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# European integration of Ukraine: experience of yesterday for development of tomorrow





#### Informational & analytical bulletin

# **Public opinion**

Informational & analytical «Public opinion» bulletin is a representation of novel trends in public opinion of Ukrainian citizens, way of informing of wide public about dynamics of public attitudes towards salient issues of democracy, statehood, expert commentaries on urgent issues, and recommendations on improvement of state of affairs in various spheres of societal life. «Public opinion» is the regular edition of Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation which focuses its activity on enhancing establishment of consolidated democracy, market economy, and Ukraine's integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

#### What is public opinion?

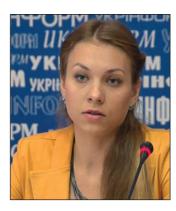
Public opinion is a conglomerate of attitudes, evaluations, thoughts, judgments, and opinions in a society. Research of public opinion means investigation of citizens views on specific problems and issues of political, economic, and social life.

This is an assessment of events and public figures made by population and source of information about problems and priorities of people. Public opinion is indicator of level of satisfaction of citizens with authorities and overall situation in a society. Permanent monitoring of public opinion and wide dissemination of results thereof favors better understanding of rational and emotional elements and factors which determine character of social interaction of society members.



Ilko Kucheriv **Democratic Initiatives Foundation** 

# **EUROPEAN** INTEGRATION **OF UKRAINE:** experience of yesterday for development of tomorrow



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European integration has become one of the most relevant topics in public discourse in Ukraine. Importance of foreign policy priorities was always rather high in Ukrainian society, but now, in the light of Association Agreement issue, European integration has gained ever greater significance. Despite the fact that all the discussions have been focused on Association Agreement and the Vilnius summit as some turning point in EU – Ukraine relations, we propose to look at European integration of Ukraine today in a broader perspective. In particular, it is much more essential to understand what are the main findings in public opinion about European integration, what are specific features and tendencies in public beliefs and attitudes in this regard. It is extremely important at the present stage, because public opinion is one of the most crucial domestic factors, which can influence European integration and Europeanization processes from inside the country. Destiny of Ukraine - EU relations and European integration of Ukraine after the Vilnius summit (independently of its results) will to a great extent depend on public attitudes and perceptions of what has been going on in the field of Europeanization processes in Ukraine.

Thus, having the main aim defined, this article provides answers to the following questions:

- What do Ukrainians think about European integration option, whether they support this direction of integration more than integration into the Customs Union?
- What are positive and negative after-effects of integration of Ukraine into the EU, in people opinion?
- What prevents Ukraine from progress on its European integration path?

#### **European integration of Ukraine: what is public opinion?**

Public opinion about foreign policy priorities of Ukraine is one of the most important domestic issues, which influences the processes of European integration and Europeanization in Ukraine.

Since 2011 public support to European integration has been prevailing over support to integration into the Customs Union. Thus, between three alternatives – joining the EU, entering the Customs Union, entering neither the EU, nor the Customs Union – people tends to support European integration vector during last two years. Dynamics of public opinion is presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1. In which direction of integration should Ukraine move?<sup>1</sup>

	October 2011	February 2012	December 2012	May 2013
Entering the EU	43,7	38,6	42,4	41,7
Entering the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan	30,5	29,7	32,1	31,0
Entering neither the EU, nor the Customs Union	9,3	11,7	10,5	13,5
It is difficult to say	16,4	20,0	15,0	13,7

Recently from Ukrainians point of view relations with the European Union members had also become more important. In particular, in November, 2009 there were 24% of Ukrainian citizens, thinking that relations with EU member-states had to be priority direction in foreign policy of the country. In three years after that, in November, 2012, there were already 41% of Ukrainians supporting this vector of foreign policy of Ukraine as the most significant. Relations with the Russian Federation at the same time were losing their importance for ordinary citizens. In November, 2009 52,5% of Ukrainians thought that relations with Russia had to be the main foreign policy priority, and in February, 2012 this figure fell to 31%, and slightly increased up to 35% in November, 2012 (table 2)<sup>2</sup>.

Table 2.
What foreign policy vector should be the foreground for Ukraine?<sup>3</sup> (November, 2009 - November, 2012)

	Relations with EU member- states	Relations with the USA	Relations with Russia	Relations with CIS	Relations with other countries	It is difficult to say, didn't answer
November 2012	40,8	1,2	35,3	4,8	3,6	14,3
February 2012	36,7	1,0	31,0	8,1	3,3	19,9
October 2011	38,2	1,2	35,3	7,7	2,7	14,8
February 2011	35,7	0,9	40,4	7,2	3,6	12,3
May 2010	26,5	1,7	46,3	10,1	4,5	10,8
November 2009	23,8	2,5	52,5	9,0	3,4	8,9

### European integration: are there any differences in support in the regions of Ukraine and among citizens?

Distinctive features of public attitude towards the European integration have rather stable and clear region—and age—specific differences. Thus, the highest support to the idea of entering the EU is demonstrated by the Western macro region citizens (72%). In the Centre of Ukraine relative majority of citizens is favouring the European integration (49%). At the same time in the East and the South of Ukraine another integration option – entering the Customs Union – is more popular among macro regions citizens. In particular, 50% of the Eastern region citizens and 39,5% in the South of Ukraine support integration into the Customs Union as a priority of foreign policy of Ukraine<sup>4</sup> (see table 3). It is interesting that the largest number of people hasn't made up their mind about these issues live in the Eastern part of our country. While there are 10% of citizens in the West, who haven't yet decided what direction they support, there are 15,5% of such undecided people in the East of Ukraine.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Data from press release with comparative sociological data. – Available at: http://dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relizy/ukraini---22-dumka-gromadjan.htm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Dynamics of public opinion, based on public opinion polls conducted by Razumkov Centre. Data is available at: http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll\_id=305

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> National public opinion poll, conducted by Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation together with sociological service of Razumkov Centre during 17-22 of May 2013. Sample included 2010 respondents over 18 years old in all regions of Ukraine. Theoretical error of the sample is 2,3%. Results are available at: http://dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relizy/kfvieviierjvioji. htm

Table 3. In which direction of integration should Ukraine move?

	West	Centre	South	East	Ukraine in general
Entering the EU	72,2	48,8	32,9	20,7	41,7
Entering the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan	7,4	21,9	39,5	50,4	31,0
Entering neither the EU, nor the Customs Union	10,2	15,3	13,8	13,5	13,5
It is difficult to say	10,2	13,9	13,8	15,5	13,.7

All abovementioned means that regional factor appears to be very important when it comes to the issue of integration option. Regional differences in this aspect of public opinion are deeply interconnected with various historical and cultural reasons, on the one hand, and to some extent explain different voting preferences of voters in the East and in the West of Ukraine, on another hand.

At the same time there are also age-specific differences in support to European integration. Thus, young generation of Ukrainians tends to support joining the EU rather than the Customs Union or being outside any integration project. European integration is supported by absolute or relative majority of young generation of Ukrainians in all regions of Ukraine. The lowest support to joining the EU is found among citizens of 60 years old and older. The absolute majority of elderly people favours joining the Customs Union (see table 4)<sup>5</sup>.

Table 4. In which direction of integration should Ukraine move?

	18-29 years old	30-39 years old	40-49 years old	50-59 years old	60 years old	Ukraine in general
Entering the EU	54,1	44,5	44,5	37,5	30,4	41,7
Entering the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan	18,8	22,3	27,6	38,7	45,0	31,0
Entering neither the EU, nor the Customs Union	13,4	16,1	13,0	13,7	11,6	13,5
It is difficult to say	13,6	17,2	14,8	10,1	13,0	13,7

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> National public opinion poll, conducted by Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation together with sociological service of Razumkov Centre during May 17-22, 2013. Sample included 2010 respondents over 18 years old in all regions of Ukraine. Theoretical error of the sample is 2,3%. Results are available at: http://dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relizy/kfvieviierjvioji. htm

## Benefits vs negative consequences of integration into the EU: Ukrainians point of view

For general understanding of reasons of public support or non-support of the European integration of Ukraine, it is very important to find out the ground for this or that position, to know how people perceive possible consequences of the European integration of Ukraine in practice.

Thus, in December 2007, and in December 2011 Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation in cooperation with Ukrainian Sociology Service conducted nationwide public opinion poll, part of which was devoted to revealing people's opinion about possible benefits and probable negative after-effects of Ukraine's integration into the EU.

Both in 2007 and in 2011 the most frequently named variants among possible benefits were **free movement of people abroad** (the most popular answer in 2007 and in 2011), raising living standards of people, and easier access of youth to studying at European universities.

Table 5.

If Ukraine became fully-fledged member of the EU,
what, to your opinion, benefits would the country receive in this case?
(Number of possible answers is not limited)

Possible benefits	December 2007	December 2011
Free movement of people abroad	35,4	34,7
Raising living standards of people	33,0	28,0
Easier access of youth to studying at European universities	19,0	24,3
Improving the provision of goods	8,8	16,1
It would facilitate movement of the country towards modern European civilization	17,7	16,1
It would contribute to democratization process	13,0	13,7
It would facilitate development of Ukrainian economy	15,0	13,3
Ukraine would get stronger authority on international arena	11,0	11,2
Receiving the financial assistance	8,8	9,7
It would strengthen security/defense potentialities of the country	6,7	7,5
Other	0,6	0,6
Ukraine would get no benefits	15,7	27,7
Difficult to answer	16,3	11,6

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As we can see from the table 5, there were only slight changes in public opinion about the benefits during 2007-2011. The most frequently mentioned benefits in 2011 remained the same as in 2007. The only difference was that 5% fewer people in 2011 expected raising living standards of ordinary citizens, and 5% more people mentioned easier access to European universities for youth. Another important change was related to growing number of people, who thought that Ukraine would get no benefits in the case of entering the EU (from 16% in 2007 to 28% in 2011). In general, public opinion in dynamics shows that rather stable understanding of possible benefits in the case of becoming fully-fledged member of the EU was formed in Ukrainian society till the end of 2011. It is worth mentioning, that young generation of Ukrainians found more benefits in the case of joining the EU in comparison to other age-specific groups (see the table 6 below).

Table 6.

If Ukraine became full (fully-fledged) member of the EU, what, to your opinion, benefits would the country in this case? December, 2011 (Age-specific distribution of answers)

(Number of possible answers is not limited)

Possible benefits	18–29	30-54	55 and older
Free movement of people abroad	46,1	35,2	24,3
Raising living standards of people	32,6	27,1	25,7
Easier access of youth to studying at European universities	31,8	24,1	18,3
Improving the provision of goods	21,9	15,6	12,0
It would facilitate movement of the country towards modern European civilization	22,9	16,2	10,3
It would contribute to democratization process	18,2	12,7	11,6
It would facilitate development of Ukrainian economy	16,8	13,3	10,3
Ukraine would get stronger authority on international arena	15,2	11,2	8,0
Receiving the financial assistance	15,2	9,1	6,1
It would strengthen security/defense potentialities of the country	7,2	7,6	7,6
Other	0,8	0,7	0,3
Ukraine would get no benefits	19,5	27,2	35,3
Difficult to answer	9,6	11,0	14,3

Public opinion about possible negative consequences of Ukraine's accession to the EU became also rather crystallized and stable. Thus, the most popular answers about possible negative consequences were emigration of Ukrainians abroad, possible deterioration of relations with member-states of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and tide of foreigners, selling out the country.

Table 7.

If Ukraine became fully-fledged member of the EU, what, to your opinion, negative consequences would the country experience in this case?

(Number of possible answers is not limited)

Possible negative consequences	December 2007	December 2011
Emigration of Ukrainians abroad	26,7	31,1
Deterioration of relations with member-states of the Commonwealth of Independent States	19,8	22,5
Tide of foreigners, selling out the country	30,9	22,0
Unemployment	10,2	17,5
Decline in living standards	9,5	16,7
Spread of drug addiction, AIDS etc.	17,1	14,0
Growth of social stratification	10,8	12,3
Spread of the Western mass culture	11,2	11,2
Rising of the crime rate	9,9	10,1
Loss of the state sovereignty	12,6	9,7
Others	2,0	0,9
There would be no negative consequences	13,2	16,3
Difficult to answer	17,5	16,0

During this period people became more afraid of deterioration of relations with CIS member-states, and possible emigration of Ukrainian citizens abroad, while fears about tide of foreigners to Ukraine became less spread among people.

Regional differences in public attitude towards the European integration were mentioned

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above. They were also observed in regard to these issues – positive and negative consequences of possible accession to the EU. Thus, more negative expectations are in the regions, where attitude towards membership in the EU is the worst: in Donbass region (East of Ukraine) and in Crimea. In 2001 people in these regions expected that membership in the EU would lead to decline in living standards (39%, while in the Western Ukraine only 7% of citizens were afraid of such a consequence), unemployment (30%), tide of foreigners and selling out the country (27%). Among young Ukrainians all these fears, negative expectations, became apparently weaker than in other age groups (besides of emigration related expectation that is explained with emigration ideas, which youth had).

#### The main obstacles for progress on the road to the EU

European integration of Ukraine and Ukraine's progress in this field is a complex result of domestic, international and geopolitical factors, influencing EU – Ukraine relations and pre-defining its success or failure. But in the light of this paper, it is interesting to look at public opinion about the main factors, which prevent Ukraine from membership in the EU in a long-term perspective, and from successful completion of the processes, connected with Association Agreement.

In the period between 2006 and 2011 significant changes happened regarding Ukrainians beliefs about obstacles for Ukraine's movement towards membership in the EU.

Table 8.

What most of all prevents Ukraine from becoming the European Union member? (Number of possible answers is not limited)

The main obstacles for Ukraine's membership in the EU	June 2006	December 2011
Insufficient level of economic development of Ukraine	51,8	34,5
Low level of living standards in Ukraine	48,0	32,4
Problems with democracy and human rights in Ukraine	17,6	22,6
Position of Western member-states of the EU, which do not want to let Ukraine join the EU	12,9	18,7
Position of Ukrainian authorities, which do not wish to join the EU	6,2	17,6
Tied relations with Russia	11,0	10,8
Lack of willingness of Ukrainian citizens	13,4	8,9
Nothing prevents Ukraine from entering the EU, Ukraine is already ready for that	1,3	5,0
Ukraine doesn't need to become a member of the EU	17,2	14,5
Other	_	0,9
Difficult to say	11,0	11,2

Thus, in 2006 the main obstacles were considered to be economic in their nature. While in 2006 people mentioned insufficient level of economic development of Ukraine and low level of living standards as the main problems, depriving Ukraine from the membership perspective, in 2011 the situation was different. Economic factors became less important for Ukrainians, and at the same time the significance of political and democracy-related factors increased. In particular, problems with democracy and human rights in Ukraine, position of Western member-states of the EU and position of Ukrainian authorities were seen as obstacles for Ukraine's membership perspective by significantly larger number of people than in 2006.

In February, 2013 before 2013 EU – Ukraine summit, in the framework of expert poll conducted by DIF, it was discovered that absolute majority of questioned experts (64 out of 90) considered, that Ukrainian authorities in the framework of preparation to Association Agreement signing would try to partially fulfil EU requirements: by satisfying some of them and ignoring the others<sup>6</sup>. At that time experts predicted that the main requirement Ukrainian authorities would ignore, would be demands for inadmissibility of selective justice practice and release of political prisoners<sup>7</sup>. Thus, to experts point of view, the problem combining political, freedom, democracy and human rights aspects, was the most sensitive for Ukrainian authorities and that would make them ignore this problem.

In the late September, 2013 DIF conducted an expert poll focused on problems, which could prevent Ukraine from having the Association Agreement signed at Vilnius summit 2013.

Despite the fact that at that moment 30 out of 32 experts were more or less but certain that signing would take place in Vilnius, they were rather sceptic about the potential and willingness of Ukrainian authorities to fulfil needed requirements. In particular, the majority of questioned experts stated that the main obstacle, which could prevent Ukraine from successful result of the Vilnius summit, was failure of Ukraine in fulfilment of the EU requirements. The second reason was determined as counteraction of Russian authorities, and some unpredictable events, possible provocations<sup>8</sup>.

These expert polls were conducted in 2013, in the most intense and stressful period in EU – Ukraine relations during recent years. Their results proved the following: obstacles to the European perspective of Ukraine (democracy-related and lack of real intention to fulfil the EU requirements) from ordinary citizens point of view, in 2013 were mentioned by experts as problems and factors, which could prevent Ukraine from important step on its European integration path – Association Agreement signing. It means that the rollback of democracy has increased democracy and human rights significance for Ukrainian society on the one hand, but on another hand it has led to deepening the problem with getting closer to the EU standards and further progress in EU – Ukraine relations.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Expert polling «EU — Ukraine summit: what public expects» was conducted in February, 15-20 2013 by Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation. 90 experts were questioned. – Available at: http://dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relizy/samit-ukrainekati-zavtra.htm

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Expert poll «What could prevent signing the Association Agreement on Vilnius summit» was conducted in September, 13-18 2013 Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation. 32 experts were questioned. – Available at: http://dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relizy/kcoedvpkpbkp.htm

#### Instead of conclusion

#### After Vilnius: not to lose the spirit of unity and consolidation

Whatever the results of Vilnius summit will be, they will have an impact on public opinion and the developments in Ukrainian society, related to public attitude towards the European integration.

Today several important conclusions can be made regarding the role of Ukrainian civil society, mass media and pro-European politicians in influencing or shaping public opinion.

First, 2013 has become a year of temporary and superficial, but nevertheless consensus between political elites. During last 6-7 months unprecedented amount of public attention was focused on each and every development in the field of European integration. Cooperation between the main political actors in the name of European-oriented policy, on one hand, demonstrated to society that such a consensus between political opponents is possible, and on another hand, it depends on political will of both authority and opposition to cooperate. The spirit of consolidation around the European integration issues has never took place in Ukraine in such a visible and rather clear shape, as it happened due to Association Agreement negotiations.

Second, developments of 2013 stressed necessity to conduct information and education campaign among population in order to equip people with objective knowledge about the European perspective, and prevent manipulations, which has been used by opponents of the European integration of Ukraine.

Third, it is of vital importance of prevent any attempts to conduct referendum on foreign policy priority issue. There are clear and stable regional differences in public support to two integration options. NGO and politicians should not divide the society, but contribute to its consolidation. Any referendum will underline differences, especially regional, in public opinion and lead to polarization of the society. There is no and there will be no question of Ukraine accession to the EU on agenda in the nearest future. It means that there is no vital necessity to conduct any referendum, and such attempts can be considered to be the instrument of manipulation at the present moment.

Fourth, the East and the South of Ukraine should become the target regions for education campaign. The largest number of people without definite, formulated attitude towards the main integration vector is in the East of Ukraine. If people have no solid position about where Ukraine should move, it means that they need clarification and explanation of something they don't understand. Moreover, supporters of the European integration have to listen to people biased against this foreign policy option. Two sides can hear one another only in an open discussion.

Current situation with public attitude towards the European integration creates favourable ground for progress probably not so much in the European integration, as in the Europeanization,

if we consider the latest as a complex process of approaching to Europe-wide practices, norms and values, shared by EU member and candidate countries and permanently reproduced and further developed in all areas of political, economic, cultural, and social life. Support of the European integration as priority vector prevails in Ukrainian society over support to the integration with the Customs Union since 2011. Young generation of Ukrainians supports the European integration more than other age-specific groups, and sees more benefits from Ukraine membership in the EU that older generations do. Youth of Ukraine has fewer fears about negative consequences of possible accession of Ukraine to the EU. All that means that the new generation of Ukrainian citizens may speed up Europeanization processes from inside of Ukraine by being more demanding to politicians, more critical and sceptic about politicians actions in the field of the European integration. But this potential may remain unrealized without the encouragement from civil society and mass media. Thus, the new stage of qualitatively new work on promotion and pushing European integration of Ukraine forward just starts nowadays and only common efforts of different domestic actors can bring tangible effect in this area.

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