recent years [has been focused](#) on building economic cooperation within the EU and other international platforms, protecting freedom in the world, guaranteeing security in the regional and continental dimensions, as well as providing growth opportunities for developing countries. Accordingly, we should expect that official Copenhagen will remain supportive of Ukraine's course towards the EU. However, given the above-mentioned skepticism of the Nordic countries regarding Kyiv's

candidacy and its demands for a “fast-track accession procedure”, it can be said that Denmark will vote for Ukraine’s next steps towards the EU only if all the reform tasks are implemented in full. This conclusion can also be [applied](#) to the position of the Dutch government.

Looking at the prospects of Ukraine’s accession to the EU, it is also worth recalling the position of individual actors from the European institutions. Today, official Kyiv enjoys a strong [support](#) of its European integration aspirations from the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. Meanwhile, in September, the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi [stressed](#) that the European Commission will now assess reforms in Ukraine more deeply, considering not only their actual execution, but also their implementation. Referring to the participants of the meeting with the European official from the Ukrainian side, the media [reported](#) that he pointed out the impossibility of opening accession negotiations until 2024. In this case, it is difficult to assess how subjective Olivér Várhelyi’s forecasts are and how much his position reflects the views of the entire European Commission. However, we can say that such a judgment on the part of the European Commissioner increases the price of any delays with reforms on the part of Ukraine.

Speaking about the position of NATO and its member states on Ukraine’s accession to the Alliance, it should first be pointed out that none of the parties to the bloc has officially objected to such a prospect of the Ukrainian state over the past year. Moreover, representatives of the organization and its member states have strongly rejected the Kremlin’s speculation that “NATO is responsible for the growing tension on the European continent due to the neglect of Russia’s interests”. A month before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops, U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and his deputy Wendy Sherman [revealed](#) the details of the official Washington’s response to Moscow’s earlier written demands to “stabilize the geopolitical situation”. In particular, U.S. officials pointed out that the ultimatum to the Alliance to return to the 1997 borders cannot be fulfilled, since Russia in this demand refers to agreements that never existed, and because the decision to join the bloc is a sovereign matter of individual states. Although, at the same time, during his visit to Moscow, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz [assured](#) dictator Putin that Ukraine would not become a member of the North Atlantic Community for at least 30 years. After the start of the full-scale invasion, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [stated](#) that Russia had unilaterally ceased to comply with the Founding Act between it and the Alliance by its aggressive actions. He also stressed that the demands to “return to the 1997 borders” demonstrate that the Kremlin’s goal is not only the war against Ukraine.

This year’s [Declaration](#) of the NATO summit in Madrid does not mention the prospects of Ukraine’s membership in the Alliance. Yet, the Allies condemned Russia’s invasion, recognized it as the biggest and most direct threat to themselves, expressed support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Ukrainian state, as well as its right to self-defence, and reaffirmed their commitment to provide assistance to official Kyiv as appropriate. In



particular, Allies expressed their readiness to accelerate the delivery of non-lethal defence equipment, which “will improve Ukraine’s cyber defences and resilience, and support modernising its defence sector in its transition to strengthen long-term interoperability”. In this way, the bloc demonstrated that it considers Ukraine as a partner for a long time. In this context, it should be noted that the provision of lethal weapons to official Kyiv takes place not within the framework of cooperation with NATO, but within bilateral or other multilateral contacts. Finally, in the declaration, the Allies reiterated their commitment to NATO’s Open Door Policy. However, this point was primarily related to the invitation to Sweden and Finland for membership.

The next moment that could reveal the position of the NATO leadership and member states on Ukraine’s accession to the Alliance was the submission of the application by the Ukrainian state on September 30, 2022. On that day, dictator Putin announced an attempt to annex four more regions of Ukraine, in addition to Crimea. Commenting on these events, Jens Stoltenberg [stressed](#) that the Alliance does not recognize any illegal actions of Moscow and will continue to support official Kyiv, although it is not a party to the conflict. The NATO Secretary General also noted that the main focus of the Allies was to assist Ukraine in its defence against the aggressor. At the same time, he stressed that any democracy in Europe has the opportunity to apply for membership in the Alliance, and the Madrid summit confirmed that the Ukrainian state has the right to choose its own path. However, the decision to admit official Kyiv to the North Atlantic bloc must be supported by all its 30 member states. A few days later, Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Ihor Zhovkva [said](#) that the Alliance had received the Ukrainian application. The next stage of its review should be a discussion at the level of representatives of member states in the organization.

The reaction of a number of Central and Eastern European countries to Ukraine’s application for NATO membership was indicative. Two days after the announcement of this decision by Kyiv, the Presidents of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Montenegro signed a joint [statement](#) supporting “the decision of the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit on Ukraine's future membership in the Alliance”. It is essential to note that the initiative to announce such a position came from the heads of these states themselves.

Prior to that, at a joint briefing with Anthony Blinken, Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly [stated](#) that her country believes that Ukraine should be a member of NATO and has been advocating this idea for over a decade. The U.S. Secretary of State was more restrained in commenting on this topic. He said that official Washington supports the Alliance’s Open Door policy, but also remarked that there is a certain process that countries must follow in order to join. On the same day with these statements, National Security Advisor to the President of the United States Jake Sullivan [said](#) that the issue of Ukraine’s accession to



NATO “is not yet a priority” for the White House. He emphasized that the Allies should now concentrate on helping Kyiv in the fight against the Russian aggressor, while stressing that Washington is committed to the Open Door Policy. Finally, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi in her comments to the media [refused](#) to talk about the prospects of Ukraine’s application for NATO membership, but supported the idea of security guarantees for Ukraine.

Interestingly, most European members of the Alliance at the highest official level did not publicly react to Kyiv’s application. In particular, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, former Prime Minister Liz Truss and current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Rishi Sunak did not comment on this topic. In addition, even [official reports](#) about Volodymyr Zelenskyi’s [conversations](#) with these leaders do not mention any discussion of the application or membership. It was only during the visit of the current British Prime Minister that the Ukrainian head of state [pointed](#) to the need for security guarantees for Ukraine while the country is not a NATO member. Rishi Sunak was silent on this topic. The only official from these countries who responded to Kyiv’s request was German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht. She [expressed](#) support for Ukraine’s aspiration to join NATO in an accelerated mode, but only under the conditions defined by the regulations. She also underlined that this is a decision of 30 countries and Germany cannot act independently in this situation. Kyiv’s application [could](#) also have been discussed at the Ramstein meeting of the international format of assistance to Ukraine in October. However, the summit participants’ [reports](#) did not mention the content of the conversations and their results.

Finally, we should recall Hungary’s position on the accession of Ukraine to NATO in 2022. In May, the head of the Hungarian diplomatic mission in Kyiv, István Íjgyártó, [told](#) the media that official Budapest had never been against Ukraine’s accession to the Alliance. According to him, Hungary blocked Kyiv’s cooperation with the organization because of the issues of language policy and education of national minorities, which were resolved at the level of relevant ministers within NATO. István Íjgyártó reiterated that Hungarian representatives had no other choice but to use the capabilities of the Alliance not only as a military but also as a political organization. As of May 2022, according to the Ambassador, Hungary is not against Ukraine’s accession to NATO. And although Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has repeatedly [stated](#) in recent months that the current war in Europe is a consequence of the “U.S. desire to establish a unipolar world order” and “the West’s failure to take into account Russia's interests”, he did not deny the possibility of Ukraine joining the Alliance. However, he did not comment application of Kyiv to join NATO.

## **Recommendations for countering the narratives against Ukraine’s membership in the EU and NATO**

Today, there is a consensus among the EU states that Ukraine will become part of the United

Europe. The only difference in the positions of European institutions and member states is how long it will take to join and what levers of influence on official Kyiv should be used in this process. Accordingly, now the initiative to move towards the EU rests in the hands of the Ukrainian authorities—at least until the transition to the next stage of candidacy and the opening of accession negotiations. The core of this initiative is the opportunity to implement reforms that are the responsibility of the state leadership. Their efficiency will be the most effective response to any skeptical views or negative narratives about Ukraine’s European prospects. Obviously, given the active hostilities and terror on the part of Russia, serious destruction of infrastructure, severe social and demographic problems, rapid and large-scale changes in certain sectors of society are hardly possible in Ukraine. Yet, European partners understand this challenge, and their requirements primarily concern changes in the legal framework and institution building. These tasks are quite feasible even in the conditions of war.

Moreover, the doors to NATO have not been closed to Ukraine. None of the Alliance members and the organization itself has officially rejected the prospects of Ukrainian membership. The main prejudices regarding Ukraine’s accession to the bloc today are related to the desire to avoid direct participation in the armed confrontation with Russia. However, at the level of the Alliance and bilaterally, Allies support Kyiv in its fight against the aggressor and view it as a long-term partner. NATO and its members are not only responding to the situational challenges faced by Ukraine, but are also ready to invest in the country’s military and political transformation to strengthen its defence capabilities and cooperation with it in the future. Under such circumstances, joining NATO also becomes the subject of reforms, which, in turn, guarantee the Ukrainian state long-term resilience to threats of various kinds.

If we talk about the ways of countering the narratives against Ukraine’s accession to the EU and NATO by the Ukrainian state, we should distinguish two dimensions of resistance to them:

*In the political dimension:*

- **Ukrainian actors should first and foremost focus on reforms.** Fulfilling the relevant accession requirements is the main way to answer any doubts about Ukraine’s ability to be a member of the European and Euro-Atlantic communities. In the case of EU integration, the process looks more straightforward, as it is formalized: completion of specific tasks means moving to the next stage. On the other hand, NATO membership implies approximation to the Alliance’s standards, building a market economy and ensuring an appropriate level of governance. These changes will be partly implemented within the framework of integration into the EU, and partly—within the course announced by the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine on the transition of the Armed

Forces of Ukraine to Western models of weapons and NATO management standards.

- **Official Kyiv should seek further implementation of cooperation with NATO in bilateral documents.** The Membership Action Plan is not a requirement for joining the Alliance, according to official documents of the bloc. This list of reforms is an auxiliary mechanism for the accession countries to achieve NATO standards. In the case of Ukraine, in fact, this task has been fulfilled in recent years by the Annual National Programs of Cooperation with the Alliance. Kyiv needs official recognition and consolidation of its progress towards the Alliance by NATO itself.
- **The Office of the President, the leadership of the Verkhovna Rada and the Cabinet of Ministers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine should continue the practice of concluding bilateral declarations and other documents in support of Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO with the member states of the respective organizations.** The fact of signing such acts will testify to the fact that the leadership of the respective countries recognizes the prospects of the Ukrainian state, its progress in the necessary reforms and its contribution to stability and security in Europe. In addition, such documents can be a signal to other members who are more skeptical about ability of Ukraine to join the EU and NATO.

*In the information dimension:*

- **Ukrainian authorities, representatives of the expert community and civil society, when communicating with foreign partners on the prospects of EU membership, should highlight the progress Ukraine has already made on the path of European integration.** Official Kyiv has almost implemented the Association Agreement, EU investments in Ukraine's institutions and economic development have led to improved governance, services to the population and rising living standards, as reflected in sectoral statistics for 2019-2021. Russia's full-scale invasion has undermined some of the effects of this progress, but it has not undone the fact that Ukraine is a reliable partner of the EU, which uses European integration instruments purposefully and in most cases effectively to ensure the country's quality

development. There is no reason to assume that the accession of Ukraine to the EU will follow a different trajectory after gaining the candidate status.

- **During the dialogue with foreign partners on the prospects and necessity of Ukraine's membership in NATO, Ukrainian authorities, representatives of the expert community and civil society should put emphasis on the fact that the decision to join the Alliance is the exclusive sovereign right of the Ukrainian state.** Today, according to sociological surveys, the majority of the country's population is in favor of joining the bloc. This is the reaction of citizens to the threat that Russia

poses to their lives and future. To deprive Ukraine of the right to join NATO means to deprive these people of opportunities for a full existence. **It should also be underscored that Ukraine is already a part of the North Atlantic security system, effectively protecting Europe from the Russian threat.** Moreover, the country is achieving NATO standards through the modernization of its Armed Forces and through the reforms it is implementing within the scope of EU integration.

- **Ukrainian authorities and representatives of civil society should create conditions and encourage national and foreign experts and scholars loyal to Ukraine to engage in discussions with known world opponents of Ukraine’s integration into the EU and NATO.** The arguments of such advisors can influence the position of the member governments, which in the future will determine the fate of Ukraine’s accession to the respective organizations. Accordingly, it is necessary to frequently and publicly expose the weakness or ill-founded nature of their positions.

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