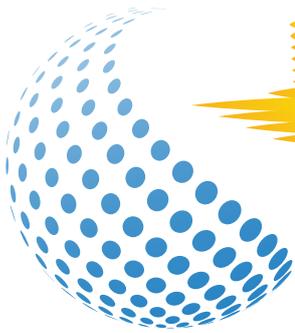


# THE SPEED OF UKRAINE'S EU ACCESSION:

HOW TO OVERCOME THE MAIN CHALLENGES



**ROUNDTABLE  
DISCUSSION**

**23**  
MARCH, 2026

**KYIV, UKRAINE**

**AN ANALYTICAL REPORT  
BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THE  
ROUNDTABLE "DETERMINING THE  
SPEED OF UKRAINE'S EU ACCESSION:  
POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC FACTORS."**



23  
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The pace of Ukraine's accession to the European Union depends on the country's ability to mobilize all state institutions, complete key reforms (particularly in the area of the rule of law), and systematically convince EU political elites. This is one of the main conclusions of [the discussion organized by the New Europe Center in cooperation with the National Interests Advocacy Network \(ANTS\)](#). More details on other conclusions can be found in the extended analytical report.



## TOP 10 CONCLUSIONS:

- **Full internal political mobilization is a key prerequisite for Ukraine's progress toward EU membership.** Without the consolidation of the Verkhovna Rada, the government, and the Office of the President, as well as the acceleration of decision-making, the accession process risks losing momentum and the trust of member states.
- **Restarting the internal "reform machine" is critically necessary.** Ukraine has already carried out complex transformations; however, it is precisely the stage of completing reforms, particularly in the area of the rule of law, that remains the most vulnerable and decisive for further progress.
- **The implementation of the fundamentals, primarily in the area of the rule of law, is a non-negotiable condition for integration.** No political decisions or geopolitical circumstances can compensate for the failure to meet the EU's basic requirements, which constitute the "DNA" of the European Union.
- **A combination of speed and quality of reforms is required.** The growing public demand for quick decisions must be balanced with the need for sustainable and profound changes, which will determine Ukraine's successful path toward membership.
- **A broad platform for coordinating European integration efforts is needed.** Effective interaction between the Office of the President, the government, the parliament, and civil society is critical for aligning decisions and maintaining the pace of reforms.
- **Alternative approaches to integration, in particular "Membership by Design" or gradual integration, may serve as tools to accelerate the process.** They do not replace the need for full implementation of reforms and must be based on a clear link between Ukraine's achievements and EU decisions.
- **National parliaments of EU member states will play a decisive role in the accession process.** It is they who will make decisions on the ratification of the accession agreement, which makes domestic political dynamics in these countries a significant factor in Ukraine's success.
- **Advocacy in the capitals of EU member states must become systematic and a priority.** Ukraine needs to work more actively not only with institutions in Brussels, but primarily with national governments, parliaments, and societies.
- **There is a significant communication deficit between Ukraine, the European Commission, and member states.** Insufficient communication with partners creates barriers to advancing integration and increases skepticism toward enlargement.
- **Ukraine's accession process remains politically sensitive and is not limited to the technical fulfillment of criteria.** The political will of member states, the influence of populism, and internal interests may slow down integration even in the presence of progress.



In his opening remarks, **Sergiy Solodkyy, Director of the New Europe Center**, outlined the key dilemma of the European integration process — the need to balance the speed and quality of reforms. He emphasized that while the European Union traditionally tends toward a slower, more thorough approach, there is a growing public demand in Ukraine for faster decisions: according to an [opinion poll conducted in autumn 2025](#), nearly 47% of Ukrainians support the speed of reforms, while approximately the same share support the quality of reforms. However, it is emphasized that Ukraine's effective progress toward EU membership is only possible if these two approaches are balanced both in Ukraine's domestic reforms and in the transformation of the European Union itself.

**Sergiy SOLODKYY,**  
Director, New Europe Center



In the keynote speech, **Taras Kachka, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine**, focused on the critical importance of internal mobilization of state institutions for advancing Ukraine's accession process to the European Union. He emphasized that Ukraine has already achieved significant progress in the negotiation process: all negotiation chapters have in practice moved into the status of being open, which indicates the irreversibility of the European integration course. At the same time, the key challenge remains the completion of already initiated reforms, in particular in the area of the rule of law.



**Taras KACHKA,**  
Deputy Prime Minister for  
European and Euro-Atlantic  
Integration of Ukraine

Particular emphasis was placed on the need for full mobilization of the Verkhovna Rada and the government for the prompt adoption of decisions, as delays in the legislative process and a shift to ideological discussions negatively affect Ukraine's assessment by EU member states.



The second important aspect of the speech was the need to change the approach to implementing reforms — from partial implementation to fully bringing them to completion. Taras Kachka emphasized that Ukraine has already carried out the most complex transformations, including the creation of anti-corruption infrastructure and the reform of the judicial system; however, **it is precisely the "finalization" stage that is the most vulnerable and is often underestimated**. In this context, he stressed that the success of the negotiation process fully depends on Ukraine's internal capacity to demonstrate consistency and coherence in fulfilling the benchmarks defined by EU member states.

Separately, the Deputy Prime Minister drew attention to the political dimension of European integration, emphasizing that the speed of Ukraine's progress toward membership depends not only on the formal fulfillment of requirements but also on the ability to convince EU member states of its effectiveness. He noted that the assessment of Ukraine is often formed on the basis of the current political dynamics, in particular the quality of interaction between the government and parliament. Therefore, **the importance of coordinated work of all branches of government is emphasized, as well as the need for active communication with European partners in order to form a favorable political environment around EU enlargement**.



**Pekka TOVERI,**  
Member of the European  
Parliament, Chair of the  
Delegation to the EU-Ukraine  
Parliamentary Association  
Committee

**Pekka Toveri, Member of the European Parliament, Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee,** highlighted the strategic importance of Ukraine's membership in the European Union for the security of the whole of Europe. He underscored that **Europe cannot be secure without a secure Ukraine, and Ukraine, in turn, will not be fully protected without membership in the EU and NATO.** At the same time, the speaker pointed out that not all politicians in Europe are guided by strategic thinking, as domestic political factors often dominate. It is precisely for this reason that national parliaments of EU member states, which must ratify Ukraine's accession agreement, will play a key role in the accession process. **The MEP also expressed skepticism regarding the possibility of Ukraine's rapid accession to the EU, in particular by 2027, noting that the process will remain merit-based** rather than based on political agreements, and should develop independently of peace negotiations with Russia.

The second important aspect of the speech was the need to strengthen political interaction and communication both within Ukraine and with EU member states. Pekka Toveri highlighted

**the importance of full support for the European integration process from the Verkhovna Rada through effective legislative adoption and further advancement of anti-corruption reforms, which remain a sensitive issue for European partners.**



Particular attention was given to **the need for active advocacy of Ukraine's membership both in the European Parliament and in national parliaments, as well as among the public in EU countries.** This includes countering disinformation and reducing the concerns of certain groups, in particular farmers, by communicating the real benefits of Ukraine's membership. It was also underscored that deepening interparliamentary cooperation is essential to build a broader understanding of Ukraine's progress, which is critically important for the successful ratification of membership in the future.



**Hanna HOPKO,**  
Chairwoman, National Interests  
Advocacy Network (ANTS)



**Hanna Hopko, Chairwoman of the National Interests Advocacy Network (ANTS),** highlighted **the need for systematic coordination among the key stakeholders of the European integration process – the Office of the President, the government, the Verkhovna Rada, and the expert community.** She noted the expediency of creating a joint platform for the step-by-step alignment of actions toward membership, in particular based on analytical monitoring of reforms. In this context, **the expert announced the "Membership Check" initiative (an expert assessment of progress in implementing priority reforms on the path to EU membership ("Kachka-Kos plan"), launched by the New Europe Center together with a coalition of leading think tanks and civil society organizations).** It was also observed that there is a high level of public support for European integration: the majority of Ukrainians are ready to accept difficult and unpopular decisions for the sake of EU accession. It is stated that political will for reforms exists, but requires better organization and consolidation.

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**A key focus was placed on the fundamentals, which are defined as the "DNA of the European Union" and constitute a basic prerequisite for further progress toward membership.**

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It is underlined that **without their full implementation, primarily in the area of the rule of law, no political agreements or even potential peace arrangements will be able to ensure Ukraine's integration into the EU.** European integration is viewed more broadly – as an element of the EU's geopolitical strategy, which includes a security dimension, strengthening sanctions against Russia, and establishing Europe as a global actor. There should be a clear focus on the need not only to mobilize for reforms, but also to develop a clear strategic vision of Ukraine's role in Europe and to counter the rise of Eurosceptic and Ukraine-sceptic sentiments.





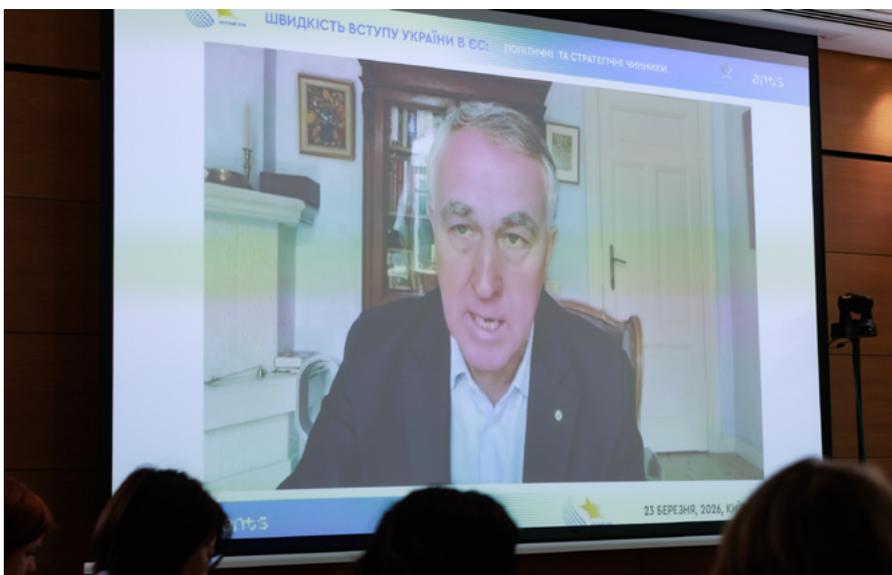
**Petras AUŠTREVĪČIUS,**  
Member of the European  
Parliament, Member of the  
Delegation to the EU–Ukraine  
Parliamentary Association  
Committee

**Petras Auštrevičius, Member of the European Parliament, Member of the Delegation to the EU–Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee**, presented the enlargement of the European Union as a complex, long-term and politically sensitive process that is not limited to technical procedures. He highlighted that the current stage of enlargement is taking place in the context of a new geopolitical reality, with candidates divided into two geographical groups – Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans – and with increasing internal political polarization within the EU, partly due to the rise of populism. In this context, the key factor of success is the presence of sustained political will among member states, which currently remains insufficiently developed and lacks a long-term character. The MEP underlined that **enlargement should become a political priority for the EU, rather than merely the outcome of technical decisions by the European Commission, and requires a coordinated position between institutions and member states.**

At the same time, it was noted that the accession process is mutual and is based on the principle of commitments from both sides.

**Ukraine must continue systematic, daily work on reforms, even if it is not very visible and is challenging, while the EU requires stronger internal consolidation and a better understanding of the enlargement process among member states.**

Particular attention was drawn to the need to intensify communication with national governments and parliaments, as this is where key decisions are formed, as well as to the importance of taking into account the economic and political concerns of certain countries (in particular in the agricultural sector). The MEP also stressed that Ukraine needs to obtain a political decision on the opening of accession negotiations as soon as possible; however, overall, **the process will remain long-term, will require strategic planning, patience, and a flexible approach to shaping the new architecture of the European Union.**





**Stefan SCHLEUNING,**  
Head of Cooperation, EU  
Delegation to Ukraine

**Stefan Schleuning, Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Ukraine**, highlighted that **the enlargement of the European Union is today viewed as a strategic investment in the future of Europe with a clear security dimension**. According to him, Ukraine's integration is an integral part of the EU's transformation from an economic union into a fully-fledged geopolitical actor, and the completion of Europe's unification is impossible without Ukraine. At the same time, he noted that the discussion on updating the enlargement methodology has already begun and is a positive signal, as the new approach should take into account the current geopolitical context.

A key focus was placed on the fundamentals: **there are no "fast tracks" to membership, and reforms, particularly in the area of the rule of law, must be fully implemented**. It is underlined that Ukraine's accession, as a large state, will transform the European Union itself, and therefore the quality of reforms is critical. Despite some slowdown in legislative work, the speaker expressed confidence in Ukraine's ability to mobilize and continue progress, in particular within the framework of agreed reform priorities. It was also stressed that **the EU is already providing comprehensive support to Ukraine — financial, expert, and institutional — and will continue to accompany it on its path to membership**.

**Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, Chair of the Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the EU of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine**, highlighted the strategic importance of Ukraine's membership for the security of the European Union itself, underscoring that EU security is impossible without Ukraine's security. She noted that Ukraine has already received clear guidelines in the form of negotiation positions and benchmarks across all clusters, which makes it possible to structure further work. At the same time, the key challenge remains not only the implementation of reforms, but also their proper prioritization and the pace of implementation. **The MP pointed out that despite the existence of agreed plans, in particular the 10 key reform priorities ("Kachka-Kos plan"), progress in their implementation remains insufficient, which calls into question ambitious timelines**. She also warned against creating unrealistic expectations regarding accession in 2027, which may lead both to internal disappointment and to attempts to shift responsibility — onto the parliament or the EU.

Particular attention was given to the domestic political prerequisites for advancing European integration. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze stressed that **the current situation in the Verkhovna Rada requires the formation of a new pro-European majority and changes in approaches to interaction between the parliament, the government, and the Office of the President**. She emphasized the importance of early involvement of parliamentarians in drafting legislation together with the expert community, rather than at the stage of its formal consideration. It was also underlined that the European integration track should be viewed as existential for Ukraine, requiring consolidation of political forces, open dialogue, and accountability. At the same time, the MP highlighted that Ukraine should aim to accede as a strong and well-prepared member, as incomplete readiness would create risks both for the state itself and for the EU.



**Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE,**  
Chair of the Committee on  
Ukraine's Integration into the EU  
of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine



**Vadym HALAYCHUK**,  
First Deputy Chairman of  
the Committee on Ukraine's  
Integration into the European  
Union

**Vadym Halaychuk, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the EU of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine**, outlined the accession process as a combination of technical and political dimensions. He recalled that at early stages a 2027 benchmark had been discussed as the point of Ukraine's technical readiness for membership, followed by a ratification period until 2029, taking into account the change of the political cycle in the EU. At the same time, it is noted that this **"window of opportunity" is not permanent and may narrow over time due to changes in the political landscape of the European Union**. In this context, membership is viewed as a merit-based process, where the key task is to meet the defined requirements and maintain the pace of reforms.

Particular attention was given to the role of the Verkhovna Rada in the negotiation process. Vadym Halaychuk noted that Ukraine applied a unique approach by involving parliamentarians in negotiation groups and screening sessions, which significantly increased their awareness of European integration commitments. At the same time, such involvement has a reverse effect — strengthening the political component, which at times begins to dominate over the technical one, complicating decision-making and potentially slowing down the process. The current difficulties, according to him, do not constitute a crisis, but rather represent a typical stage for a democratic system, where political will and the agenda are shaped through complex internal consultations. At the same time, it was underlined that Ukraine clearly understands its obligations and does not question their fulfillment, but seeks to ensure the realism of their implementation and the preservation of reform momentum.

**The MP stressed the importance of close cooperation with European partners and civil society, particularly in assessing progress and shaping the negotiation position.**

Overall, it is highlighted that further progress depends on Ukraine's ability to maintain a balance between political mobilization and the technical efficiency of the negotiation process.





**Leo LITRA,**

Senior Research Fellow, New Europe Center; Senior Policy Fellow, ECFR



**Leo Litra, Senior Research Fellow at the New Europe Center, Senior Policy Fellow at ECFR,** proposed a **rethinking of approaches to Ukraine's accession through the concept of "Membership by Design" as an alternative to simplified and politicized narratives about "fast track" accession or "reverse accession."** He highlighted that Ukraine is not seeking "shortcuts," but rather aims for a predictable model in which the implementation of reforms and achievements in the area of fundamentals will automatically open access to subsequent stages of integration, including financial instruments and participation in EU policies. At the same time, it was underlined that the current merit-based approach does not always function properly, as even when requirements are fulfilled, political factors may block progress. In this context, **"Membership by Design" is viewed as a tool that combines the political and technical components of the process, preserving the key role of fundamentals while ensuring a clearer and more incentive-based link between Ukraine's progress and EU decisions.**

A separate focus was placed on the need to prepare a legal framework for such an approach, in particular through the establishment of a working group to develop an accession agreement that would comply with EU law and take into account potential risks. At the same time, **the expert stressed the critical lack of communication between Ukraine and EU member states, as well as even between the European Commission and these countries.** It is noted that many partners do not have a full understanding of Ukraine's processes and intentions, which creates additional barriers to advancing integration. For this reason, the need for systematic advocacy at all levels — government, parliament, and civil society — is identified in order to build support among member states. **It also highlights the importance of readiness for a "window of opportunity" in the event of changes in the security situation, when the issue of Ukraine's membership may become part of broader political agreements, and by that moment both Ukraine and the EU must be as prepared as possible.**





**Steven Blockmans, Associate Senior Research Fellow, Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS)**, expressed skepticism regarding the possibility of Ukraine's accession to the EU in 2027, noting that this date had been highly ambitious from the outset given the political constraints within the EU. He also pointed out that ideas such as "reverse accession" did not receive support among member states and were effectively rejected at the level of the European Council. However, **despite the difficulties, the very emergence of the 2027 benchmark is of significant importance, as it sets political momentum and expectations around the enlargement process.**

**Steven BLOCKMANS,**  
Associate Senior Research Fellow,  
Center for European Policy  
Studies (CEPS)

As an alternative, the expert proposed placing greater emphasis on the model of gradual integration, which allows candidate countries to gain access to certain elements of the EU even before formal membership. He highlighted the potential of symbolic decisions, in particular granting Ukraine the status of an "associated" or "nominated" member, which could support internal motivation and increase awareness in EU countries. At the same time, it is underlined the importance of continuing technical work on negotiation chapters, as well as the expediency of creating a working group to prepare a future accession agreement and to take into account the concerns of member states through appropriate transitional mechanisms.



**The moderator of the roundtable, Sergiy Sydorenko, Editor of European Pravda**, highlighted that Ukraine has no alternative but to simultaneously ensure both the speed and the quality of reforms on its path to EU membership. However, he raised a key question: how to convince the European Union of Ukraine's capacity to implement this dual approach.



**Sergiy SYDORENKO,**  
Editor, European Pravda

## REMARKS BY THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE ROUNDTABLE:



**Larysa IVSHYNA,**  
Editor-in-Chief of Day newspaper



**Larysa Ivshyna, Editor-in-Chief of Day newspaper**, highlighted the need to create a broad civic platform to support the European integration process, underscoring that such a consolidated internal foundation is currently lacking. She emphasized that **Ukraine's key challenges are primarily domestic in origin — in particular, insufficient coordination of reforms, a contradictory attitude toward oversight by European institutions, and weak internal integration**. It was also underlined that the problem of corruption has not only a tactical but also a systemic nature, linked to the very structure of political life, which requires deep transformations. At the same time, Larysa Ivshyna stressed the mutual interest of Ukraine and the EU in membership, highlighting that **Ukraine's integration is not only its own need but also a strategic necessity for Europe itself**.



**Mykhailo GONCHAR,**  
President of the Global Studies  
"Strategy XXI"



**Mykhailo Gonchar, President of the Global Studies "Strategy XXI"**, highlighted **the insufficient use by Ukraine of the mechanisms предусмотрених the Association Agreement, in particular the early warning mechanism provided for by the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement in the field of energy**. He underscored that **in the relevant crisis situation Ukraine had clear legal grounds for its application**; however, this instrument was not utilized. In this context, the expert critically assessed the effectiveness of interaction with the European Commission and the practical implementation of existing instruments for protecting Ukraine's interests.



**Oleksandra BETLIY,**  
Leading Research Fellow, Institute  
for Economic Research and Policy  
Consulting



**Oleksandra Betliy, Leading Research Fellow, Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting**, drew attention to the complex nature of the challenges in advancing European integration reforms, noting that they cannot be resolved with a single instrument. She highlighted **the need for better preparation of draft legislation by the government in close cooperation with the expert community, as well as the importance of properly explaining them to Members of Parliament**, as a lack of understanding often becomes an obstacle to decision-making. A particular focus was placed on the need for greater involvement of the European Commission and the EU Delegation to Ukraine, both in shaping clear guidelines on the content of legislation and in direct communication with the parliament to counter myths and increase awareness. At the same time, the expert noted that, according to monitoring results, the pace of reforms has significantly slowed down, creating additional risks for the dynamics of the European integration process.



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[A video recording of the roundtable discussion in English is available](#)

