

HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY MESSAGES FROM THE SPEAKERS

2nd EU Accession Exchange Forum

Kyiv, 28 September, 2023

In partnership with:



DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER'S
OFFICE FOR EUROPEAN
AND EURO-ATLANTIC
INTEGRATION OF UKRAINE



IPRE
Institute for European
Policies and Reforms
ipre.md



OPEN
SOCIETY
GEORGIA
FOUNDATION



**LIB
MOD**
Zentrum
Liberale
Moderne



EUROPEAN PRAVDA
aligning Ukraine and EU
since 2014



In partnership with:



The 2nd EU Accession Exchange Forum is organized by the New Europe Center in partnership with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine, the International Renaissance Foundation, the Institute for European Policies and Reforms, Moldova, the Soros Foundation in Georgia and the Center for Liberal Modernity, Germany. European Pravda became Forum media partner. The Accession Exchange Forum was taking place with EU support, within the EU-funded "European Renaissance of Ukraine" project implemented by the International Renaissance Foundation.

Foto: Yuriy Bielakh
Design: Olga Pugina

CONTENTS

- 4 Introduction
- 5 Opening remarks
- 6 Session 1. Russian war against Ukraine: how the security environment alters the EU and the enlargement process
- 10 Session 2. How the EU needs to reform to be ready for new members?
- 14 Keynote speech and conversation with Olha Stefanishyna, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine
- 16 Session 3 Preparing for membership — reforms in the candidate countries: what now? What next?
- 20 Concluding remarks with Ihor Zhovkva, Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine



INTRODUCTION



On September 28, 2023, the New Europe Center organized the 2nd EU Accession Exchange Forum with the participation of high-ranking government officials and leading experts in Kyiv. The event was dedicated to exchanging thoughts on the accession process, discussing best practices, generating new ideas, and learning from past experiences. It also aimed to explore opportunities in the relations between the European Union, countries of Eastern Europe, and the Western Balkans. The Forum was also intended to discuss new ideas and explore opportunities in the relations between the European Union and Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and the Western Balkan countries. Additionally, during the Forum, the fifth independent monitoring of Ukraine's implementation of EU recommendations, known as "[Candidate Check-5](#)", was presented.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS



Alyona Getmanchuk,
Director of the New Europe
Center:

”



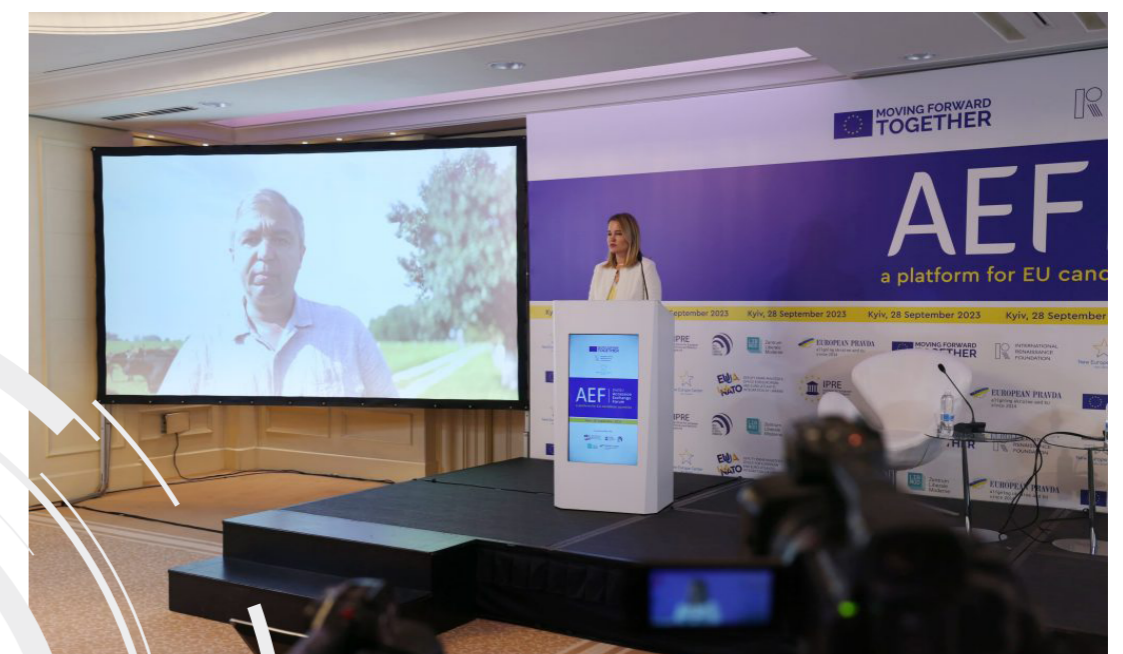
We've identified 3 major challenges for EU enlargement so far and we will have 3 discussion panels reflecting those challenges in their topic. The first challenge is the EU accession process under unprecedented military aggression in Europe since World War 2. The second challenge is internal EU reform which obviously will have an impact on all future enlargement moves. And the last huge challenge – reforms in candidate countries. Candidate status proved to become an effective tool for pushing important reforms in the right direction.

We will build our meeting in order first of all to discuss the path of reforms in the candidate countries and then we will look closely to the lessons learnt from the past experiences of the other countries which are candidates. This experience proves that along with the positive achievements we've had something wrong. So we have to discuss the experience of the other countries in order to avoid typical mistakes and build the proper path to the future.

”



Oleksandr Sushko,
Executive Director of the
International Renaissance
Foundation:



SESSION 1. RUSSIAN WAR AGAINST UKRAINE: HOW THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT ALTERS THE EU AND THE ENLARGEMENT PROCESS



Katarina Mathernova,
Ambassador of the EU to Ukraine:



- I am very much subscribed to the notion that if it wasn't for the unfortunate and tragic escalation of the war and invasion on February, 24 last year we wouldn't be discussing the issues of the Forum. For all the obvious reasons there was a lack of consensus on EU enlargement previously. It was only the war that created the approximate cause for that consensus. But one element which was extremely important in the positive assessment by the leaders to invite Moldova and Ukraine as candidate members was based on internal transformations in the countries. Thanks to the fact that we had very deep association and trade agreements that went through a plenty of domestic reforms with huge emphasis on governments, rule of law, anti-corruption, building of institution and regulatory regimes, we have received the basis to discuss all this.
- To be able to get the victorious enlargement is the continuation and even speeding up of the reforms internally in Ukraine. The geopolitics will drive it (the process of EU accession) but this element (reforms) without which you won't move to the geopolitics. The EU is such a complex that without a reformed country the system wouldn't be understood. It is important to do internal reforms step by step.

- Though the war is a tragedy it creates a possibility of consensus and pushing through the processes and reforms that are in peace times are hard to find consensus about. Many public opinions show one thing that has changed during the war: it is society's expectations. It's the expectations of the public that we want a new Ukraine. That creates an environment for major transformation steps. The resilience of Ukraine is remarkable: it is making fundamental changes and fighting in the war at the same time.
- Now it is really more recognized that Ukraine is fighting our war. It's not only Ukraine that got aggressed, it's the international order that got aggressed.



Oleksandr Ilkov,
Director General at Government
Office for Coordination on
European and Euro-Atlantic
Integration:



- The accession process that now takes place has its peculiarities. First of all, it is its high speed and intensity. But speed does not mean the reduction of quality.
- Ukraine started a process of self-screening. We've already analyzed more than 28 000 acquis. And more than 3000 should be implemented in Ukrainian legislation.
- The future of Ukraine is in the European Union. 92% of Ukrainians support Ukraine in joining the Union.

- Moldova cannot allow itself for a fatigue because what Ukraine does, from our perspective, is not only self-defense but it's a forward defense of Moldova. As far as Ukraine resists russians cannot reach the territory of Moldova by military means. And as long as they can't reach, we have a chance to do European integration. So, no fatigue in Moldova or Ukraine. We'll continue to support as long as it needs.
- There are several impacts of war on EU accession. First, the security problem became stronger. The perception of the enlargement process has changed from transformation and economic development of the country to security dimension. Second, EU integration has become a more urgent issue. We don't have decades to do accession and make progress to join the EU. Third, we have to do two things simultaneously: defend ourselves and do reforms to pursue European integration. This needs adjustments and more assistance from the EU. But we see the accession process not only in the way we receive assistance to get to the EU but as a way to demonstrate through practical examples that we are showing solidarity with EU countries.
- By accepting the fact that some countries cannot join the EU until they solve the conflicts on their territory is just giving the veto right to Russia to decide what happens to these countries on their paths towards the European Union.



Stanislav Secieru,
National security adviser to the
President of the Republic of
Moldova:

- EU accession and NATO integration are interlinked. The war accelerated these two processes in a way unthinkable before. I would even say that NATO membership now is a precondition to EU accession. We had a big boost in the accession process which gradually goes down to a more normal speed. And the big challenge now is to keep that speed.
- NATO has to be ready for accession as well as the EU has to be ready. There are mainly two points we need to focus on. The first is cohesion and unity. As for Vilnius (NATO Summit) there were no clear invitation to Ukraine because of some of the members' positions. It means that no ally should use Ukraine to solve its bilateral issues. And it's very important for NATO to have unity and cohesion. Second is the military capacity to act with NATO. It means the total adaptation of the defense planning postures and command structures. So, it's not the reason to say 'no'. That's just the explanation why the NATO accession needs as much preparation as the EU accession.
- There is a difference between territorial tensions and open high intense war. As for NATO, flexibility and creativity can be used in issues of territories, but not in case of war.



Claudia Major,
Head of the International Security Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin:



Pierre Haroche,
Lecturer in International Relations and International Security at Queen Mary University of London:

- The questions that candidate countries should ask themselves first are what kind of contribution they can make to the EU, what kind of member state they want to be and what kind of union they want to build with the EU members.
- The key variable in the question of support of Ukraine by the allies is not the length of the war. It's the feeling that Ukraine is victorious. When there is an impression that actually we are investing into victory, the numbers rise again.
- There's something that we can already have in mind when thinking about that concept of progressive accession. Security in defense in the case of Ukraine's accession in particular could be an important first step. An idea that I want to exploit and discuss is that there can be a very good first step in the accession process to have an Agreement between European Union and Ukraine for the integration of Ukraine within the defense part of this single market and the EU industrial defense instruments.
- We shouldn't wait till Ukraine is the EU and NATO member to have this joint reflection about what we want to do together. This starts now. And I think that Ukraine has already shown in the way it conducts this war and in terms of innovative skills in industrial sector that it can contribute a lot to European community. It can be more than just a recipient of support. So, this is the test that we should conduct together.



SESSION 2. HOW THE EU NEEDS TO REFORM TO BE READY FOR NEW MEMBERS?



Pavlo Klimkin,
former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine:



- I don't believe that the EU needs to reform to deliver on new members. It's a fundamentally wrong approach. The EU should understand what kind of European Union we need or probably don't need in the future. We don't need to discuss the reforms which are needed for EU enlargement, we need to understand what Europe is in the 21st century and what Europe is for.
- We live in a fundamentally different world, we live in the sense of security, we live in the sense of technology, basically in the narrow reality between the U.S. and China.
- The real point of how to make decisions on big issues in the 21st century, whether its enlargement or other geopolitical questions, is how to push Europe out of the narrative of being where we are now.

- The right question is not whether the EU needs to reform in order to be ready for the new members, the right question is whether the EU can be stronger. If it's not getting bigger, if it's not able to integrate new members, if it's not able to safeguard and export democracy any more, it's not possible for the EU to be stronger.
- The next question is about the date 2030. If the European integration process is merit-based it's really impossible to have any kind of dates.
- There are five words about a better enlargement process: consistency, clarity, capacity, high level political attention and fundamentals. Consistency means when a candidate country achieves the next level of progress it should get some kind of benefits. Clarity means that the candidate needs to get a single certain signal from the EU, not the vast of different messages, plans etc. About capacity – the regional enlargement process is really unstoppable. And it's important for the candidate states whether the political situation changes it would not reflect on negotiations with the negotiation structure. High level political attention means to have positive signals from different high levels. Fundamentals are the most important. All the EU reforming process should reflect in the rule of law.



Jovana Marovic,
former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of European Affairs of Montenegro:



Adrian Balutel,
Head of Office of the Moldovan president Maia Sandu:



- Here's one definite fact for the countries which wait and are eager to become members of the European Union: every wave of the reforms of the EU made the EU stronger. And even the enlargements eventually made the EU stronger. Having a discussion on the reform of the EU inside the EU is a good thing because it signals the willingness to get stronger and overcome the challenges the EU is facing. And on the other hand, it's pinpointing the fact that enlargement is happening and cannot be stopped.
- The clarity in the EU enlargement is important because society which supports accession needs to know what are their steps for country's membership. And there won't be disappointment. As well, such clarity is important for policy makers.
- Accession itself carries significant transformative power. So, the reformation during the accession process has a transformative effect. The EU has to be ready to fuel this transformation in the countries which are eager to become member states.

- War in Ukraine definitely and the strategic interests connected with the necessity to integrate Ukraine as soon as possible have opened the path and re-launched West Balkans' enlargement. Now it is Ukraine's and all the others. I think it's a fair assessment of where we are now.
- This winter might change the political landscape. In case of a hard season the society of European countries can push on their politicians and questions of enlargement may get backwards from the debate.



Petrit Selimi,
former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo:



- I think that candidate states are more prepared for enlargement than the European Union. In the past years we had the opposite thing – the shrinking, such as the Greece crisis and BREXIT. And we have to create a new, common narrative.
- To work and operate with 35 members the EU has to change the rules. We had some problems even with 27, so we need to change some processes. I do believe in democracy but I think it will not be easy to negotiate with 30-35 countries on the basis of unanimity.
- We have to change the narrative from Europe to candidate states. In Europe we think of enlargement as a favor to candidate countries. It's not like a pie is getting bigger for all of us and all the countries are sharing the same pie. We stay together, we are not a functional family of course but we share the same resources. It is existential both to candidate states and Europe, but this idea is not established in our public discourse. So, we have to put it.
- A very important concern is people's consensus. In our history Europe and referendums are not a happy marriage. So when we put European question to people directly, usually the answer is "No". And I think that it's important to explain better what enlargement is for the countries that are already in the EU in order to build a consensus. Not just an institutional consensus but people's consensus.

”



Paola Peduzzi,
Deputy Editor, Il Foglio, Italy:



”



Iryna Solonenko,
Senior Fellow at Centre for Liberal
Modernity, Germany:

- The idea of reforms is not new – it's been discussed in the EU for some time before among expert community. I do think that some things are to be changed before candidates can become members. But I'd prefer doing it in such way that no treaty changes could take place, because it will be difficult to find consensus between the states.
- First thing that needs to be changed, it might be easier procedurally but not politically, is that current EU members give up their veto right for opening and closing accession chapters. Due to difficult neighboring countries it can be a problem. So, it must be agreed. But still it is a matter of political will.
- In a long-term perspective there should be a qualified majority voting both in a foreign policy and on domestic issues. We must understand that new member states are very sensitive to give up their sovereignty. And it can be difficult to do but it is necessary to be changed before the enlargement takes place.
- A very important dimension is budget. The EU has a multi-annual budgetary system and a new budget will function from 2028 to 2034. It is in this frame of time that Ukraine and Moldova plan to join the EU. The talks on a new budget will start in 2024 when a new Parliament is elected and a new EU commission is formed. And this is where Ukraine can contribute. There are some calculations that when Ukraine joins the EU, Poland's share in EU budget will reduce from 30% to 12% and Romania – from 18% to 7%. So, we can add something to the EU and not only take its resources.

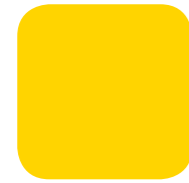
- I think that the accession process has already started in the most convoluted way right after the full-scale invasion. There have been a lot of decisions in the EU and individual member states that effectively integrated Ukraine already: with the common market, free flow of services and people and virtually unified labor market.
- I want to draw attention to a very special form of accession discussion. Usually these things are talked about thoroughly beforehand. We are talking about transitional period, distortions and how accession affects internal constituencies and markets, and then proceed with the opening. Now it was the other way around but I think we should still reach this level of formal sustainable framework of cooperation.
- The momentum of for and from the EU is growing and it will certainly result in some changes. Some of them are really needed. But I think that the conditionality that accession will follow only after EU's reforms is risky. It's doable but risky.
- I think it is very important to imagine yourself already in the EU with some specific things you want to push through and ask yourself a question whether the reforms you see being proposed fit you or not.

”

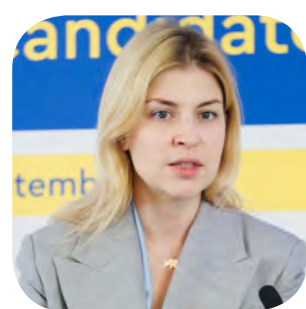


Jakub Jakobowski,
Deputy Director at Center for
Eastern Studies, Poland:





KEYNOTE SPEECH AND CONVERSATION WITH OLHA STEFANISHYNA, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FOR EUROPEAN AND EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION OF UKRAINE



Olga Stefanishyna,
Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine

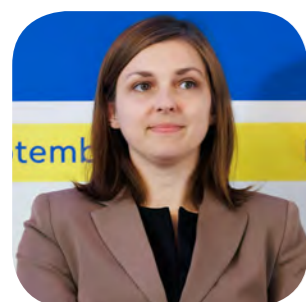


- Completing 7 steps doesn't mean the end of the reforms process and the end of the transformation. This is the ongoing process.
- Based on the progress we have managed to show on all seven recommendations and commitment to reforms agenda generally has left no room for discussion whether the assessment would be positive and Ukraine has not delivered something that would not make it possible to open the accession talks. So, opening the accession talks is not the case where Ukraine still has to deliver something. There is an understanding that the accession talks might be opened for Ukraine. Generally, we have a consensus of all member states on that.

- 2030 is the date for EU enlargement and it concerns not only Ukraine, but also all the other countries which are currently in the accession process, not excluding that some of them might do it earlier.
- Ukraine's preparedness for the membership could be ensured into two years. We are already significantly integrated into single market. Ukraine is the part of policy's making process in Europe.
- Ukraine has capacity to run the country throughout the war and make it not only functional but developing.



SESSION 3. PREPARING FOR MEMBERSHIP — REFORMS IN THE CANDIDATE COUNTRIES: WHAT NOW? WHAT NEXT?



Olena Halushka,
Board member of the Anti-Corruption Action Center, Ukraine:



- Indeed, the EU candidate status with the reforms list was probably the most effective leverage and tool for reform advocacy that Ukraine could have had. A lot of the reforms wouldn't have taken place without this EU push.
- It is important that civil society is more actively engaged in shaping, defining those conditionalities and monitoring, like Candidate Check. It was a very useful tool not only to keep Ukrainian authorities mobilized but also keep wider international partners informed about the dynamics.
- Regarding 2030 the Ukrainian civil society definitely will use the leverage of the EU accession to make the Ukrainian government do the reforms. But also, we understand we will need to make some advocacy in the EU. EU accession will take some time. If we speak about recovery, sustainable economic growth, return of the refugees, investors coming to Ukraine – they won't come without a sustainable security guarantee. So, the EU accession should go together with NATO accession. And NATO accession should be much faster.

- There's a clear lesson learnt that you cannot advance without democracy as well as without security. Building up institutions, strengthening resilience, addressing security threats is as important as preserving democratic and rule-of-law processes.
- At the beginning of this European Commission there was a statement that there would be no enlargement until the end of this EC. At the end of this Commission we hear that there is an ambitious goal for 2030 for the countries to be ready to join the EU.
- Looking into the previous wave of enlargement there were 4-6 years of negotiations before membership. And 2023-2030 timeframe looks realistic to complete the accession negotiations.



Iulian Groza,
Executive Director of the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), the Republic of Moldova:

- One thing I would say is never make the predictions of any country's future with regards to the EU enlargement.
- Three-four years ago there was a discussion about the enlargement. And in the previous report it was said that at least two Western Balkans countries will join the EU by 2025. Now it's mostly the prior year and now it is not really possible to see two countries or at least one to join the EU.



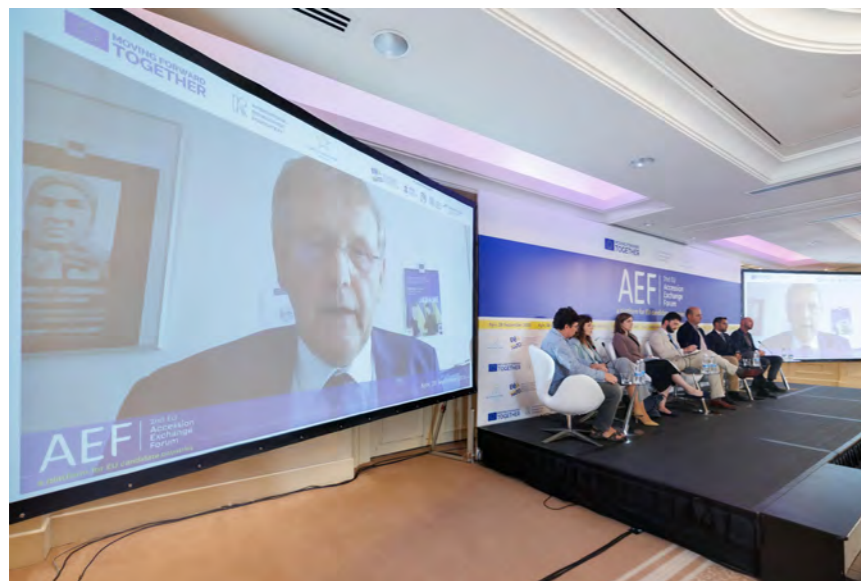
Ivane Chkhikvadze,
EU Integration Program Manager at Open Society Foundation Georgia (OSGF):





Georg Ziegler,
Deputy Head of the Support
Group for Ukraine, European
Commission:

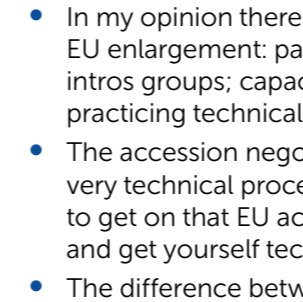
- You were very quick in Ukraine with the questionnaire, we were very quick with producing the opinion, and now as the process goes on we try to be in this positive ping-pong. We are actually in almost daily contact with Ukrainian experts and also at the highest levels from the President to the Deputy Prime Minister with our Commissioner and Director General.
- Tremendous efforts have been done, we are still fine-tuning certain things and we always set it very clearly from the top level that if we consider that the seven steps are fulfilled, we will recommend opening the accession talks.
- I think that the more objective we are as European commission, the stricter we are, the higher are then the chances that we are convincing, the recommendations will be treated seriously and it will lead to the final result which is opening of accession negotiations.



- Regarding 2030 the EU enlargement: I don't disapprove of setting deadlines because they are making push to the accession process.
- Over years the EU created the narrative towards Georgia portraying the country as a success story and a frontrunner in the Eastern partnership program. So now the EU finds itself in quite an awkward situation when it has to make a choice between geopolitics and democracy. It has to deal with unintended consequences of its failure in its democracy support in Georgia.
- By giving a priority to stabilization rather than to the promotion of democracy we ended up in a reality where Brussels as Europe is in front of the choice that if it doesn't grant Georgia with the status Russia will profit out of it and strengthens its influence. But if the status is granted the European credentials will be out under question mark because out of 12 foundations Georgia satisfies only three and there is no way that it will meet other nine in a month that's left.



Nona Mikhelidze,
Senior Fellow at Institute of
International Affairs (IAI), Italy:



Teun Janssen,
Academy Fellow, Clingendael
Institute, the Netherlands:

- In my opinion there are three more things regarding 2030 the EU enlargement: participation of NGO's; getting in touch with intro groups; capacity building, which relates both: trainings and practicing technical negotiations.
- The accession negotiations are not really the negotiations. It's a very technical process, a trust building exercise. So, if you want to get on that EU accession train you need to pass all the stations and get yourself technically ready.
- The difference between the political and technical negotiations is that the engaged institutions will be different from those of the commission working groups. And here what's important is the cultural alignment – if the negotiation culture of the acceding countries matches the one of the European Commission. So, the more cultural alignment you get, the more successful negotiations will be.



Bojan Elek,
Deputy Director of the Belgrade
Centre for Security Policy, Serbia:

- Whenever a European official comes to Serbia he brings two messages: you need to introduce sanctions against Russia which is a part of aligning foreign policy with the EU and which Serbia refuses to do. And second, you need to continue normalization of relations with Kosovo.
- The pro-European people and forces in Serbia are getting less. Public opinion polls show that for the first time ever two years ago there was less than 50% support for the EU and it dropped even lower with the start of the war. And according to the polls six months ago more Serbs would be concerned if Serbia introduces sanctions than if the country abandons its European path. So, this is very disturbing.
- It's very important to keep democratization on the EU agenda.





CONCLUDING REMARKS WITH IHOR ZHOVKVA, DEPUTY HEAD OF THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE



Ihor Zhovkva,
Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine



- We are thinking about the perspectives and will be watching the process of internal transformation in the EU but there's one important thing. If these possible transformations start will not they affect the pace and the tempo of Ukraine's entry to the EU? There is a trap where Ukraine can find itself in. If the process of reforming the institutions in the EU starts, the process of entering the new countries including Ukraine, can be again postponed.
- We do really feel and understand now that we have all the rights to be on the next stage which is accession negotiations.

- What is very important, I am sure that Ukraine will have a strong voice. It's understandable in each and every capital of the member states of European Union that you cannot discuss anything, as far as the future of the EU is concerned, without the voice of Ukraine. They are already counting us in. Not de jure unfortunately, but certainly de facto.





ABOUT NEW EUROPE CENTER

The New Europe Center was founded in 2017 as an independent think-tank. Despite its new brand, it is based on a research team that has been working together since 2009, at the Institute for World Policy. The New Europe Center became recognized by offering high-quality analysis on foreign policy issues in Ukraine and regional security by combining active, effective work with advocacy.

The New Europe Center's vision is very much in line with the views of the majority of Ukrainians about the future of their country: Ukraine should be integrated into the European Union and NATO. By integration, we understand not so much formal membership as the adoption of the best standards and practices for Ukraine to properly belong to the Euroatlantic value system.

More about New Europe Center: neweurope.org.ua

AEF | 2nd EU
Accession
Exchange
Forum

a platform for EU candidate countries

[Video recording
of the Forum](#)

