

II. Political-Economy Analysis: How Civic Activism Can Maintain UA Democratic Reform Momentum in EU Accession

Introduction

The EU decision in December 2023¹ to open official EU Accession talks with Ukraine marked a historic moment of promise even within the depths of war. The June 24, 2024² start of official negotiations further demonstrated the resolve on both sides to push forward with some predicting accession already by 2030.

Yet past experiences of other candidate countries highlight that the path to the EU can be bumpy, and that democratic reforms may get lost in the mix. They also highlight that even becoming a member is no guarantee of maintaining democratic standards.³ For Ukraine the path may be particularly bumpy and civic actions and activism in this mix will be a crucial component of ensuring a meaningful and sustainable reform process that leads to a more democratic and rule-of-law Ukraine as a full-fledged member of the EU.

This analysis focuses in on lessons from past accession processes, specific challenges that Ukraine faces, and ways that civic efforts can mitigate the challenges while promoting democratic development, both during accession process and as a new member.

Lessons to consider from current and wannabe EU Members

Past and ongoing accession efforts by countries in Central and Southeast Europe show that the process has had significant pitfalls when considering democratic reforms. We examine how the EU's use of incentives and penalties, as well as the early years of membership, can sometimes undermine efforts to strengthen democracy.

Need to 'Frontload' Key DG Chapters and Emphasize DG as Cross-Cutting Component of All Chapters

Historically, the technocratic nature of the EU accession process has often overshadowed democratic concerns. The 35 chapters of the EU *Aquis* are considerably challenging framework for any country that is in the process of accession. Inherent in the accession process and at least in the declarative stances of the EU and the accession countries is the understanding that the technical aspects of reforms and compliance across the chapters would become hollow without democratic governance underpinnings and that any reforms in any chapters are 'for the good of the country.'⁴ Yet the push for accession

¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/12/15/european-council-conclusions-14-and-15-december-2023/>

² https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-opens-accession-negotiations-ukraine-2024-06-25_en
³ Freedom House's Nations in Transit notes that Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary have all experienced significant drops in democracy ratings on a twenty-year trajectory. Hungary went from being a 'semi-consolidated democracy' to a hybrid/transitional regime in 2019. See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2024/region-reordered-autocracy-and-democracy> Also see: <https://www.idea.int/gsod/2023/chapters/europe/>

⁴ The EU has repeatedly emphasized this point with the most recent being during in the official Accession talk announcement for Albania and North Macedonia in 2022. See: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-launch-accession-talks-north-macedonia-albania/>

from Brussels and the national capitals, in practice prioritized the technical over the democratic approach, pushing the Democratic Governance (DG) issue primarily to the confines of the several chapters directly focused on these.

The results are still being understood but analysts point to a set of EU members' slippage in democratic credentials, partially as due to the technical difficulties of large-scale administrative reform as well as the shallow absorption of DG reforms. Croatia's experience, particularly with judicial and public administration reform after its 2013 EU membership, illustrates these challenges. The rapid pace of reforms often resulted in a "box-ticking" approach, where institutional changes were made but lacked the political will and cultural shift necessary for long-term impact. This is why concerns over the judiciary in Croatia persist today.⁵

Since Croatia's accession, some lessons have been learned by so-called front-loading or putting more emphasis earlier on the explicit 'tough chapters' such as Chapter 23 – *Judiciary and Fundamental Rights* – and Chapter 24 – *Justice Freedom and Security* – that would then have a knock-on effect on other chapters – e.g. if rule of law and fundamental rights are addressed, this should cross-pollinate to help institutional reform, anti-corruption etc. covered in other chapters. This was the case for Serbia in 2016 and is the case for all new candidate countries including Ukraine which highlights the need for candidates to pay more stringent attention to democratic reforms at least formally from the beginning of the process.

Perception of Changeable Criteria

Accession process enthusiasm can be undercut in candidate countries when they perceive the EU process as having changeable criteria. Another lesson learned from recent members Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and wannabe members of the West Balkans is that democratic standards are not only malleable, but periodically changed even if you are already members but not 'full members.' For example, the EU added additional compliance criteria for Bulgaria and Romania through the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) in 2006.⁶ While this acted as a conditionality tool to encourage democratic reforms—albeit slowly, as the CVM was only closed in 2023⁷—it also gave rise to perceptions of double standards. Political considerations, such as linking CVM compliance to Schengen access, often appeared to overshadow democratic principles.

Expectations Wane as New Members and as “Waiting Room” Members

Expectations during and after the accession process also matter. The realities of life in the EU and what the EU means for maintaining democratic standards can play a significant role in citizens' willingness to undertake painful reforms and or to call out poor

⁵ <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/12/06/policy-brief-state-of-croatian-judiciary-sheds-light-on-the-shortcomings-of-eu-accession/> ; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331528904_Public_Administration_Reform_in_Croatia_Slow_Modernization_During_Europeanization_of_Resilient_Bureaucracy

⁶ <https://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-role-of-European-Union-accession-in-democratisation-processes-PROOF1.pdf>

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_4456

governance practices. Citizens in candidate countries generally displayed a clear preference for EU membership linking this with better chances of economic prosperity and political stability. One of two things tends to happen to these expectations. First, expectations tend to stay relatively high until membership and shortly after. Then the reality of new rules and obligations and for some the missing ‘end of the rainbow effect’ cause a slump in EU support which in turn impacts support of the pro-EU domestic political actors.⁸

Second, there are the countries that have been in the waiting room of EU Accession hovering between steps⁹ now for decades (besides Turkey) namely the West Balkan countries. These countries have had waxing and waning enthusiasm for Accession and in turn what this is supposed to promise due to the slow progress of their countries, the shifts in policy decisions by Brussels, and the sense of inertia of ever being able to meet what are perceived as shifting and biased standards. The result is a population that dreams and wants EU but doesn’t see it happening soon¹⁰ and doesn’t see (even if investment and trade data says differently) that EU is already in fact present more than anyone. Turns to Russia, to China to Turkey and others are the inevitable effect.

Mix of Democracy and Stability/Foreign Policy Considerations

The EU has often used the Accession process as a foreign policy tool to cajole candidate countries to do what the EU (or specific current members of the EU) want them to do, often with a view that creates a democracy vs. stability dilemma.¹¹ This feeds into domestic political competitions between populists and reformers, and this can have backlash implications on democratic standards as well as citizens’ interest to be part of the EU. Serbia is an instrumental case here given the back and forth the EU has had with Serbia and its *Chapter 35* on negotiations and some type of normalization of relations with Kosovo. The EU has played an even more heavy-handed game in North Macedonia which has undertaken two significant domestic concessions to its political identity to get a green light to start accession negotiations, including its name change and more recently provisions in its constitution referencing a Bulgarian minority. Both concessions delayed accession progress, undermined citizens’ trust in the EU, and arguably increased populism politics domestically.

Mixed Effectiveness of Democracy Supported Focused Tools

The effectiveness of EU tools to support democratic reforms in both candidate and member states has been mixed. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine prompted EU institutions to get more serious about examining democracy support and promotion, both within its borders and in its neighborhood yet reforming accession support tools like the Programme of Community aid to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (PHARE) or the

⁸ See for example: “The Unbearable Lightness of EU Membership: Post-Accession Challenges Facing Bulgaria and Romania,” at <https://www.cceol.com/search/chapter-detail?id=556465>

⁹ The Four Steps are: Application and Association Agreement; Candidate Status; Opening of Accession Negotiations; Member.

¹⁰ A 2024 IRI poll suggests still high levels of support for EU across West Balkan countries, but lower expectations that this will be realized. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2024/05/16/iri-poll-most-western-balkan-countries-support-eu-membership-but-many-citizens-are-sceptical-of-eus-seriousness/>

¹¹ For example, see: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14782804.2020.1823823>

Stabilization and Accession Process and Stability Pact with Balkan countries¹² or the European Neighborhood Policy, has been slow. This is largely due to institutional inertia, competing high politics agenda priorities, and the challenge of aligning smarter support mechanisms with broader EU institutional reforms.¹³ Hence, tools to facilitate the reforms the EU supports are not always fully ‘fit for purpose,’ which underpins the need for aspiring members to ensure local ownership, energies and resources that are necessary to sustain democratic transformations in their countries. This challenge is pertinent not only to prospective members, but also to the member states.

Weak Democracy Conditionalities for Members

EU members have demonstrated that membership is no safeguard against democratic decline. The authoritarian shifts in Hungary and Poland stem from various factors tied to their unique transitions,¹⁴ but a common issue is that once a country is in the EU, it takes significant democratic deterioration before the EU intervenes. Hungary and Poland both pushed anti-democratic practices to the point that Brussels finally had to react in some meaningful fashion to keep a level of credibility. One attempt to keep standards up started with the annual *EU Rule of Law Report* in 2020 for all members which noted the intersection of both democratic actor backsliding as well as the complex effort needed to truly create transparent and accountable institutions.¹⁵ But the lesson for other EU members and aspiring mini-Orbans or Polish Kaczynski Twins is that they have a lot of space to undermine the democratic standards that they as EU members agreed to uphold.

Membership sometimes is perceived (later) to do more harm

Since the 2004 enlargement, many new EU members have voiced concerns about economic inflation,¹⁶ despite acknowledging overall economic development. Cultural and political standardization – whether on gender rights or the composition of yogurt, however, has been perceived as anti-democratic dictates from Brussels and have been used by domestic political actors to spark both anti-EU and anti-democratic plays for power with surprising effect. A key trend across EU members where the backlash is the highest is the lack of understanding of what Brussels is doing and hence misinformation often is the propellant of further anti-EU and what they link as anti-democratic sentiments.¹⁷

¹² Both tools were considered more successful in improving trade and economic over democratic outcomes. <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0459-the-western-balkans-between-stabilisation-and-integration-into-the-european-union>

¹³ <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/01/european-democracy-support-annual-review-2022?lang=en¢er=europe>; and <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/chapters/the-role-of-the-european-union-in-democracy-building/eu-democracy-building-discussion-paper-8.pdf>

¹⁴ In the case of Hungary, some argue that consolidation of political elite around a particular version of the democracy that they want to build needs time and deliberate consideration, and this is something that some analysts argue in retrospect did not happen. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/922833>

¹⁵ For a statement on the report’s origins see: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1756 For the 2024 Report, see: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/annual-rule-law-cycle/2024-rule-law-report_en#communication-and-country-chapters Note. including four of the West Balkan candidate countries in the annual Rule of Law Report is an attempt to be more proactive with accession countries in relation to Rule of Law issues.

¹⁶ <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2013/05/13/the-new-sick-man-of-europe-the-european-union/>

¹⁷ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/14651165231193833>

Specific Challenges for Ukraine: What (else) makes it bumpy:

The challenges faced by current EU member states and aspiring members in their accession processes are not only relevant for Ukraine, but are also exacerbated by the current domestic, regional and international geopolitical realities.

Accession negotiations amidst the war

Russia's full-fledged war has had and will continue to have a major impact on Ukraine's progress towards EU membership. Paradoxically, it is both an impetus and a major obstacle to Ukraine's integration into the EU.

On the one hand, the war has accelerated the processes necessary for Ukraine's EU membership. Ukraine's formal EU membership application was made just days after Russia's February 2022 invasion, and the EU moved with an unprecedented pace¹⁸ to grant Ukraine a candidate status and, later, start formal accession negotiations. The speed with which the EU and Ukraine have been progressing towards a potential membership suggests that EU's decisions were driven by geopolitical considerations to support Ukraine's resistance, rather than strictly adhering to EU legal requirements.¹⁹

It is argued that without the war, Ukraine might not have received such favorable treatment, and the EU had to bend its rules for the sake of regional security. This is important because "the special treatment" that Ukraine has enjoyed means Ukraine's membership is far from guaranteed, as significant progress is still required, particularly in areas like the rule of law, democratic governance, and economic reforms.²⁰ The EU's renewed emphasis these principles during the enlargement process will likely influence the pace of Ukraine's negotiations.²¹

On the other hand, the war is the factor that is likely to prevent Ukraine's EU membership. Until it is settled²² and until Ukraine can exercise sovereignty over its internationally recognized territory²³ it is virtually impossible to imagine Ukraine's EU membership. The timing and nature of a potential peace remain uncertain, with the war now over 2.5 years old, leaving Ukraine in a precarious position. The toll of the conflict – thousands of dead or wounded military personnel,²⁴ over 35,000 of Ukrainian civilian casualties,²⁵ millions of internally and externally displaced citizens,²⁶ and over \$150 billion in infrastructural damages,²⁷ with the constantly changing war dynamics²⁸ and the

¹⁸ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/ukraine_en

¹⁹ <https://www.europeanpapers.eu/en/europeanforum/bumpy-road-ukraine-towards-eu-membership-time-war>.

²⁰ <https://www.bruegel.org/policy-brief/ukraines-path-european-union-membership-and-its-long-term-implications>

²¹ <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2024/06/25/what-will-ukraines-path-to-the-eu-look-like/>

²² <https://ecfr.eu/article/dreaming-of-eu-the-challenges-ahead-for-ukraines-and-moldovas-accession/>

²³ <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/06/can-eu-enlargement-work?lang=en¢er=europe>

²⁴ <https://www.congress.gov/118/meeting/house/116768/documents/HHRG-118-ZS00-20240130-SD002.pdf>

²⁵ <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15736.doc.htm#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20escalation%20of%20attacks%20impacting,figures%20are%20likely%20significantly%20higher>

²⁶ <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/>

²⁷ <https://kse.ua/about-the-school/news/155-billion-the-total-amount-of-damages-caused-to-ukraine-s-infrastructure-due-to-the-war-as-of-january-2024/>

²⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-launches-drone-attack-kyiv-ukraines-military-says-2024-08-26/>;
<https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/09/ukraine-needs-a-new-storyline.html>

reemerging,²⁹ yet illusive prospects of peace talks, makes it difficult for Ukraine to balance between aspirations for sustainable security and the reforms necessary for EU accession. This balancing act will require “impossible choices”³⁰ from Ukraine nudging the country, often, to prioritize existential necessities.

Balancing democratic governance of institutional reform with centralization of powers

In the context of the active war, President Zelensky and his team, naturally, need to balance between the demand for government transparency and accountability with the war-dictated need to further centralize power and ensure that the state can deliver a strong and consistent response to the aggressor. The most recent and largest government reshuffle³¹ since the start of the war has been criticized³² for the lack of democratic process and labeled as further consolidation of power, but it is also argued that cementing effective control over strategic decision-making areas is a war-time necessity.³³ It is likely that this trend will continue for as long as the war and martial law define the constitutional order in Ukraine.³⁴

While centralization of power, restrictions on access to state-held information, and limitations on citizens' political rights³⁵ may appear necessary during wartime, they will inevitably create short-term challenges for the rule of law, democratic governance, and anti-corruption efforts. Indeed, President Zelensky, who remains in power after his mandate expired in May, still enjoys considerable public support despite declining ratings,³⁶ and nearly 70% of Ukrainians believe he should remain in office until the martial law ends.³⁷ But in the longer-term, Ukraine could face the reality of a transformed political landscape after the war,³⁸ and changes in Ukraine's political climate³⁹ could potentially undermine the progress of reforms, slow negotiations with the EU, and destabilize post-war society.

Technical capacity of the state to navigate EU negotiations is not an immediate priority

The recent government reshuffle also suggests (whether this is the case or not) that President Zelensky's state building strategy is focused on ensuring a clear line of command, loyalty⁴⁰ and consistency of internal and external state action, rather than strengthening technocratic capacity of state institutions to navigate the complex EU negotiation process

²⁹ <https://www.newsweek.com/putin-shifts-stance-ukraine-peace-talks-amid-kursk-incursion-1947576>

³⁰ <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/06/ukraine-public-opinion-russia-war?lang=en¢er=europe>

³¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-foreign-minister-tenders-resignation-parliament-speaker-says-2024-09-04/>

³² <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukrainian-president-volodymyr-zelenskyy-backlash-government-reshuffle-opposition-war-in-ukraine/>

³³ <https://youtu.be/jXIC9VHFHPc>

³⁴ <https://www.gmfus.org/news/shakeup-wartime-ukraine-consolidates-power-presidents-office>

³⁵ <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/04/29/ukraine-expands-martial-law-to-boost-defences-near-occupied-areas>

³⁶ <https://english.nv.ua/nation/ukrainian-president-s-rating-dropped-to-54-razumkov-center-poll-50430342.html>

³⁷ <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2024-05-20/president-until-end-war-volodymyr-zelenskys-term-office-extended>

³⁸ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraines-veterans-can-transform-the-countrys-postwar-political-landscape/>

³⁹ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/winds-change-ukrainian-politics-reacts-us-electoral-drama>

⁴⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPD9AdEWhhc&ab_channel=ABCNews%28Australia%29

that is expected to start on substance already next year.⁴¹ Consistent with the earlier point, the Ukrainian state is likely to prioritize measures to ensure immediate existential needs of the country rather than going “all in” for EU integration and focusing on technical trade, agriculture, and other technical aspects of negotiations may not receive significant attention⁴² for as long as the war continues.

Societal demand for EU membership is overwhelming, but confused

While Ukrainians overwhelmingly support joining the EU,⁴³ their primary motivations are driven by security and economic prospects, rather than aspirations for democracy and the rule of law. A recent poll shows that 54% of Ukrainians believe that joining NATO is more pertinent than joining the EU (24%).⁴⁴ Although public sentiment for peace over victory is growing,⁴⁵ the overwhelming majority of Ukrainians are not willing to sacrifice parts of Ukraine’s political independence (68%) or territory (80%) in order to join the EU.⁴⁶ This suggests that EU membership is largely viewed as a means to distance Ukraine from Russian influence and ensure greater security, rather than a vehicle for deeper democratic reforms. This creates a considerable challenge for building a sustainable and well-internalized societal demand for meaningful democratic reforms and a rule-of-law state, where EU membership is a means for a better future and not an end.

What would you be willing to accept as a political sacrifice for Ukraine to become a member of the EU?



USAID/ENGAGE Spring 2024 Civic Engagement Poll

EU spectrum of unity: Hungary et. al., as dividing the solidarity

Although the EU has remained firm in its support for Ukraine, including its EU accession path solidified by the June 2024 negotiations, not all member states are equally committed. This divergence complicates both the EU's efforts to support Ukraine’s defense against Russia and its parallel push for EU membership talks. Hungary has been a notable

⁴¹ <https://www.gmfus.org/news/moldova-and-ukraine-will-need-navigate-complex-political-landscape-eu-accession-negotiations>

⁴² https://pie.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PIE-Raport_Stronger_Together_2023.pdf

⁴³ <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2024/06/25/what-will-ukraines-path-to-the-eu-look-like/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1303&page=1>

⁴⁵ <https://kyivindependent.com/44-of-ukrainians-believe-its-time-to-start-official-peace-talks-with-russia-survey-finds/>

⁴⁶ USAID/ENGAGE Spring 2024 Civic Engagement Poll

spoiler, opposing both military aid and the EU integration process. Despite this, the EU has found creative ways to circumvent Hungary's resistance, such as the June 2024 decision to bypass its veto on using frozen Russian assets⁴⁷ to buy weapons for Ukraine and the partial boycott of Hungary's EU Council Presidency meetings.⁴⁸

However, divisions persist, particularly on economic and trade issues. Pro-Russian Slovak PM Fico declared that Slovak economic interests would not be dictated by the Kyiv sanctions against Lukoil.⁴⁹ The Polish blockade of the border area was halted in April 2024, even as tensions about agricultural products and trade continue. As accession chapters are opened, dealing with irate economic, trade and agricultural ministers of other Central European countries or potential populist backlash forces within other member states against full Ukraine EU acceptance are real and pressing concerns.

International geopolitical space of support

Furthermore, the international geopolitical space of support for Ukraine remains dynamic. While not directly tied to EU Accession, this broader support is crucial for Ukraine's survival and its ability to function as a state, ultimately affecting its EU prospects. The fact that 78 countries signed a peace communique in June 2024⁵⁰ and the fact that since the July 2023 NATO Summit, twenty countries have signed bilateral security pacts with Ukraine show a clear commitment to supporting Ukraine in its defense.⁵¹ Furthermore, Ukraine's signaling of enhanced engagement with India with Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kyiv in August⁵² and stepped-up engagement with China the past months⁵³ gives it a wider band of potential political actors to work with if not gain specific support from. At the same time, Ukraine's diplomatic offensive in Africa has yielded limited success. Despite opening new embassies and promoting food diplomacy, the ongoing conflict with Russian-supported rebels in the Sahel has strained relations, leading Mali to formally sever diplomatic ties in August 2024.⁵⁴ Lastly, the outcome of U.S. presidential election in November will be the largest determinant of geopolitical posturing towards Ukraine for the foreseeable future, influencing both its democracy and security prospects, as well as its EU Accession abilities.

What Ukraine civic actions can do:

The overview of historical and current challenges of using EU Accession to augment and consolidate democratic reforms provide instructive lessons to civil society actors in Ukraine for how to avoid and or seize or create opportunities for democratic strengthening

⁴⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/88dd9521-30c0-475f-b635-3d04190b82e4>

⁴⁸ <https://www.dw.com/en/european-commission-to-partly-boycott-hungarys-presidency/a-69674726>

⁴⁹ <https://kyivindependent.com/fico-criticizes-kyivs-sanctions-against-russian-oil-in-call-with-shmyhal/>

⁵⁰ <https://kyivindependent.com/ukraine-war-latest-over-80-states-organizations-sign-peace-summits-joint-communique/>

⁵¹ This includes all G7 countries and a special agreement with the EU.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/07/getting-ukraines-security-agreements-right?lang=en>

⁵² <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/08/23/indian-pm-modi-offers-to-help-as-a-friend-to-bring-peace-to-ukraine>

⁵³ https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/28/ukraine-steps-up-engagement-with-china_6702957_4.html

⁵⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/west-african-juntas-write-un-over-ukraines-alleged-rebel-support-2024-08-21/>

as part of the Accession process. The following recommendations outline how civic actors can support the democratic reform process:

Prioritize civic (actors) self-education on what the EU means and how to navigate it

A lack of understanding about the EU has historically left governments and their citizens less prepared to maximize its processes. Civic actors must educate themselves on what the EU, the EU *Aquis*, and EU accession process entails. While not everyone needs to be an expert, understanding how EU institutions function, how negotiations unfold, and how to engage effectively is crucial. This self-education should include a clear look at the EU accession process; how institutions function and work together in principle and in practice; how different tools and programming should and can work; and how they as civic actors can engage, with which tools, and in which circumstances to have the most meaningful impact. Part of this self-education should be to identify key civic society actors in other EU members or Accession countries that have successfully positioned themselves as advocates and voices of democratic reform.

Leverage the EU negotiation process to push for domestic democratic reforms

Locally driven democratic reforms are the most sustainable. Once civic actors understand the EU's composition, tools, and tendencies, they should use the EU negotiation process as a block building of effort of cross-cutting democratic reforms. Key reform issues for every chapter and their cross-cutting governance, accountability, and transparency criteria should be identified as part of a larger democratic reform process. Measuring and engaging government officials to build in key reform provisions and implement them should be part of a larger civic pressure to create a shared set of reform expectations as each chapter opens, is negotiated and closed. A key focus of education should be on setting the narrative of how democratic reform and accession should work together. This ideally should be co-designed with state actors in a way that shows a unity of intention.

Design civic actions to educate the population on rights/obligations/expectations

The lessons highlight the need to manage public expectations and responsibilities, and a strand of applying public pressure for reform and managing public expectations is a more educated populace on the rights and responsibilities of the EU. The Accession process is full of multi-step procedures that can raise or crush public expectations if there is insufficient information and understanding of their significance. Civic actions need to raise public awareness of the process, understanding of benefits, rights and obligations to help forge real expectations of how EU accession can and could affect everyday lives of Ukrainians, whether in the Recovery and Reconstruction phase or in mid-term horizons of Accession and then membership realities.

Design civic actions to deliberate the critical Accession questions with the state and the public

As previous Accession efforts have demonstrated, becoming a member can open new avenues of social and political tensions and it is useful now to begin to map out some of these potential points of contention. For example, what are the costs of EU membership

in relation to the so-called cultural wars, gender issues, data privacy? What are the tradeoffs of EU membership in relation to Schengen or Eurozone? Perhaps even more front and center, how is the EU a sponsor of democracy and security? These are some of many questions that will have a direct impact on how Ukraine governs itself and how its population sees its place within the EU. Opening these public discussions now as part of specific Accession efforts can begin to build consensus on complex issues and further ground solidarity around meaningful reform processes.

Design civic actions to support sustainability of democratic reforms

As political elites can change in Ukraine, the EU and its member states, civic actors could take on the role of being an alternative keeper of institutional reforms memory, including lessons learned from Ukraine's EU alignment efforts and the ultimate holders of local knowledge. To prevent the accession process from becoming personalized and dependent on individual politicians, civic actions could serve as a communication bridge between various (and changing) decisionmakers/influencers within various stakeholders.