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# Policy Brief

Institute of World Policy, 2015

## European Integration and the Regional State Administrations.

### How is the EU Promoted on the Regional Level?

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**Increasing the level of support for European integration course among the residents of Ukrainian regions would greatly contribute to success of any reform. Thus far, a significant contribution for the coverage of issues related to European integration has been carried out by non-governmental organizations, the EU Delegation and representatives of the EU member states; however, with the start of the Association Agreement implementation and introduction of a free trade area (since January 1, 2016), the primary responsibility for public awareness moves to Ukrainian authorities. Development of a clear and thorough information strategy should become a priority of state policy in the field of European integration.**

However, Ukrainian politicians and experts, though recognizing the need to raise public awareness on European integration, often forget about the role of local authorities in this process, although the latter have multiple tools to influence public opinion at their disposal. By neglecting, either consciously or unconsciously, the issues related to European integration, the local officials would undermine the central government's efforts and hamper the implementation of state policy in this direction. Moreover, the process of decentralization implies significant empowerment of the local authorities, which would make them share responsibility for the Europeanization of Ukraine with the central government.

What is the role of the regional state administrations in the European choice promotion on a regional level nowadays? How effective are they in informing the citizens on the advantages and possibilities of cooperation with the EU? How is the process of European integration perceived on a regional level? In order

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to answer these questions, we have been conducting a monitoring of the regional state administrations' websites in terms of their coverage of the European integration process from September 14 to September 20, 2015. Taking into account the complications in Donetsk and Luhansk regions due to loss of Ukrainian government's control over some areas of these regions, these two regions, as well as Crimea, occupied by the Russian Federation, were excluded from our monitoring. We evaluated the content of the websites based on a number of criteria: availability of general information on EU-Ukraine cooperation, information on regional events/activities/initiatives related to European integration, availability of practical recommendations for producers willing to export their products to the EU (or references to the relevant resources), and publication of the regional Association Agreement implementation action plan and report on the plan's execution for 2014.

## Informational leaders and outsiders

According to the action plan for the implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU for 2014–2017, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on September 17, 2014, the central and local executive authorities should provide the public and media access to relevant information on the Association Agreement implementation on a permanent basis (Article 470). Achieving this goal involves „setup, maintenance and updating the relevant sections of the official websites of local executive authorities on a regular basis.“<sup>1</sup> Following the Cabinet of Ministers' instructions, the regional state administrations have developed and approved regional Association Agreement implementation action plans for 2014–2017, which includes the public awareness activities.

It should be noted that setting up separate pages related to European integration on the websites of executive authorities has been outlined by the State target program for increasing the public awareness on European integration for 2008-2011<sup>2</sup>. This program required active involvement of local authorities in the process of informing the citizens of Ukraine on the practical possibilities of using the results of cooperation with the EU. However, as shown by our monitoring, a number of regional state administrations' do not update the information inside the sections "European integration" or "European choice".

For instance, no data regarding European integration could be found on the web resources of Dnipropetrovsk, Poltava and Volyn regions. The websites of Rivne and Kharkiv Regional State Administrations contained only the hopelessly outdated information. Latest press releases and news regarding European integration on Kharkiv Regional State Administration website date back to 2010, while the regulatory documents have time stamps of 2008. To be objective, we should note that in 2015, a post on Kharkiv region's participation in the Association of European Border Regions has been added; however, it did not contain any details. Rivne Regional State Administration's website hasn't had its section on European integration updated since 2012.

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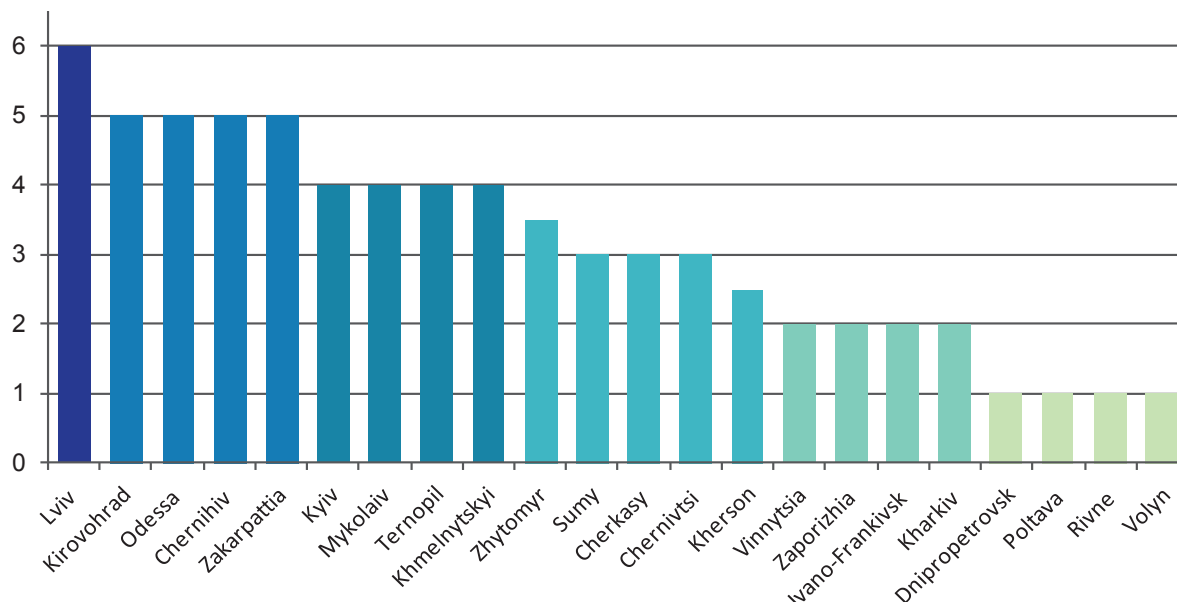
<sup>1</sup> Action Plan for Implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine, of the One Part, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community, and their Member States, of the Other Part, for 2014-2017. Available at: <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/847-2014-%D1%80>

<sup>2</sup> State Target Program for Increasing the Public Awareness on European Integration of Ukraine for 2008-2011. Available at: <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/594-2008-%D0%BF>

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**Figure 1.** Regional state administrations rating. Who is best inform about the European integration?

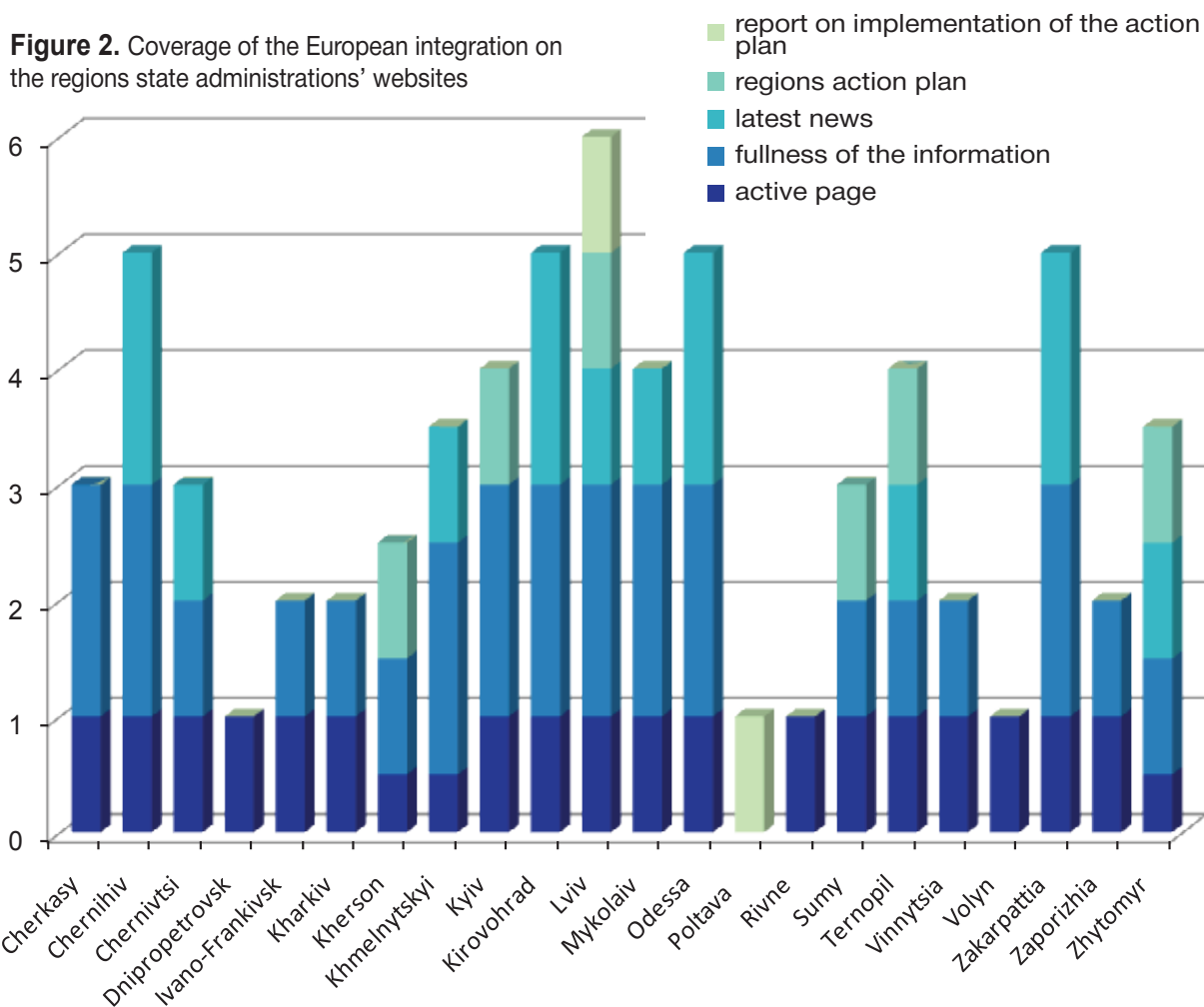


The internet pages of Khmelnytsky, Vinnytsia, Zaporizhzhia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kherson and Sumy regions contain only general information on the EU (history, institutions, and member states), Ukraine's relations with the EU, and the Association Agreement. Moreover, the information on some of these websites has not been updated at least since last year, and the latest news includes only the Europe Day celebration in 2015.

The web pages of Kyiv, Mykolaiv, Ternopil, Cherkasy, and Chernivtsi regional state administrations show relatively better situation with their content. There is more detailed information on the provisions and implementation of the Association Agreement and the free trade area with the EU; furthermore, it should be emphasized that, the websites of these regions contain practical guides for regional exporters and producers interested in entering the European market. For instance, Mykolaiv RSA web page offers the „Endowment resources and investments in regional development for 2015“<sup>3</sup> manual, as well as the „Map of international technical assistance.“ The issues of trade and economic cooperation between Ukraine and the EU are also covered in details on Kyiv RSA website. However, those resources are lacking relevant information on the regional dimension of European integration process. Specifically, the latest news on Sumy RSA web page date back to 2014.

The top five of our rating features the web pages of Lviv, Zakarpattia, Kyrovohrad, Odesa and Chernihiv RSAs. On the web pages of those regional state administrations one could not only find relevant information on EU-Ukraine cooperation or the Association Agreement implementation (often as the links to the Government's resources), but also learn about projects, initiatives and activities related to European integration on the regional level. As a positive example, we could mention the „Economic Portal“ created by the Department of Economic Development of Chernihiv Regional State Administration containing comprehensive information on the terms of exporting goods and services

<sup>3</sup> Endowment Resources and Investments in Regional Development. Available at: [http://www.mykolayiv-oda.gov.ua/store/files/file/Funding\\_Guide\\_UA.pdf](http://www.mykolayiv-oda.gov.ua/store/files/file/Funding_Guide_UA.pdf)



to the EU, current news, announcements, programs and grants. The Kyrovohrad RSA's website also offers the latest news on the events associated with European integration and regional initiatives. However, almost all of them are related to cooperation in the cultural and educational spheres or promotion of the European integration among the region's residents<sup>4</sup>.

Quite comprehensive informational campaign is being conducted by the Department of Foreign Economic Activity and European Integration of Odessa Regional State Administration. The Department's web page features not only the latest information on cooperation between Ukraine and the EU, but also news by the EU Delegation in Ukraine and articles on European integration issues. However, this resource is also lacking systematic approach to the coverage of the regional dimension of European integration, as among all conducted events, only the Europe Day celebration is listed. All other news on events associated with European integration are placed in the general news feed, which makes it fundamentally difficult to obtain an objective and comprehensive picture

<sup>4</sup> The Regional Aspect of European Integration. Kyrovohrad Regional State Administration. Available at: <http://www.kr-admin.gov.ua/start.php?q=Eurounion/Ua/aspekt.html>

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of European integration processes in the region. The easiest way to improve the situation would be publishing of quarterly (or semiannual) reports on the local authorities' activities in this regard.

Among the top five, only Lviv regional administration's website contained the regional Association Agreement implementation action plan, as well as the report on its execution for 2014. Moreover, instead of lengthy articles on cooperation between Ukraine and the EU, the website of our rating's leader includes clear and vivid infographics, links to key information materials on European integration and basic guide to business access to the EU's markets<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the Facebook page of the regional state administration's Department of Economic Development, Trade and Industry offers relevant information regarding events related to the cooperation with European structures, infographics, and other materials updated on a regular basis<sup>6</sup>.

It should be noted that in our assessment of the coverage of European integration process, our primary focus was not on the amount of posted information, but on its importance and relevance. Lengthy articles on relations between Ukraine and the EU (or on history of the EU) do not facilitate a clear understanding of impact of European integration process on the quality of life in respective region.

The local authorities' web pages should be, on the one hand, a source of comprehensive and systematic information on the process of European integration in a specific region for the local media and the public (not only a repeater of the Government's news); and on the other hand, a kind of a database for regional businesses interested in trading with the EU. As shown by our monitoring, currently the regional administrations have shown certain success only in the second part. It is understandable, taking into account that coordination and aggregation of the activities aimed at execution of the regional action plan are imposed on the „economic“ departments of the regional state administrations responsible for foreign economic activities and economic development.

## Finding an effective communication

One of the main drawbacks of all informational and advocacy activities performed by every regional state administration is a lack of the up-to-date information on legislation related to the European integration of Ukraine as well as on decisions and resolutions of local authorities on the latter's web portals. Another issue revealed by monitoring is a lack of cooperation and communication between local authorities and regional non-governmental organizations involved in EU-related public awareness and advocacy campaigns. As a result, the significant potential of European Information Centers established in almost every regional center of Ukraine remains unemployed. Only two regional state administrations (Kyrovohrad and Ivano-Frankivsk) provide coordinates of local European Information Centers on their websites.

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<sup>5</sup> O. Myroshnychenko. Basic Manual on Business Internationalization and Entering the European Union Markets – 2014. – Available at: [http://www.irf.ua/knowledgebase/publications/bazoviy\\_posibnik\\_z\\_internatsionalizatsii\\_biznesu\\_ta\\_vikhodu\\_na\\_rinki\\_evropeyskogo\\_soyuzu/](http://www.irf.ua/knowledgebase/publications/bazoviy_posibnik_z_internatsionalizatsii_biznesu_ta_vikhodu_na_rinki_evropeyskogo_soyuzu/)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DepeconomyLODA>

Establishing an effective exchange of information between NGOs and local government bodies responsible for European integration would significantly increase the communications capacity of the latter. The experience of the EU member states shows that the regional information point networks are the key elements in the process of informing the public on European integration and providing support for the course towards the EU membership<sup>7</sup>. As of today, the European information centers do not operate at all in Poltava, Zhytomyr, Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv and Odesa. It is symptomatic that the administrations of two regions from this list (Poltava and Zaporizhzhia) have received the lowest scores, according to the results of our monitoring.

We have managed to find only six regional Association Agreement implementation action plans for 2014–2017 (Kyiv<sup>8</sup>, Lviv<sup>9</sup>, Ternopil, Zhytomyr, Sumy and Kherson) in public domain. Furthermore, in only two cases (Kyiv and Lviv) the plans were found in the “European Integration” section of the regional state administration’s website.

In general, action plans for various regions are almost indistinguishable from each other and constitute a compilation of the relevant items of the government’s Association Agreement implementation action plan. Minimal reflection of regional needs and opportunities combined with relatively general statement of goals and objectives in these documents provide the local authorities with a room for maneuver in terms of their performance. There are no any key performance indicator of successful achievement of stated goals. The practical consequences of this approach are vividly demonstrated by the example of Poltava region.

Aside from Lviv region, only the web page of Department of Economic Development of Poltava Regional State Administration has a report on execution of the Association Agreement implementation action plan. It should be noted that this report was in fact the only source of information on the process of European integration present on the Administration’s website. Moreover, reporting on the informational activities conducted to raise public awareness on the EU integration the Department mentions only a few television broadcasts and a single (!) article in the „Zorya Poltavshchyny“ newspaper.<sup>10</sup> However, none of the aforesaid materials is directly related to the Association Agreement implementation. Several TV programs by Poltava RSTBC „Ltava“ featured discussions on strengthening state security in the context of European integration, while the „Zorya...“ had published an article on the observers of the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations.

Report on the execution of the regional action plan by Lviv Regional State Administration for 2014 shows a whole different approach to the authorities’ interaction with the public and the media.

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<sup>7</sup> Further details on the role of the regional centers of European information in Poland, Austria, Norway, and Finland on the path towards the EU, see in the publication by Agata Dobrowolska „The Role of European Information“, available at: [http://www.batory.org.pl/upload/files/pdf/RoI\\_Ewroinformoacji.pdf](http://www.batory.org.pl/upload/files/pdf/RoI_Ewroinformoacji.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Oblast action plan on execution of the action plan for implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU in 2014-2017. Available at: [http://koda.gov.ua/rozporjadzhennja\\_pro\\_oblasnij\\_plan\\_zahodiv\\_iz\\_zabezpechennja\\_vikonannja\\_zavdan\\_peredbachenih\\_planom\\_zahodiv\\_z\\_implementatsiji\\_ugodi\\_pro\\_asotsiatsiju\\_mizh\\_ukrajinoju\\_z\\_odniji\\_storoni\\_ta\\_jevropejskim\\_sojuzom\\_jevropejskim\\_spivtovar](http://koda.gov.ua/rozporjadzhennja_pro_oblasnij_plan_zahodiv_iz_zabezpechennja_vikonannja_zavdan_peredbachenih_planom_zahodiv_z_implementatsiji_ugodi_pro_asotsiatsiju_mizh_ukrajinoju_z_odniji_storoni_ta_jevropejskim_sojuzom_jevropejskim_spivtovar)

<sup>9</sup> Decree of the Head of Lviv Oblast State Administration on November 12, 2014, № 603/0 / 5-14. Available at: [http://loda.gov.ua/upload/doc/2014/11/Rozp\\_603.\\_1415892236.doc](http://loda.gov.ua/upload/doc/2014/11/Rozp_603._1415892236.doc)

<sup>10</sup> On progress of execution of the action plan for implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. Available at: [http://www.gue.gov.ua/plan\\_impl\\_ygodu\\_ukr\\_es.htm](http://www.gue.gov.ua/plan_impl_ygodu_ukr_es.htm)

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The report is prepared in plain language and contains vivid illustrations. However, the main point is that in Lviv, the officials have abandoned the traditional approach, which implied only listing the public events, seminars or meetings that have been held in the region and are somehow related to European integration. Such „lists“ could be found on the websites of a number of regional state administrations; nevertheless, those lists cannot be considered reports, since they contain no information on achieving certain goals. It seems quite obvious; however, our monitoring shows that the vast majority of local authorities continue assessing their performance in European integration by the number of conducted round tables and exhibitions.

The regional action plans provided us with a basis to scrutinize the meaning of European integration on the regional level. The implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU implies that the local authorities should, on the one hand, ensure improvement of the local government bodies' staff skill level through introduction of European experience in local governance and regional development policy; and on the other, increase the economic potential of their regions. Achievement of the former group of goals requires trainings, seminars and conferences of the issues related to the AA implementation, as well as learning from European experience of local governance. Furthermore, the action plans provide training of local officials on preventing and fighting corruption, public relations and knowledge of foreign languages.

In order to achieve the economic objectives, it is planned to involve a wide range of tools, from establishment of infrastructure for small and medium business (business incubators, technology parks, business support funds) or participation in relevant EU programs to presenting economic and investment potential of the region to the EU institutions. Several regional plans involve establishing agreements for bilateral cooperation on the development of green tourism between Ukrainian regions and regions of the EU member states. Furthermore, the plan outlines trainings and conferences, involving European experts, for the rural populations, and study visits to the European Union.

According to the order issued by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on September 17, 2014, every three months the regional state administrations should report on the execution of the AA implementation action plans. Reports of all executive authorities are accumulated by the Government Office for European Integration that publishes its reports on implementation of the Association agenda and Association Agreement on a regular basis. It should be noted that the report for September 2014 – April 2015 had not mentioned any activities of the local authorities related to European integration; moreover, that report had not contained a single word regarding the efforts of central and local authorities aimed at increasing the public awareness on the Association Agreement implementation and promotion of the European choice of Ukraine<sup>11</sup>.

Development of information and communications strategy outlined in the AA implementation action plan still remains a subject of debate. Meanwhile, such strategy is vital for establishment of the unified mechanism aimed at spreading information on European integration to the public, and regional authorities and European information centers should become the essential components of

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<sup>11</sup> Report on Implementation of the Association Agenda and the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU // Government Portal. Available at: [http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/publish/article?art\\_id=248121015](http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/publish/article?art_id=248121015)

that mechanism<sup>12</sup>. Without those low-level components the process of European integration is likely to remain an obscure and distant issue for the ordinary citizens.

The experience of countries that are already members of the EU clearly shows that it is extremely important for the local authorities (regional administrations and local governments in Ukraine's case) to be involved into the process of European integration in timely manner. The examples of Lviv, Zakarpattia, Chernivtsi, Odesa and other border regions having close cross-border cooperation with the EU member states confirm that the regions are able to become powerful agents of European integration of Ukraine, in case they get adequate resources and knowledge.

## Conclusion

Since the first celebration of the Europe Day in Ukraine, in 2003, the increasingly lavish celebrations are presented as major achievements in European integration by the local authorities. This trend has not changed in a number of regions even after the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU and the Cabinet of Ministers' approval of the Agreement implementation action plan. Moreover, the celebration of the Europe Day is usually the only relevant topic for the whole year in the EU-related sections of websites of numerous regional state administrations. This situation reflects both the failure of the European integration related public awareness policies on the regional level as well as the lack of understanding of the nature and essence of the process of European integration, that is not limited to popularization of European choice through various cultural activities.

Although „ensuring public and media access to relevant information on the implementation of the Association Agreement“ is an essential point of all regional action plans for the implementation of the Association Agreement, our monitoring shows that only few regional administrations are concerned with informing their communities about the process of European integration on a regular basis. Most regional administrations implement that action item relatively formally, while some others have even ignored it. The list of outsiders includes Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Poltava, and Zaporizhzhia regions, the ones inhabited by citizens, rather skeptical about Ukraine's course towards European integration, according to the latest opinion surveys. While the Western regions show the majority's (78%) readiness to vote for EU membership, the Southern and Eastern ones only have 33% and 22% of the EU supporters respectively<sup>13</sup>.

Increase in level of support for Ukraine's course towards European integration is impossible without improving knowledge and understanding of issues related to European integration at the local level. And it is not about general topics (such as history, structure of the EU or Ukraine's relations with the EU), but about practical problems, familiar to any average Ukrainian. Effective communication means showing specific examples of community's life standards improvements in the context of European integration. It is necessary to stress the connection between positive changes in the region and implementation of norms, practices and values of the EU. This applies particularly to such areas as good governance, environmental protection, public services etc.

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<sup>12</sup> Communication and Information Strategy for the European Integration of the Republic of Moldova (draft). – Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.md/img/docs/Strategy-Information-and-Communication-EI-DRAFT.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> The results of a nationwide poll conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) from 19 to May 29, 2015.



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### **How is the EU Promoted on the Regional Level?**

Each region needs its own success story in about European integration, whether it would be an introduction of European standards and practices in urban planning or local producers entering the EU market. Only through such story European integration would start being perceived not as a geopolitical choice between Russia and the EU, but as a way to improve the quality of life of every Ukrainian.