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Failure, crisis, or renewal? The Eastern policy of the European Union and the war in Ukraine

Kłęska, kryzys czy szansa na sukces? Polityka wschodnia Unii Europejskiej a wojna w Ukrainie

Abstract: This paper's objective is to study the impact of the war in Ukraine on the Eastern policy of the European Union. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to highlight this policy's position in the overall international activity of the EU, as well as its characteristic features, main goals, instruments, and two components: the strategic partnership with Russia and the Eastern Partnership (EaP). The substantive part of the paper contains an analysis which, taking into account the implications of the war in Ukraine, is intended to justify three research hypotheses. They concern: the complete failure of the strategic partnership with Russia, then the serious crisis of the EaP and, finally, the possibility of achieving success in the Eastern policy in the form of Ukraine's accession to the EU. As indicated in the conclusion, this would provide the European Union with a permanently strong position in Eastern Europe.

Keywords: European Union, EU Eastern policy, EU-Russia strategic partnership, EU Eastern Partnership

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest zbadanie wpływu, jaki wojna na Ukrainie wywiera na politykę wschodnią Unii Europejskiej. W tym celu konieczne jest najpierw wskazanie miejsca, jakie polityka ta zajmuje w całokształcie aktywności międzynarodowej UE, a także tego, jakie są jej cechy charakterystyczne, główne cele oraz części składowe, czyli partnerstwo strategiczne z Rosją i Partnerstwo Wschodnie (PW). Zasadnicza część artykułu zawiera analizę, która – uwzględniając implikacje wynikające z wojny na Ukrainie – ma za zadanie uzasadnić trzy hipotezy badawcze. Dotyczą one kolejno: całkowitego fiaska partnerstwa strategicznego z Rosją, następnie poważnego kryzysu PW i wreszcie możliwości osiągnięcia przez politykę wschodnią sukcesu w formie akcesji Ukrainy do UE. Jak wskazano w zakończeniu, zapewniłoby to Unii Europejskiej na stałe silną pozycję na wschodzie Europy.

Słowa kluczowe: Unia Europejska, polityka wschodnia UE, partnerstwo strategiczne UE-Rosja, Partnerstwo Wschodnie UE

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Introduction

There is no doubt that Russia's open military aggression against Ukraine that broke out in February 2022 has had an immense impact on various actors in international relations. One of the actors most concerned is the European Union. It is for obvious geopolitical reasons, i.e., not only Ukraine's immediate geographical proximity but also special relations connecting Ukraine and the EU. In trying to determine the impact of the war in Ukraine on these relations, we should start by selecting the right research approach.

First of all, we should take into account certain specific features of the European Union as a unique political entity. It is the only actor in international relations that is not a state, yet has extensive economic potential, which makes it one of the leading industrial and commercial powers on a global scale. What is even more significant is the fact that the EU has adopted a specific political philosophy. It combines elements of pragmatism (in the research approach emphasised by the school of political realism) and normativism, the role of which is particularly highlighted by the school of constructivism.

According to the normative approach, the systems of political and ideological values play a significant role in international relations. As Charles A. Kupchan put it, "international order is not just about the distribution of material power and the hierarchy and authority structure" but is also based "on norms and rules that guide state behaviour and govern their relations with other states"¹. Hence, the European Union not only pursues, like all other global actors, a pragmatic realisation of its various interests. It also strives to be an actor building its relations with the outside world on a specific catalogue of so-called "European values". They include democracy, human rights, the rule of law, etc., and in foreign relations – abstention from the use of force, the peaceful resolution of disputes, international cooperation, etc. This means that the EU is a *normative power*, which tries to influence the international environment with its own *soft power*, i.e., not using

1 Ch.A. Kupchan, *Reordering order: Global change and the need for a new normative consensus*, [in:] T. Flockart et al. (eds.), *Liberal order in a post-western world*, Washington 2014, p. 6.

force, but rather political, diplomatic, economic, and cultural instruments, or more broadly – its civilisational attractiveness².

Taking this into consideration, we can use a research approach based on the concept of normativism, which underlines those aspects of the EU's international activity that are based on "European values". To some extent, it is also necessary to take heed of the approach based on the concept of political realism since the EU is also concerned about the pragmatic implementation of its specific interests. We have also to bear in mind another specific feature of the European Union, namely, the fact that it is a hybrid structure that combines features of a supranational international organisation and a state. All this makes it extremely difficult to determine its legal and political status and also makes it challenging for the EU itself to function efficiently as an actor in international relations. This applies primarily to the sphere which, in relation to a sovereign state, is referred to as foreign policy.

Without getting into more detailed considerations, it is sufficient to note that despite critical voices denying the existence of such a policy in the case of the EU, it possesses a developed institutional and legal system regulating its contacts with the international environment. In many respects, this system is similar to the foreign policy of sovereign states, and its real existence is confirmed by both scientific research and political practice. As a result, we can talk about EU foreign policy, regardless of whether it is called external policy, foreign relations, external relations etc. This policy incorporates various components, including the part most important for this analysis, i.e., the EU's Eastern policy, which encompasses two main elements: the strategic partnership with Russia and the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

As regards the methodology applied in studying this issue, we can pose the following research question: do the consequences of the war in Ukraine lead to complete collapse, or to a more or less severe crisis, or, on the contrary, to giving new impetus to the EU's Eastern policy? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to put forward three research hypotheses.

2 See more J.S. Nye, *Soft power*, "Foreign Policy" 1990, no. 80; O. Barbarska, *Argument siły czy siła argumentów? Unia Europejska w stosunkach międzynarodowych jako 'soft power'*, "Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej" 2016, no. 10.

The first hypothesis assumes that one of the two components of the EU's Eastern policy, i.e., the strategic partnership with Russia, has failed completely. The second hypothesis considers that the second component of this policy, i.e., the Eastern Partnership, is undergoing a serious crisis. Finally, the last hypothesis claims that, paradoxically, the war in Ukraine may lead to a successful implementation of the main goals of the European Union policy towards Eastern Europe. This is due to the fact that this war laid the foundations for strengthening the EU's influence in the region due to the possibility for the most important partner country, i.e., Ukraine, to become a future EU Member State.

With regard to other methodological issues, it should be added that research methods such as the method of historical analysis and the systemic method (treating the EU as a specific political unit) have been applied. The classic method of analysing the literature on the subject was also used, including both analytical texts and official documents and statements.

1. What is the EU's Eastern policy?

● Generally speaking, the Eastern policy of the European Union can be defined as a joint formulation of specific frameworks, the establishment of institutions, and the undertaking of specific actions by both EU authorities and the Member States in terms of their relations with the Eastern European countries³.

The geographical range of that policy has been changing since initially it covered a wide group of Central and Eastern European countries. Following the EU accession of a significant part of these countries, the range has shrunk significantly, although it is difficult to precisely specify it. According to certain analyses, it covers areas such as the Balkans, and, according to other studies – it also includes Turkey, as well as the countries of the Caucasus region and Russia. From such a perspective, Eastern Europe is definitely more a geopolitical than a geographical concept.

3 O. Barburska, *Polityka wschodnia Unii Europejskiej jako część składowa polityki zagranicznej UE*, Warsaw 2018, pp. 165-173.

The historical scope of this policy has also changed. Setting aside the Cold War period, the beginning of the Autumn of Nations at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s must be recognized as the turning point marking the beginning of the EU's Eastern policy. At this time, the structures of Euro-Atlantic integration were faced with establishing relations with the newly emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. The second major turning point was in the years 2004-2007, when a number of countries from that region joined the EU, with Croatia's accession in 2013 completing the process⁴. Since then, the Eastern policy has been focused on the remaining countries of Eastern Europe, becoming one of the two main components of a wider project that is the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy. (Its other main element is its Mediterranean policy).

As previously mentioned, the EU's Eastern policy encompasses two instruments: the strategic partnership with Russia and the Eastern Partnership. In accordance with the research approach adopted in this paper, it is necessary to explore the effects of the war in Ukraine on the functioning of each of these instruments.

2. The strategic partnership with Russia

The Russian Federation's military aggression launched in February 2022 against Ukraine destroyed – virtually in one day – the entire policy of the European Union towards its largest eastern neighbour. The Russian invasion showed the ineptitude of the policy pursued by the entire EU, as well as its individual Member States, in particular Germany and France. As a consequence, a number of comments emerged strongly criticising that policy. Hasty conclusions, however, should be avoided. It rather seems necessary to identify the assumptions and objectives of the EU's policy, as well as its implementation process.

First of all, it is important to take into account the historical context of that time. The collapse of the communist system in Europe brought a lot of hope to the Western world for the final victory of democracy in the entire former Soviet empire. Democracy prevailed not only in

⁴ See more A. Adamczyk, *Perspektywy rozszerzenia UE*, [in:] J. Niżnik (ed.), *Geopolityczne powiązania Europy, system polityczny Unii Europejskiej i możliwe kierunki jego ewolucji*, Warsaw 2016.

the Central European countries, but also in some post-Soviet republics, so the West hoped that the newly established Russian Federation would also take a more democratic and liberal course in its domestic and foreign policy.

It is, therefore, important to emphasise that the EU's policy objective towards Russia adopted in the early 1990s was reasonable and realistic. That objective was by no means to make Russia a formal ally of the West or to bring liberal democracy and a free market economy to that country. The goal was to establish such political and economic ties with Russia, enabling it to play the role of an important and reliable partner, while preserving its specific character. The only expectation was that Moscow would respect the fundamental principles of democracy and human rights in both its foreign and domestic policy. This was to lead to the establishment of mutually beneficial political, economic and even security-based cooperation. It required the conclusion of a number of international agreements, which in the late 1990s laid formal foundations for the so-called strategic partnership between the European Union and the Russian Federation. One can say that the expectations were very low, but yet so very high.

In light of Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine, it is easy to criticise the entire policy of the EU towards Moscow. But we should ask ourselves the most legitimate question: was there a reasonable alternative to such a policy 30 years ago? The entire Western world at that time was convinced of the "end of history" as announced by Fukuyama, which was to signify the uncontested victory of democratic and liberal capitalism. Building political and, in particular, economic cooperation with former communist enemies such as Russia and China seemed to be the only effective way to ensure global peace and prosperity. As can well be imagined, the adoption in the 1990s of a different confrontational policy towards Russia by the Western world would have only accelerated and effectively justified in terms of propaganda and ideology the current explosion of Russian imperialism and nationalism.

Taking these conditions into account does not mean absolving the European Union from its mistakes. Generally speaking, the objectives of the EU's policy were legitimate, but their implementation was erroneous. There is no doubt that the EU's decision-makers believed too strongly in the neoliberal message about the total primacy

of the economy and the infallibility of the “invisible hand of the free market”. (Imaginatively speaking, they probably believed too much in Michael Douglas’ famous line from the Wall Street movie that “greed is good”). The economic calculations overshadowed other aspects, bringing a number of negative issues. A prime example is the excessive dependence of almost all EU Member States on energy supplies from Russia. This meant that European economies were at the mercy of Moscow (especially Germany’s), which did not even hide the fact that it treated oil and gas supplies as an “energy weapon”.

It should be emphasised that unconditional reliance on trade with Russia resulted not only from selfish economic calculations but also from specific political blindness. It turned out that many European decision-makers attached excessive importance to relations with Moscow, which was symbolised by the infamous “Russia first” slogan. In reality, all we had to do was – figuratively speaking – keep our eyes and ears open. It is undeniably not a question of accusing the EU of not deferring to Russophobia. (Critical rhetoric towards Russia has always existed in the West – it is enough to recall US Senator John McCain’s words, who once mockingly described Russia as “a gas station pretending to be a state”). Generally speaking, the fundamental mistake of the EU was political and ideological reluctance to understand Russia’s real intentions.

The fundamental mistake here was that the ideological conditions – a factor of paramount importance in the case of Russia – were very much underestimated. As it turned out, the understanding of ideological values is fundamentally different in Western and Eastern Europe. While both parties were able to reach an agreement on economic issues, with the Russians showing far-reaching pragmatism, things look completely different in terms of ideology. In this area, there is practically no room for compromise from both parties. Such compromise would undermine their “ideological backbone” based on a set of various nationalist and imperialist concepts for Russians and on a catalogue of “European values” for Europeans⁵.

5 See more O. Barburska, *Russia’s Perceptions of the European Identity*, [in:] A. Skolimowska (ed.), *Perceptions of the European Union’s Identity in International Relations*, Routledge, 2019.

What is more, the European Union, in general, did not treat Russia any differently than other international partners. Russia, on the other hand, has developed a specific attitude towards the EU. The main reason for this is that the Russian identity is built as the antithesis of the paradigms developed by the West, and in particular by Europe. As Tomasz Stępniewski notes, this means a deep “ideological opposition” between the Western civilisation based on the Latin Christianity predominant in Europe and the Byzantine civilization represented by Orthodox Russia. The existence of such opposition has significant consequences as it is associated with “different images of the world, human life, and political ideas”⁶.

As a result, the Russians accuse “rotten” Europe of every possible manifestation of moral corruption and political decadence, which goes hand in hand with the absolute glorification of the ideological and political virtues of the Russian civilisation, whose messianic vocation is to save the entire world under the aegis of Moscow as the “third Rome”. Such concepts have a long-standing tradition firmly rooted in Russian history. It is sufficient to mention concepts such as the “Russian World”, the “Russian idea”, or Eurasianism that exist to this day. Such views are represented, among others, by Alexander Dugin and Elgiz Pozdnyakov – the latter claims that “only the complete dominance of the Eurasian continent by Russia guarantees the balance and stability of the world”⁷. Such views *de facto* constitute the conceptual basis for the whole Russian foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin. They shape also this policy towards the EU, as evidenced by Moscow’s accusations that the European Union arbitrarily imposes “European values” on the international community. As Tatiana Romanova put it, the very concept of the EU as *a normative power* is considered an attack on Russian identity and conflicts “with some of the Russian Federation’s fundamental foreign policy ideas”⁸.

6 T. Stępniewski, *Gra sił w kontestowanym sąsiedztwie Unii Europejskiej i Rosji*, “Studia Europejskie” 2017, no. 4, pp. 40-41.

7 In: K. Nieczyppor, *Aleksander Dugin – eurazjatycki głos w twoim domu*, 6 February 2017, <http://www.eastbook.eu> [4.06.2017].

8 T. Romanova, *Normative power Europe: Russian view*, [in:] *Normative power Europe in [a] changing world: a discussion*, The Hague, 2009, p. 53.

This means that we are dealing here with a spectacular axiological incompatibility of the philosophies governing the foreign policies of both parties. As Józef Fiszer summarised it, “it was inevitable, sooner or later, that these two contrasting views on the European order in the 21st century would clash”, and “European hopes that Russia could be a partner of the European Union (...) turned out to be in vain”⁹. The war in Ukraine has clearly proved it, therefore, the thesis that the EU-Russia strategic partnership has failed completely seems to be very much accurate.

3. The Eastern Partnership

Proceeding to an assessment of the impact of the war in Ukraine on the second main element of the EU’s Eastern policy, i.e., the Eastern Partnership, it should be noted that the range of various determinants is broader here than in the case of the strategic partnership with Russia. At this point, it is necessary to provide some historical context connected with the formation of the Eastern Partnership. It was officially established in 2009 on the initiative of Poland and Sweden. High expectations were connected with the EaP at that time, treating it as a potentially crucial instrument for expanding the influence of the EU in its immediate neighbourhood. The EaP incorporated six states: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. What characterised this group was its great diversity in many respects, while at the same time, they had in common the long history of dependence on the Russian and then the Soviet state, with all the negative consequences of the lack of democratic traditions¹⁰.

As regards the main objectives of the Eastern Partnership, they were more extensive and ambitious than in the case of the strategic partnership with Russia. (These objectives are in line with the assumptions adopted in this paper that it is necessary to consider both the ideological sphere of “European values” promoted by the European Union, as well as the pragmatic sphere of interests of the EU in that

9 J. Fiszer, *Zadania i cele polityki zagranicznej Władimira Putina*, “Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna” 2016, no. 1, pp. 188-189.

10 See more O. Barburska, *Blaski i cienie Partnerstwa Wschodniego Unii Europejskiej*, “Studia Europejskie” 2015, no. 4.

region). The first key objective was to establish a group of political allies of the European Union adopting European standards, which would secure its “eastern flank” in a reliable and stable manner. The second main objective was the emergence of an economic system in Eastern Europe based on free market principles, which would be compatible with the Single Market to the greatest extent possible.

Over several years of its functioning, two informal groups emerged within the EaP. The first can colloquially be called “top states”, including Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. These countries were most engaged in the process of bringing their political, legal, economic, and social systems closer to EU standards. This has been demonstrated by various concrete actions such as their conclusion of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, then Association Agreements, and finally agreements granting Ukraine and Moldova the formal status of EU candidate countries. Nevertheless, their road to Europe has been fraught with a number of serious difficulties, and, setting aside the analysis of Ukraine for now, it is obvious that there are still influential anti-European and pro-Russian forces in the other two EaP “top states”.

In Moldova, these forces are fervently trying to weaken or even overthrow the current government that supports EU integration. To achieve this, they use the tension caused by the existence of the separatist and pro-Russian “Republic of Transnistria” in the country, wherein Moscow keeps a contingent of its troops. Despite this, the Moldovan authorities are trying to maintain a policy of rapprochement with the EU, at the same time condemning Russia’s aggression and supporting Western sanctions against this country. The situation is far more complicated in Georgia since the current government has been accused of having pro-Russian sympathies. It is evidenced by the fact that, although officially Tbilisi condemned Russia’s aggression, it opposed the imposition of sanctions on Moscow and there is ample evidence that it has helped the Russians in circumventing those sanctions. Nevertheless, the opposition and a significant part of Georgian society clearly support the pro-European direction. However, in the case of Georgia, the status of an EaP “top state” has become somewhat doubtful, as it was not recognised as an EU candidate country along with Ukraine and Moldova.

The second informal group within the EaP encompasses Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The first country is the most obvious case.

Authoritarian Belarus had never really been an active member of the EaP and suspended itself from its membership in 2021. What is more, the Belarusian dictator, Alexander Lukashenko, is currently Russia's most loyal ally, supporting it in its aggression against Ukraine. In the case of the other two countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, one can say that the strengthening of their ties with the EU is moving rather slowly. A factor of significant importance complicating their geopolitical situation is the Nagorno-Karabakh war that these two countries have been fighting for many years. (The most recent act of this war was the occupation of this region by Azerbaijani troops in September 2023). Participation in the EaP has in no way contributed to the mitigation of this conflict. As a result, Azerbaijan is getting closer politically and militarily to Turkey; Armenia, on the other hand, is wavering between maintaining closer ties with either Russia or the EU. At the same time, both countries adopted a highly reserved attitude towards the war in Ukraine – they did not directly support Russian aggression but also did not join the anti-Russian sanctions.

Taking all this into account, it could be said that the main objectives of the Eastern Partnership have not really been achieved in relation to most EaP countries. After 2009, the European Union strengthened mutual ties with those countries, but with regard to the process of aligning their political, legal, economic, and social systems with EU standards, a lot remains to be done – and unfortunately, there is very little evidence that the situation might improve any time soon. Hence, the thesis that the Eastern Partnership is undergoing a serious crisis seems to be accurate.

The reason is the impact of a number of different factors. One of the most important is, of course, the immense pressure exerted by Russia, which in some cases can prove very effective. There are, however, more factors that contribute to this situation which are visible within both the EU, as well as the countries of the EaP. It is sufficient to mention the excessive bureaucracy of the EU's various cooperation channels or, in particular, the insignificant efficiency of building economic ties with the EaP countries. As for the partner countries, the key obstacle seems to be their insufficient will to follow the road to Europe. In general, the EaP countries appear to be too passive and their expectations are much higher as compared to the effort they put in. Figuratively speaking, it takes two to tango.

The validity of this observation can be justified by the case of Ukraine, the largest and most important country of the Eastern Partnership. The evolution of its relations with the EU shows that it is possible to build strong mutual ties, which may lead to a qualitative breakthrough in the EU's Eastern policy. It is a great tragedy that the decisive factor conducive to this breakthrough was Russia's brutal and bloody aggression.

4. The singular case of Ukraine

● Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has shown, although with varying degrees of intensity, a clear pro-European orientation. This was manifested firstly by the so-called Orange Revolution of 2004, followed by the Maidan Revolution initiated at the end of 2013. During this period, however, the pro-European aspirations of Ukrainians encountered serious obstacles of an internal and international nature. Internal factors included, among others, the unstable political situation, the lack of a fully democratic political system, the omnipresent corruption, and the extremely difficult economic situation.

In addition, various international factors had to be considered. The most important of which was undoubtedly the aggressive policy of Russia as discussed above. One of its concrete expressions was Moscow's assistance provided to the rebels seeking to separate the eastern regions from Ukraine (which led to the outbreak of civil war in Donbas), as well as the annexation of Crimea in March 2014. The EU's attitude was also quite ambivalent. This was especially true with regard to the positions of Germany and France, which showed rather pro-Russian than pro-Ukrainian sympathies. The same applied to several other countries such as Italy, Austria, and especially Hungary (Russia's *de facto* ally).

When, in February 2022, Russia brutally attacked the entire territory of Ukraine, the Ukrainian army and society, quite unexpectedly, successfully and heroically resisted. The outbreak of the war also fundamentally changed the position of the European Union. It showed extraordinary determination and unity in condemning Russian aggression. Along with other Western countries, the EU imposed extensive sanctions on Russia, particularly on energy supplies, the gradual reduction of which deprived Moscow of a powerful instrument of pressure

on Europe. Ukraine was provided with great political and diplomatic support, as well as immense financial, economic, and even military assistance. As the war progressed and intensified, the scope of the assistance increased.

All this demonstrated significant changes not only in the EU's Eastern policy but in the entire foreign policy of the European Union. For the first time in its history, it has undertaken such a large-scale and coordinated action of direct military assistance to a third country. This broke a specific taboo urging the EU to remain solely a so-called *civilian power*, and at the same time, has given it new opportunities to be an important actor in international relations. In addition, it must be strongly emphasised that the determination shown by the EU has given full credibility to "European values". It turned out that they are not ideological slogans, but can in fact inspire and guide the most practical actions.

Obtaining direct foreign help in the course of a defensive war is clearly of paramount importance for Ukraine, but what is even more significant in the long term is a historic opportunity to become a Member State of the EU. Only a few days after the outbreak of war, Kiev submitted an official application for candidate status, and three months later (an absolute record!), this application was approved. Although some Member States showed hesitation or had doubts about the idea of Ukraine's possible accession, for the first time this idea was on the agenda as a feasible scenario.

It should, however, be emphasised that it is a very long way from political and material support to *de facto* membership. As French President Emmanuel Macron put it, thanks to its fight and courage, Ukraine "is already a member of the heart of the European Union". At the same time, however, he noted that it could take years or even decades for it to become a real Member State¹¹. Macron, like many other European politicians, fears the negative consequences of lowering the criteria for obtaining EU membership. There is also the fear of involving the EU in a permanent state of tension or even open conflict

11 In: M. Kucharczyk, *Macron chce nowej Europejskiej Wspólnoty Politycznej*, Euractiv.pl, 10 May 2022, <https://www.euractiv.pl/section/polityka-wewnetrzna-ue/news/macrin-unia-europejska-francja-rosja-ukraina-akcesja-przyszlosc-ue/> [10.05.2022].

with an aggressive Russia. Concerns have also been raised about the need to incur enormous expenditure, firstly on assistance, and subsequently on rebuilding and restructuring the Ukrainian economy in line with EU standards. There are already signs that political elites and societies of certain Member States are starting to feel the strain, and in some countries, such as Poland, there are also concerns about the economic consequences of Ukraine's possible membership, especially in the context of competition from its agriculture.

Therefore, key questions arise as to what the real chances are of Ukraine becoming a Member State of the EU? It should be taken into account that, besides the fears, there are a multitude of positive aspects of Ukraine's possible accession. Above all, this would show that the project of European integration is very much alive and open to neighbouring regions. It would also encourage the other countries in Europe's immediate neighbourhood to increase their efforts to "Europeanise" their policies, treated as a way to achieve the best standards of democracy, as well as social and economic development¹².

What is more, Ukraine's accession would greatly enhance the overall potential of the European Union. This applies in particular to the demographic potential (more than 40 million Ukrainians would largely compensate for the loss of EU population caused by Brexit) and to the economic potential. We must bear in mind that this country, even though currently partially destroyed, still has powerful industries at its disposal. In addition, there are Europe's largest reserves of various natural resources including gas and rare earth metals indispensable in modern electronics. Ukraine also has a vast area of the world's best arable land and is already one of the largest global exporters of agricultural products. Finally, millions of Ukrainians motivated to work would constitute an injection of "fresh blood" for EU societies. All in all, when perceiving the issue from the viewpoint of the requirements of *Realpolitik*, it is clear that admitting a country with such powerful assets as a European Union member would be immensely beneficial in various respects. Many European politicians and commentators are aware of this, and some of them even go so far as to say that for

12 See more O. Barburska, *Europeizacja jako instrument polityki zagranicznej Unii Europejskiej w zakresie promocji demokracji*, "Studia Europejskie" 2020, no. 1.

the EU, from a long-term strategic point of view, “Ukraine is more important than Greece”¹³.

Conclusions

Whether Ukraine will ever become a Member State of the European Union remains an open question today. In order for this to happen, Ukraine has to fulfil a number of conditions, and the same applies to the EU. One of these conditions is the further strengthening of European integration processes, in which the lessons arising from the war in Ukraine may be very helpful. This conflict has revealed to the EU the absolute necessity of a new, more comprehensive look at the issues of broadly understood security. Europeans, in theory, were aware that it covered various aspects, but it was only practice that painfully showed them that in the political and especially in the military dimension they were not safe, and in the economic sphere they were far too dependent on the import of strategic materials from Russia. All this should prompt the European Union to reasonably consider the issue of its possible enlargement. The fears will obviously not disappear overnight, but there should be a reflection that enlargement does not equal only problems. Europe should fully realise that valiant Ukrainians, displaying blue flags since the Orange Revolution, feel more European than many current EU citizens.

In summary, it can be said that Ukraine’s accession would be a great success and a culmination of several decades of the EU’s Eastern policy. It would be also the great achievement of the whole European Union, acting both as a *normative power* promoting “European values”, and as an international actor securing its interests in accordance with the principles of *Realpolitik*. At the same time, the failure of Ukraine’s endeavours to join the club of European democratic states would be a great debacle in the EU’s Eastern policy. As has been argued in this paper, this policy is undergoing serious problems, as evidenced by the complete failure of the strategic partnership with Russia and a serious crisis in the functioning of the Eastern Partnership. What should be

13 A. Åslund, *Ukraine is more important than Greece*, Atlantic Council, 6 June 2015, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticcouncil/ukraine-is-more-important-than-greece> [8.06.2015].

emphasised, is that the war in Ukraine proved to be not only the direct source of all those troubles but rather a catalyst for phenomena and tendencies that had already been more or less clearly outlined for the last three decades.

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