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ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP UKRAINE–EU: RETROSPECT AND CHALLENGES OF FURTHER ENHANCED COOPERATION

ABSTRACT

Ukraine has been a priority partner of the EU since the signing of the Association Agreement in 2014. It was the significant financial and economic support of the EU as a whole and, in particular, of individual EU member states that became a key tool for avoiding catastrophic consequences in the financial and economic system of our country at the beginning of a full-scale war and for the current financing of the state budget deficit. Today, the European Union's support for Ukraine is extremely significant, although it is accompanied by a number of problematic issues that require an in-depth study of certain aspects of economic partnership in terms of finding ways and directions to improve the use of the potential of bilateral economic relations with the European Union as a whole and with individual EU member states.

The methodological basis of the study is based on general scientific and special methods of economic theory, in particular, methods of theoretical generalization and comparative analysis for a comprehensive consideration of the research issue, and statistical methods of analysis. In the course of the study, the statistical materials of the European Union and the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine on foreign trade in goods were used.

Modern scientific views on the content and prospects of Ukraine's economic partnership with the EU are studied. The key stages of the development of Ukraine's economic partnership with the European Union are summarized and schematized, with details of the areas of sectoral cooperation. The main indicators of trade relations and their role in the economies of the studied countries are analyzed. The key obstacles to further deepening of the economic partnership are substantiated, the elimination of which should be the primary goal of our country on the way to European integration.

The obtained results can serve for further study of trade relations and their role in the economies of the studied countries.

Keywords: economic partnership, European Union, Ukraine, foreign trade in goods, exports, imports

JEL Classification: F13, F15, O52, H77

INTRODUCTION

Ukraine has been a priority partner for the European Union (EU) since the signing of the Association Agreement in 2014, including establishing an enhanced and comprehensive free trade area [1]. To implement the developed roadmap of reforms within the EU Agreement, European financial institutions have mobilized over EUR 17 billion in grants and loans since 2014 [1], aimed at stabilizing the domestic economy, providing financial and resource support for structural reforms, and improving the quality of life for our citizens. The substantial financial and economic support from the EU as a whole and, especially from individual EU member states, has become a key instrument in avoiding disastrous effects on our country's financial and economic system at the beginning of the full-scale war and in addressing the current budget deficit. For instance, "in June 2022, the EU Council approved EUR 9 billion in urgent macro-financial assistance, and in December 2022, a plan was endorsed to provide Ukraine with regular micro-financial assistance of up to EUR 1.5 billion per month in 2023" [2]. The support

from the European Union for Ukraine today is exceptionally significant. However, it involves a range of problems that require in-depth research into specific aspects of economic partnership in terms of exploring ways and directions to enhance the utilization of the potential of bilateral economic relations both with the European Union as a whole and with individual EU member states.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of Ukraine's economic partnership with the European Union, specifically its strategic perspectives, is consistently within the focus of researchers. In this regard, while scientists previously considered various scenarios for the development of economic partnership or diverse aspects of implementing our country's Euro integration aspirations before the full-scale invasion, the introduction of martial law shifted the emphasis to examining the actual assistance to Ukraine within the framework of economic partnership or the strategic prospects of its existence in general. For instance, T. Zosymenko [3] substantiates two basic scenarios for building economic cooperation between Ukraine and the EU by 2025, one of which envisions our country becoming the core of mutually beneficial projects within the Eastern Partnership of the EU, while the other involves remaining in a constant process of adaptation to the new requirements of economic cooperation. Some research groups [4] study economic cooperation issues in the context of the precondition for Ukraine's accession to the EU, outlining the main achievements and strategic challenges for the country on the chosen path, while others [5] focus on the issues of trade and economic cooperation between Ukraine and Poland within the scope of economic partnership with the EU, concluding about the incomplete utilization of its potential opportunities.

The recent developments of some researchers are focused on strategic perspectives, albeit in a somewhat different context. For instance, Crombois J. [6] concludes about the subverting of the fundamental principles and the loss of specific features in relations within the Eastern Partnership with Ukraine from the post-war perspective. Scholars from the Kiel Institute of World Economics [7] emphasize the financial assessment of support to Ukraine within the economic partnership. They compare it with the levels of assistance from other countries worldwide. The issue of Ukraine's economic cooperation with the European Union has been sufficiently explored; however, considering the complex and significant factors driven by the full-scale military actions on our country's territory, the outlined problems gain new relevance in defining ways to improve the utilization of the potential of bilateral economic relations both during the war and after its end.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of the article is to study the content and prospects of Ukraine's economic partnership with the EU. To achieve this goal, the article:

- the key stages of the development of the economic partnership between Ukraine and the European Union are summarized and schematized with detailing the directions of sectoral cooperation;
- the key obstacles to further deepening of economic partnership, the elimination of which should become the primary goal of our state on the path of European integration, are substantiated.

METHODS

The article aims to study the role of economic partnership with the European Union for Ukraine and the prospects for enhancing cooperation during the war.

The basis of this research is a systematic approach to analyzing trade and economic cooperation between Ukraine and the countries of the European Union in retrospect and under contemporary conditions. The methodological foundation of the study consists of general scientific and specialized methods of economic theory, including methods of theoretical generalization and comparative analysis, as well as statistical methods. The research utilized statistical materials from the European Union and the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine on issues of international merchandise trade.

RESULTS

The active development and enhancement of economic cooperation between the EU countries and Ukraine began with the "signing on 14.06.1994 of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Ukraine, the European Communities, and

their Member States – a fundamental bilateral international treaty, with a duration of 10 years and the possibility of automatic renewal for one year” [8]. Taking into account the essential meaning of the concept’s “partnership” as “coordinated, harmonized actions of participations in a common cause” [9], and “economic partnership” – as actions that are “based on mutual agreements of the partner parties based on bilateral and multilateral agreements, determining the rights, duties, obligations, and responsibility of the parties, the procedure and scope of financial participation, and other,” the initial text of the Partnership and Cooperation.

However, further enhancing partnership relations and economic cooperation between Ukraine and the EU has become significantly closer (Figure 1).

The agreement outlined three main areas:

- political dialogue and promotion of the development of close political relations;
- development of trade and investments;
- forming the foundations of mutually beneficial cooperation in the economic, social, financial, civil, scientific-technical, and cultural spheres.

It is worth noting that the signing of the Association Agreement with Ukraine has been unprecedented in the history of the European Union’s partnership relationship. Researchers point out that “never before has the European Union provided any non-candidate country with such a broad and documented perspective” [10], the tangible results of which have manifested not only in the financial support of our state and the establishment of a “deep and comprehensive free trade area, which started operating on January 1, 2016” [11] but also in sanctions against the aggressor state.

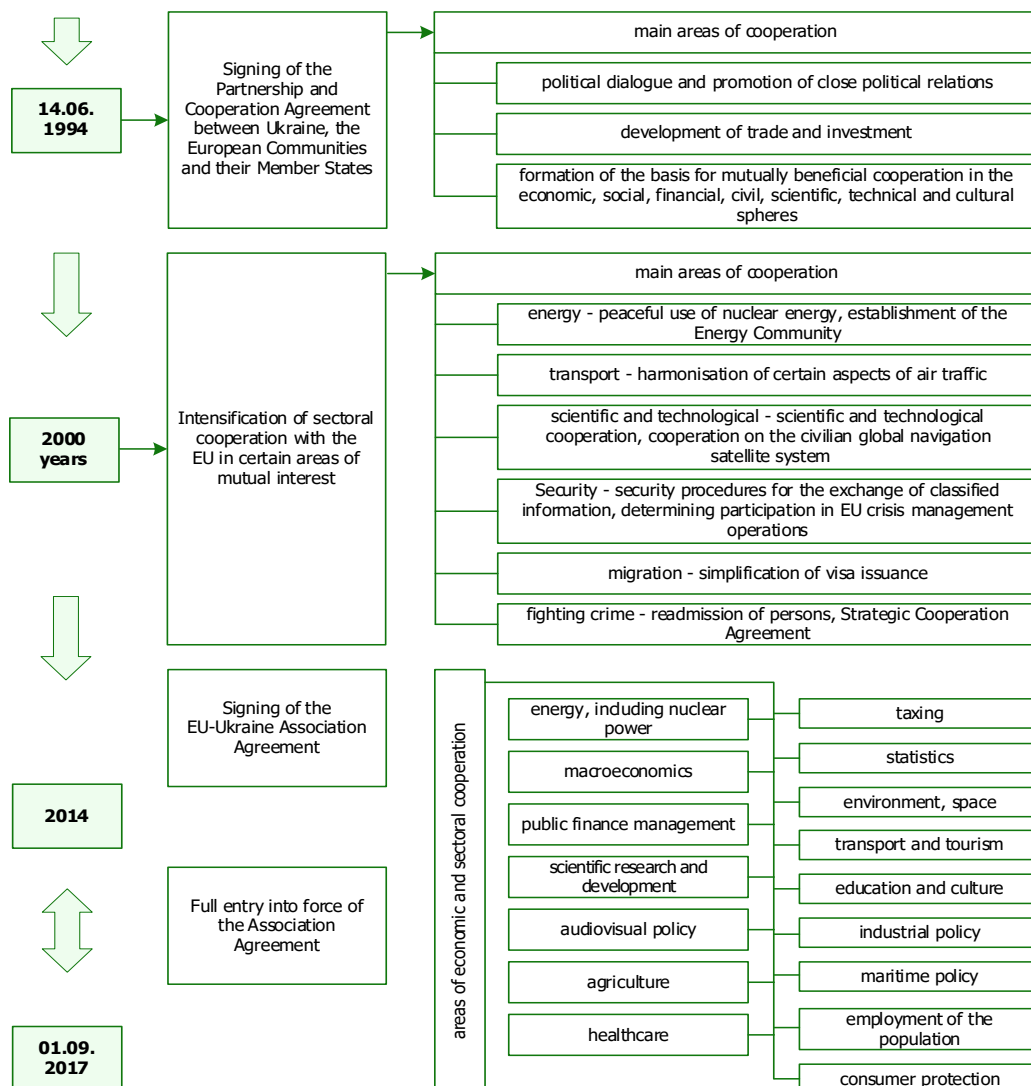


Figure 1. Key stages in the development of the EU-Ukraine economic partnership. (Source: built by the author on the basis of [8; 10; 11])

The main results of implementing the free trade area for Ukraine were assessed by experts quite ambiguously, as the imports from European Union countries predominantly recorded growth as a result (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of the functioning of the free trade area between Ukraine and the EU in 2016. (Source: constructed and calculated by the author according to [12])

Product Group	The volume of exports from Ukraine, USD million		Relative growth, %	Relative growth, %	The volume of imports to Ukraine, USD million		Product Group
	2015	2016			2015	2016	
Ferrous metals	2623.5	2683.3	2.3	5.1	521.5	547.9	paper and cardboard
Electrical machinery and equipment	1434.1	1612.7	+12.5↑	+11.1	1093	1214.7	electrical machines and equipment
Grain crops	1625.8	1279.5	-21.3↓	+14.9	988.9	1136.5	pharmaceutical products
Fats and oils of vegetable/animal origin	678.3	1204.3	+77.5	-25.4↓	3404.2	2539.5	pharmaceutical products
Ores, slag and ash	962.5	963.3	+0.1	+15.9	628.8	729	other products of the chemical industry
Wood and wood products	712.7	784.2	+10.0	+3.1	1086.7	1120	polymeric materials and plastics
Seeds and fruits of oilseeds	645.3	607.1	-5.9↓				
Residues and waste from the food industry	490.6	439.2	-10.5↓				

■ a decrease in volumes of more than 5%
■ Increase in trade volumes by more than 5%

First and foremost, the provided data presents grounds to assert that the free trade area has contributed more to the growth of imports to Ukraine than to the export of domestic products to European markets. For instance, in 2016, only the import of petroleum products from EU countries to Ukraine decreased by 25,4% compared to the previous year, while the export volumes of domestic products decreased for several commodity groups: grains by 21,3%, residues and waste of food industry by 10,5%, seeds, and oil crops by 5,9 %.

Ukraine's oil industry was the biggest beneficiary of establishing the free trade area with the EU, whose export volume in 2016 recorded an increase of 77,5%. However, from the perspective of the European Union, Ukraine, as a trade and economic partner, plays a relatively insignificant role in its internal market (Figure 2).

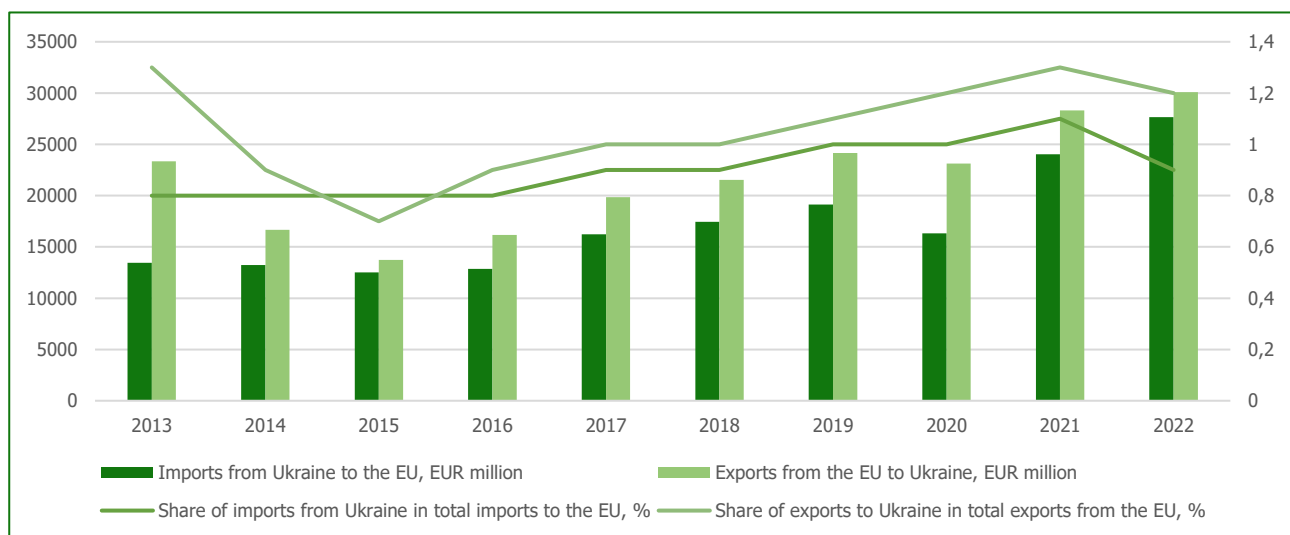


Figure 2. Key indicators of Ukraine's foreign trade with the EU in 2013-2022. (Source: built by the author on the basis of data [13])

Despite the continuous growth in foreign trade volume with Ukraine, the share of goods exported from the European Union to our country in their exports was at most 14% during the researched period. Additionally, the share of Ukrainian imports in the EU market exceeded 1% only in 2021.

On the other hand, looking at the dynamics of the volume of imports of goods from Ukraine to the European Union markets, it is worth noting that although by the end of 2016, the free trade area did indeed operate more towards saturating the Ukrainian market with imported products, there was subsequently an annual intensive growth in the volume of Ukrainian goods exported to EU markets. A noticeable decline occurred only in 2020, and the main factor is our country's internal financial and economic problems.

Even by the end of 2022, during the full-scale war, goods and services worth EUR 27,650.2 million were exported from Ukraine to the EU, exceeding the 2021 figure by 15,1%. However, somewhat different dynamics are observed when discussing the commodity group (Figure 3).

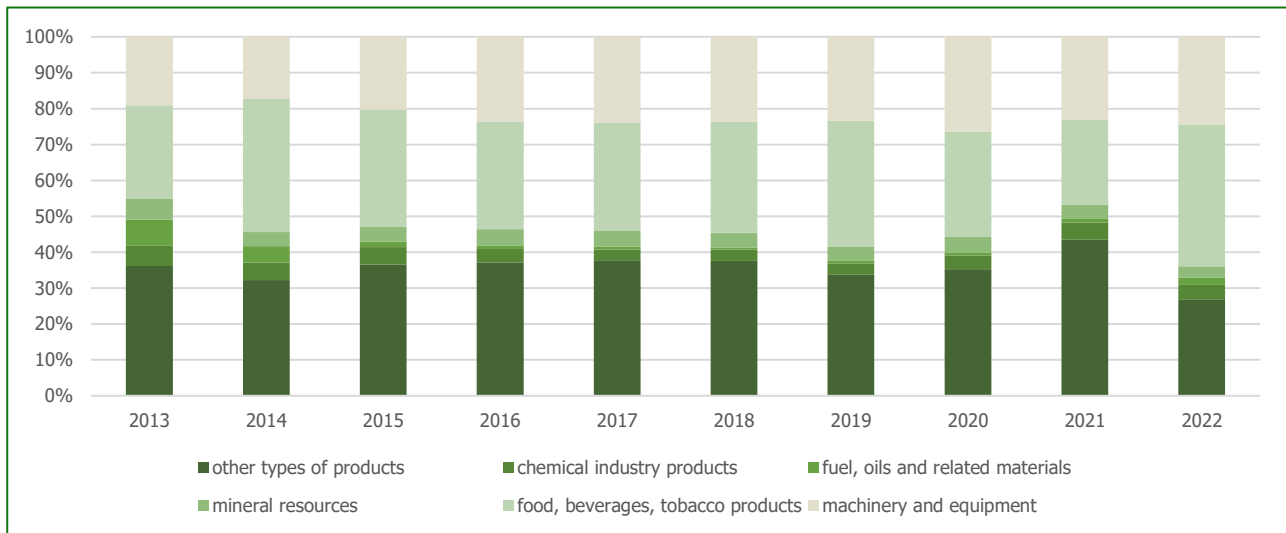


Figure 3. Volumes of merchandise imports from Ukraine to the EU in 2013-2022, EUR million. (Source: built by the author on the basis of data [13])

Indeed, the overall volume of goods exported from Ukraine to European Union countries slightly decreased in 2022, primarily due to a reduction in the export volumes of other types of products. However, as indicated by the provided data, there was a noticeable increase in the export volumes of food products, beverages, and tobacco products, with a relative growth rate of 60% compared to 2021. Additionally, the export volume of minerals and mineral raw materials practically doubled during the first year of the full-scale war.

The occupation of parts of our country's territory and the practical foreign policy efforts of Ukraine's leadership structures have significantly strengthened and enhanced partnership relations with the European Union, with full-scale military aggression against our state catalyzing these processes. In 2022, "trade contact liberalization and visa-free regimes in various areas of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU" were introduced – all tariffs for Ukrainian goods were abolished for a year, and an agreement on automotive transportation was signed, explaining the significant increase in export volumes from Ukraine during the state of war [11].

Additionally, the European Union allowed Ukraine to submit joint projects with EU member states to develop border crossing points under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). Moreover, the EU provided a wide range of measures to support the participation of Ukrainian displaced persons in the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs program, leading to the highest number of beneficiaries from Ukraine in 2022 [14].

Thus, economic partnership with the European Union is significantly more advantageous and necessary for Ukraine, especially considering that the EU is one of the vital external markets for domestic producers (Figure 4).

In the most challenging year for the domestic economy, 2022, trade with the European Union accounted for over 55% of our country's total foreign trade turnover. It is also worth noting that since 2019, the growth rate of trade volume with European Union countries has not only slowed but also decreased. This is, of course, attributed to various reasons. However, one of the most important ones is the significant discrepancy between the ruling circles declared and actual economic directions, which could not but impact external trade relations.

In this regard, we consider the statement that "the war has reduced the interest and the level of activity of European business partners in developing contacts with a warring country with a complex internal situation, containing risks and dangers for prospective investments and business conduct" [14] inaccurate. From our perspective, the interest in trading

with Ukraine among European businesses is decreasing due to the extremely high corruption across all branches of power and deficient levels of legal protection.

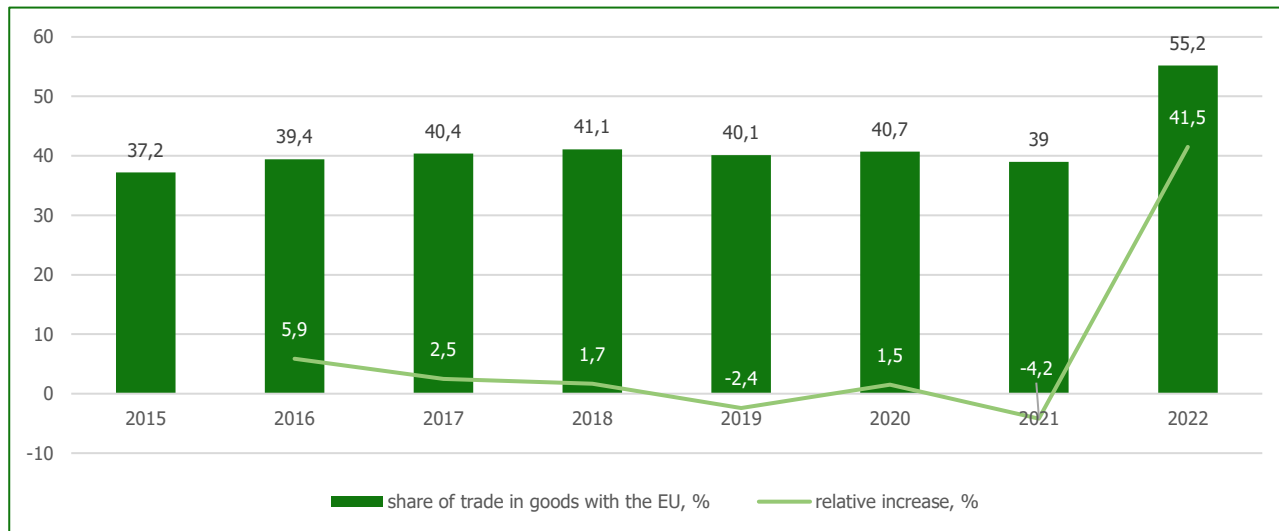


Figure 4. Share of trade in goods with the European Union. (Source: based on data from [12])

Specifically, according to the Corruption Perceptions Index in 2022, Ukraine scored “only 33 out of 100 possible points” [16], ranking 116th out of 180 surveyed countries. Although this is one point higher than in 2021, we can observe that even large-scale military actions, the occupation of significant territories, and an incredibly massive number of human casualties have practically not reduced corruption among officials and employees at all levels.

The corrupt component as one of the decisive obstacles to the further development of Ukraine’s partnership with the European Union is emphasized by leading information agencies, focusing on the fact that “judicial reform and a very tough fight against corruption” [17] are crucial in the context of accelerating the integration of the domestic economy into the European one. However, analyzing government data on the implementation of the Association Agreement in various areas [18], we see that while progress in issues such as intellectual property rights or the exchange of statistical information is over 96%, financial cooperation and combating fraud is only 24%. The leadership structures of our state consistently declare active efforts to combat corruption – in 2020, the Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021-2025 was even approved [19], the content of which is based on a list of existing problems and expected strategic results, with no defined pathways to achieve them. At the same time, the State Ant-Corruption Program for 2023-2025 [20], which should specify concrete ways and means to achieve defined strategic results in the fight against corruption, similarly contains a list of existing problems and an expanded interpretation of the reasons for their existence. In this aspect, the list of indicators determining the effectiveness of the state anti-corruption strategy looks particularly unclear, among which the primary one is the “implementation status of measures provided for by the Program” [20], as the mentioned Program does not outline any measures.

The mentioned government documents, as well as the actual, rather than declared, actions of the Ukrainian authorities, have already led to the European Union increasingly paying attention to the fact that the “immediate priority of the Ukrainian government is to obtain financial assistance for recovery and reconstruction, not tackling corruption” [21]. In turn, more and more researchers and organizations emphasize the need to “by no means provide funds to Ukrainian government structures” [22] and “by no means transfer funds even to funds that are somehow controlled or directly influenced by the Ukrainian government” [23].

Such a situation is hazardous for our state, as the financial support from partners is one of the determining factors for the macroeconomic stability of Ukraine as a country, a significant part of which has been at the epicentre of full-scale hostilities for the second consecutive year. Indeed, from March 2022 to October 2023, the EU countries, as a whole, provided financial support to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, totalling over EUR 82 billion [24], of which over EUR 65.4 billion were allocated for economic assistance (Figure 5).

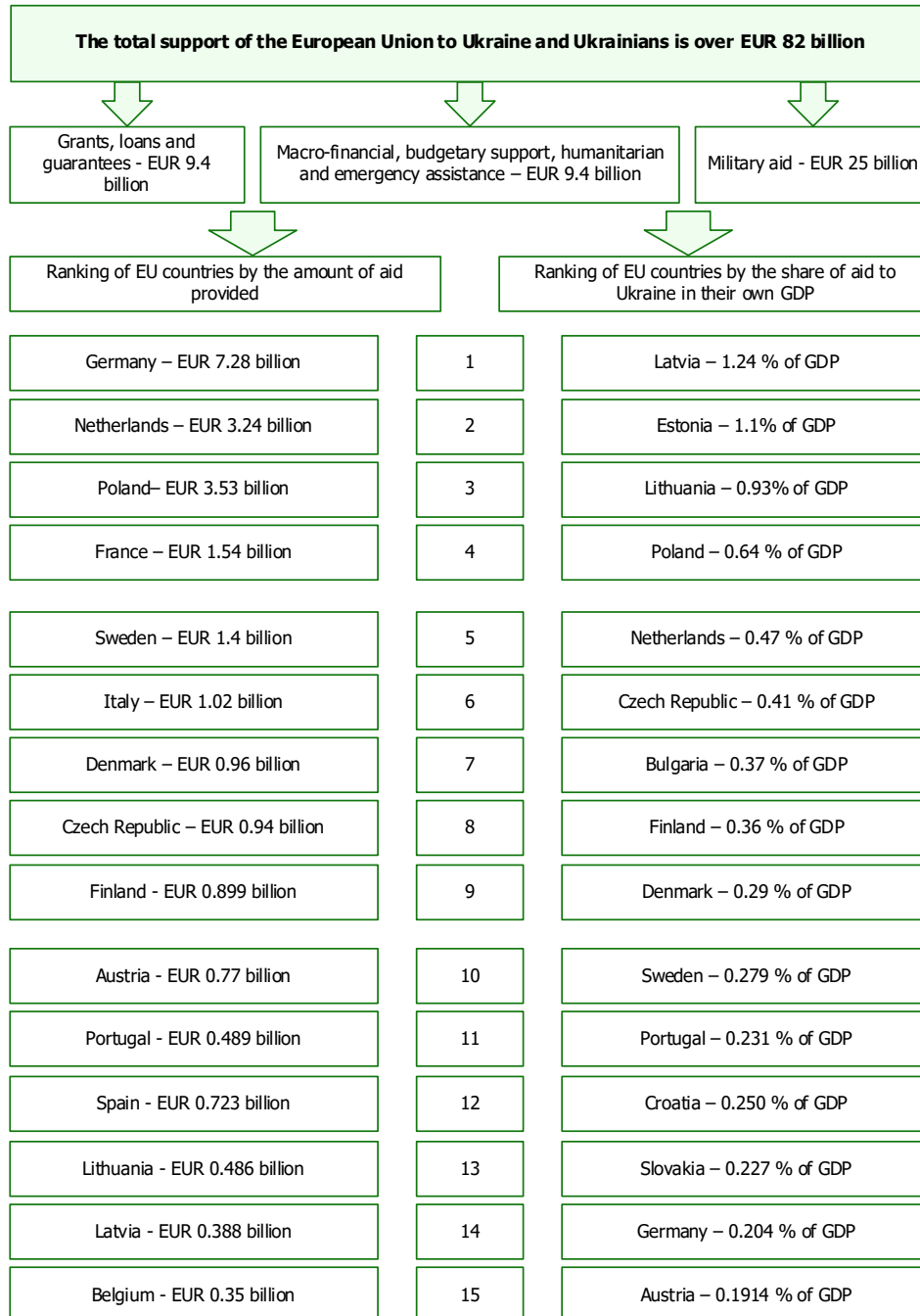


Figure 5. Amounts of assistance to Ukraine from the European Union. (Source: grouped and built by the author according to [24])

The undisputed leader in supporting Ukraine during the state of war is Germany, which, as of the beginning of October 2023, has spent over EUR 7 billion for these purposes.

However, this represents only 0,2% of its annual gross domestic product. The Netherlands and Poland also spent over EUR 3 billion to assist Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. However, when characterizing the volumes of aid in comparison to the actual GDP of each country, the unquestionable leaders are the Baltic States, which have allocated approximately 1% of their GPD to aid our state.

The mentioned support from the European Union and each member country significantly contributes to stabilizing the economic situation and approaching the complete de-occupation of Ukrainian territories. This demands special attention to the requirements and conditions for further assistance the partners provide. Considering that the draft State Budget of Ukraine 2023 envisages an external financing volume of over USD 30 billion, of which they expect to receive USD 13.1 billion from the EU [25], it would be advisable to fulfil the partners' demands carefully. This is especially important in the

context that the official plans of the EU regarding the financing of Ukraine contain a comprehensive set of requirements regarding the fight against corruption and even a schedule (roadmap) for their implementation with established deadlines.

DISCUSSION

The findings can serve as an important basis for further research on trade relations and their impact on the economies of both Ukraine and the European Union.

Thus, the results obtained can serve as an important basis for further research on trade relations and their impact on the economies of both Ukraine and the European Union. The study of trade relations between Ukraine and the EU, in particular their role in promoting economic growth, resilience and development during the military conflict, can help identify key success factors and problematic issues that require further study.

Based on the findings, further research could be conducted on the following aspects:

1. The interdependence of trade and economic development: Studying how trade relations affect the economic development and stability of both Ukraine and the EU countries can help to understand the importance of these relations for both sides.
2. Political and economic consequences of the conflict: An analysis of the impact of the military conflict on trade relations between Ukraine and the EU can reveal the consequences of the conflict for the economy and possible ways to overcome it through strengthening trade ties.
3. The role of anti-corruption measures: A study of the impact of anti-corruption measures on trade and economic cooperation can reveal how the fight against corruption contributes to improving the business climate and attracting foreign investment.
4. Joint projects and initiatives: Studying the results of joint projects and initiatives between Ukraine and the EU can help identify successful cooperation practices and recommendations for further development of cooperation.
5. Potential for trade expansion: A study of opportunities for expanding trade and investment between Ukraine and the EU, including the identification of new markets and sectors, could identify potential ways to increase trade.
6. Challenges and prospects: An analysis of the challenges and prospects for the development of trade relations between Ukraine and the EU can help identify the most critical aspects that need to be addressed in future research.

These aspects can serve as a basis for further research and new insights into the understanding and development of trade relations between Ukraine and the European Union.

CONCLUSIONS

Establishing partnership relations between Ukraine and the European Union has become one of the critical factors in the economic development of our country. It is a fundamental element for survival and macro-financial stability during a full-scale war. The comprehensive and unwavering support of Ukraine, particularly Ukrainian businesses, by EU countries during the period of martial law remains the fundamental basis for maintaining economic stability in our state during its most challenging period of functioning. Considering that the annual share of trade with Ukraine in the EU's total external economic activity does not exceed 1,5% and that Ukraine's foreign trade turnover with the EU countries is more than 50% of its total foreign trade, the critical task of our state is to comprehensively promote the enhancement of foreign trade relations and economic partnership in general.

Instead, currently, it is the Ukrainian state, through its relevant governing structures, that is creating the main obstacles to enhancing partnership relations with European Union countries, primarily due to the absence of real, rather than declarative, efforts to combat systemic corruption in the highest levels of state administration.

Therefore, an important direction for further research should be an in-depth analysis of the implemented steps in the fight against corruption in Ukraine and the formulation of a comprehensive action plan to comply with the conditions set by EU management bodies for obtaining necessary financial support and expediting the process of Ukraine's European integration.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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Data curation: Inna Levytska, Alona Klymchuk
Formal Analysis: Alona Klymchuk, Svitlana Prokhorchuk
Methodology: Inna Levytska, Natalia Biletska, Svitlana Prokhorchuk
Software: Inna Levytska, Natalia Biletska, Svitlana Prokhorchuk
Resources: Inna Levytska, Alona Klymchuk, Svitlana Prokhorchuk
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Investigation: Inna Levytska, Alona Klymchuk, Svitlana Prokhorchuk
Visualization: Inna Levytska, Natalia Biletska, Svitlana Prokhorchuk
Project administration: Inna Levytska, Alona Klymchuk
Funding acquisition: Inna Levytska, Alona Klymchuk, Natalia Biletska, Svitlana Prokhorchuk
Writing – review & editing: Natalia Biletska, Svitlana Prokhorchuk
Writing – original draft: Inna Levytska

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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ЕКОНОМІЧНЕ ПАРТНЕРСТВО УКРАЇНА-ЄС: РЕТРОСПЕКТИВА ТА ПРОБЛЕМИ ПОДАЛЬШОГО ПОГЛИБЛЕННЯ ВІДНОСИН

Україна є пріоритетним партнером ЄС з моменту підписання 2014 року Угоди про асоціацію. Саме вага фінансово-економічна підтримка ЄС в цілому, і особливо окремих країн-членів Європейського Союзу, стала ключовим інструментом уникнення катастрофічних наслідків у фінансовій та економічній системі нашої держави на початку повномасштабної війни й поточного фінансування дефіциту державного бюджету. Підтримка України з боку Європейського Союзу на сьогодні є надзвичайно вагомою, хоча й супроводжується цілим рядом проблемних моментів, що вимагає поглибленого дослідження окремих аспектів економічного партнерства з точки зору пошуку шляхів і напрямів покращення використання потенціалу двосторонніх економічних відносин і з Європейським Союзом у цілому, і з окремими державами-членами ЄС.

Методологічну основу дослідження склали загальнонаукові та спеціальні методи економічної теорії, зокрема методи теоретичного узагальнення й порівняльного аналізу з метою всебічного розгляду досліджуваного питання, статистичні методи аналізу. У процесі дослідження використано статистичні матеріали Європейського Союзу та Міністерства фінансів України щодо питань зовнішньоекономічної торгівлі товарами.

Досліджено сучасні наукові погляди на зміст і перспективи економічного партнерства України з ЄС. Узагальнено й схематизовано ключові етапи розвитку економічного партнерства України з Євросоюзом із деталізацією напрямів секторального співробітництва. Здійснено аналіз основних показників торговельних відносин та їхньої ролі для економік досліджуваних країн. Обґрунтовано ключові перешкоди для подальшого поглиблення економічного партнерства, усунення яких має стати першочерговою метою нашої держави на шляху до європейської інтеграції.

Отримані результати можуть служити для подальшого дослідження торговельних відносин та їхньої ролі для економік досліджуваних країн.

Ключові слова: економічне партнерство, Європейський Союз, Україна, зовнішньоекономічна торгівля товарами, експорт, імпорт

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