

# International Relations: Integration Opportunities of the National of the Ukrainian Economy Under Martial Law

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**Abstract:** The Russian aggression against Ukraine has become a powerful destabilising factor, which, at the same time, has opened up some new opportunities for the potential of the Ukrainian economy. The purpose of the article is to study the integration capabilities of the national economy of Ukraine during the deployment of military operations and against the background of intensified international cooperation. To achieve the research objective, the author uses the methods of analysis and synthesis, content analysis of modern scientific literature, which helps to determine the current state of understanding of the impact of integration on the development of the Ukrainian economy during martial law. The study results indicate that in international relations, the term “international economic integration” reflects the process of uniting countries or regions for joint economic cooperation, creating a single customs area, overcoming tariff barriers, and solving common economic problems. Under the influence of Russian military aggression, the Ukrainian economy suffered significant losses due to various factors, but improved cooperation with the European Union and NATO helped to mitigate some of the negative effects. Particular attention should be paid to integration into international trade, where since 2014 the majority of Ukraine's exports have been to the EU, a trend that is likely to strengthen in the future. An important development is the introduction of European standards in the military sector, which promotes military-industrial economic integration and opens up opportunities for Ukraine's further participation in European structures. The conclusions emphasise that the political aspects of economic integration remain important for further research, as they have an impact on the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

**Keywords:** Ukraine, economy, Russian aggression, integration, prospects, opportunities, international trade.

**JEL Classification:** F15, F17, F35, F51.

## INTRODUCTION

Russia's open armed aggression, which began in 2014 with the occupation of Crimea and moved to a new and larger level in February 2022, has become a significant challenge to Ukraine's economic development. Military damage to infrastructure, agriculture, production facilities, the occupation of part of the country's territory, and the large number of refugees and internally displaced persons further complicate the opportunities for successful recovery and reintegration of the returned territories. At the same time, these difficulties undermine the likelihood of a rapid recovery of the national economy. However, integration and cooperation at the international level make it possible to identify certain benchmarks and opportunities.

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## Research Problem

First of all, Ukraine's economic cooperation since 2014 has been taking place in the context of confrontation with the Kremlin regime and the loss of control over some territories. Even at the level of interstate relations, the resumption of an integration course with a realistic chance of joining the European Union may become a unique case in history. Economic cooperation with the markets of the EU, the US, and China opens up opportunities to work with more than 60% of the global GDP, creates certain competitive advantages that are especially noticeable in the current conditions of the formation of economic centres in the global economy, development of economic security, new strategic outsourcing industries and creation of regional opportunities for national economies. The Ukrainian economic system has a chance to restore its own capacities on a more competitive and efficient basis. Intensification of economic cooperation will allow us

**Table 1. Key Features of Economic Integration**

Aspect.	Explanation.
Reducing trade barriers	Integration leads to a reduction in customs duties and other trade restrictions, which facilitates the exchange of goods and services between countries.
Formation of free trade zones	Countries conclude agreements to create a free trade area where goods and services can move without tariffs and quotas (Kremers, 1992). Common trade policy: Countries can coordinate their trade policies towards other countries by jointly setting tariff rates and other trade rules.
Common currency policy	Some forms of integration involve the sharing of currency or the creation of a common currency.
Deep integration	In addition to trade cooperation, integration can include deep cooperation in areas such as standardisation, regulation, investment, etc. (König, 2015).
Separation from foreign markets	Integration can lead to less dependence on external markets, but it can also pose risks in the event of changes in internal cooperation.
Harmonisation of legislation	Countries can work together to harmonise legislation to facilitate trade and investment.

Source: compiled by the authors.

to choose the best options for the Ukrainian model of socio-economic, political, and legal development paradigms.

**Research Focus**

Another important issue is the creation of appropriate conditions that will allow the Ukrainian economy to effectively join the EU economic area. To this end, structural changes in the national economy and some of its sectors, the organisation of a re-profiling function for external trade contacts, and the further development of profitable export potential are urgently needed. An important vector of cooperation is to establish cooperation with all centres of modern civilisation, and, above all, with European countries, which fully contributes to the realisation of Ukraine's interests. Obviously, solving the economic problems that have arisen is impossible without establishing profitable cooperation and creating appropriate conditions that would allow for effective attraction and use of foreign investments and loans (while maintaining the possibility of attracting seized Russian assets).

Effective integration of the Ukrainian economy into the economic space of the European Union requires structural restructuring of the national economy and its individual sectors, re-profiling of foreign trade, and development of export potential. It is in Ukraine's interest to develop mutually beneficial cooperation with all centres of global civilisation, and in particular with European countries. Obviously, the state cannot fully solve its economic problems without creating conditions that will really facilitate the attraction of foreign (European) investments and loans. Therefore, the study of these systems, models, and challenges of integration and their significance is an urgent task given the realities of the time and the need for further development.

**Research aim and Questions**

The purpose of the article is to analyse the integration capabilities of the national economy of Ukraine under martial law through the prism of international cooperation. To achieve this goal, the author identifies the following tasks: to reveal

the essence and significance of integration in modern studies, and to determine the importance of cooperation with NATO's political and economic structures during the Russian aggression.

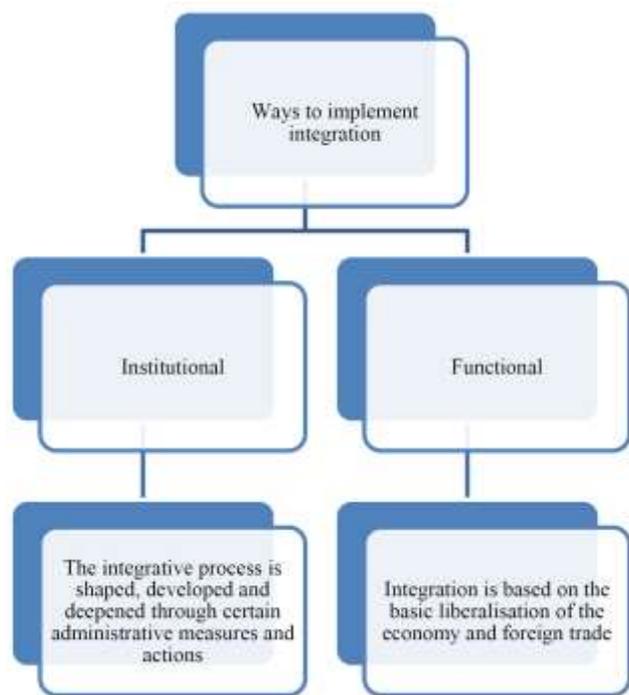
Theoretical framework and Literature Review: the phenomenon of integration in the context of international relations

In the theory of international relations, integration in the context of international economic relations refers to the process of bringing countries or regions together for joint economic cooperation and joint decision-making on economic issues (Zito and Schout, 2009). This may include the formation of customs unions, free trade zones, or economic unions, where countries jointly decide on tariff barriers, regulation of goods and services, common monetary policy, and other aspects of economic cooperation (Börzel and Thomas, 2020). Modern authors identify several important features of economic integration (see Table 1).

These features vary according to the level of integration, which can be relatively superficial (e.g., free trade areas) to deep (e.g., economic unions).

The integration process is based on several basic principles. First of all, it is stated that no country can be forced to become involved in integration. In addition, the prerequisites for a multi-speed integration process are being formed, which implies a choice within the list of options approved by the majority (Spolaore, 2015). Integration also does not require the complete unification of norms and standards of group members. After all, integrative processes cannot be imposed by force, and any unifying initiative must be understood by the entire population of the country. At the same time, it should be noted that the strengthening of supranational elements of the integration process is implemented in stages (Gaspar, 2009). For example, in the course of the EU's development, European integration has passed through several key stages: the period of the free trade area, the customs union, the common market, and the period of the economic union, which began in 1993 and is still ongoing (De Somer, 2018). These periods are characterised by certain peculiari-

ties. In the scientific literature, there are several ways to implement the integration process (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. (1).** Ways to implement integration processes.  
Source: compiled by the authors.

In the practical plane of integration, these paths are intertwined. Their correlation depends on the state (forms) of the integration process and the region in which it takes place. Thus, the mechanism of integration interaction developed by the theory of international relations and practice is aimed at maximising the effect of division and cooperation.

Nekhay et al. (2021) identify the main consequences of EU-Ukraine integration under several alternative possibilities: unilateral trade liberalisation, bilateral liberalisation with exceptions, and bilateral liberalisation without exceptions. Latkovskiy and Marushchak (2019) describe the main transformative changes in trade between Ukraine and the EU as a result of the introduction of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Neely (2022) identified the financial market's reaction to the unfolding of Russian aggression in Ukraine. At the same time, Sapir (2022) emphasised sectoral asymmetries in the mutual trade between Ukraine and the EU and the technological complexity of goods. Modern authors have analysed in detail the prospects of Ukraine's accession to the EU. In particular, Welfens (2022) pointed to the political support of some EU countries for the idea of Ukraine's accession to the Union in the future.

At the same time, the study by Aristova et al. (2020) outlines the key aspects of the formation of an intellectual property court in Ukraine through the prism of intellectual property rights protection in Ukraine's economic security. The development of Ukraine's intellectual economy in line with modern requirements and trends was also highlighted by Bushman (2021). The main trends in the development of the public administration sector in Ukraine, in line with the for-

mation of a modern economy, are described in the studies by Buriak et al. (2022) and Semenets-Orlova et al. (2020). The importance of digitalisation in improving the state of Ukraine's economy is highlighted in Ovcharova (2022). Semenets-Orlova et al. (2021) also addressed similar issues.

Sologoub (2022) identified key benefits for the European Union from Ukraine's cooperation and accession, primarily related to food security, human capital, energy, culture, and industry. Current research emphasises the importance of mediation in the further effective socio-economic development of Ukraine (Romanadze, 2022; Schläpfer, 2016).

Thus, the scientific literature describes in detail the theoretical foundations of Ukraine's integration process into the EU, but the analysis of Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO during the Russian-Ukrainian war, with a focus on the transformation of the military-industrial sector, remains poorly understood.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### General Background

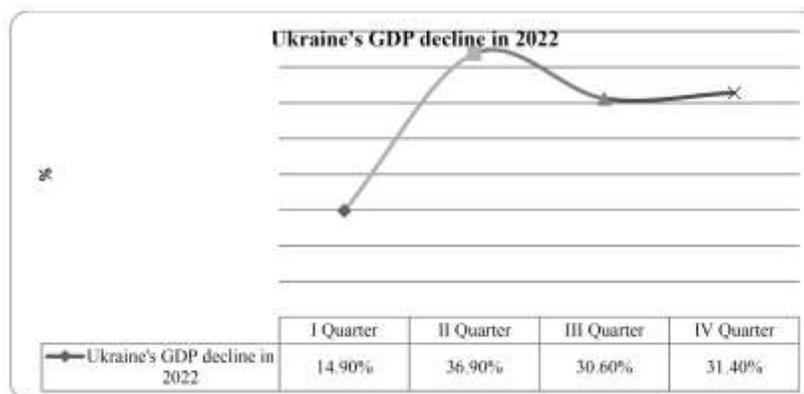
The research was carried out in several stages. At the first stage, the relevance of the issue was determined and the main objectives of the study were outlined; at the second stage, the scope of the GDP decline in 2021 and the possibility of its recovery in 2024-2025 were analysed; based on the information collected, the specifics of Ukraine's a trade and economic cooperation, primarily with EU member states, were identified. The third stage also considered the importance of integration in the military-industrial sector. The last stage discusses the results and compares them with the works of other contemporary authors and draws the main conclusions.

### Materials

The study uses up-to-date reports and institutional documents of international institutions, including materials of the World Bank, statements of the Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services, and Capital Markets, and materials of the European Commission (European Commission, 2023; Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 2022). The study also used legislative documents of the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine (Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 2023).

### Methods

The study is based on the use of such research methods as analysis and synthesis. In particular, based on the analysis, the main subject of the study is divided into several important aspects: defining the role of integration, characterising the transformation of the GDP structure, considering Ukraine's trade and economic cooperation, and determining the importance of integration in the country's military sector. Based on synthesis, these elements are combined and a general vision of the main opportunities for the integrative development of Ukraine's economy is formed. At the same time, the article discusses recent research and identifies important issues for further analysis using a content analysis of the current scientific literature. The study also applies the



**Fig. (2).** Ukraine's GDP decline rate in 2022.

Source: Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 2023

analytical principle to determine the current state of understanding of the impact of integration on the development of the Ukrainian economy during martial law.

## RESULTS

According to researchers, the beginning of a new phase of Russian aggression in 2022 led to the formation of pessimistic scenarios for the development of the Ukrainian economy (Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 2023). Experts estimate that in 2022, Ukraine's real GDP declined by more than 29% (compared to 2021) (see Fig. 2).

Accordingly, taking into account the above figures for the first to fourth quarters, we can determine the average decline in Ukraine's GDP:

$$(14,9\%+36,9\%+30,6\%+31,4\%):4=28,45\%.$$

Accordingly, the average GDP decline for 2022 is 28.45%.

These extremely negative figures were the largest economic decline in Ukraine's history, although the war, as a destructive factor, played a major role in this (National Security and Defence Journal, 2022). The occupation of certain territories, Russian attacks on infrastructure and production facilities, threats to navigation in the Black Sea, the breakdown of established logistics contacts, and the departure of a large part of the population abroad caused a sharp drop in consumer demand, reduced investment activity, and the country's attractiveness, led to a collapse in exports and the inability to freely dispose of agricultural products (which is an extremely sensitive issue for Ukrainian realities) (National Security and Defence Journal, 2022).

At the same time, according to forecasts, in 2023, a slight increase is expected, reaching 0.3-0.5 % of GDP, while in 2024 and 2025, GDP will increase by 4.1 % and 6.4 %, respectively (Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 2023). The stabilisation of the economic situation was also the result of close cooperation with foreign partners, whose financial support has become an important source of revenue for the state budget of Ukraine, while the provision of modern weapons has significantly reduced military spending and, most importantly, provided the necessary time to deploy Ukraine's own production facilities and systems (Sapir, 2022). This algorithm is also in line with the general idea of scholars about the stages of post-war economic recovery in

Ukraine, which will necessarily include periods of stabilisation, gradual recovery, and modernisation of production and services (Ladonko et al., 2022).

In addition, trade has become an important consequence of the integration of the Ukrainian economy into international markets. In particular, the EU member states became Ukraine's largest partner in the international market: in 2013-2021, their share in trade increased from 32.1 % to 39.2 % (Ladonko et al., 2022). These tangible shifts in the geographical coordinates of Ukraine's foreign trade occurred in a relatively short period of time. As a result of Russia's military aggression and the imposition of a naval blockade in 2022, the EU's share in Ukraine's trade operations increased even further: in the second quarter of 2022, the countries of this political and economic bloc accounted for 78% of all Ukrainian exports (Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 2023). In addition, experts have determined that in the first three quarters of 2022, Ukraine's exports to the EU were already significantly higher than in the same period in 2021 (Sologoub, 2022). Although the country's total exports have almost halved, these figures demonstrate that trade integration with the EU has helped to reduce the devastating effects of the blockade.

Since 2014, Ukraine's economic integration into the European Union has been taking place in the context of Russian aggression and the occupation of a certain part of the country's territory. This, in turn, leads to significant problems and obstacles on this path, as well as significant risks for Ukraine's socio-economic development. As of 2021, Ukraine's trade with the European Union amounted to €52.4 billion. This is 2 times more than in 2016. Therefore, the trade process with the EU is an important foreign economic factor in the resilience of Ukraine's open economy in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war and significant socio-economic losses. As of 2021, Ukraine's GDP was over USD 200 billion. This compares to USD 90.6 billion in 2015 (at nominal exchange rates) (Shnyrkov and Chugayev, 2023).

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russia (February 2022), the EU financial institutions and individual Member States have raised more than €22 billion between early March and November to support Ukraine's economic and financial resilience. This was in various forms of budgetary, macro-financial, emergency, or humanitarian support.

**Table 2.**

Product Group	Share of exports of goods in Ukraine's exports to the EU, %, March-October 2022	Transformation of the share of merchandise exports in Ukraine's exports to the EU, %, March-October 2022 compared to the same period in 2021
Meat and meat products	1,32	0,6
Dairy products, products of animal origin	0,98	0,6
Cereals	12,67	6,9
Oilseeds, medicinal plants, feed	12,23	6,7
Animal fats and products made from them	11,14	2,8
Mineral fuels, lubricants, and distilled products, bitumen materials	5,42	2,8
Wood and wood products	7,71	1,7
Electrical equipment, audio equipment, video equipment, individual parts	7,46	-0,2

Source: Shnyrkov and Chughaev (2023).

Thus, according to the National Security and Defence Journal (2022), the EU's share was €12 billion, individual EU member states €7.4 billion, and the European Peace Facility €3.1 billion (European Commission, 2023).

Another important area of economic assistance to Ukraine from the EU is the process of further liberalisation of trade relations. The Special Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council, which was adopted on 4 June 2022, suspended most tariff restrictions on imports from Ukraine (Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 2022). For example, this Regulation provides for the elimination of import duties for industrial products, the use of a system of input prices for fruits and vegetables, and vegetables, the application of tariff quotas for agricultural products, etc.

The European Union is one of Ukraine's largest partners in terms of imports and exports of goods. Ukrainian goods are able to access the EU market duty-free thanks to the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (Karamyshev, 2019). Imports from Ukraine may include food, electronics, metal products, etc. The study by Shnyrkov and Chughaev (2023) presents key structural changes in the EU-Ukraine trade system in 2022, highlighting the shares of bilateral trade in specific product groups. The data covered the period from March to October 2022 (just after the start of the full-scale invasion) and are compared with the data for the same period in 2021 (the period before the full-scale invasion).

Thus, Ukraine is an influential supplier of timber, vegetable oil, and grain crops to the EU market (over 10% of EU imports). At the same time, during the war, Ukraine's role as a supplier of oilseeds and meat products has increased for the EU, but its importance as an exporter of ferrous metals and non-metallic minerals has weakened (Shnyrkov and Chughaev, 2023).

Another important vector of Ukraine's foreign policy that will bring significant changes in economic development is the intensification of military-economic integration (Riabov and Riabova, 2021). This aspect is simultaneously an ele-

ment of deepening economic cooperation, which combines all areas of the national production complex as a whole. This vector will lead to further internationalisation of military-industrial production and improvement of scientific and technical interconnections, which usually occurs among countries that belong to a certain military-political association, have similar social development, common values and interests, and opportunities for extension, mutual adaptation, and overall optimisation of the capacities of production complexes.

In particular, the possibilities of military-economic integration of EU states have become an important element in the development of Western economies (Kovalyuk et al., 2020). The formation of national production complexes related to the military industry was caused not only by the limited capabilities of national resources, problems of internationalisation in the markets of the international division of labour, and the formation of branched production systems, but also by the specific military and political circumstances in the states belonging to this political association. After the end of the bloody Second World War, countries in Western Europe were able to quickly and efficiently restore the economic potential and capabilities of the military-industrial complex to meet defence needs. As a result, the capabilities of the military economies of NATO member states increased significantly and went beyond national borders, which led to the emergence and formation of an extensive system of interstate military-economic contacts, which significantly accelerated integration processes and stimulated the beginning of close integration of the economies of the member states of the political bloc as a whole. An important factor in the implementation of this aspect was the US financial assistance embodied in the Marshall Plan (Buriak et al., 2022). Similar opportunities are also opening up for modern Ukraine, which politically aspires to join NATO and integrate closely into the political structures of the Alliance.

Possible positive effects of deepening military-economic integration may include the following elements:

1. Trade diversion - the gradual reorientation of local buyers and consumers of the military-industrial complex (purchases of dual-use goods, weapons, and their components, spare parts, and complete military equipment) from more efficient non-integration sources of military products to less efficient internal integration suppliers. This process is being implemented through the abolition or radical reduction of import duties within the common customs union.

2. Changes in dynamics - economic results that demonstrate effectiveness at much later stages of establishing economic cooperation and functioning of the customs union.

3. Static transformations are military-economic results that are formed simultaneously as a result of the creation of a customs union or other forms of integration and are aimed at national changes in production chains.

NATO countries are also interested in close cooperation with Ukraine (Ladonko et al., 2022). Obviously, further military transformations in the Ukrainian army will lead to the purchase or production of the latest weapons. In particular, if we take into account the average prices for typical models of modern weapons supplied to Ukraine as a result of international assistance in overcoming Russian aggression, the capacity of this market for Western manufacturers is already estimated at more than USD 63 billion, while the prospects for procurement of modern weapons are already estimated at more than USD 1.5 billion. The prospects for purchases can reach up to 58 billion US dollars in 2013 and more than 58 billion US dollars in 2014. In 2023, the market capacity for Western producers is already estimated at over USD 58 billion, while the prospects for purchases could reach USD 75 billion in 2023. In the case of further integration with NATO, this will mean the purchase of new weapons systems that meet international standards (Shnyrkov and Chugaev, 2023). Cooperation between Ukraine and NATO under such circumstances will not only lead to the physical expansion of NATO but as can be seen from the figures cited by researchers, will form an important economic burden and lead to a clear increase in profits of corporations related to the military and defence production of goods and services. These assessments of the situation have a chance of success, as even the absence of a possible accession to NATO would mean additional security guarantees for Ukraine, which would be backed by defence contracts that would be of interest to European and global arms manufacturers. For this reason, integration with the Alliance will allow for the growth of arms markets, which has a positive impact on political and economic decision-making and will be important for Ukraine's integration into the body of this military and political bloc.

## DISCUSSION

Researchers' conclusions about the extremely negative impact of hostilities on the Ukrainian economy are undeniable (Das, 2023). While these research findings are quite logical, they also demonstrate the specifics of the impact of the destructive military factor on certain sectors of the economy and on the overall picture of GDP decline in general. The emphasis on integration opportunities for the recovery of the Ukrainian economy is also quite relevant in research circles (Neely, 2022). Attention to this aspect can be considered fair, since even in the face of a military challenge, interna-

tional cooperation makes it possible to understand how cooperation with the EU and NATO countries can be useful in times of crisis. We can also agree with the conclusions of Riabov and Riabova (2021) about the importance of trade integration with the EU, first and foremost. The growing role of this economic bloc in foreign economic performance has become an important aspect of the functioning of Ukrainian exports (also to third countries through transit), as further emphasised by Sologoub (2022) and Welfens (2022).

At the same time, it is also worth focusing on other aspects that have received much more modest attention in the scientific literature. On this basis, it is possible to trace not only the benefits that the Ukrainian economy receives from international integration, but also the challenges that will arise on this path. They can be divided into internal and external. The former include the peculiarities of Ukraine's internal economic development, while the latter include the attention of foreign partners to Ukrainian affairs and their support. In particular, scholars have focused much less attention on highlighting the importance of international assistance provided to Ukraine as part of support (Buriak et al., 2022; European Commission, 2023). These elements played a crucial role in 2022 in the ability of the Ukrainian economy to withstand the hostilities, but also to at least partially realise its potential. The steps taken by the leaders of the EU, the US, and other countries to intensify Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO structures were also important. However, while EU membership has become less likely for Ukraine, further cooperation with the structures of the North Atlantic Alliance seems problematic. On the one hand, the arguments of researchers who see risks for NATO from the accession of a country with a potentially powerful third-party agency are important (Welfens, 2022; Shnyrkov and Chugaev, 2023). However, there may also be a desire to preserve room for manoeuvre during potential negotiations with the Russian Kremlin regime. At the same time, the economic benefits of integration into NATO structures may play in favour of Ukraine's accession: the transition of the Ukrainian army to NATO standards opens up wide opportunities for economic cooperation, which is also of interest to influential business players.

Among the internal obstacles that may have a negative impact on Ukraine's integration into global economic processes, researchers traditionally name corruption (Schläpfer, 2016; Sapir, 2022; Shnyrkov and Chugaev, 2023). On the other hand, Welfens (2022) identified several other important factors as key challenges in this regard. In particular, this author highlights the following aspects:

1. Relatively low level of income;
2. The presence of oligarchic structures;
3. The presence of corruption;
4. Mass migration;
5. The problem of the existence of independent courts, which makes it difficult to implement effective judicial reforms in the country (Welfens, 2022).

This conclusion can be agreed with, as the use of corruption schemes and non-transparent distribution of financial resources in wartime has led to several tangible scandals that

have generally undermined the political situation in Ukraine. On the other hand, the situation with the de-oligarchisation of Ukrainian sectors of the economy is complicated, which generally hinders the continuation of market reforms in Ukraine and will create corruption challenges in the future (Mildner, 2003; Börzel et al., 2020). Obviously, this state of affairs, although not publicly emphasised by Ukraine's Western partners, will be the subject of a separate discussion and will require an active response.

Researchers' comments on the future of Ukrainian-Russian relations are also important (Das, 2023). While before 2014, the ideas of broad economic and political integration with political blocs in which the official Kremlin occupied the highest levels were discussed at the highest level, the role of the Kremlin regime may be reconsidered after the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Also, for this reason, it will not be so much about integration as about restoring economic cooperation with other post-Soviet countries based on possible new forms of interstate cooperation.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, in the field of international relations, the concept of international integration in the economic context demonstrates the processes of uniting states or regions for the purpose of joint economic cooperation, establishing common customs zones, tariff barriers, addressing common economic issues, etc. In the context of Russia's military aggression, the Ukrainian economy suffered significant losses due to many factors, but closer cooperation with the EU and NATO countries made it possible to overcome some of the negative effects. First and foremost, we are talking about integration into international trade, in which the EU countries have accounted for the majority of Ukraine's exports since 2014. This trend is likely to continue in the future. Another important aspect is the military-industrial economic integration, which is caused by the gradual reorientation of the Ukrainian army towards the use of European weapons. The potential economic benefits of this sector open up opportunities for further integration of Ukraine and the Ukrainian economy into European structures. At the same time, the political aspects of economic integration, which have their impact on the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war, remain a promising area for further research.

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