

Analysis: Civil society's next step challenge: Utilizing EU prospects amidst a war of attrition, citizen fatigue, and ever-present government transparency and accountability gaps

War Context

Russia has inflicted 18 months of full-scale war on Ukraine since its unjustified and unprovoked invasion on February 24, 2022. Following the somber one-year anniversary of hostilities, hopes that the counter-offensive would produce dramatic territorial gains have been tempered after heavy fighting in Bakhmut and the reality of confronting multi-level fortified Russian defenses across the 1000km+ of active front-line territory.¹ During the summer, Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) achieved some territorial gains described as “tactically significant”² along two south lines of attack towards Berdiansk and Melitopol, with the aim of breaking the so-called land bridge between Russia and Crimea. Ukraine also succeeded in attacking Russia’s assets in the occupied territories in Crimea and the east, as well as in the Black Sea and the Kerch Bridge, all of which have damaged Russian supply lines and capacities. While there is still a chance for breakthroughs before the onset of fall and winter weather, experts surmise that the conflict has evolved into a grueling ground war of attrition,³ one where UAF morale is also suffering.⁴

At the same time, a steady barrage of Russian air bombardment and attacks across the country continued to result in the deaths of civilians, destruction of infrastructure, and damage to private and cultural buildings⁵, resulting in citizen insecurity and shock throughout the country. The deadliest in this period was the June 6th blowing up of the Kakhovka Dam. Its collapse caused death and destruction and long-term harmful effects to the Kherson region communities, environment, economy, and power grid which months after the explosion are still difficult to quantify.⁶ While the tireless fundraising and relief efforts of CSOs like Zakhyst have helped to alleviate some of the suffering faced by Kherson residents, the needs of the population remain immense.

The Netherlands and Denmark to transfer F-16s to Ukraine.⁷ A robust international advocacy effort led by ENGAGE partner, the International Center for Ukrainian Victory (ICUV), has proven instrumental in convincing Western allies to support Ukraine’s calls for F-16s. ICUV has actively solicited Western governments to provide F-16s in several global security fora, including the Munich Security Conference, Warsaw Security Forum, Halifax International Security Forum, and others. Furthermore, ICUV has also organized protests and mass events across Western cities to draw attention to the need for F-16s.⁸ However, in spite of successful Ukrainian advocacy efforts in receiving weapons, as much as 20 percent of some ground weaponry was destroyed in the first weeks of the counteroffensive.⁹ Concerns about shortages in artillery, resupplies, and the length of time needed to train and begin using the F-16s suggest that it will be difficult for Ukraine in the near future to surpass what is understood currently as “relative parity in combat capabilities.”¹⁰

This combined with a return of some Western actors mentioning peace talk options has further ratcheted up pressure on the UAF to achieve some breakthroughs.

¹ <https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2023/08/03/2023-MATRA-I-KVARTAL-ENGL-13.pdf>

² <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-11-2023>

³ Estimated UAF causality rates spiked with the counteroffensive bringing estimated losses for the UAF up to 70,000 killed and 120,000 wounded. Russia casualty rates are estimated at 120,000 deaths and 170-180,000 wounded, but overall having active troops at roughly a 3-1 advantage to Ukraine

(1.33mn to 500,000) <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/18/us/politics/ukraine-russia-war-casualties.html> ⁴ <https://www.businessinsider.com/ukraine-losing-4-5-men-advance-hundreds-feet-2023-7?IR=T>

⁵ Until July 30, 2023, the OHCHR recorded civilian casualties as 26,015 (9,369 killed and 16,646 injured. Please see:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/07/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-31-july-2023>

⁶ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/kakhovka-dam-disaster-responsibility-and-consequences> and <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/war-ukraine-situation-report-who-ukraine-country-office-issue-no-56-13-july-2023>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66551478#>

⁸ <https://ukrainianvictory.org/publications/icuvs-year-long-advocacy-campaign-for-f-16s-the-path-to-closing-ukrainian-skies/>

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/15/us/politics/ukraine-leopards-bradleys-counteroffensive.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/15/us/politics/ukraine-leopards-bradleys-counteroffensive.html>

Socio-Economic Context

Half-way through the second year of war, the Ukrainian economy continues to take significant hits, but has slowed in its further downward trajectory, and there is the general sense of a steady stabilization of the macro-economic environment.¹ Some signs of business recovery were observed, with GDP projected to grow by 0.5% in 2023 according to the World Bank² and possibly as much as 2.9% according to the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU).³ This growth comes after a contraction of almost 30% in 2022. Yet export upticks that were registered in the first quarter of the year went sharply down (40%) in the second quarter after Russia pulled out of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July.⁴ Any momentum in economic stabilization could reverse given the war uncertainties, particularly possibilities of further supply chain shocks (domestically and internationally) and infrastructural damage.

Daily life for Ukrainians during the war continued with a grim familiarity. Civilian causality rates have remained roughly steady since November 2022 with approximately 200 deaths and over 600 injuries every month.⁵ Refugee numbers have remained stable at just over 5.8 million, while IDP numbers slightly decreased to around 5 million during the summer months.⁶ While inflation rates showed a slight decrease in month-on-month increases in the second quarter of 2023,⁷ and unemployment was estimated at 16.6% in July,¹⁸ (the lowest since the invasion), the affordability of living remains challenging, with over 7 million Ukrainians estimated to be living

¹ <https://razumkov.org.ua/en/edition/annual-analytical-results-and-forecasts>

² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ukraine/overview#1>

³ <https://ces.org.ua/en/macroeconomic-forecast-2023-2024/>

⁴ <https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/ukraine/>

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/07/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-31-july-2023>

⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/country/ukr/key-figures>

⁷ Inflation was at 12.8% in June in comparison to May at 15.3% and registered as lowest inflation rate since February 2022. <https://www.focus-economics.com/country-indicator/ukraine/inflation/> ¹⁸ <https://ces.org.ua/en/tracker-economy-during-the-war/> ¹⁹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ukraine/overview#1>

in poverty.¹⁹ The high cost of living one of the most concerning challenges for citizens after the war.⁸ The destruction of the Kakhovka Dam and the depletion of the Kakhovka Reservoir have particularly affected populations in the south and east, resulting in flooding, displacement, extensive damage to homes and infrastructure, and challenges in restarting food production in these regions.⁹ Following the withdrawal from the grain deal in mid-July, Russia intensified the shelling of ports and grain storage facilities which threatens exporting of all future agricultural products.¹⁰

Ukraine made political progress in its recovery and reconstruction efforts during the Londonhosted Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC 23) in June. Political signaling objectives of support were met with the EU Commission,²³ individual states, and pledges from International Financial Institutions. Strategic efforts to ensure mid-term planning, private sector investment, transparency, and accountability (through using the DREAM system), the use of confiscated Russian assets, and donor coordination were tentatively agreed, but it remains to be seen how the key actors will work together with the Ukrainian government to enact these agreements. Due to the war and corruption, international private sector investment is seen as a significant challenge by various stakeholders.¹¹ Civil society efforts to engage with all the actors, articulate and support organizing visions are as well ongoing and getting some traction, but the process is still challenging and very fluid.¹² Civil society engagement with citizens on the issue of recovery is also ongoing, but recent polling suggests that most citizens believe that post-war priorities do not align with their own, and they do not see CSO activities in these areas as (yet or particularly) beneficial to their interests.¹³

Political Context

Ukraine's democratic governance eighteen months after Russia's invasion is holding its own, but with clear stresses and concerns that the unending war situation could upend earlier anticorruption and accountability gains. The political and civic mood in the summer of 2023 was still resolute, united, and focused on the war effort. End of June polling suggests that a large majority (73%) still see events in Ukraine as heading in the right direction and have high hopes for it as a democratic European country (64%).²⁷ Volunteer organizations are still primarily trusted, and volunteerism amongst citizens has continued to evolve and professionalize while addressing the needs of the population.²⁸ However, citizen engagement has slightly decreased,²⁹ which appears to be part of a longer term trend. The decline is likely due to people refocusing on addressing their own needs.

Part of the unified edifice, however, is showing strain due to the political class corruption and cronyism that continued during the war. Scandals ranging from military recruiting corruption³⁰

⁸ "High Cost of Living and Salaries" was listed at 87%: See the National Corruption Perceptions and Experience Poll 2023:

<https://engage.org.ua/eng/national-corruption-perceptions-and-experience-poll-2023>

⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/iom-regional-ukraine-response-situation-report-12-july-2023>

¹⁰ <https://ces.org.ua/en/tracker-economy-during-the-war/> ²³ This included \$55billion from the EU Commission and multi-year commitments through 2027.

¹¹ An April survey by TI Ukraine highlighted reconstruction corruption risks with most citizens (73%) and businesses (80%) considering corruption in reconstruction as an even greater threat than resumption of conflict hostilities. (How to Rebuild Ukraine A survey of citizens and business representatives, (TI Ukraine, April 7, 2023).

¹² See ISAR presentation of its CSOs' participation in reconstruction survey on July 12th, 2023.

¹³ Civic Engagement Poll (CEP) Spring-Summer 2023

and questionable procurements to ministerial, court,³¹ and MP misconduct barrage the public and reinforce public perception (89%) that corruption remains a serious problem.³² Compared to earlier in the war, there is a noticeable uptick in domestic reporting on corruption, attracting more (public) attention from domestic and international public actors. President Zelensky has responded by calling out the high-profile cases during the summer to demonstrate zero tolerance for corrupt practices and patronage. There is likely much more happening that remains comfortably under the radar and the public senses this.³³ Zelensky remains a clear favorite for future elections (whenever they may take place), despite citizens signaling a desire for political change in the central government and parliament.³⁴

Continued extension of martial law is considered justified, but it is limiting Ukraine's ability to adhere to and demonstrate transparency, rule of law and the quality of public administration that are required for EU membership. Even in the high-profile reconstruction of Irpin, procurement practices were deemed very problematic by some observers.³⁵ Civil society-led domestic and international pressure to reinstate transparency and accountability have yielded some results in past months in relation to political actors and parties: In July the parliament adopted draft law No 9354. in the first reading to restore the mandatory electronic declaration of officials, and in August it adopted draft law No. 9419-1 to restore the financial reporting of political parties. Domestic and international watchdog pressure to improve performance of the anti-corruption institutions³⁶ has gotten additional traction with the reconstruction and recovery discussions.³⁷ This includes the G7 Ambassadors' Support Group for Ukraine publicly calling out the government to empower and enact key legislation in relation to the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) and to the National Anticorruption Bureau (NABU), as one of the top three judicial and anti-corruption reforms needed before September 30.³⁸ Although citizen trust in anti-corruption institutions has grown,³⁹ trust in journalists

²⁷ <https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2023/08/07/2023-MATRA-PR.pdf>

²⁸ See: "Values of Volunteers" study by Active Group, June 2023. ²⁹ See CEP data for Spring-Summer 2023.

³⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/11/world/europe/ukraine-fires-recruitment-chiefs.html>

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Amongst high profile cases, in May the National Anti-corruption Bureau (NABU) arrested Ukraine's Supreme Court Chairman of taking a bribe of almost \$3million. <https://kyivindependent.com/charges-to-be-filed-against-corrupt-supreme-court/> ³² National Corruption Perceptions and Experience Poll 2023: <https://engage.org.ua/eng/national-corruption-perceptions-and-experience-poll-2023>

³³

³⁴ 38.1% of citizens polled in August believed that corruption has increased since the war started; this was an increase from 22.1% in July. <https://activegroup.com.ua/2023/08/14/puls-tizhnya-5-11-serpnya-2023-roku/>

³⁵ In a July 19 survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), 73% want at least some changes in the central government composition after the war. Around 69% of the respondents want changes in the Verkhovna Rada (parliament), 47% in the Cabinet of Ministers, and only 23% would prefer a different president. <https://kyivindependent.com/survey-only-23-ukrainians-want-to-change-president-after-war/>

³⁶

See: <https://kyivindependent.com/transparency-international-reconstruction-of-irpin-carried-out-by-suspicious-companies/> and <https://tiukraine.org/en/blogs/non-transparent-reconstruction-of-irpin/> Only a portion of the contracts (approximately 40% of the UAH 933 mln worth of tenders went through the Prozorro procurement system.

³⁷ As noted by TI Ukraine, a July external audit of NACP (2020-2021) recognized the progress that it has made since being reinstituted in 2019 (meeting 72% of criteria) while 58 criteria (28%) were not met. <https://ti-ukraine.org/en/blogs/first-audit-of-anti-corruption-body-is-done-what-s-next/>

³⁸ <https://baselgovernance.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/230620-URC2023.pdf>

³⁹ <https://www.ua.emb-japan.go.jp/files/100515235.pdf>

According to the poll, "State Investigation Bureau, SAPO, HACC, NACP, NABU, and Prosecutor Office increased their level of trust from an average of 6-7% in 2021 to 17-18% in 2023." <https://engage.org.ua/eng/national-corruption-perceptions-and-experience-poll-2023>

and CSOs for uncovering corruption remains higher than trust in government institutions.¹⁴ At the same time, actual awareness of the anti-corruption efforts that CSOs and others undertake in 2023 has noticeably decreased compared to pre-war trends in 2018.¹⁵

International Relations

The West's overall support of Ukraine has held fast, and the past six months saw further concrete demonstration of political and material assistance with the June URC 23 and further pledges of political, military, and financial support.

U.S. support remains a linchpin of Trans-Atlantic relations, but US domestic questioning of support for Ukraine grew during the summer of 2023 as several current political figures and those seeking the Republican party presidential nomination (including front-runner former President Trump) advocated for less support and emphasis on Ukraine.⁴² Concern that U.S. resolve is wavering (even if only rhetorically) has increased pressure on all partners and Ukraine alike to 'deliver' military and political results earlier rather than later.

Ukraine undertook more robust efforts to engage with a wider set of states and partners globally including for the first time directly with China in late April¹⁶ and attending the Arab League summit in May as well as reaching out to key countries in Africa, Asia, and South America.¹⁷ Russia ramped up its own charm offensives, notably in Africa through hosting of its second Russia-Africa Summit in July.¹⁸ But both this and Russia's efforts with BRIC countries¹⁹ to shore up support for its world view and justification of invasion have had little clear uptake. At the same time, the world continues to wait, watch, and speculate about power dynamics in Russia after the late June apparent Wagner-led mutinous march on Moscow (and then August 24 apparent killing of Wagner leader

Prigozhin) and the steady uptick of alleged Ukrainian drone attacks in Russia proper (which the Ukrainian government has not confirmed). Fears of war expansion (whether just over the Danube border in Romania or to other NATO members), in Russia proper or intensification of fighting in Ukraine all have the potential to shift global public opinion and support levels towards Ukraine.

Furthermore, despite the concerted efforts of the government, civil society and Ukraine supporters, there has been little progress in the efforts to embed Ukraine firmly into NATO. The July NATO conference decision to not invite Ukraine but to signal its support for future membership²⁰ demonstrated the limits of one coherent Western position and the inevitability of needing to further accommodate multiple state positions to hold together the Western alliance. The non-invitation was taken hard domestically even as Ukrainian leadership quickly reverted to constructive dialogue about the decision and further cooperation. And notably, after the NATO decision, joining the EU is likely to become an even higher priority for Kyiv.

¹⁴ According to a May NDI survey, 64% trust or fully trust journalists; 44% trust or fully trust CSOs; 32% trust or fully trust NABU as the highest trusted government institution to combat corruption.

https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/May%202023_wartime%20survey_Public%20version_%20Eng.pdf

¹⁵ National Corruption Perceptions and Experience Poll 2023: <https://engage.org.ua/eng/national-corruption-perceptions-and-experience-poll-2023> ⁴² <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/08/23/republican-debate-ukraine-divide-00112659>

¹⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65396613>

¹⁷ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/ukraine-quarterly-digest-april-june-2023>

¹⁸ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/08/russia-africa-summit-fails-deliver-concrete-results>

¹⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/08/23/brics-summit-putin-xi-russia/>

²⁰ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm

The Path Towards EU Membership

Ukrainians made their decisive choice of having a European future at the end of 2013 during the Revolution of Dignity (Euromaidan),²¹ triggered by pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich backing out of the EU integration commitments. That choice resulted not only in Russia's 2014 invasion, but also in the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU.²²

The full-scale war against Ukraine, launched in February 2022, has strengthened Ukrainians' commitment to European integration and accelerated the integration process. A few days after

Russia's invasion, Ukraine submitted a formal application for EU membership and was granted

candidate status in June 2022.⁵⁰ Last summer's confirmation of Ukraine's status as an official EU candidate country⁵¹ came with an accompanying report, in which the European Commission set out seven conditions⁵² that Ukraine must fulfill before membership talks can officially begin.

In its preliminary June 2023 report,⁵³ the European Commission acknowledged that Ukraine has fully implemented two out of seven prerequisites necessary to open accession negotiations (reforms in the fields of judiciary and harmonization of audio-visual legislation). Some progress has been made in the de-oligarchization process, the issue of national minorities, the fight against corruption (which requires strengthening and a reliable track record), and the fight against money laundering and reforming law enforcement agencies (where the system of combating money laundering needs to be strengthened). That assessment closely matches the findings of some of the most prominent independent Ukrainian watchdogs.⁵⁴

CSOs, supported by USAID/ENGAGE, including New Europe Center,⁵⁵ Anti-Corruption Action Center,⁵⁶ Vox Ukraine,⁵⁷ Center for Policy and Legal Reform,⁵⁸ Transparency International Ukraine,⁵⁹ Razumkov Center,⁶⁰ National Advocacy Interests Center (ANTS),⁶¹ School for Policy Analysis⁶² and Environment-People-Law,⁶³ have made a major contribution to Ukraine's EU candidacy status and continue to monitor the progress of reforms and hold the government accountable.

There is wide public support⁶⁴ and political will⁶⁵ in Ukraine to join the EU as soon as possible. Some top EU officials' political statements⁶⁶ appear to support Ukraine's early accession, including options of "progressive integration."⁶⁷ Yet, challenges are likely to remain, with political statements needing to align with Ukraine politicians' messages⁶⁸ that joining the EU is not a matter of "if" but "when."

Already ahead of the European Council's meeting scheduled for mid-December 2023, which is expected to formally launch the accession negotiations with Kyiv, Ukraine's Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, stated⁶⁹ that Ukraine will not fully meet all seven EU accession criteria. She anticipates that negotiations will still begin, but expectations for subsequent steps toward membership need to be aligned with reality.⁷⁰ Namely, the EU's accession methodology⁷¹ as a process is unlikely to yield fast results for Ukraine because it is grounded in "fundamentals," such as technical, legal, and bureaucratic reforms including rule of law, functioning democratic institutions, and public administration reform.

²¹ <https://ants.org.ua/en/why-do-ukrainians-need-eu-membership/>

²² https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/071215_eu-ukraine_association_agreement.pdf

Ukraine's accession is also dependent on the EU's own reform efforts. Ukraine's eventual accession to the EU carries significant implications, both politically and financially, for the existing EU member states.⁷² The multifaceted nature of this process, which encompasses political, financial, and institutional aspects, presents challenges that are not fully foreseeable at the present and requires addressing institutional enhancements of EU structures themselves. It has also been consistently

⁵⁰ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/ukraine/>

⁵¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61891467>

⁵² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52022DC040>

⁵³ <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/news/2023/06/22/7164201/>

⁵⁴ <http://neweurope.org.ua/en/analytics/kandydat-check-4-de-ukrayina-perebuvaye-u-vykonanni-7-rekomendatsij-yes/>

⁵⁵ <http://neweurope.org.ua/en/analytics/kandydat-check-4-de-ukrayina-perebuvaye-u-vykonanni-7-rekomendatsij-yes/>

⁵⁶ <https://antac.org.ua/en/special-projects/corruption-vs-europe/>

⁵⁷ <https://voxukraine.org/derzhavnyj-rynkovyj-naglyad-chergovyj-krok-na-shlyahu-do-yevropejskoyi-integratsiyi>

⁵⁸ <https://pravo.org.ua/books/poryadok-rozglyadu-ta-uhvalennya-yevrointegratsijnih-zakonoprojektiv-u-verhovnij-radi-ukrayiny/>

⁵⁹ <https://ti-ukraine.org/blogs/yak-povemennya-deklaruvannya-dopomozhe-yevrointegratsiyi-ukrayiny/>; <https://ti-ukraine.org/news/podalshi-zminy-u->

[systemi-kontrolyu-publichnyh-zakupivel-obgovoryly-v-mezhah-projektu-yes-u-sferi-yevropejskoyi-integratsiyi-ta-pislyavoyennogo-vidnovlennya/](https://ti-ukraine.org/news/podalshi-zminy-u-systemi-kontrolyu-publichnyh-zakupivel-obgovoryly-v-mezhah-projektu-yes-u-sferi-yevropejskoyi-integratsiyi-ta-pislyavoyennogo-vidnovlennya/)

⁶⁰ <https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2022/12/28/2022-MATRA-IV-KVARTAL-7.pdf>

⁶¹ <https://ants.org.ua/en/category/uncategorized-en/euro-atlantic-integration-uncategorized-en/>

⁶² <https://spa.ukma.edu.ua/en/projects/rethinking-and-reshaping-the-eu-s-democracy-support-in-its-eastern-and-southern-neighbourhoods/>

⁶³ <http://epl.org.ua/announces/imitatsiya-yevrointegratsijnogo-postupu-mindovkillya-vidhody-u-fokusi-chastyna-2/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/ukraine-92-want-eu-membership-by-2030/>

⁶⁵ <https://gordonua.com/news/politics/do-konca-vesny-ukraina-poluchit-promezhutochnyy-otchet-ob-integracii-v-es-shmygal-1661462.html>

⁶⁶ <https://www.rferl.org/ukraine-european-union-membership-talks-metsola/32299247.html>; ⁶⁷ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/08/28/speech-by-president-charles-michel-at-the-bled-strategic-forum/>

⁶⁸ <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-eu-membership-two-years-prime-minister-denys-shmyhal/>;

[https://euromaidanpress.com/2023/02/04/from-](https://euromaidanpress.com/2023/02/04/from-eu-single-market-to-crimea-results-of-eu-ukraine-2023-historic-summit/)

[eu-single-market-to-crimea-results-of-eu-ukraine-2023-historic-summit/](https://euromaidanpress.com/2023/02/04/from-eu-single-market-to-crimea-results-of-eu-ukraine-2023-historic-summit/)

⁶⁹ <https://english.nv.ua/nation/zelensky-enacts-bill-on-constitutional-court-judges-selection-crucial-to-eu-membership-50347208.html>

⁷⁰ <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/why-europe-will-struggle-to-bring-ukraine-into-the-eu/>

⁷¹ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/revised-enlargement-methodology-questions-and-answers-2020-02-05_en

⁷² <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/want-ukraine-in-the-eu-youll-have-to-reform-the-eu-too/>

suggested²³ that the EU should reform its accession policy to provide a more predictable way forward for Ukraine and other candidate membership states.

Conclusions

The overall war context has become more predictable, resembling a war of attrition in different arenas as the most likely scenario for the foreseeable future. This provides a backdrop for understanding that any social-economic challenges are likely to evolve in a pattern like that of the past months: with some stabilization in the daily lives of citizens but always the possibility of being upended at a moment's notice. Additionally, it suggests that the ongoing war will continue to impede efforts to make the government more transparent, accountable, and responsive to citizens.

²³ https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/template-2-0-for-staged-accession-to-the-eu?mc_cid=07bdc70520&mc_eid=e9f8bcf032 and <http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Win-win-2.pdf>

⁷⁴ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/political-will-or-procedure-assessing-ukraines-eu-membership-goals-2023>

Civil society's role in monitoring, analyzing, advocating, connecting, and empowering citizens during these times has provided a steady support for the war and reform efforts. Now with the EU option offering both promise and pitfalls, civil society requires a heightened set of tools, technical knowledge, and skills if it wants to seize this opportunity.

This should happen in several concrete ways. First, while it has been acknowledged that meeting all seven EU accession requirements is hardly possible, CSOs should find a way not only to monitor reform progress but to provide tangible assistance to the state to accomplish as much as possible by the end of the year. ENGAGE CSO partners are well equipped to push Ukraine's government to bring the country into compliance with the EU's seven pre-accession conditions as laid out by the EU.

Second, whether or not political will overtakes EU's stringent technical criteria for membership,⁷⁴ Ukrainian decisionmakers and civil society organizations (CSOs) need to be prepared to address the latter and have highly technical skills to negotiate on 35 chapters of the EU acquis.²⁴ CSOs' contribution until now has been invaluable on accountability and transparency efforts, but there has been less attention given to how to build expertise in other technical areas and be part of these chapter negotiation processes. Once eventual accession begins, they are best equipped to facilitate the implementation of the fundamental clusters, more specifically for chapters 23 and 24 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights; and Justice, Freedom and Security). Overall, accession talks would require the Ukrainian state and civil society to improve their highly technical capacities in the multitude of areas in the EU acquis.

Third, a context subtext throughout is the still high level of national unity, but there is also the population's fatigue from the war and declining civic engagement. EU integration is deemed as the broadest umbrella to unite under, and CSOs can use this umbrella to reignite their outreach to constituencies, to ensure citizen participation in safekeeping a democratic Ukraine. For Ukraine, the start of the talks would provide a boost of morale for the society, which has been the cornerstone of resistance against Russia's aggression, and this needs to be seized upon.

Fourth, internationally, CSOs, have proven they have the technical knowledge to advocate for EU accession and NATO membership. EU accession efforts should be broadened to now focus on the reform of the EU accession policy itself while they continue to influence and shape the international community narrative on Russia's war in and continued support Ukraine.

And finally, CSOs need to consider the EU process as one that becomes a backdrop of all accountabilities, transparency, advocacy, and engagement efforts. Civil society needs to make the EU process real and alive for citizens in a way that invigorates their will to fight, demand, and participate in a free and democratic Ukraine.

²⁴ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/conditions-membership/chapters-acquis_en