








New Europe Center
Kyiv, Ukraine

New Europe Wonders:

POLICY COMMENTARY

 <http://neweurope.org.ua/>
 info@neweurope.org.ua

 <https://www.facebook.com/NECUkraine/>
 https://twitter.com/NEC_Ukraine
 https://t.me/n_e_c

New Europe Center, 2019



INTERNATIONAL
RENAISSANCE
FOUNDATION

The paper was written within the Think Tank Development Initiative for Ukraine (TTDI), carried out by the International Renaissance Foundation in partnership with the Think Tank Fund of the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE) with financial support of the Embassy of Sweden in Ukraine.

The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Embassy of Sweden in Ukraine, the International Renaissance Foundation, and the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE)



WHAT DOES THE WEST EXPECT FROM THE NEXT UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT?

Ukraine's presidential election season is in full swing, being unpredictable and tense. Whoever becomes a President, he will have to deal with a whole range of challenges, including the Russian-Ukrainian conflict settlement and promoting the reforms implementation. Therefore, it is very important to understand what other states expect from the future Ukrainian President. This may influence the support of Ukraine on the international arena. With this in mind, the New Europe Center contacted well-known foreign researchers with the following question :

What changes do you expect the future President of Ukraine to make both in domestic and foreign policy?



STEFAN WOLFF,

Professor of International Security
at University of Birmingham, UK

Whoever will win Ukraine's presidential elections this spring will face several significant challenges. Among them are dealing with Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in Crimea and Donbas. These problems cut across traditional domestic and foreign policy. From one perspective, one could argue that domestic and foreign policies over the past five years have not been able to undo Russia's annexation of Crimea or deal effectively with the crisis in Donbas. A contrary view could point out that Ukraine's international partners have maintained a more or less united front in refusing to recognise the annexation of Crimea, have condemned Russia's actions in the Kerch Strait (including the construction of a bridge linking mainland Russia to Crimea, which effectively prevents larger ships reaching Ukraine's third-largest port of Mariupol, and the capture of three Ukrainian vessels and detention of their crew), have upheld and widened sanctions against key Kremlin allies, and insisted on the implementation of the Minsk Agreements as the only viable way towards a stable and just peace in Donbas. Given the multi-player, intensely internationalised and protracted nature of this blended conflict, this is not a bad result. The question, however, is how sustainable, let alone desirable, this state

of affairs is. This is where the intersection with domestic politics particularly matters. Economically, Ukraine has still not recovered from the 2014-15 war, its population keeps shrinking, and distrust in political and economic elites is at an all-time high. With the population divided along several cleavages—east-west, urban-rural, generational, etc.—any winning candidate will need to work on renegotiating Ukraine's social contract at a time when, almost three decades after independence, there is still no widely shared vision of Ukrainian statehood.

Thus, stability-seeking continuity in terms of foreign policy will only be possible on the basis of a bold domestic reform agenda that focuses on building solid foundations for economic growth, including strengthening the rule of law and fighting corruption in order to improve Ukraine's invest climate, on tackling the enormous social and income disparities across the country, on enhancing the effectiveness of key state institutions, and on building a new consensus on what Ukrainian statehood means for the relationship between state and citizens and for the country's relations with both Russia and its western partners. A stronger and more capable Ukrainian state domestically will be one that can be more responsive to its citizens' needs and that will be more resilient in the face of future challenges. It will also be a state that will continue to receive the essential support it needs from its partners in carrying out these reforms and a state that can eventually resolve its major foreign policy problems, and can do so from a position of strength and confidence. The next President of Ukraine may not be able to achieve all of this, but he will be judged on whether the country has at least begun to move in this direction.



EDWARD LUCAS,

Senior Vice President at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), USA

We need Ukraine to be successful, not least because it's the best way of containing Putin. We don't particularly care about the details, for example whether economic reforms such as privatisation and liberalisation are fast or slow. The main thing is consistency and integrity. We want clear signs that the authorities are committed to cracking down on corruption, ending the climate of impunity in which rich people buy justice, and poor people suffer injustice. We want proper stewardship of the energy system, particularly gas transit. We are worried about right-wing extremism. We know that the far-right is not strong numerical terms (that's just Russian propaganda). But we don't like seeing thuggishness going unpunished. We yearn for Ukrainian politics to be boring, for the economy to develop and for European integration on all fronts – trade and investment, cultural, security, political, people-to-people – to continue. In short: foreigners want the same as Ukrainians – honest, stable, effective government



CÉLINE MARANGÉ,

Research fellow, Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM), France

Based on the recent study visit to Ukraine and numerous meetings with Ukrainian opinion leaders and high-level decision makers I suppose that the future President of Ukraine should be more consistent and persistent in implementing anti-corruption reforms. For instance, the creation of anti-corruption courts is an important step. However, it does not guarantee the independence of the justice system if prosecutors and judges known for their involvement in corruption schemes are not removed.

Apart from that the future President could organize an earnest and open debate within society about Ukrainian strategy towards the Donbas, its ends, ways and means. Finally, there is a demand to focus more on addressing the basic needs of the population on the controlled and uncontrolled territories of the Donbas, especially of the elderly and the children (de-mining of the grey zones, school infrastructures, access to pension, electricity, water supply...).



CONSTANZE AKA,

Senior Project Manager, Research Associate, Institute for European Politics (IEP), Germany



MARTIN STEIN,

Senior Project Manager, Research Associate, Institute for European Politics (IEP), Germany

In our opinion, the future President of Ukraine should commit to the reform path outlined by the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA).

5 years ago, the presidential election took place in the light of Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity. The course was clear: economic integration and political cooperation with the EU. Simultaneously, Ukraine had the attention of the EU and its member states. Financial and technical support, the coming-to force of the AA and the perspective of visa-free travel raised the expectations for a quick transformation of Ukraine on both sides.

Meanwhile, Ukraine has come a long way. The macro-economic situation stabilized; trade with the EU is growing. Ukraine introduced a vast number of reforms with the support and political pressure of Western donors and especially the EU. However, the reform process is slow and comes with high social costs, while the war and annexation of Crimea are ongoing. Both inside and outside of Ukraine, the disappointment is great.

This year, none of the top candidates put European integration high on their campaign agenda. Similarly, the EU and its member states seem to lose interest in Ukraine. In our view, the future President of Ukraine should consequently:

1. Treat and communicate the EU association process as a priority matter.

The next President will need to deliver on reforms. The AA continues to be a clear roadmap and the commitment to framework reforms such as anti-corruption and justice will create trust internally and externally.

2. Advocate for a socially sustainable transformation of Ukraine.

While Ukraine will have to repay its loans, the reforms will continue to be costly. The reform benefits will be distributed unevenly among the Ukrainian population. In the light of increasing gas prices, low incomes, and a lack of social security Ukraine must advocate for further technical and financial support by Western donors. Moreover, it needs to convey to the international community that social



CRISTINA GHERASIMOV,

Research Fellow, Robert Bosch Center for Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), Germany

policy plays a defining role for the public perception of the EU association process.

3. *Deliver on reforms before demanding further integration.*

To secure further EU support, the next President must be a credible and reliable partner. The proper implementation and enforcement of harmonized laws is the basis for further integration demands.

4. *Ensure a functioning EU coordination mechanism.*

To deliver on reforms, EU coordination in the administration and government needs qualified personnel, adequate resources and – more than anything – political will. Furthermore, the communication vis-à-vis the EU and international partners must be consistent, avoiding contradicting messages from different parts of the Ukrainian executive.

Despite limited powers within the Ukrainian political system, the President is a key figure for the Ukrainian society. The President is expected to provide a vision for the country which would be supported by constructive and realistic steps for how to achieve it domestically, and internationally.

Amidst an open conflict with Russia in the Donbas region and a parallel commitment to an ambitious pro-European reform agenda, expectations both at home and abroad of the next voice of Ukraine are high. The future President needs to demonstrate strong political will to fight high-level corruption, and work hard to rebuild societal trust in state institutions to be able to meet these expectations. On the background of corruption scandals in recent years and consequent decrease in confidence in the Ukrainian government, the magnitude of many of the reforms adopted after Euromaidan has faded away. Societal support for a painful reform agenda is yet key to any government's success.

The international community expects a President who can keep Ukraine stable and flourishing.

It would like to see a political leader who is strongly committed to continue the deep structural reforms within the framework of the Association Agreement and the DCFTA. While numerous reforms have been adopted already, clear progress on their implementation is still expected. This increasing discrepancy between pace of adoption and implementation makes it difficult for European governments to explain their domestic electorates why Ukraine's transformation agenda still needs to be supported. More important, in this sense, implementation should go beyond selective spheres and cut across the entrenched vested interests to unleash the true potential of the Ukrainian economy and society. Hence the next President is expected to embed Ukraine's chosen pro-European vector not so much in declarative statements but more important, in new modes of leadership and political behavior.