INTERNATIONAL RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION

New Europe Center
Kyiv, Ukraine

THE COST OF ACCESSION VERSUS THE COST OF SECURITY:

WHY UKRAINE'S EU MEMBERSHIP IS STRATEGICALLY BENEFICIAL FOR THE EU

Anton Alimov,
Dmytro Babushko,
New Europe Center







This discussion paper was prepared with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation. The document reflects the views of the authors and does not necessarily represent those of the International Renaissance Foundation.

INTERNATIONAL RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION

New Europe Center
Kyiv, Ukraine

THE COST OF ACCESSION VERSUS THE COST OF SECURITY:

WHY UKRAINE'S EU MEMBERSHIP IS STRATEGICALLY BENEFICIAL FOR THE EU

Discussion Paper

Anton Alimov,
Dmytro Babushko,
New Europe Center

October, 2026

Opponents of Ukraine's accession to the EU are becoming increasingly vocal in their reservations and criticism of full membership. The high cost of enlargement, reduced agricultural subsidies for existing member states, the loss of funding from European Union funds, security risks and the EU's institutional unpreparedness are among the arguments advanced by enlargement sceptics. Yet the overwhelming majority of studies by leading European think tanks show that many fears about Ukraine's membership are exaggerated. The risks that do exist can be addressed through transition periods, compensation mechanisms and advance preparations by the EU itself. Failure to enlarge would only increase instability on the European continent, encourage Russia to continue its aggression and raise the European Union's costs. For the EU, Ukraine's full membership could become a strategic investment in its own security, less costly than leaving Ukraine in a "grey zone".

KEY FINDINGS

ECONOMIC DIMENSION:



- **The EU's projected costs of integrating Ukraine are overstated.** Russia's armed aggression currently makes it difficult to assess the full cost of Ukraine's accession. Nevertheless, enlargement is unlikely to be nearly as expensive as its opponents claim. The EU can also manage costs through transition periods and the gradual opening of access to structural funds once the necessary reforms have been implemented.

- **Ukraine's accession could help address several economic shortcomings in the EU.** Ukraine's EU membership could help tackle Europe's economic and demographic challenges, including shortages of skilled labour. Its innovative IT sector, strong defence industry and access to critical minerals are significant assets in the integration process.

- **Integrating Ukraine into the Common Agricultural Policy will be difficult, but it is possible.** Despite the claims made by opponents of enlargement, Ukraine's membership is unlikely to bring about the decline of European agriculture. Ukraine's agricultural sector already complements EU production in several

areas. By meeting some of the European Union's needs, Ukraine's membership would strengthen Europe's food security and its geopolitical role in global food markets.

SECURITY DIMENSION:



- **Only full membership can turn ad hoc cooperation into institutional cooperation.** The EU can already benefit from access to Ukraine's market, defence industry and combat experience, but this currently rests on bilateral agreements that give Ukraine no seat at the table in joint planning and Europe no corresponding mechanisms of influence. Membership would change that: it would anchor Ukraine firmly in Europe's camp over the long term, pave the way for including its military in joint planning, and put the support that the EU will provide in any event on a structured footing. This would help safeguard what Europe has invested throughout the years of war.

- **The source of danger is not the path towards membership, but the "grey zone."** Opponents of enlargement portray Ukraine's closer integration with the EU as a provocation against Russia. However, the experiences of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova suggest the opposite: it is an uncertain status, rather than integration, that provokes aggression. The 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit demonstrated that a promise of membership without a Membership Action Plan (MAP) or security guarantees does not provide protection but instead gives Moscow an opportunity to resort to force. The "grey zone" is already imposing direct costs on the EU through sabotage, cyberattacks, and drone provocations along its borders. These costs will continue to rise unless the EU translates its recognition of the Russian threat into a consistent deterrence policy and concrete decisions on enlargement.

- **Ukraine's EU accession would contribute to restoring peace in Europe.** Ukraine's membership should be seen not only as a source of additional security obligations, but also as a deterrent. Extending Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union to Ukraine would increase the potential cost of renewed Russian aggression and reduce uncertainty about Ukraine's place in Europe's security system.

- **The security obligations arising from enlargement would not be one-sided.** Ukraine could strengthen European deterrence through its large Armed Forces, experience of prolonged high-intensity warfare and up-to-date combat expertise. The question, therefore, is not only what commitments the EU would

assume towards Ukraine, but also what Ukraine would contribute to European security.

- **Ukraine's military is the largest defence asset the EU could acquire in the coming years.** What critics portray as a threat is in fact a unique resource: over more than ten years of war, the Armed Forces of Ukraine have become Europe's largest land force after Russia's and one of the world's most battle-experienced militaries. Only two armies on the continent have experience of large-scale modern warfare, which means any system for deterring Russia will be weaker without Ukraine. Ukraine already contributes to Europe's security in practice, but remains outside joint planning: existing cooperation arrangements do not give it decision-making rights. Membership would move Ukraine from being a partner with which agreements are negotiated separately to being a participant in joint planning. That would not happen automatically, but without membership it cannot happen in principle.

- **Ukraine's membership would cost the EU less than keeping it outside the Union.** According to scenarios developed by researchers at Corisk and NUPI, a partial Russian victory, with Ukraine remaining outside the EU in a frozen conflict, would cost Europe EUR 1,205–1,633 billion over four years. By contrast, a partial Ukrainian victory followed by EU accession would cost EUR 522–838 billion over the same period. By "partial victory", the researchers mean not the complete liberation of occupied territory, but the ability to halt the adversary's advance and establish peace on acceptable terms. Ukraine's membership would therefore not create an additional financial burden on top of existing assistance: the associated costs are already included in the less expensive scenario. The difference of hundreds of billions of euros represents money the EU risks losing not because it supports Ukraine too much, but because it supports it too little.

- **The costs of integration are predictable; the costs of the "grey zone" are not.** Support currently depends on temporary instruments, including a EUR 90 billion loan, the Ukraine Assistance Fund and the Ukraine Support Instrument, each requiring separate political approval. Membership would bring this support within a budgetary framework in which expenditure is planned seven years ahead and shared among all member states. At the same time, the benefits of this approach may be less apparent to Member States located farther from the EU's eastern flank. For Spain or Portugal, enlargement could mean reduced funding from EU funds, while the direct security benefits would be less tangible. Therefore, to secure support for enlargement, the EU should establish compensation mechanisms and transitional periods in advance to mitigate the financial impact on individual Member States.

EUROSCEPTICISM AND UKRAINE'S NARROWING WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

The EU and Ukraine recognise that the success of the accession process depends on the quality and speed of reforms. Equally important, however, will be whether political and public support for enlargement survives within the member states themselves. While Ukraine focuses its efforts on meeting the accession criteria, shifts in European public opinion often go unnoticed. Yet the growing strength of Eurosceptic forces in member states threatens to narrow Ukraine's window of opportunity.

In France, a candidate from the far-right National Rally leads every first-round scenario for the 2027 presidential election, with 31–36% support, compared with the roughly 23% the party received in the first round in 2022.[1] In Germany, Alternative for Germany (AfD) became the country's most popular political force for the first time, polling at 27% in July 2026, compared with 20.8% in the 2025 Bundestag elections.[2] Rhetoric calling for enlargement as a whole, or Ukraine's accession process in particular, to be blocked can also be found in debates in Austria, Bulgaria, Poland and elsewhere.

The following are some of the narratives we identified in statements by Eurosceptics:

1. **Threats to the agricultural sector.** French politicians predict disaster for their country's agriculture if Ukraine joins the EU, describing it as the "death of French agriculture".[3] Similar statements are heard in many other EU countries, including Belgium, Poland and certain German federal states.

2. **Extraordinary budgetary expenditure.** Ukraine's membership would supposedly mean "hundreds of billions down the drain" for European

1 2027 French presidential election: National Rally candidates well ahead in the first round. Ipsos bva-CESI School of Engineering for Le Parisien, 1 June 2026: https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/presidentielle-2027-les-candidats-du-rassemblement-national-largement-en-tete-au-premier-tour

2 YouGov Sunday poll, July 2026: AfD loses ground but remains the strongest party. YouGov, 14 July 2026: https://yougov.com/de-de/artikel/55162-yougov-sonntagsfrage-juli-2026-afd-verliert-aber-bleibt-starkste-kraft-grosses-bedurfnis-nach-reformen-in-der-bevolkerung

3 "Ukraine joining the European Union would mean the death of French agriculture." CNews, 11 March 2025: https://www.cnews.fr/france/2025-03-11/lentree-de-lukraine-dans-lunion-europeenne-cest-la-mort-de-lagriculture-francaise

taxpayers, while Europe would become a permanent "bill-payer" for the war and reconstruction.[4]

3. **Security risks.** Accession negotiations with a country at war allegedly entail "significant political and security risks" and send a "fatal signal to Russia".[5]

Public opinion across the EU on support for enlargement is also mixed. On the one hand, a majority of respondents are in favour: 52% of EU citizens support Ukraine's membership provided it meets all the criteria. However, this is hardly an overwhelming majority, as 41% are opposed.[6] Moreover, opponents of enlargement outnumber supporters in Austria, Bulgaria and Hungary, while opinion is almost evenly divided in Estonia, France, Germany and Poland.[7] Winning Europeans' support is therefore already essential and will remain so until Ukraine approaches a final decision on accession. Current delays within the EU are due to a considerable extent to member-state governments taking their voters' views into account.

Against this backdrop, the New Europe Center set out to examine the principal fears and challenge them on the basis of research by influential international and Ukrainian think tanks. We recognise that Ukrainians' position on this issue might be perceived as biased, which is why we focus on the analytical findings of experts from other countries.

4 Live updates on the war in Ukraine. Deutschlandfunk, 17 December 2023: https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/newsblog-zum-krieg-in-der-ukraine-276.html

5 No EU accession negotiations with Ukraine. AfD parliamentary group in the German Bundestag, 4 June 2026: https://afdbundestag.de/keine-eu-beitrittsverhandlungen-mit-der-ukraine/

6 Special Eurobarometer 564: Attitudes towards EU Enlargement. European Commission, 2 September 2025: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/special-eurobarometer-and-perception-surveys-2025-09-02_en

7 Home Alone: Europeans are ready to defend themselves. European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2026: https://ecfr.eu/publication/home-alone-europeans-are-ready-to-defend-themselves/

THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF UKRAINE'S EU ACCESSION

1.1 COSTS AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES: HOW UKRAINE'S ACCESSION WOULD AFFECT THE EU BUDGET



The loss of financial support and adverse economic consequences are central arguments used by opponents of enlargement. Sahra Wagenknecht, leader of the German left-wing Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance, described Ukraine's possible accession to the EU as a "graveyard for billions" and said that financing Ukraine would become a "bottomless pit" for the Union.[8] Marine Le Pen, a leading figure in the French National Rally, which is ahead in election polling, has likewise argued that Ukraine's accession would cost France billions of euros.[9] Both statements share one message: Ukraine would be too expensive a burden.

From an economic perspective, however, **Ukraine's integration would not be fundamentally new.** The European Union has faced similar challenges during previous enlargements. In terms of development, Ukraine's economy is comparable to those of the poorest candidate countries in the 2004 enlargement process (Latvia and Romania), while its population is comparable to Poland's at that time.[10] This suggests that **the EU has experience and instruments it can use to reduce potential risks, including transition periods**.

The EU has experience and instruments it can use to reduce potential risks, including transition periods.

During the 2004 enlargement, the EU established a clear framework of transition periods for new members, drawing up 265 transitional

8 Bundestag member Sahra Wagenknecht (formerly of The Left) calls for a German veto on EU accession talks with Ukraine. Deutschlandfunk (in German), 17 December 2025: https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/newsblog-zum-krieg-in-der-ukraine-276.html

9 French far-right politician Le Pen: Promising Ukraine NATO and EU membership is a big lie and a risk to peace. Ukrainska Pravda, 3 March 2025: https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/03/03/7501117/

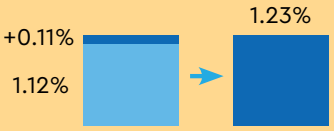
10 Richard Grieveson, Branimir Jovanović, Miriam Kosmehl, Michael Landesmann, Olga Pindyuk, Alireza Sabouniha, Marina Tverdostup and Stefani Weiss. Outlier or not? The Ukrainian economy's preparedness for EU accession. Bertelsmann Stiftung, Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, November 2023: https://wiiw.ac.at/p-6704.html

EU BUDGET AND GENERAL EXPENSES

MYTH:

'Bottomless barrel' and 'grave for billions'

FACTS IN NUMBERS:



+0.11% GDP: The change in overall EU budget with the accession of 9 candidate countries (from **1.12%** to **1.23%** GDP).

26 bln euros/year: The net cost of enlargement for current Member States (a total of **0.17%** of EU GDP).

265 transitional arrangements: The 2004 enlargement experience (evidence of the existence of ready-made adaptation tools).

arrangements,[11] including arrangements governing access to economic funds. **A similar mechanism could be used in negotiations with Ukraine to reassure the public in member states about the possible adverse effects on Europe's economy.**

EU enlargement will clearly entail some economic difficulties, but its cost could prove moderate. According to calculations by the Brussels-based think tank Bruegel, the simultaneous accession of nine candidate countries—Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and six Western Balkan states—would increase the EU budget from just 1.12% to 1.23% of GDP. The net cost of their accession for current members (the change in the allocation of funds to new members minus their contributions) would be approximately EUR 26 billion per year, or 0.17% of EU GDP. This figure remains within the EU's existing budgetary capacity and would not require an overhaul of its financial architecture.[12]

The burden on cohesion funds would also be moderate. In terms of GDP, Ukraine's economy (USD 214 billion) is comparable in size to Slovakia's (USD 154 billion).[13] It is therefore reasonable to assume that Ukraine is unlikely to receive substantially more funding than other member states. According to the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Ukraine's payments from these

11 Marie Beyrich. EU Enlargement and Best Practices: Lessons from the Past for the Future? The Central European Association for Comparative Law, 27 February 2026: https://www.ceaclaw.org/post/eu-enlargement-and-best-practices-lessons-from-the-past-for-the-future#viewer-pzbeg808

12 Zsolt Darvas, Juan Mejino-López. What enlargement could imply for the European Union's budget. Bruegel, 12 December 2024: https://www.bruegel.org/analysis/what-enlargement-could-imply-european-unions-budget

13 World Bank. Ukraine-Slovak comparison, 2025: https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=UA-SK

funds would not exceed EUR 4.8 billion annually—less than Italy (EUR 5.79 billion) or Spain (EUR 4.88 billion), and approximately half the amount paid to Poland (EUR 8.79 billion). In other words, **Ukraine would be neither the largest recipient of EU funds nor an exceptional case: it would fall within the range of current member states .**[14]

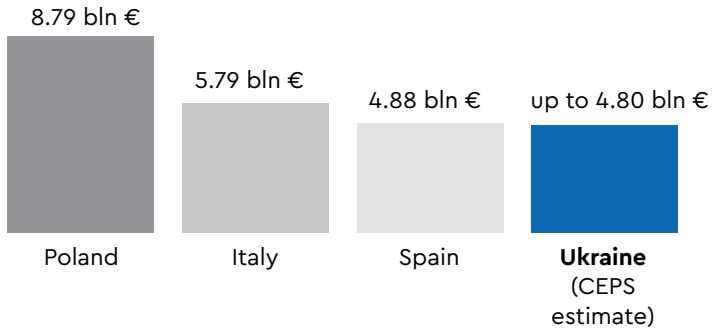
Ukraine would be neither the largest recipient of EU funds nor an exceptional case: it would fall within the range of current member states.

One concern for member states remains the need for additional redistribution of funds following the admission of new members. This effect could be eased by providing in advance for enlargement-related spending in the new 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). That would eliminate the need to find additional resources after new states accede.

Enlargement would indeed change how funding is distributed among member states. A fall in average EU GDP per capita would lead to some regions being reclassified, leaving certain countries with less funding than they would have received without enlargement: approximately EUR 9

COHESION POLICY

MAXIMAL ANNUAL PAYOUTS FROM COHESION POLICY:



No country that is currently a net recipient would become a net contributor as a result of Ukraine's accession

14 From myths to reality: Mitigating the impact of enlargement on the EU's common budget, the CAP and cohesion policy, Centre for European Policy Studies, 8 June 2026: https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/from-myths-to-reality-mitigating-the-impact-of-enlargement-on-the-eus-common-budget-the-cap-and-cohesion-policy/

billion less each for Spain and Italy, EUR 4 billion for Portugal, and EUR 2 billion each for Hungary and Romania over a seven-year budget period. These are significant sums, but they do not alter the overall picture: most of these countries have already experienced similar or greater reductions in the transition to the current budgetary framework.[15] This also challenges one of enlargement opponents' main fears: that Ukraine's accession would unbalance the EU budget and turn several net recipients into net contributors. **Research by European think tanks rejects this claim: no country that is currently a net recipient would become a net contributor as a result of Ukraine's accession .**[16] Nevertheless, it is important for the EU to prepare institutional mechanisms now to mitigate the possible negative consequences of admitting new members. If the costs of Ukraine's accession continue to be regarded as excessive, the EU could temporarily introduce transition periods for access to its funds to ease tensions and the financial effects of enlargement.

No country that is currently a net recipient would become a net contributor as a result of Ukraine's accession.

Moreover, **in the medium and long term, any losses of funding could be offset by the benefits of enlargement**, which opponents often leave out of their arguments. Expanded trade, access to new markets and participation in reconstruction would support economic growth within the EU. Bruegel analysts specifically stress that reductions in fund allocations can be offset by increased trade, investment and tax revenues. The benefits would be particularly pronounced for Central and Eastern European countries, just as Germany gained the most from Poland's accession. A Polish Economic Institute report, "Win-win for Ukraine and Central Europe", finds that, under various scenarios, **integration could increase GDP both in Ukraine (by 26%) and in Central and Eastern European countries (by 0.13–0.17%) through expanded trade and deeper economic ties.**[17]

15 Zsolt Darvas, Juan Mejino-López. What enlargement could imply for the European Union's budget. Bruegel, 12 December 2024: https://www.bruegel.org/analysis/what-enlargement-could-imply-european-unions-budget

16 Johannes Lindner, Thu Nguyen, Romy Hansum. What does it cost? Financial implications of the next enlargement. Jacques Delors Centre. 14 December 2023: https://www.delorscentre.eu/en/publications/financial-implications-of-the-next-enlargement

17 Pawlak, K., Sojka, A., Strzelecki, J. Win-win for Ukraine and Central Europe: The Economic Implications of Ukraine's Accession to the EU, Polish Economic Institute, Warsaw, 2025: https://pie.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/PEI_Report_Ukraine-and-EU.pdf



Extending the Single Market to approximately 40 million additional people would increase the EU's population by 10%[18] and encourage the movement of goods, capital and people within it. Given the substantial integration of Ukrainian workers into the EU Single Market already under way, as well as the introduction of the Temporary Protection Directive in 2022, formalising these arrangements would make them permanent and more predictable. Ukraine's integration would also encourage refugees to return, helping to ease tensions over migration in member states. **Combined with its industrial capabilities, particularly in defence, IT innovation and energy resilience, Ukraine would make a valuable contribution to the economic strength and energy security of a united Europe.**

Finally, integration would make costs not only moderate but predictable. **Transparent mechanisms for financing accession and reconstruction would make the sums involved easier to manage, while the integration process itself would remain the main incentive for reform.**

Transparent mechanisms for financing accession and reconstruction would make the sums involved easier to manage, while the integration process itself would remain the main incentive for reform.

18 Maria Repko. "The New European Frontier: Why Ukraine Matters Now." Centre for Economic Strategy, 7 April 2025: https://ces.org.ua/eu-ukraine/

If Ukraine stays outside the EU, by contrast, the costs of supporting it will not disappear; they will simply become less predictable and rise because of instability on the eastern border. Overall, integrating Ukraine makes sense both as a way of structuring assistance and as a means of protecting the EU's investments.

The EU therefore faces two related questions. **What is it prepared to pay for: managed enlargement or unmanaged instability? And which Ukraine is it better to support: one that remains outside the EU's mechanisms of influence, or one that participates in the process and follows common rules?** These questions are particularly relevant given the changes the EU itself needs to make to improve the effectiveness of decision-making and its institutional capacity.

What is it prepared to pay for: managed enlargement or unmanaged instability? And which Ukraine is it better to support: one that remains outside the EU's mechanisms of influence, or one that participates in the process and follows common rules?

1.2 AGRICULTURE AS THE MOST CHALLENGING DIMENSION OF INTEGRATION



Agriculture is the most challenging area of Ukraine's integration, and it is the issue on which opponents' fears are voiced most frequently in European capitals. Representatives of farming communities are concerned about Ukraine's agricultural potential and the consequences for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), warning of the "destruction of family farming in Europe".[19] Farmers are well organised and have considerable political influence in many countries,[20] so politicians heed their concerns. Some of these concerns have merit: Ukraine is a large, competitive producer, and rapid market opening would indeed place downward pressure on prices

19 «Ukraine's entry into the European Union means the death of French agriculture,» warned Marine Le Pen during her visit to Flamanville. CNews (in French), 11 March 2025: https://www.cnews.fr/france/2025-03-11/lentree-de-lukraine-dans-lunion-europeenne-cest-la-mort-de-lagriculture-francaise

20 Miriam Kosmehl, Simon Schlegel, Susan Stewart. Charting Ukraine's EU Path: Engaging with Member States. Bertelsmann Stiftung, 13 January 2026: https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications/publication/did/charting-ukraines-eu-path-engaging-with-member-states

in certain segments. However, by no means all the fears about Ukraine are justified.

First, **Ukraine can hardly be described as a direct threat to European farmers at present.** Despite positive assessments of its agricultural potential, a substantial share of its territory cannot be used for farming. According to the DeepState analytical project, 19.25% of Ukrainian territory is under occupation,[21] while as much as 20% may be contaminated by mines, according to the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SESU).[22] This means **Ukraine will need considerable time and effort for demining and restoring its land before its agricultural sector can operate at full capacity.**

Moreover, **CAP payments are largely linked to the area of cultivated land**. Given the structure of Ukrainian agriculture, large agricultural holdings would benefit most from this model, but they are also the producers least likely to qualify for the payments.

CAP payments are largely linked to the area of cultivated land. Given the structure of Ukrainian agriculture, large agricultural holdings would benefit most from this model, but they are also the producers least likely to qualify for the payments.

WHY WON'T A 'TAKEOVER' OF THE MARKET HAPPEN?

THE FACTOR OF LAND AND WAR:



19.25%
of Ukraine's territory is under occupation (DeepState).



~20%
is potentially mined (State emergency service).

21 DeepState: Russia occupied more than 4,000 km² of Ukrainian territory in 2025. Ukrainska Pravda, 1 January 2026: https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2026/01/01/8014292/

22 Almost 200,000 hectares cleared of mines in Ukraine since the start of the full-scale war, says SESU. Suspilne, 3 April 2026: https://suspilne.media/1280186-vid-pocatku-povnomasstabnoi-vijni-v-ukraini-rozminuvali-majze-200-tis-ga-dsns/

According to the Centre for Economic Strategy, holdings of up to 100 hectares account for only 58.9% of Ukraine's agricultural land, compared with 96.2% in the EU.[23] **If CAP rules remain unchanged, only 20% of Ukraine's agricultural land would be eligible for subsidies**, according to analysts at the Transatlantic Dialogue Center.[24] In other words, the Common Agricultural Policy's structure, geared towards smaller farms, would be either unattractive or inaccessible to large Ukrainian producers, preventing a large-scale diversion of subsidies to them. Moreover, according to a SWOT analysis by the German-Ukrainian Agricultural Policy Dialogue, **Ukraine's agricultural growth has relied on competitiveness rather than subsidies**: state support for producers averaged no more than 1.5% of their revenues in 2013–2021 and was negative in some years.[25]

To mitigate Ukraine's impact on EU agriculture, the Union will most likely use transition periods and gradual-access mechanisms. Full access to the CAP depends on meeting all EU food standards, which requires time and support from EU institutions. This includes aligning Ukrainian legislation with European rules on pesticides, phytosanitary requirements, veterinary conditions and related matters. Phased access to payments in exchange for reforms would spread the adjustment over time, allowing Ukrainian farmers to learn the rules and adapt to the new requirements while protecting European farmers from a sudden price shock. Rabobank explicitly predicts that such transitional arrangements, including gradual access to direct payments, will be introduced for Ukraine.[26] Another possible approach has been proposed by Leo Litra, Senior Research Fellow at the New Europe Center:[27] under a faster path to political accession, voting rights on changes to CAP rules and influence over payment ceilings would become available only after the European Commission's annual assessment verifies progress on reforms.

---

23 Iana Okhrimenko. How Can Ukrainian Agriculture Be Integrated into the EU Internal Market and Common Agricultural Policy? Centre for Economic Strategy, 25 June 2024: https://ces.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/yak_integruvati_ukra%D1%97nske_silske_gospodarstvo_do_vnutrshinogo.pdf

24 Marianna Fakhurdinova, Viktoriia Valinkevych, Yehor Tkachuk, Stepan Rusyn, Diana Maslianchuk, Bohdan Veselovskyi, Kateryna Khimich, Sofiia Demchuk, Yana Balanchuk. The EU's Next Chapter: Economic, Political and Security Gains from Ukraine's Accession. Transatlantic Dialogue Center, 19 June 2026: https://tdcenter.org/2026/06/19/economic-security-gains-ukraine-eu-accession/

25 Stephan von Cramon-Taubadel. Analytical Report on the Agricultural Sector of Ukraine, the EU, and a Post-Enlargement EU: A SWOT-Based Assessment. German-Ukrainian Agricultural Policy Dialogue, December 2025: https://www.apd-ukraine.de/fileadmin/user_upload/APD_Bericht_ENG.pdf

26 Barend Bergkamp, Maartije Wijffelaars. What if Ukraine joins the EU?. Rabobank, 18 June 2026: https://www.rabobank.com/knowledge/q011531237-what-if-ukraine-joins-the-eu-an-exploration-of-the-impact-on-european-food-and-agriculture

27 Leonid Litra. Political Accession First: A New Pact for Ukraine to Join the EU. New Europe Center, 23 April 2026: https://neweurope.org.ua/analytics/spershu-politychnyj-vstup-novyj-pakt-dlya-pryyednannya-ukrayiny-do-yes/

Comparing the two alternatives provides another important counterargument. Ukrainian agriculture would not disappear if Ukraine remained outside the EU: it would still affect world prices and prices within the Union, and therefore European farmers' incomes. Moreover, outside the EU, Ukraine would retain lower production standards, giving it a competitive advantage. The SWOT analysis therefore finds that **Ukrainian agriculture operating within the EU and subject to its rules would pose less of a threat to European farmers than Ukrainian agriculture outside it.**

Ukrainian agriculture operating within the EU and subject to its rules would pose less of a threat to European farmers than Ukrainian agriculture outside it.

The current debate on agriculture is often distorted by alarmist claims, including warnings that cheap products will "flood" the market. Such claims, however, lack empirical support.

An example cited by Leo Litra during the online discussion "Preparing for the 'Ukrainian plumber' in the EU",[28] organised to address member states' main concerns about Ukraine's accession, illustrates how exaggerated this fear is. Contrary to the widespread belief that Ukraine would overwhelm the European market with agricultural products, **its exports are roughly half those of Belgium**, a country comparable in area to Ukraine's Odesa region.[29] In Litra's assessment, **fears of Ukrainian agricultural expansion are not supported by the facts**, while much of the debate rests on misconceptions carried over from previous enlargement rounds.

Fears of Ukrainian agricultural expansion are not supported by the facts, while much of the debate rests on misconceptions carried over from previous enlargement rounds.

Poland provides another telling example: grain prices fell only slightly following the arrival of Ukrainian grain after the EU lifted tariffs and quotas

28 Preparing for the "Ukrainian Plumber" in the EU. New Europe Center, 15 July 2026: https://neweurope.org.ua/vstup-ukrayiny-do-yes-yak-rozviyaty-poboyuvannya-ta-zmitsnyty-suspilnu-pidtrymku-v-yevropi/

29 Ukraine's EU Accession: How to Dispel Concerns and Strengthen Public Support in Europe. New Europe Center, 15 July 2026: https://neweurope.org.ua/vstup-ukrayiny-do-yes-yak-rozviyaty-poboyuvannya-ta-zmitsnyty-suspilnu-pidtrymku-v-yevropi/

on Ukrainian agricultural products in 2022 through Autonomous Trade Measures.[30]

At the same time, Ukraine's accession would bring direct benefits to European agriculture. Despite imbalances in production and losses caused by the war, Ukraine remains a world leader in the cultivation of important crops, including soybeans, sunflowers and cereals. Having such a producer within the EU would strengthen European food security. As Rabobank notes, **Ukraine's agricultural sector could reduce the EU's dependence on imports of several plant-based products and meet a substantial share of its food needs**, including sunflower oil, maize and grain products.[31] For the European Union, this could support food security, a priority for EU leaders[32].

Ukraine's agricultural sector could reduce the EU's dependence on imports of several plant-based products and meet a substantial share of its food needs.

The war has also already redirected parts of Ukrainian agriculture towards European demand. Russia's displacement of Ukraine from markets in Africa and Asia contributed to an increase in the EU's share of Ukrainian agricultural exports from 30% in 2021 to 47.5% in 2025 (the share had reached 52% before tariff-rate quotas were reintroduced in 2024).[33] In the short term, with few opportunities to redirect exports quickly towards other markets, the European Union will remain the principal export destination for Ukrainian agriculture. **After the war, however, if maritime trade routes are restored, Ukrainian exports to third countries could increase the EU's influence in global agricultural markets.**

Ukraine will also need advice on new standards during and after its accession to the EU, opening a large market for the expertise of European companies. The arrival of a new participant would also encourage debate on necessary

30 Stephan von Cramon-Taubadel. Analytical Report on the Agricultural Sector of Ukraine, the EU, and a Post-Enlargement EU: A SWOT-Based Assessment. German-Ukrainian Agricultural Policy Dialogue, December 2025: https://www.apd-ukraine.de/fileadmin/user_upload/APD_Bericht_ENG.pdf

31 Barend Bergkamp, Maartije Wijffelaars. What if Ukraine joins the EU?. Rabobank, 18 June 2026: https://www.rabobank.com/knowledge/q011531237-what-if-ukraine-joins-the-eu-an-exploration-of-the-impact-on-european-food-and-agriculture

32 Speech by President von der Leyen at the Annual Conference of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture. European Commission, 16 March 2024: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/pl/speech_24_1726

33 Infographic Report "Ukrainian Agribusiness 2024/2025." Latifundist.com, 2026: https://agribusinessinukraine.com/the-infographics-report-ukrainian-agribusiness-2025/?utm_source=latifundist&utm_medium=banner

CAP reforms and the adoption of new standards to make European agriculture stronger, more resilient and more innovative.

Thus, despite its genuine complexity, integrating the agricultural sector would not be the catastrophe portrayed by opponents of enlargement. It would require compliance with standards, transition periods and sustained dialogue with European farmers, ultimately producing mutual benefits. At the same time, a more detailed analysis is needed of the potential benefits and losses across EU member states, as well as of which agricultural sectors could be most adversely affected.

UKRAINE AS AN EU SECURITY ASSET

2.1 THE COST OF THE "GREY ZONE": INSTABILITY AS A COST TO THE EU



Opponents of enlargement often portray Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU as a factor that provokes Russia and increases risks for the European Union itself. Recent history suggests the opposite: **the source of danger is not movement towards membership, but the uncertain status of a country left without a clear answer about accession.** That uncertainty makes it a target and ultimately brings instability to the EU's borders.

The source of danger is not movement towards membership, but the uncertain status of a country left without a clear answer about accession.

Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 experienced open armed aggression. Moldova lives under constant hybrid pressure, including the Russian military presence and ammunition depots in Transnistria and energy blackmail. **A country left by the West in a "grey zone" becomes vulnerable to Russian pressure** regardless of its own intentions or whether it seeks neutrality.

RAND analysts explain why. In a July 2025 report, they note that the pro-European orientation of Moldova, Georgia and Armenia, in the absence of a credible prospect of accession, increases their vulnerability to Russian pressure, subversion and even military aggression.[34] The 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit is a telling example: Ukraine and Georgia were promised eventual membership but were not offered a Membership Action Plan, partly because of fears of provoking Russia. This approach proved ineffective: the half-measure failed to protect them and instead created an opportunity for Moscow to resort to military force while Ukraine and Georgia remained without collective defence guarantees. Four months later, Russia attacked Georgia and subsequently used force against Ukraine. In other words, Moscow interprets uncertainty about accession as a signal that aggression is possible.

[34] Countering Russian Influence: Support for Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova in the 'Waiting Room of the West'. RAND Corporation, July 2025: https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/07/countering-russian-influence-support-for-armenia-georgia.html

That dynamic has not changed. In its 2024 report, the Munich Security Conference found that **shrinking the "grey zone" in Eastern Europe depends directly on decisions by the EU and NATO themselves**, and that the only way to do so is to provide real support for these countries' progress towards membership.[35] As long as Ukraine remains outside the EU, it is an external factor in the Union's security architecture rather than part of it. Uncertainty also has domestic consequences: without a clear membership prospect, the main incentive for judicial, anti-corruption and other reforms weakens, because the integration process is the principal driver of such changes in Ukraine.

The cost of the "grey zone" has long extended beyond Ukraine and is now borne directly by the EU. **Russian operations on European territory—sabotage of undersea infrastructure, arson attacks on logistics facilities, cyberattacks on energy infrastructure and drone provocations at the Polish border in 2025**—are already direct costs of delay and the mistaken hope that Russia will stop at Ukraine.[36] Some EU member states wish to preserve the status quo to avoid worsening relations with Russia by admitting new members. This appears to be a mistake for which the EU is already paying through instability on its eastern borders. **Managed and predictable integration of Ukraine therefore offers a better alternative to continuing uncertainty**, whose costs will only increase.

Managed and predictable integration of Ukraine therefore offers a better alternative to continuing uncertainty, whose costs will only increase.

2.2 ARTICLE 42(7) AS A DETERRENCE MECHANISM



Some concerns centre on the military obligations the EU would assume by admitting Ukraine and the debate over whether it could fulfil them. **Ukraine regards EU membership as one of its security guarantees**, as envisaged by Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union, which sets out member states' mutual assistance obligations. Moreover, at the beginning of 2026,

35 Munich Security Report 2024, Chapter 2: Eastern Europe – Shades of Gray Zone. Munich Security Conference, February 2024: https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report-2024/eastern-europe/

36 The Hybrid Threat Imperative: Deterring Russia Before it is Too Late. CEPA, December 2025: https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/the-hybrid-threat-imperative-deterring-russia-before-it-is-too-late/

accelerated Ukrainian accession was discussed as an element of a possible peace settlement and post-war security guarantees. That idea, however, proved contentious for some member states.[37]

The EU's founding treaties do indeed contain a mutual defence mechanism. **Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union obliges member states to provide each other with "aid and assistance by all the means in their power" if a member state is the victim of armed aggression on its territory.**[38] This mechanism would naturally extend to Ukraine upon accession.

However, the argument that membership risks "drawing the EU into the war" needs an important qualification. In current debates, Ukraine's membership is considered primarily in the context of ending the war and building a sustainable post-war security order, rather than as a mechanism for involving the EU in ongoing hostilities. Under favourable security conditions, **Ukraine's membership could instead be a stabilising instrument**: it would reduce uncertainty about the country's future status and increase the potential cost of renewed Russian aggression.

Ukraine's membership could instead be a stabilising instrument: it would reduce uncertainty about the country's future status and increase the potential cost of renewed Russian aggression.

EU membership itself could serve as a preventive instrument, deterring Moscow from launching another phase of aggression. The experience of Russian aggression, and not only against Ukraine, demonstrates the particular vulnerability of countries outside systems of collective security commitments. **Bringing Ukraine into the EU's political and security structures could reduce that uncertainty** and make it harder for Moscow to calculate that renewed aggression would carry an acceptable cost.

More than a decade of resistance to Russian aggression has demonstrated Ukraine's capacity to sustain military resistance. With additional mechanisms of support, Ukraine would be an even more difficult target for another

37 EU executive weighs idea of quick, but limited membership for Ukraine. Reuters, 16 January 2026: https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-executive-weighs-idea-quick-limited-membership-ukraine-2026-01-16/

38 Mutual defence clause (Article 42.7 TEU). European Parliament: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/sede/dv/sede200612mutualdefsolidarityclauses_/sede200612mutualdefsolidarityclauses_en.pdf

invasion. **Ukraine's accession would be a bold European security decision that could contribute to deterrence .** Refusing to admit Ukraine out of fear, by contrast, would make not only Ukraine but the European Union itself more vulnerable.

Ukraine's accession would be a bold European security decision that could contribute to deterrence.

Moscow will clearly oppose Ukraine's EU accession, since such an outcome would effectively defeat its original objective of establishing control over all of Ukraine. The EU's strategic task in these circumstances is to prevent Russian opposition to enlargement, and similar arguments within the Union itself, from setting the agenda. Instead, **the EU should use the opportunity to develop a post-war plan in which Ukrainian membership becomes one of the instruments for securing lasting peace on the continent.**

The window of opportunity for such a decision may be limited. Prolonged internal disagreements among member states over secondary aspects of enlargement could prevent the EU from taking advantage of favourable political and security circumstances if they emerge. The costs and risks of Ukrainian membership should therefore be assessed in the broader context of Europe's long-term security.

At the same time, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the deterrent effect of membership would fail and Russia would again attack Ukraine, this time as an EU member state. This scenario is the strongest argument advanced by critics of rapid enlargement. **Article 42(7) does not provide for an automatic military response under a predetermined collective defence mechanism**: the specific form of assistance would depend on member states and their available capabilities. The force of Article 42(7) is not automatic. As analysts at the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) note, the guarantee is relatively strong on paper but becomes effective only if backed by real defence capabilities and plans.[39] In the event of renewed aggression, Ukraine itself would evidently still bear the main military burden, at least initially.

39 Is EU accession a security guarantee for Ukraine? The New Union Post, August 2025: https://newunionpost.eu/2025/08/21/ukraine-security-guarantee-eu-accession

The alternative scenario—keeping Ukraine outside the EU for fear of a possible conflict with Russia—also entails a security cost. If Moscow considers further aggression against Europe, one of the main factors in its calculations will be its assessment of Europeans' readiness, unity and strength. The Kremlin would interpret a refusal to enlarge under Russian pressure as evidence of limited EU political will and a willingness to adjust strategic decisions out of fear of escalation. It would recognise European vulnerabilities: fears, weaknesses and a readiness to "listen" to Moscow's demands. By contrast, **Ukraine's accession would demonstrate the EU's ability to take decisive strategic steps** and could change Russia's calculations based on Europe's presumed indecision .

Ukraine's accession would demonstrate the EU's ability to take decisive strategic steps and could change Russia's calculations based on Europe's presumed indecision.

Indeed, whether Ukraine is admitted or not will be a major test of the EU's mutual commitments. Russia will prolong hostilities as much as possible and exert "hybrid" pressure on member states to prevent EU enlargement. This creates a need to discuss not only the risks of Ukraine's future membership but also the conditions under which ending the war, post-war deterrence and the accession process could reinforce one another.

Ukraine seeks EU membership not to bring the war onto Union territory, but to reduce the risk of its recurrence. Moreover, the security benefits of enlargement would not flow in only one direction.

This is where Ukraine's contribution becomes significant. Its military could fill gaps in European defence: its scale, readiness for prolonged high-intensity warfare and current combat experience would provide a major deterrent to potential future aggressors. **The security question surrounding enlargement should therefore concern not only the obligations the EU would assume towards Ukraine, but also Ukraine's contribution to Europe's ability to deter future aggression.**

2.3 UKRAINE'S DEFENCE POTENTIAL AS A CONTRIBUTION TO EU SECURITY



Security concerns about Ukraine's accession tend to conflate two distinct matters: a large army and an ongoing war. In fact, it is the war that causes concern: by admitting Ukraine, the EU would supposedly import the conflict within its own borders. According to a 2023 European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) opinion poll, 45% of Europeans believed Ukraine's accession would negatively affect EU security, while only 25% expected a positive effect.[40] **Ukraine's army, however, is the country's greatest defence asset that the EU could gain in the coming years.**

At the start of the full-scale invasion, the Armed Forces of Ukraine numbered approximately 250,000 personnel. After four years of war, they have become the largest army in Europe after Russia's, with more than 800,000 active-duty personnel; according to the Council of the European Union, their troops are now among the most experienced in the world.[41] Over the past decade, European militaries have prioritised technological superiority with relatively small forces, optimising them more for expeditionary operations than for sustained continental defence. Ukraine, meanwhile, has adapted to a new generation of warfare involving unmanned systems and operations in the electromagnetic spectrum. This experience is transforming the nature of combat: continuous zones of fire along the line of contact, constant aerial reconnaissance and cycles of introducing new technical solutions measured in weeks rather than years. **Ukraine's combination of manpower, experience and innovation would considerably strengthen European defence**, particularly given that most European forces are made up of professional volunteers and have limited capacity to expand rapidly.

Ukraine's combination of manpower, experience and innovation would considerably strengthen European defence, particularly given that most European forces are made up of professional volunteers and have limited capacity to expand rapidly.

Assessments by Western research institutions confirm Ukraine's value to European security. CEPA analysts note that **only two armies on the continent**

40 New ECFR poll: Europeans open to Ukraine joining the EU despite security risks. European Council on Foreign Relations, December 2023: https://www.eureporter.co/world/ukraine/2023/12/14/new-ecfr-poll-europeans-open-to-ukraine-joining-the-eu-despite-security-risks-but-cool-on-further-enlargement-of-the-bloc-ahead-of-crucial-european-council-summit/

41 Ukraine: an investment in Europe's future. Council of the European Union, July 2026: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/ukraine-an-investment-in-europe-s-future/

have experience of large-scale modern warfare—Russia's and Ukraine's—and that any system for deterring Russia will therefore be weaker without Ukraine.[42] The Council of the European Union likewise recognises that combining Ukraine's combat experience with member states' industrial and technological capabilities could significantly improve Europe's defence readiness.[43]

Ukraine already contributes to European security in practice, though not institutionally.

Ukraine already contributes to European security in practice, though not institutionally.

Existing forms of cooperation are partial: the EU has invited Ukraine to help identify capability-development priorities, is considering expanding its agreement with the European Defence Agency, and is facilitating participation in Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects.[44] All these mechanisms, however, share one limitation: cooperation agreements do not grant partners decision-making rights, and participation in projects is possible only within the existing legal framework.[45] In other words, Ukraine can take part in European defence initiatives but cannot jointly shape European defence planning. Notably, a systematic mechanism for sharing combat experience has been established within NATO: the Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre (JATEC) has operated in Bydgoszcz since February 2025. It is the Alliance's first body run jointly with a partner country and incorporates lessons from the war directly into NATO doctrine. The EU currently has no equivalent centre.[46]

Membership would change precisely this. Ukraine's military would move from the status of a partner with which arrangements are negotiated separately to that of a participant in joint planning.

42 Ukraine: Founding Member No. 1 of Europe's New Defense Alliance. CEPA, June 2026: https://cepa.org/article/ukraine-founding-member-no-1-of-europes-new-defense-alliance/

43 Ukraine: an investment in Europe's future. Council of the European Union, July 2026: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/ukraine-an-investment-in-europe-s-future/

44 White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030. European Commission, March 2025: https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/white-paper-future-european-defence-rearming-europe_en

45 How the UK and the EU can deepen defence co-operation. Centre for European Reform, 2025: https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/policy-brief/2025/how-uk-and-eu-can-deepen-defence-co-operation

46 NATO and Ukraine Open the Joint Analysis Training and Education Centre. NATO Allied Command Transformation, 17 February 2025: https://www.act.nato.int/article/nato-ukraine-open-jatec/

Membership would change precisely this. Ukraine's military would move from the status of a partner with which arrangements are negotiated separately to that of a participant in joint planning.

The change would not be automatic—the form of cooperation would have to be developed—but it is impossible in principle without membership. The distinction matters: practical cooperation can be ended at any moment, while institutional ties are harder to undo.

The central issue, therefore, is not what the EU can obtain from Ukraine: access to its market, defence industry and expertise is possible without membership. The question is what institutionalising those relations would achieve. First, **it would anchor Ukraine firmly within Europe over the long term and provide Europeans with mechanisms of influence and oversight.** The entire EU project rests on this principle, with states mutually constrained by a network of common rules. Second, it would allow Ukraine to participate in military planning instead of cooperating only on an ad hoc basis. Third, it would structure assistance to Ukraine and thereby reduce its cost, since such assistance will be needed for a long time in any event. At the same time, a contribution to defence is not, and cannot be, a passport to EU membership. Membership depends not only on a country's ability to defend Europe but also on its ability to abide by European rules. Effective judicial reform, functioning anti-corruption institutions and the rule of law therefore remain essential conditions for Ukraine's accession.

WHAT WOULD UKRAINE'S EU MEMBERSHIP ACTUALLY CHANGE?

Membership would transform ad hoc cooperation into long-term institutional cooperation, creating new opportunities for both Ukraine and the European Union.

UKRAINE OUTSIDE THE EU
(CURRENT SITUATION)

1. Predominantly bilateral agreements.
2. Participation in selected defence initiatives.
3. Temporary support mechanisms.
4. Limited influence over EU decision-making.

UKRAINE AS AN EU MEMBER
(NEW OPPORTUNITIES)

1. Institutional cooperation.
2. Opportunities to participate in joint planning.
3. More predictable budgetary frameworks.
4. Extension of mutual assistance obligations under Article 42(7) (does not provide for an automatic military response).
5. Participation in joint decision-making.

THE COST OF DELAY: UKRAINE'S MEMBERSHIP IS CHEAPER THAN DEFEAT

The financial argument against Ukraine's membership is that accession would become a "bottomless pit" costing Europe hundreds of billions. But such calculations usually consider only one side of the equation: how much it would cost to admit Ukraine, without calculating how much it would cost not to admit it.

But such calculations usually consider only one side of the equation: how much it would cost to admit Ukraine, without calculating how much it would cost not to admit it.

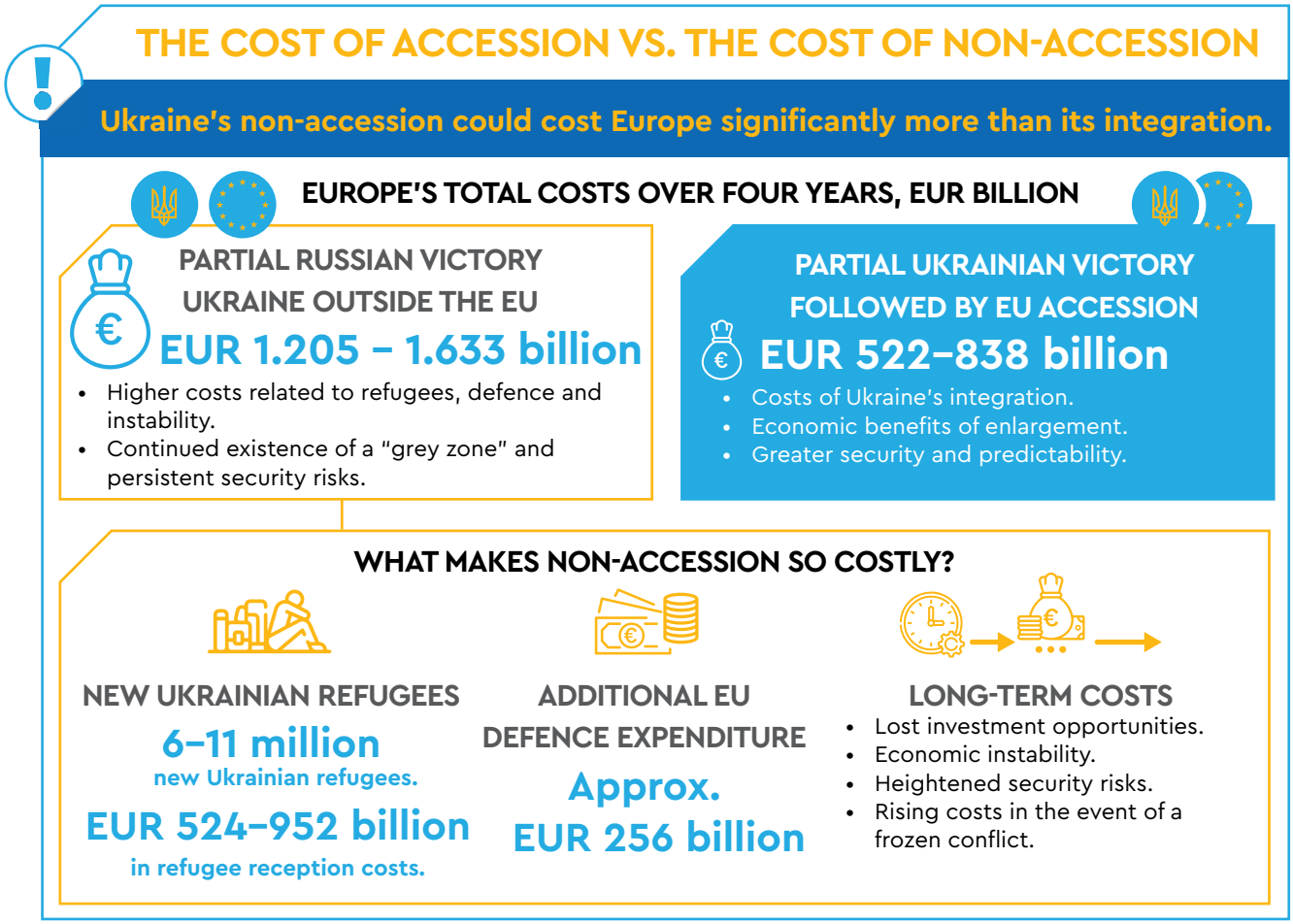
One of the few attempts to compare both alternatives was made by the Norwegian analytical firm Corisk and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) in their November 2025 study "Europe's Choice".[47] The authors modelled two possible outcomes of the war and calculated Europe's aggregate costs over four years under each scenario. The first is a partial Russian victory: Western support remains at its current level, the balance of forces gradually shifts in Moscow's favour, Russia gains the ability to impose peace on its own terms, and Ukraine remains outside the EU in a frozen conflict. The second is a partial Ukrainian victory, which the authors define not as the complete liberation of occupied territory but as the ability to halt Russia's advance and compel it to accept peace on sustainable terms while Ukraine retains a combat-capable army and subsequently integrates into the EU. The costs of this integration are included in the calculation. In other words, membership is not an additional charge on top of aid but part of the less expensive option.

The high cost of the first scenario consists of three categories of expenditure, each resulting from instability at the EU's borders. The first relates to migration: a Russian advance deeper into Ukraine would trigger 6–11 million new refugees, costing host countries EUR 524–952 billion over four years and increasing social tensions and support for populist parties. The second concerns defence: a partial Russian victory would free up Russia's military resources, forcing Europe to strengthen the defence of the Baltic states,

47 Erlend Bjørtvedt, Karsten Friis et al. Europe's Choice: Military and Economic Scenarios for the War in Ukraine. Corisk Report Series No 12, NUPI, November 2025: https://dupuyinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-Europes-choice_FINAL_251125_174147.pdf

Finland and the High North urgently within two to four years at a cost of approximately EUR 256 billion. The third is indefinite support for Ukrainian-controlled territory in a frozen conflict. The authors do not quantify this item, but note that high investment risk would increase the cost of capital, deter investors and slow reconstruction.[48] Under the second scenario, these same categories would generate savings: up to 1.5 million refugees would return home, Ukrainian military capabilities would contribute to collective defence, and the EU would have more time for its own rearmament.

The difference between the scenarios is substantial. **A partial Russian victory would cost the EU EUR 1,205–1,633 billion over four years, while a partial Ukrainian victory followed by EU membership would cost EUR 522–838 billion over the same period.**[49] Notably, securing Ukraine's advantage would cost less than the additional expenditure on accommodating refugees alone in the event of Russian success. Europe would lose this money not because it supported Ukraine, but because its support was insufficient.



48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

These estimates are forecasts, but the EU is already incurring some of these costs. **Member states closest to the theatre of war devote the highest shares of GDP to defence**: Poland, 4.48%; Lithuania, 4.00%; Latvia, 3.73%; and Estonia, 3.38%.[50] **Poland's military expenditure reached EUR 40 billion in 2025, three times its level a decade earlier.**[51] **This is the current cost of uncertainty on the eastern flank**, which these countries cover from their own budgets while Ukraine remains outside a common defence system.

The second scenario is also less costly because it changes the financing model itself. Support for Ukraine currently relies on temporary and fragmented instruments: a EUR 90 billion loan to cover needs in 2026–2027, the Ukraine Assistance Fund under the European Peace Facility, and the Ukraine Support Instrument under the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP). Most military assistance is provided bilaterally and depends on decisions in individual capitals. Each instrument requires separate political approval. **Membership would place support within a predictable budgetary framework, where spending is planned seven years in advance and shared among all member states.**

For some countries, however, this very redistribution is an argument against enlargement: member states far from the eastern flank would assume costs that previously did not concern them. Preparing for enlargement therefore requires decisions within the EU itself, particularly on the structure of its future budget and compensation mechanisms for those that lose out through redistribution.

The question of financing sources remains open. In December 2025, the European Commission proposed funding support for Ukraine through a "reparations loan" backed by frozen Russian assets. Of approximately EUR 300 billion frozen worldwide, around EUR 210 billion are held under European jurisdiction, mostly at Belgium-based Euroclear. Belgium blocked the proposal because of concerns about lawsuits from Russia. The European Council instead agreed on a EUR 90 billion loan to cover Ukraine's needs in 2026–2027, financed through EU borrowing on capital markets and guaranteed by the EU budget. Ukraine would repay the loan only after receiving reparations. The assets would remain frozen, while the EU would retain the right to use them to repay the loan; the Commission was

50 EU Member States' defence budgets. European Parliament, EPRS, 9 March 2026: https://epthinktank.eu/2026/03/09/eu-member-states-defence-budgets-2/

51 Poland blows hole in budget rearming but global military spending reaches all-time high. EUobserver, 29 April 2026: https://euobserver.com/214036

meanwhile instructed to continue work on the reparations-loan mechanism.[52] Whatever the final decision, **Europe will bear costs related to Ukraine in any case. Membership will determine only how manageable and predictable those costs are.**

Europe will bear costs related to Ukraine in any case. Membership will determine only how manageable and predictable those costs are.

This analysis does not address every concern or potential problem associated with Ukraine's future EU membership. We have focused on the issues most frequently raised in political and public debates in member states: the cost of enlargement, its consequences for agriculture and the EU budget, and security risks. Several other important questions lie beyond the scope of this study, ranging from Ukraine's impact on the Union's institutional balance to migration, the future decision-making process and the effects on further enlargement.

The political and institutional challenge deserves particular attention. As a large member state with its own national interests, Ukraine would be able to influence joint EU decisions and, in areas where unanimity is still required, to block them. The experience of Viktor Orbán's government has made other countries more cautious about further enlargement, not least because member states can abuse their veto power. At the same time, Member States' concerns extend beyond the potential abuse of veto power to the risk of new members backsliding on democratic principles and the rule of law. One possible instrument to prevent such a scenario is the PACT model proposed by the New Europe Center: Ukraine would immediately gain political and security membership, while access to EU funds and certain rights would be granted gradually, based on progress in implementing reforms, and could be restricted in the event of reform backsliding.[53] This approach would allow the EU to retain mechanisms for promoting compliance with democratic standards after accession, although the potential abuse of veto power would require a separate institutional solution. Ukraine's accession would thus strengthen, rather than weaken, the EU's existing deterrence arrangements.

52 European Council meeting (18 December 2025) – Conclusions, EUCO 24/25. European Council, 18 December 2025: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/wqmknoh4/en-20251218-european-council-conclusions.pdf

53 A New Approach to Ukraine's EU Accession. 4 June 2026: https://neweurope.org.ua/en/analytics/novyj-pidhid-do-vstupu-ukrayiny-v-yes/

The analysis presented here does not suggest that Ukraine's accession would be painless or free of cost for the EU. Enlargement would require additional budgetary resources, adaptation of the Common Agricultural Policy, institutional changes and responses to new security commitments. However, the available research (not only that of the New Europe Center) indicates that most of these challenges should not be considered unprecedented or insurmountable.

The EU already has instruments to mitigate their effects: transition periods, gradual access to funds, budget planning, safeguard mechanisms and reforms to its own procedures. The right question, therefore, is not whether Ukraine's membership comes at a cost; it clearly does. (But that cost is not nearly as catastrophic as critics' worst-case scenarios suggest.) The right question is how much it would cost for Ukraine not to join the EU. (And that cost really could prove catastrophic.) Keeping Ukraine outside the EU would make developments harder to manage, costs less predictable and security risks greater. A comparison of these two scenarios—accession and non-accession—rather than an assessment of enlargement costs alone, should form the basis of the debate over the EU's future enlargement.

The authors are grateful for assistance in preparing this document and for valuable comments on the text from Sergiy Solodkyy, Director of the New Europe Center; Leonid Litra, Senior Research Fellow at the New Europe Center and Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR); Dmytro Shulga, Director of the Europe and the World Programme at the International Renaissance Foundation; Daniel Szeligowski, Head of the Eastern Europe Programme at the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM); and Marianna Fakhurdinova, Coordinator of the EU-Ukraine Partnership Program at the Transatlantic Dialogue Center. All views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the study's reviewers.



ABOUT NEW EUROPE CENTER

The New Europe Center was founded in 2017 as an independent think tank. 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.

More about New Europe Center: *www.neweurope.org.ua*



http://neweurope.org.ua/
info@neweurope.org.ua
https://www.facebook.com/NECUkraine/
https://twitter.com/NEC_Ukraine