UKRAINE FACING CORRUPTION:

A Story of the Fight for Credibility

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Krzysztof Izdebski

Introduction

We present a collection of texts by Ukrainian authors, dedicated to the phenomenon of corruption in Ukraine. However, this phenomenon serves merely as a pretext to reveal the broader context of contemporary Ukrainian democracy as well as the complex relationship between Ukrainian society and power over the past several decades. These texts also touch upon more universal issues, reaching far beyond the borders of Ukraine and Europe, as well as concisely address the phenomenon of corruption and citizens' relationship with the state, moving beyond regulatory matters. They describe psychological, historical and systemic factors which are too rarely discussed in the context of attempts to grasp the crisis of citizen trust in the state, with the debate too often narrowed to the regulatory sphere.

Yevhen Hlibovytsky, referring to the history of Ukraine's independence after 1991, writes: 'along with the old institutions, the Soviet paradigm of the relationship between citizen and state, in which the citizen is an object of the state and, in unfavourable circumstances, may end up in the gears of the system, immigrated to independent Ukraine.' This argument is expanded in a text by another author, Olesia Ostrovska-Liuta. Recalling the history of Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation, she notes that 'the inhuman attitude of the state towards the individual justifies the unethical attitude of the individual, including officials, towards the state.'

It is also crucial to draw attention to the broader economic context. Corruption and democratic deficits cannot be eliminated or even curbed without implementing economic reforms. That is why Yana Okhrimenko clearly states: 'for the fight against corruption in Ukraine to be effective, it must be accompanied by the economy's emergence from the informal sector.'

Another element extensively discussed by Olha Aivazovska is trust in the state, rooted in how citizens perceive its institutions. Although holding elections – the most fundamental democratic institution – is currently impossible, the author appeals to the Ukrainian Parliament to begin creating a legal framework that will lay the groundwork for organising elections after martial law ends.

She is concerned not only with the efficiency of the entire process (taking into account, for example, that 20% of voters live outside the country) but also with building public trust in this act.

The authors therefore highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing the problem of corruption in Ukraine – a solution that takes into account both structural reforms and a shift in social mentality, which must confront the challenges stemming from historical experience.

In this discussion, we cannot forget – as Olha Aivazovska aptly described – that 'there has probably never been a precedent in the world where a fully developed representative democracy – such as Ukraine – has been forced to simultaneously fight for the country's survival, comply with standards concerning potential post-war elections and implement an ambitious package of fundamental reforms necessary for accession to the European Union. No one has walked this path under comparable conditions, which is why this experience is also significant as a global precedent.' For this reason too, it is worth engaging with the publication presented here.

Olesia Ostrovska-Liuta

Mined Relationships: How to Understand Ukrainian Society, the State and the Problem of Corruption

For my grandfather and grandmother, a young, recently married couple living near Lviv, the autumn of 1939 became apocalyptic. Everything that seemed reliable fell apart. The Polish interwar state, although not too friendly to my Ukrainian relatives, was still the support and foundation they built their lives on. By the end of 1939, everything had changed: the state they knew had fallen, buried under a new aggressive Soviet rule. The Union of the Third Reich and the USSR ground down Eastern Galicia, subordinating it to a completely new state organisation for the Galicians: ridiculous, counterintuitive and, in my grandmother's opinion, unnatural.

However, soon, in 1941, the apocalypse sparkled with new colours. The Soviet Union went to war with its former ally, Nazi Germany, and my grandfather was drafted into the Soviet army. He later recalled that in that army neither he nor other similar new fighters were given weapons. Perhaps – I am extrapolating the experience of the great Russian war against Ukraine – they should have become nothing more than cannon fodder. But in fact, several million Soviet soldiers ended up in Nazi concentration camps for prisoners of war. My grandfather was among them.

My grandmother Maria found out about this one night when a fugitive from the camp where my grandfather was allegedly detained came to her house. She was not sure that he was talking about her husband or that the information was reliable, but there was a chance that he was alive. So she took some money, packed a few loaves of bread into a large canvas bag (Maria always talked about this bread, because it was an important means of obtaining information from prisoners who were starving and crowded under the huge fence of the camp in the hope that the locals would throw them some food) and went to the outskirts of Lublin, where the camp was located.

As was often the case in Galicia at that time, Maria spoke fluent Polish, so she had no trouble getting along with the inhabitants of the village located near the concentration camp. She was introduced to the locals who worked in the camp and 'had connections,' and, shouting to the prisoners over the fence, she found out that it was indeed the camp my grandfather was being held in. Through her new acquaintances in the village, she discreetly asked the local staff how much it would cost to buy her husband's freedom from the camp. She did not have such sums of money on her, so she had to return home, sell some household property, borrow some money, and go back to Lublin. 'They just brought him by the hand. I handed over the money, and they brought him,' she told me in the late 1990s. My grandmother believed that of all the prisoners kept in that camp, only my grandfather survived.

One reads a similar story in the book *The Choice* by the American psychotherapist Edith Eger. A Hungarian Jew, after liberation from the death camp and crossing the border between Hungary and Slovakia, she found herself in a new state – Soviet-ruled Slovakia. Here, she and her husband were thrown into prison as capitalists, and she saved her family by bribing a prison officer – giving him a precious ring.

In both cases, a person makes an obvious decision of self-preservation from mortal danger, resorting to bribery – an essentially immoral act. I do not know whether readers will condemn my grandmother Maria, but the hundreds of thousands of copies sold and dozens of languages Eger's book was translated into seem to suggest that there is no condemnation for the heroine of the book. Why is that?

First of all, it is clear that this person is not acting within a framework or interacting with a legitimate state, which has the consent of its citizens to govern them. No. Both stories are about an absurd, untrue, unreliable state that coercively confines people within its borders. Such a state has no legitimacy, and any sabotage is justified here. So, if the state is illegitimate or does not exist at all, as was the case during the transition of military power in Eastern Europe between Stalin and Hitler, collective salvation is impossible. The most obvious form of collective salvation is the state's own army, which resists the attacker. This is exactly what is happening in Ukraine now. But if it is not possible, your army is destroyed or you are in occupied or annexed territory, as Maria was, then it is not collective but individual preservation that becomes paramount.

In his book *Black Earth*,[1] American historian Timothy Snyder analyses how the destruction of states by the Nazis in Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine led to extreme levels of violence. The absence of a functioning state proved more deadly than a weak or unfriendly state. Therefore, the survival of an individual person became a matter of personal responsibility and one's network of loved ones – relatives, acquaintances and like-minded people. I suppose that in time, this experience and skill will create a foundation not only for survival, but also for many social pathologies, such as petty domestic corruption.

What life lessons did Maria learn? Having fallen into the clutches of the ruthless machine of the Third Reich in general and Nazi concentration camps in particular, look for a 'soft spot' and try to escape through personal arrangements. Do not engage with the machine itself, but with a person who controls a certain part of it. In this case, the question of the ethics of interaction is completely irrelevant and even detrimental.

Perhaps such a lesson, both for Maria and Edith Eger, would have become a thing of the past and never have been needed after the war if a legitimate state, from the point of view of its residents, friendly to its citizens, had been restored in Eastern Galicia. But here the successor of the Third Reich was the Soviet Union, and it enforced its power using similar methods: terrorising the local population, carrying out selective killings, banning the burial of relatives and mass deportations, while at the same time brutally suppressing free thought and imposing ideological clichés, control of education, statism within all organisations, collectivisation and concomitant enslavement of peasants on collective farms by depriving them of their right to free movement. In short, there was no question that people would accept such a government. It was a state of total coercion and control, where the rules were established not for the benefit of citizens, but to strengthen the state machine. Under these circumstances, the self-preservation strategy continued to be relevant: find someone inside the state and try to influence this person – initially for self-preservation but in time – simply to satisfy basic human needs.

Both of these forms I have described – the absence, or legitimate state vacuum, and a totalitarian state aimed at ensuring its own survival rather than the interests of its people – produce the same results. Individual strategies to achieve one's interests through various methods of state sabotage.

Several generations of totalitarian rule, combined with merciless exploitation of the population by the state, strengthened and consolidated a lot of small

1   T.D. Snyder, *Black Earth. The Holocaust as History and Warning*, Vintage, London 2015.

strategies for using the state for one's own benefit. In a sense this represents an equivalent reciprocity between the state and the citizen, where each side plays against the other. This was the general background against which the Ukrainian state was founded in 1991.

And although the declaration of Ukrainian independence undermined the Soviet Union, the new state inherited all the structures, methods, practices and institutions of Soviet governance. At that time, Ukraine had neither historical nor individual experience of anything that differed from the Soviet governance model. Even those Ukrainian lands that were annexed by Stalin as a result of World War II had been ruled over by other states before the war, which often pursued discriminatory policies against the local Ukrainian population, whose participation in politics and government was limited.

However, the first decade of Ukrainian independence was a time of rapid deterioration of the state: while preserving Soviet rule (based on the widest possible control), Ukraine of the 1990s did not have the resources to reinforce it. Control as a basic principle of governance clashed with the practices of government officials themselves, who tried to balance it with reality on one hand and how this principle affected their own lives on the other: post-Soviet bureaucrats, like all citizens, were also nothing more than tools to be used without any remorse from the state's point of view. In other words, the economic fragility of state institutions combined with an exploitative attitude towards all actors within the system, including civil servants, gradually led to the emergence of these 'soft spots:' the interests of individuals responsible for certain areas of state functioning began to deform these institutions from within. Moreover, they not only deformed them, but even managed to find a certain moral justification: the state's inhumanity vis-à-vis the individual justified that individual's unethical behaviour, including that of a civil servant, toward the state.

As a result, there was a certain tacit indulgence in using the state for one's own benefit. And the merging of interests between certain prominent bureaucrats and sometimes criminal elements turned certain parts of the state (functions, institutions, and sometimes entire bodies, such as ministries) into a kind of 'rogue roadblock.' Controlling channels, or to continue this metaphor, roads on which public resources like power, money, etc. travelled, became a way of earning money. There was even a specific term to describe this activity – 'to sit atop the flows.' For example, through extremely restrictive management or regulatory practices aimed at emerging businesses, other organisations, or even foreign actors that could be mitigated or properly executed 'on demand.' A striking example, which is a significant problem even nowadays, is

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the regulation of urban development in historical city centres. This is a rather highly regulated area, which gives the state a wide range of permitting powers, but this does not prevent ill-considered urban development, infrastructure congestion, etc. One possible reason is that regulation takes place 'on demand,' that is, strict measures that are permitted by law are not carried out systematically for a certain strategic goal that is understandable to citizens, but in an inconsistent and sometimes partial way. For example, some permits are not granted automatically, but selectively, which is still entirely within the law.

Add to this the indifference of most citizens to the quality of the state (after all, the state is always the enemy!) and the historical habit of sabotaging this state and we have downward dynamics of governance that are less and less adapted to social life, and even well-meaning, but low-paid and systematically humiliated civil servants are not able to develop a new intellectual framework for the state. Instead, such a climate encourages dishonest officials to abuse the functions of the state for their own benefit – more on that below.

But something else was characteristic of Ukraine in the 1990s. These were times of social chaos: the state kept its Soviet DNA, but could not maintain it effectively. The opening of borders brought an incredible amount of new information, including acquaintance with other systems of government and political practices, political experiments, an avalanche of facts and historical knowledge about Soviet repressions, the rapid accumulation of wealth in private hands – all this gave rise to an atmosphere of a somewhat terrible carnival that was nonetheless rife with opportunity. Carnival in the sense that is understood by historians and cultural researchers: a medieval carnival that reverses high and low, noble and vile, a time of 'letting off public steam' permitting various forms of behaviour that are unacceptable in ordinary times. This led to the emergence of bizarre entities: private financial–industrial groups that would later be called oligarchic structures, unexpected totalitarian religious sects like the macabre White Brotherhood,[2] and even highly regarded modern universities like the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Kyiv.

An interesting example is the artistic life of that time. The main artistic strategy of the 1990s in Ukraine was transgression – overcoming the widest possible range of restrictions to do the impossible, asserting the supremacy of individual expression over the public good, which not only did not exist in the artistic

2   The White Brotherhood of Yusmalos was a cult founded in 1990 by Marina Tsvetkova and Yuri Krivonogov. The members of the organisation believed in the imminent end of the world. On 10 November 1993, its members attempted a mass suicide. Three years later, the leaders were sentenced to prison (editor's note).

dictionary of the time, but was generally considered ridiculous and almost improper. Hence a large number of erotically coloured, and sometimes quite pornographic works, a travesty of Soviet symbols – a red flag, elements of the coat of arms, making grand gestures that would have been unthinkable a few years before. For example, one of the important exhibitions of that time took place in 1990 at the Lviv Lenin Museum, called Defloration, and was built in particular around a large canvas by Andrei Sahadakovsky – an abstraction in a muddy red colour. Another landmark exhibition project of its time – Alchemic Surrender – took place on board of the battleship *Slavutych* in the Sevastopol harbour in the Crimea. It displayed many works that were criticised, travestied and provoking, none of was connected to the venue location, the navy or any political elements of public life. Particularly interesting in this context is the action by the artistic duo of Ihor Podolchak and Ihor Durich (Masoch Fund), *Art in Space*.

In the autumn of 1992, Ihor Podolchak's graphic works were literally sent into space to the Mir space station. The event was announced as an exhibition of etchings by Ihor Podolchak and the first art exposition in space. The works were delivered by Russian cosmonauts Sergei Avdeev and Anatoly Solovyov, who also filmed the presence of artworks on board, and the video of this event became exhibition material at many subsequent exhibitions. Why is this event worth mentioning? It clearly demonstrates the mixing of hierarchies, the shift of what is permitted and unauthorised, the opening of some previously unattainable public elevators or secret passages, the transformation of something recently considered absurd into something that was practically feasible. Such a social climate contributed to the emergence of socially harmful phenomena, such as the previously mentioned oligarchy, as well as new, useful institutions. It was an intensely carnival-like atmosphere, which could have given birth to both beauty and ugliness.

Certainly this climate also changed the quality of the Ukrainian state. It was no longer totalitarian in practice, but retained some basic settings. There were some innovations inherent in the democratic system, which were 'bolted' onto the totalitarian foundation, fostering even more chaos in an already disoriented state. For instance, asserting the primacy of human rights in some areas has had bizarre consequences.

One of these well-intentioned steps was reinforcing the law so that patients with mental disorders could only be hospitalised with the patient's consent or by court decision. In practice, this led both doctors and local communities and families of patients to avoid interaction with the judicial system, and therefore many patients and their families were left without proper medical care and

social support. At the same time, citizens continued to treat the state as something that must be fought against and limited politically, as well as sabotaged and used individually.

The constitutional formula that required a civil servant to act solely 'on the basis, within the powers and in the manner provided for by the Constitution and laws of Ukraine' became one of these means of political control. The norm, written into the 1996 Constitution and supported by former Soviet dissidents, was an attempt to limit the concentration of state power and prevent the re-emergence of a predatory state that is deadly to its citizens. However, in practice, it sometimes contributed to the paralysis of state functions. How did this manifest?

Usually within the public sector, and especially in the civil service, all parties interpret this norm to mean that an employee can only act on the basis of written regulatory documents: laws, government regulations, ministerial orders, etc. If an employee is faced with a situation that is not described in any regulatory documents or that objectively requires action that violates regulatory documents, that individual refuses to act at all or goes through the motions of purely formal activities to avoid prosecution for official negligence or inaction.

For example, in 2022, during the first days of the full-scale Russian invasion, this became a serious problem for Ukrainian museums in threatened territories. Objectively, the situation required museum directors to take quick unprecedented action to evacuate museum collections, but the directors did not receive the necessary regulatory documents to justify them. They faced a dilemma: to act at their own risk not only in terms of military threats, but also future criminal prosecution for violation of the norms and requirements of sectoral legislation, or refuse to take matters into their own hands and initiate the evacuation. Different museum workers took different decisions. But this situation highlights how limitations of personal judgment and initiative, originally intended to avoid state abuse and violence against citizens, leads to no less negative consequences.

Popular culture even produced funny memes about this issue. One of them featured a well-recognised phrase from news broadcasting in Ukraine: 'People complain, the authorities throw up their hands.' It became a meme after it was repeatedly used by Ukrainian journalists to describe a number of outrageous situations, when citizens demanded that the authorities or state institutions take decisive action to solve problems, and the authorities, having neither instructions nor authorised powers to take action, threw up their hands.

Indeed, we are dealing with a certain 'criminalisation of government:' the very nature of activities related to state functions creates conflict between practice and requirements on the part of citizens as well as the constitutional and regulatory restrictions imposed on government officials. After all, almost any action can potentially lead to criminal prosecution of the person performing the functions of the state. Under such conditions, two behavioural strategies are viable in the public sector: to abandon proactive action in favour of impotent and purely formal functioning (the notorious 'official paperwork!') or assimilate into a system of mutual guarantees.

The system of mutual collusion becomes a safeguard against criminal prosecution and an important element of a self-perpetuating climate of lack of integrity. It means that an employee who has a conscious intention to use the state in their favour coordinates their actions with a wider network of similar actors: dishonest judges, prosecutors, politicians, media and senior civil servants. This creates a mechanism of mutual protection, and gives one the cover to act. Paradoxically, this can be both detrimental to and beneficial for the public good. What is key here is the general capacity to act in this way. That also explains why such actors sometimes combine elements of state sabotage with elements of useful action, which creates significant difficulties for state reform. However, intentions within such a system are far from conscientious.

The alternative and conventionally virtuous behaviour under these conditions is strict compliance with regulations. But since the regulatory framework is never able to exhaustively regulate all areas of common life, and some legislative norms are in conflict with each other, any decision entails a certain degree of legal violation. This leads to inaction or sham activities on the part of civil servants. In a sense, it is nothing more than another form of state sabotage. In my opinion, this is a common behavioural strategy in the public sector, and only a minority of actors (albeit influential) engage in deliberately dishonest behaviour.

This flaw of the Ukrainian state system is exploited by another participant in the process – various law enforcement and state control entities. And here there are also several main approaches: complicity in the mutual protection racket, 'road blocking' by initiating criminal proceedings to pressure certain officials or legitimate investigation. However, even the latter process is often aimed at detecting formal violations of legal and normative acts, which, as we have shown, are practically unavoidable, even when attempting to act in good faith. Formal identification of violations, instead of establishing a real crime

that harms the public good, in this case, is analogous to the sham activities carried out by civil servants.

Such working conditions in the civil service lead to systematic loss of the best experts and preservation of the most incompetent, not to mention encouragement of the most dishonest ones. And this state of affairs cannot be addressed by even tougher measures of employee control and punishment, although this approach to management and civil service quality problems has prevailed in Ukraine from the Revolution of Dignity to the present day.

Perhaps what is needed goes beyond the obvious and tested 'treatment' methods, such as deregulation and reduction of state supervision wherever it is justified. Shouldn't we also consider methods that are counterintuitive for Ukrainian society, such as the gradual and careful expansion of the powers of public sector employees to act and make decisions for the public good? In this case, the key task is to define and describe what Ukrainian society considers public good, which usually happens through a democratic political process. On the other hand, we need collegial bodies that are capable of assessing the actions of a particular actor in these categories: supervisory boards, ethics commissions, self-governing bodies, etc. One of the components of such an approach should be the decriminalisation of a significant part of actions on behalf of the state with the simultaneous introduction of safeguards and balances in the form of a peer assessment. Let us return to the example of the evacuation of museum collections: in an ideal world, the intention to save cultural heritage sites should prevail over waiting for exhaustive instructions in a non-standard, volatile and risky situation.

At the same time, the state itself remains the main actor capable of changing this situation for the better. Its institutions, by demonstrating adaptability to social life and challenges, are able to create 'trust points' with citizens which can potentially foster a different kind of mutual interaction between them. For example, the experience of human interaction with the main universal systems of public good – schools and hospitals – largely determines a person's perception of the state as a whole. Local government plays a similar role in small communities, since the individuals in question are specific and often personal acquaintances. Responsible local government shifts the balance of relations towards greater trust, and therefore less sabotage.

It is important that individual self-preservation ceases to be the most productive survival strategy, replaced by models of common protection and arrangement of living space. In part, the experience of war pushes citizens to this kind of thinking, since it is the collective security system that becomes the guarantor

of survival. The national army, diplomacy, the tax system, national education and culture – all this makes Ukraine possible. For the first time, this kind of discourse is gaining ground in the Ukrainian public space, and there is hope that it will contribute to a positive change in the complex relationship between society and its state.

Metaphorically speaking, nowadays these relationships are mined. Any steps here are perilous and can bring about disastrous consequences: society does not trust the state and its employees, state institutions are built on the presumption of social guilt, lack of trust is traditionally met with stricter control and elimination of privacy, contempt of everyone for everyone is typical, and the occasional attempt to switch to a different model leads to the criminal prosecution of any brave souls who endeavour it. Therefore, the biggest issue faced by Ukraine after the Russian war and overt aggression is how to defuse these relations and make them productive. How to start building relationships where the focus is on the public good, and the initiative aimed at achieving this good is encouraged, rather than punished. The experience of post-Maidan Ukraine shows that it is extremely difficult, and traditional methods often engage resources that lay down more and more mines of mutual antagonism. For the time being, there seems to be no comprehensive answer to this question, which is fundamental for a better future in Ukraine. However, it is vital that we put it in the spotlight and channel all of our intellectual efforts toward finding it.

Yevhen Hlibovytsky

Anti-corruption Threat to Resilience. Counterintuitive Nuances of Ukrainian Institutional Development

In Ukraine, it is difficult to find anyone willing to defend corruption. Rejection of corrupt politicians or civil servants, the stigma of corruption that clings to businesses and even ordinary citizens, is clearly observable in public discourse and sociological research. Corruption and corrupt individuals are invariably ranked second on lists of key challenges and threats, right after Russia, whose malignancy is obvious and beyond comparison. The demand for anti-corruption measures continues, echoing and resonating in media discourse. Investigative journalism is part of the mainstream information flow and actively shapes the political agenda. There are so many officials who have lost their positions after publications exposing their corrupt dealings that it is difficult even to count them. Corruption allegations corrode, weaken and shatter the careers of government officials who initially seemed so promising. Oligarchs appear to be losing their sheen and a significant part of their influence. Anti-corruption norms, procedures and institutions tasked with overseeing these norms and procedures are maturing and becoming familiar features of Ukraine's institutional landscape. Things that were unimaginable just 10 years ago are now becoming routine.

Anti-corruption measures have sharply impacted political practices. Only yesterday, politicians and civil servants benefited from the presumption of infallibility, and their discretion was limited solely by their political weight. Now, not only are procurement and public spending regulated – the spotlight of public scrutiny and formal anti-corruption procedures has been aimed at a significant part of the private lives of formerly privileged groups. Public discourse abounds with complaints and grievances from public figures about how much more difficult it has become to operate within the new constraints. All of this engenders significant social satisfaction and even admiration.

At the same time, Ukrainian civil society, along with international actors – including influential diplomats, donors and researchers – are increasingly voicing criticism of the anti-corruption discourse. Some critics focus on particular aspects they find problematic. But a growing number of voices are questioning the direction of Ukraine's anti-corruption approach more forcefully, challenging not just specific elements of anti-corruption policies but criticising anti-corruption as a priority task in Ukrainian reforms.

Among these critical voices, it is rare to hear a justification of corruption in general or of corrupt practices as such. Yet the same sociological data show that despite the considerable attention devoted to and condemnation of corruption, and dislike and even hatred of corrupt individuals, citizens are far from ready to give up corruption as a tool for achieving their goals. The contemporary political joke, 'I want corruption to be eliminated, and for my mate to sort things out when needed,' clearly illustrates the gap in public attitudes.

To an outside observer, this may appear to be a case of simple inertia in human nature. It is difficult to adapt to new rules that eliminate old privileges. Therefore, if new procedures are introduced, penalties for old practices are established and these principles are strictly upheld, making accountability unavoidable, then cultural change becomes a matter of time. This has been the general discourse of dozens – if not hundreds – of specialised articles on anti-corruption in Ukraine over the past 15 years, all defending a theory of change which claimed that by increasing oversight and strengthening accountability, a fundamental shift could be achieved.

The reality has turned out to be less clear-cut. Anti-corruption reforms have led to the creation of a whole range of institutions tasked with combating corruption through various methods. These include the inevitable punishment imposed by anti-corruption courts and the prosecution service, as well as separate agencies conducting investigations in different areas. There is even an organisation responsible for managing and selling confiscated assets – not to mention the body tasked with preventing corruption. The architecture and logic of the distribution of powers among these institutions require professional immersion. During the implementation of anti-corruption reforms, it became evident that even experts, including judges, often struggle to understand where the authority of one body ends and that of another begins.

And the complexity of implementing anti-corruption reforms in a way that does not provoke the governance system to revert to a punitive mode – one of its natural states – or lead to the replacement of old corrupt figures with new ones under the guise of anti-corruption practices, requires a deeper understanding

of context and an awareness of the depth of the social transformation taking place in Ukraine. These are the two factors that international partners, who support and push for anti-corruption changes, have either failed or chosen not to understand. Had they done so, the theory of change and trajectory of anti-corruption reforms would have been different.

The History Behind the Problem

Ukraine has an interesting characteristic that sets it apart from most countries in the world. Three parameters – the institutional system, infrastructure and human capital – are interlinked. A significant change in one of them affects the others. That is why most countries exhibit a high concentration[1] of data points. However, examination of Ukraine's positions in global rankings reveals an unusually wide range of indicators.

In areas where institutions are measured, Ukraine's global ranking is generally in the two hundreds, and for some indicators, at the bottom of the list. This reflects the competitiveness of the system of rules within which societies operate and the state's capacity. Institutions are characterised by significant continuity – for better or worse – and their transformation typically requires decades of effort. Where infrastructure indicators are measured, Ukraine's figures are closer to the middle of the spectrum. Infrastructure plays a major role in quality of life, while improvements in this area become possible when the contributions of different generations reinforce one another. Wars or natural disasters can set a country back decades. Ukraine's human capital indicators are the highest among its global rankings. Some of them are fully competitive, even at the EU level. While some lag behind, virtually all are within the top one hundred.

This divergence arises from a factor that is as obvious as it is invisible – Ukraine's colonial experience. This colonial continuity should have been broken by the declaration of independence, after which the development of institutions ought to have aligned harmoniously with the new local subjectivity, meaning that human capital and its institutional framework would have synchronised and occupied more or less similar positions in international rankings. And this would have happened if Ukraine's independence had been declared as a result of the victory of the Ukrainian national liberation movement.

However, although the formation of a national liberation movement was in an active phase, Ukraine's independence emerged as a reaction by elites – primarily

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1   The opposite of data dispersion or scattering.

communists who fully controlled Parliament – to the coup in Moscow.[2] For a few days, the coup weakened imperial ties, shifting elite focus to their own existential concerns. Taken together, this was enough for a country whose society had not fully completed the process of preparing for mature subjectivity before plunging into the uncertainty of future independence.

The price of this uncertainty was the necessity to proceed not from a clear goal, as in East Germany – where the aim was the freedom and prosperity of West Germany – or in Poland, where the aim was an imagined independent Poland as might have been realised, had it not been for communist subjugation after the Second World War.[3] In Ukraine – given the country's twentieth-century history of struggle, lost independence and uprisings – survival became the goal and an unchallengeable imperative. In the context of 1991, survival meant preserving paternalism, maintaining the Soviet social contract and thus transferring the Soviet institutional tradition – violent, coercive and bloody – albeit in a softened form, into the new independent state. In effect, a new shell appeared, but it retained the old content.

Along with the old institutions, the Soviet paradigm of the relationship between the citizen and the state was also inherited by independent Ukraine – a paradigm in which the citizen is an object to the state and, under unfavourable conditions, can be caught in the gears of 'the system.' The Ukrainian scale of this threat may be difficult to perceive from outside the country. Poland and other Visegrád countries[4] experienced the horrors of Stalinism in a milder form compared to how it unfolded in Ukraine. Russia experienced only a portion of Ukraine's trauma, as the nature of Russian colonialism's impact on the Russian population was clearly different than its impact on Ukraine. Repression, social engineering, and forced economic and humanitarian transformations left behind a trail of physical destruction and trauma that shattered traditions, embedded itself in culture, and poisoned not only the generations who witnessed and suffered the catastrophe, but also their surviving descendants.

2   The coup in Moscow refers to the failed August 1991 attempt by hardline members of the Soviet government to overthrow Mikhail Gorbachev and reverse his reform policies. The collapse of the coup significantly undermined the authority of the Soviet centre, prompting several Soviet republics, including Ukraine, to declare independence in its aftermath.

3   After the Second World War, Poland fell under Soviet influence and control, becoming a satellite state of the USSR from 1945 to 1989. The collapse of communism across Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 marked the beginning of Poland's regained independence and democratic transformation.

4   The Visegrád countries refer to Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – a group of Central European nations that cooperate on political and economic issues.

Ukraine's twentieth-century historical trauma is rooted in a combination of two components: totalitarianism and colonialism. Totalitarianism instilled in Ukrainians a fear of strong, centralised, unaccountable power which, in its natural state, destroys any sign of subjectivity – even that which is friendly towards it. Any hint of leadership becomes cause for condemnation. Models of social relations based on trust disintegrate. Those who survive are mostly those who distrusted and stepped outside the bounds of historical tradition with all its institutional frameworks. The community, the collective, the family – even broader – every element of identity such as language or religion can become a marker for identification and extermination.

The survival paradigm is deeply rooted in the zero-sum principle. It leaves no room for compromise or cooperation. The core assumptions of this paradigm hold that all relationships – whether private or social – must be subordinated to the ethics of survival, which implies the presumption of the survivor's righteousness. If someone fighting for survival needs to break the law, commit an immoral act or corrupt another party, all these actions are justified by the existential goal. Non-compliance with unaccountable – and thus foreign – rules is justified. Stealing at work is justified. The pursuit of personal enrichment at the expense of the community is justified, as it increases one's chances of survival.

Colonial trauma is the result of prolonged efforts aimed at suppressing subjectivity and the capacity to create one's own rules. Ukrainians in the USSR had only one path to gaining access to managerial knowledge, practices and experience – loyalty to the Soviet system. And while in other societies of the socialist bloc there could be alternative hierarchies that allowed people to encapsulate their own subjectivity and protect it from the system's destructive influence – as, for instance, the Catholic Church in the Polish People's Republic – and while loyalty generally did not conflict with the local cultural framework, in Ukraine, loyalty to the USSR almost invariably meant stepping away from Ukrainian identity and adopting a 'Soviet' identity – which in practice meant a Russian one.

Colonial trauma fosters a form of inertia that is difficult to overcome. Survival practices shaped by the prolonged experience of several generations under totalitarianism or enduring autocracy – which constantly threatens to slip into totalitarianism – are reinforced by the inability to change the rules.

An ethic in which corruption can serve as a tool for safety or increase one's chances of survival becomes fundamental in a society living under the authority of a state that, at any moment, can transform from a provider of social services into a threat to life. Transferring the archetype and role of the state

from one form of statehood to the next, without the filter of independence that might have reset inherited perceptions, led to the entrenchment of corruption as an accessible resource in independent Ukraine.

Theory of Change

In a unique way, the declaration of independence was a consensus reached by very different groups. The communists were saving themselves from changes in Russia that they perceived as threatening, while feeling confident about Ukraine, which they seemed to hold firmly in their grasp. The democrats saw independence as an opportunity to initiate a democratic process that would eventually lead to respect for human rights, the rule of law and other achievements of the developed world. For Ukrainians who, by external markers, were turning into a minority group within the Ukrainian SSR, independence meant a chance to reclaim symbols and attributes that would, over time, be filled with substance. For the millions of paternalists, it was a chance to continue living according to the previous, familiar and tested order.

This unanimity was not recognised in Moscow and came as a surprise to Russian imperialists. However, the vote for independence in Parliament on 24 August 1991 – 346 in favour and only 1 against – and 90% support in the referendum on 1 December 1991, with a majority in every administrative unit, left no room for ambiguity. The unanimity in support for independence and the anti-nuclear stance (at the time a side effect of the Chornobyl disaster rather than a product of security policy) triggered a wave of international recognition of Ukrainian statehood. Russia was weak and disoriented, and Kyiv's policy on post-Soviet reintegration was ambivalent. For a time, Ukraine was safe.

The crisis came later. Communists and red directors in the first Ukrainian governments were openly disoriented and could not keep pace with events. The shifting contexts demanded reactions of a speed and depth for which they were unprepared. Democrats and reformers found themselves in situational opposition, able only to dream of joining a ruling coalition, though they supported the changes they believed to be necessary. The policies of the early years of independence were driven by inertia, continuing the Soviet understanding of the world. New concepts were received by voters in simplified forms: democracy as the dictatorship of the majority, the market as the privilege of the rich.

In the 1990s, challenges outpaced the capacity for adaptation, draining resources and deepening depression. Independence, which in the eyes of most voters was meant to preserve the paternalistic social contract, ended up dismantling it. Instead of providing active care, the paternalistic majority observed the

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helplessness of the state. Even the minority that had sought independence for political reasons experienced all the dimensions of the economic and moral crisis. Gradually, a stratum of Ukrainians began to emerge within society who were willing to step away from the paternalistic social contract of surrendering rights in exchange for social care and take responsibility for themselves.

Those who dared to act independently had to operate under an extreme deficit of security. A dysfunctional state service could not guarantee realisation of the right to private initiative, the inviolability of property or even equality before the law. As an alternative to the state, criminal circles offered short-term security at the cost of long-term dependence. This pushed the most proactive part of society to become less transparent and rely primarily on their own capacity to manage risks transactionally. In this way, corrupt practices, born of a culture of distrust, once again made it possible to obtain a level of security that would have been unattainable by adhering to the letter of the law with its malign spirit.

In effect, a new social contract was being established – one that the Nestor Group[5] would later call the 'corruption consensus contract:' citizens would not pose difficult questions to state representatives, and state representatives would turn a blind eye to most citizen actions. The simplified tax system embodied the most important part of this contract – a non-aggression pact between the parties. The newly self-aware citizens did not trust the state, but they were given a tool to minimise their interaction with it. The state, in turn, hoped this would pacify the population.

At the macro level, a different process was unfolding. Sensing a security deficit and the pervasive presence of Russian interests at the very start of his presidency, President Kuchma[6] chose Ukrainian oligarchy as a model for strengthening national security. A decentralised interest and more structured privileges would turn Ukrainian oligarchs into full-fledged political actors who saw Russian influence as a threat to their own opportunities – as the apt joke goes, 'Only Texans have the right to rob Texas.' As history now shows, Ukrainian oligarchs acquired their assets with full property rights, unlike their Russian counterparts, who held them merely by possession or usage and soon faced political constraints on their autonomy.

5   An interdisciplinary group of experts and philosophers that worked between 2012 and 2017 on conceptualising Ukraine's development trajectory.

6   Leonid Kuchma served as the second President of Ukraine from 1994 to 2005. His presidency was marked by economic stabilisation, the emergence of the oligarchic system and a foreign policy balanced between Russia and the West.

The Ukrainian tax system quickly adapted to the emergence of new actors. At the bottom, this was reflected in the simplified taxation system introduced in the late 1990s, which involved a flat-rate tax, but whose greatest value lay in its tax administration – free from grey assessment zones and the discretion of tax inspectors. At the top, it was a round table of political agreements with a limited number of participants, functioning mostly under the guise of parliamentarism.

A sharp shift in the evolution of these relations came with the pre-election poisoning of Viktor Yushchenko,[7] which led him to reassess the entire agenda of his presidency, devoting a significant part of it not to economic or social reforms but to the restoration of historical memory – in particular, the memory of the Holodomor.[8] The revival of memory about the Great Famine and the shaping of a new context for modern Ukrainian history deepened, for a large part of Ukrainian society, the awareness of a chronic lack of security and the connection between the loss of subjectivity and the loss of security, followed by the historical catastrophes experienced by the Ukrainian people: the Holodomor, repressions, the toll of the Second World War, Russification and, ultimately, Chornobyl as well as the children at the May Day demonstration in Kyiv in 1986 as a symbol of the Soviet system's heartlessness.[9]

The election of Viktor Yanukovych[10] as president in 2010 intensified the antagonism between those who were aware of their own vulnerability and the threat posed by an unreformed state – a descendant of Soviet totalitarianism. The skyrocketing increase in funding for the police, unusually high salaries for special units within the public sector, the purchase of ultra-modern equipment for dispersing demonstrations, and attempts to introduce advanced technologies for facial recognition and surveillance through street camera systems – these

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7   Viktor Yushchenko served as the third President of Ukraine from 2005 to 2010. He survived dioxin poisoning during the 2004 presidential campaign, which became a defining moment of the Orange Revolution. His presidency focused on strengthening national identity, promoting historical memory and pursuing Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration.

8   The Holodomor was a man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 that resulted in the death of 7–10 million Ukrainians. It is widely recognised as a genocide orchestrated by the Stalinist regime.

9   The Chornobyl nuclear disaster occurred on 26 April 1986, just days before the traditional May Day parade. Despite the radioactive fallout, Soviet authorities proceeded with public celebrations, including a mass demonstration in Kyiv involving schoolchildren, deliberately withholding information about the danger. This became a lasting symbol of the regime's disregard for human life.

10   Viktor Yanukovych served as the fourth President of Ukraine from 2010 until he was ousted during the Euromaidan protests in 2014. His presidency was marked by authoritarian tendencies, widespread corruption and a pro-Russian orientation.

were all signs that, as a precaution, it was advisable for a citizen not to risk opposing the state.

By that time, however, colonial trauma was gradually being diluted by access to international education, modern books and increasing openness to the world. Against the backdrop of sustained economic growth in the 2000s, the middle class began to join the national-democratic movement. The trigger for growing anxiety came with the 2008 financial crisis. While relatively mild in Central Europe, the crisis cost Ukraine 15% of its GDP in the first year alone. The populist Tymoshenko[11] cabinet promised that it would 'not let the crisis into Ukraine,' but it was mostly heavily indebted young urban office workers who had to pay for this overconfidence. The financial crisis and the threat posed by the Yanukovych regime brought together various movements, intertwined their competencies and forged them into the foundation of modern Ukrainian civil society.

Watershed Moment

Yanukovych's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU triggered a protest that had every chance of fading away before the end of 2013. Presidential elections were scheduled for the following year, and it was around them that the main political confrontation was most likely to unfold. However, in Kyiv, a series of provocations took place – later revealed to involve Russian security services. These events escalated tensions and ensured that Yanukovych became a hostage to his greatest fear – another Maidan.[12] Ukrainians overcame the regime, and by the end of the winter of 2013–2014, a new form of political subjectivity emerged on the national stage – the first generation of the 'Unexecuted Renaissance.'[13]

This subjectivity combines several characteristics: it is civic, as it defines itself through belonging to and responsibility for Ukraine; it is national, as it

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11   Yuliia Tymoshenko is a Ukrainian politician who served twice as Prime Minister, including during the 2008 global financial crisis. Known for her populist rhetoric and charismatic leadership, she was a key figure in the Orange Revolution and remains one of Ukraine's most prominent political leaders.

12   The Euromaidan was a wave of pro-European, anti-government protests that began in November 2013 after President Yanukovych declined to sign the EU Association Agreement. It culminated in February 2014 with violent clashes, the deaths of over 100 protesters and Yanukovych's eventual ousting.

13   'Unexecuted Renaissance' refers to a symbolic inversion of the 'Executed Renaissance' – a term used to describe the generation of Ukrainian artists, writers and intellectuals who were repressed or killed by the Soviet regime in the 1930s. The phrase highlights the emergence of a new generation of politically active Ukrainians who survived and shaped the country's democratic transformation.

continues the anti-colonial struggle of the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar peoples;[14] it is modernising, as it is grounded in freedom, dignity and the rule of law, representing a continuation of the list of European values from the Treaty of Lisbon and drawing on best governance practices – and thus, by its very nature, it is anti-corruption.

For imperial Moscow, this marked not merely formal but genuine Ukrainian independence – and thus the beginning of the metropolis's war against its rebellious former colony. It started with the annexation of Crimea and continued with the war in Donbas and attempts to destabilise Kharkiv, Odesa as well as other regions. The confrontation took on a final and existential character.

Inside Ukraine, anxiety set in, triggered by the collapse of the defence forces – the tenure of a defence minister with a Russian passport ended in only 6,000 combat-ready troops[15] – the weakness of the state administration system, which led to the appointment of oligarchs as heads of regional state administrations, and the absence of political leadership, as President Yanukovych, Prime Ministers Azarov and Arbuzov simply fled, while the Speaker of Parliament, Rybak, resigned. At the same time, the United States and Ukraine's key Western partners warned against attempts to resist in Crimea and did not provide military assistance for the war in Donbas.

Since 2014, the lack of security has once again become an existential challenge for Ukraine. Volunteers on the front lines in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, through bloody battles, bought time for the Ukrainian state to hold elections and avoid a power vacuum. However, the nature of this challenge has no clear interpretation within civil society, which split into two camps. One sees the broad notion of security as the top priority – both national, meaning the protection of the state, and human, meaning the protection of the individual. This implies the need for deep reforms, from the defence sector to the public sector, the desovietisation of state-citizen relations and large-scale deregulation. The updated social contract, as defined by the Nestor Group, supports the same idea when it speaks of attempts to build trust between active citizens and

14   The anti-colonial struggle of the Crimean Tatar people includes their mass deportation by Stalin in 1944, when nearly 200,000 Crimean Tatars – over 90% of the population – were forcibly removed from Crimea to Central Asia. Thousands died during the deportation and in the harsh conditions that followed. The Crimean Tatars have continued to resist Russian control, especially after the 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation.

15   In 2012–2014, Pavlo Lebedyev served as Ukraine's Minister of Defence. A former Russian citizen with business ties to Crimea and Russia, he fled to Sevastopol during the 2014 revolution. Under his tenure, Ukraine's armed forces were critically underfunded and unprepared, with only around 6,000 troops deemed combat-ready at the time of Russia's annexation of Crimea.

administrations for the sake of the only thing that can guarantee social security – an independent state. The second camp identifies corruption as the central issue, setting aside continuity and historical context. This view was quickly adopted by the US administration, which made anti-corruption efforts the primary priority of its support for civil society.

The anti-corruption rhetoric in Ukraine, focused on formal institutions, partially overlaps with one of the narratives promoted by Russian propaganda, which seeks to emphasise the dysfunction and impotence of the Ukrainian public sector as incapable of building and sustaining a hierarchy modelled on the Russian example. In contrast to the Ukrainian case, Russian corruption is fully centralised, masked as a power vertical, and integrated into the system of state governance in Russia and across the post-Soviet space. Moscow has used corrupt mechanisms to control post-Soviet elites, and a significant share of corrupt relationships – in energy, transport and raw material exports – has been Moscow-centred.

However, the anti-corruption movement in Ukraine focuses on building Ukrainian anti-corruption institutions, largely without anti-colonial or security-related framing. Subsequent years were dedicated to attempts to launch an ecosystem of bodies intended to make the governance system transparent and cleansed. Yet not all institutions proved to be equally successful. Some reforms were controversial – such as the concept of prosecutorial or judicial self-governance prior to ethical vetting – while others became dependent on political circumstances (such as the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI), the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), the Office of the Prosecutor General or the judicial selection commissions), were politically blocked (like the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU)), or took on a punitive nature, transforming them from bodies of prevention or monitoring into instruments of selective political persecution. Together, they discouraged talented candidates from entering the public sector through mechanisms such as the mandatory declaration of assets by hundreds of thousands of public servants or politically exposed persons (PEP),[16] which covered an excessive number of individuals.

16   A politically exposed person (PEP) is an individual who holds a prominent public position or has close ties to someone who does. PEP status is used in anti-money laundering and compliance frameworks to flag higher-risk individuals but, in Ukraine, the broad application of this designation has included hundreds of thousands of people, often leading to excessive scrutiny and unintended deterrence from public service.

Ultimately, the leaders of the anti-corruption movement themselves have acknowledged its limited capacity. As Daria Kaleniuk from the Anti-Corruption Action Centre admitted: 'I told Blinken that I no longer believe in the fight against corruption, because the Russians are executing Ukraine for our progress in building the rule of law and fighting corruption, while America has turned away and is not providing the help we need.'

Ukrainian history clearly shows that on the frontier, anti-corruption policy begins with enhanced security. The resolution of existential challenges liberates actors, allowing them to move beyond zero-sum constraints, to take risks, to experiment, to make mistakes and not fear that creative destruction of the system will lead to catastrophic consequences. However, the unwillingness of international partners to act as providers of security in Ukraine – as they have done in other European countries – ultimately undermines the coherence of their anti-corruption efforts. The prioritisation of EU integration over NATO membership is also telling. Western partners are willing to support Ukraine, but only to a limited extent and in ways that are as low-risk for themselves as possible.

From the Ukrainian perspective, the difference between a corrupt state and the loss of the state is the difference between an imperfect life and the loss of life itself.

Olha Aivazovska

Wartime Democracy on the Road to the EU

The Economist Democracy Index[1] reveals that just 7.8 percent of the world's population lives in full democracies. This marks a 1 percent decrease since 2022, indicating that hundreds of millions of people cannot fully engage in their country's governance, either directly or through legitimately elected representatives. The deteriorating situation is partly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing armed conflicts, including Russia's war in Ukraine.

Although the Index did not classify Ukraine as a fully developed electoral democracy prior to the full-scale invasion, its authors acknowledged that Ukrainian authorities are 'struggling to improve the state of democracy.' In terms of the electoral process and political participation, Ukraine was even rated higher than some countries labelled as 'flawed democracies.' This status bolsters Ukraine's efforts to secure military and political support from Western countries.

The martial law[2] declared by the President of Ukraine,[3] restricts certain rights and freedoms to strengthen the country's defence capabilities. This move constituted a deviation from the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, a fact formally communicated to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Notably, until the special legal regime ends, the law prohibits constitutional changes, bans elections at all levels and referendums, and restricts peaceful assemblies. These restrictions impede electoral representative democracy and indefinitely suspend the political process in Ukraine.

Nonetheless, Ukraine continues to offer a democratic space that remains largely absent in many regional states, particularly in post-Soviet societies. As a

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1 Age of conflict https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/Democracy-Index-2023-Final-report.pdf?version=0.

2 https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/389-19#Text.

3 https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/64/2022#n2.

nation at war, it must still comply with European Union (EU) accession requirements and advance reforms in the rule of law, judicial integrity, democracy, and human rights.

There is likely no global precedent for an electoral democracy like Ukraine facing such simultaneous existential challenges – striving to uphold standards for potential post-war elections while implementing a broad set of fundamental reforms essential for EU accession. No other country has navigated this unique path under comparable circumstances, making Ukraine's experience particularly significant on a global scale.

Post-War Election Preparations Indicate Democratic Advancement

In October 2023, 81 percent[4] of Ukrainian citizens disapproved of holding elections during the ongoing war – a figure that decreased to 74 percent by May 2024. Only 24 percent[5] of the population supports conducting elections during the 'active phase' of the war.[6] Additionally, over 200 civil society organisations signed a collective statement in September 2023 opposing election plans amid the conflict, outlining several key concerns:

- **Authenticity of elections:** Elections must be genuine rather than merely ceremonial, which requires the restoration of the full range of human rights and freedoms that have been significantly restricted under martial law.

- **Legal and political risks:** Current law prohibits elections, and electoral competition risks politicising the actions of defence forces and military leaders – potentially endangering Ukraine's status as a sovereign state.

- **Security challenges and legitimacy concerns:** Ukraine faces significant security threats and lacks sufficient guarantees to ensure safe elections. These challenges could hinder campaigning efforts, depress voter turnout, and undermine the legitimacy of the election outcome.

- **Voter exclusion and social tensions:** Excluding key voter groups – such as millions of internally displaced persons, Ukrainians under temporary protection abroad, and military personnel – would not only distort

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4   https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=1309&page=1.

5   https://www.kiis.com.ua/materials/pr/20240801_n/May%202024%20Opportunities%20and%20 Challenges%20Facing%20Ukraine's%20Democratic%20Transition%20%28Ukrainian%29.pdf.

6   https://www.oporaua.org/vybory/gromads-ki-organiziaciyi-proti-provedennya-viboriv-v-ukrayini -pid-chas-viyni-24904.

representation but also heighten social tensions, ultimately calling into question the legitimacy of the government.

In November 2023, at the ninth Jean Monnet Dialogue meeting,[7] Ukrainian lawmakers agreed to hold elections within six months of the end of martial law, using the existing electoral system. This decision reflects a shared understanding among citizens, experts, and officials that conducting genuine elections during the ongoing hostilities is not feasible.

As Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has evolved into a lengthy war of attrition, trust has waned in political institutions, including Parliament. Consequently, it is crucial to outline immediate actions to enable the swift restoration of Ukraine's electoral system once the security situation stabilises.

The first post-war elections must prioritise identifying key organisational and political risks, safeguarding the political process from Russian interference, drafting effective legislation, and conducting extensive outreach both within Ukraine and in host countries accommodating the largest groups of Ukrainians under temporary protection status.

The Constitution of Ukraine guarantees citizens the right to free expression – a particularly challenging principle to uphold in the post-war period. As such, transitional elections marking the shift from war to peace must be carefully planned.

The Constitutional Court of Ukraine[8] has emphasised that the principle of free elections relies on several key components: the freedom of voters to form and express their opinions; the objective and accurate official determination of election results, free from fraud; and the recognition of these results, alongside respect for the democratic choices of Ukrainian citizens.

Therefore, beyond the constitutional requirements for the electoral process and the interpretations provided by the Constitutional Court of Ukraine – in line with international standards – post-war elections will present one of the most significant challenges for the qualitative restoration of political life. This challenge stems not only from organisational complexities but also from society's high expectations regarding electoral democracy.

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7   https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Top-novyna/243634.html.

8   Абз. 10 пп. 2.4 п. 2 мотивувальної частини Рішення від 21 грудня 2017 року, № 3-р/2017, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/v003p710-17#Text.

For 67 percent of citizens, it is considered 'very important' that Ukraine becomes a full democracy, while another 26 percent view it as 'important.'[9] Thus, in 2024, over 95 percent of Ukrainians expressed support for this direction of state development.

To ensure Ukraine's continued progress, its Parliament must move beyond the stereotypical view of the pre-election process – specifically, the notion that any consideration of reform signals preparations for imminent elections. In reality, neither the Central Election Commission of Ukraine nor any political institutions or parties have ever successfully navigated such a challenge.

When the cost of error can be exceedingly high, investing in the country's institutional capacity and potential electoral participants should be treated as a systematic priority.

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine should enact a special law to regulate the organisation of the first post-war elections, taking into account new challenges such as ensuring the security of participants and countering Russian interference. Regardless of the situation at the front, the likelihood of Russian interference in political processes remains at 100 percent.

To address these challenges, it is essential to create conditions that enable all citizens to participate in the electoral process, regardless of their location. When the post-war parliamentary elections take place, representativeness cannot be fully guaranteed without substantial voter participation in the foreign electoral district. Currently, around 20 percent of the Ukrainian electorate resides outside Ukraine.

Therefore, the challenge lies not only in opening a proportional number of polling districts or stations but also in implementing a comprehensive outreach, education, and mobilisation campaign. In this context, it is crucial to secure understanding and support from the countries that have welcomed the largest number of Ukrainians under temporary protection status, particularly in facilitating voting and ensuring their backing rather than opposition to the electoral process.

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9 https://www.kiis.com.ua/materials/pr/20240801_n/May%202024%20Opportunities%20and%20
Challenges%20Facing%20Ukraine's%20Democratic%20Transition%20%28Ukrainian%29.pdf.

Key Outstanding Challenges

Open-list proportional representation
A key component of Ukraine's 10-year electoral reform for parliamentary elections, may face scrutiny from politicians regarding its application in post-war elections due to the complexity of procedural issues.

Voter accessibility and electoral legitimacy
Exercising the right to vote must consider the significant internal migration within Ukraine, as well as the millions of voters residing abroad. Expanding opportunities for participation in the voting process will strengthen the legitimacy of electoral bodies and help mitigate the risks associated with Russian interference in the political process.

Residency requirements and the right to be elected
The right to be elected must be protected and adapted to post-war realities. For instance, Ukrainian citizens who left the country at the onset of the full-scale invasion and later returned would, under current law, be ineligible to run for parliamentary or presidential elections due to the violation of residency requirements – five years for parliamentary elections and ten years for presidential elections.

Implementation of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations
Applying the recommendations from OSCE/ODIHR missions conducted between 2014 and 2020 will signal political will and a commitment to align Ukraine's electoral processes with the Copenhagen criteria, a fundamental step towards EU accession.

Security and safeguarding electoral integrity
Legislative regulation of security challenges – including physical security, cybersecurity and data protection, political security, and efforts to counter Russian disinformation and propaganda – must be paired with practical solutions. These include the development of infrastructure, training, provision of equipment, as well as the creation of bylaws and clear guidelines for organisers and participants. Even for post-war elections, the voting infrastructure must account for heightened threat levels in regions near the demarcation line or the Russian border. A ceasefire alone cannot fully protect elections from potential disruptions caused by planned and systematic attacks.

Community security and the military-to-civilian transition

Establishing a legal framework to evaluate community security during the transition from military to civilian administration is essential to prevent the politicisation of electoral decisions at the regional level. Given Ukraine's diverse security landscape, an impartial assessment scale is critical to mitigate political manipulation and interference.

Election infrastructure and post-war recovery

Election infrastructure must be made more accessible to all citizens as well as prioritised in post-war recovery and reconstruction efforts, ensuring that electoral processes remain resilient and inclusive.

Whenever post-war elections are held, Ukraine must be prepared to align its practices and procedures with EU legislation and the Copenhagen criteria in real time. The demand from Ukrainian society for high-standard elections remains vital. Achieving this requires the implementation of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations as well as the development of legislative frameworks and practical measures for conducting post-war elections under extremely challenging security conditions.

Ukraine must also focus on strengthening the capacity of democratic institutions, particularly at the local level and within public consultations, to ensure inclusive and resilient governance.

A comprehensive revision of Ukraine's political party legislation – untouched for two decades – will be essential for EU integration. Although a new draft law has been under development in Parliament for five years, it has yet to be adopted. Its approval has been repeatedly postponed, largely due to existing conditions that benefit most political players.

While parties retain a monopoly on nominating candidates for parliamentary and local elections in major cities and regions, they are not required to uphold democratic internal practices. This gap in accountability presents a significant obstacle to aligning Ukraine's political system with EU standards.

Consequently, the key players in the political landscape may, in fact, be the least democratic. Without the implementation of effective governance procedures within political parties, post-war elections could face even greater challenges in ensuring the quality and legitimacy of political representation.

In addition to the aforementioned points, further changes must be addressed promptly to ensure legal certainty for future election participants. These

proposals, along with others, have been outlined in the collaborative Roadmap for Reforms developed by the Civil Network OPORA and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).[10]

Civic Engagement Tools in Wartime

Despite the absence of elections and the protracted conflict, Ukraine maintains a structured system for civic engagement in governance. Although often overshadowed by military threats, this system plays a crucial role in preventing any political figure from consolidating authoritarian power.

Shifts in public discourse, along with instances of criticism and conflict between civil society, the government, and its institutions, reflect that both military and political leaders remain attentive to public opinion. Moreover, non-governmental organisations and the media are gradually moving beyond the military's self-censorship, increasingly critiquing government actions and officials.

This also pertains to the timeframe for restoring political processes in Ukraine, which remains highly adaptable and depends entirely on battlefield conditions, the scale of international support and military aid, shifts in the political landscapes of key partner nations, and prospects for peace talks.

Evolving rhetoric from the Kremlin, Ukraine's allies, and Kyiv itself frequently shapes this dynamic. As a result, the country's political leadership often navigates the political landscape through an electoral context paradigm, despite the absence of formal elections.

Since 2019, citizens have submitted 51,000 e-petitions to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. In 2023, a record number of these petitions surpassed the required threshold of 25,000 signatures, prompting the President to issue responses on 105 occasions.[11] The subjects of these appeals vary widely, from requests to posthumously award the title of Hero of Ukraine to fallen soldiers to calls for the President to veto legislation passed by Parliament. Importantly, when petitions receive the required support from verified users, the authorities are legally obliged to address them in accordance with the Law of Ukraine on Citizens' Appeals.

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10   https://www.oporaua.org/vybory/dorozhnya-karta-viborchoyi-reformi-v-ukrayini-2023-v-umovah -voyennogo-chasu-24959.

11   https://ms.detector.media/internet/post/34048/2024-01-24-2023-rik-stav-rekordnym-za-kilkistyu -petytsiy-do-prezydenta-yaki-nabraly-neobkhidni-golosy-rukh-chesno/.

While users may not always be satisfied with how their concerns are addressed, this tool has proven effective even under martial law. Petitions frequently bolster advocacy campaigns, such as one urging the President to veto a legislative bill that barred the disclosure of officials' property declarations.[12] Within just a few days, the petition's author and various anti-corruption NGOs collected nearly 84,000 signatures – far exceeding the required 25,000 – prompting the President to veto the bill and reinstate e-declarations.

A petition urging the President to prohibit electronic casinos – viewed as a harmful addiction for both military personnel and civilians during the war – gained significant traction and received the necessary support. Tragically, the petition's author, soldier Petro Petrychenko, lost his life in action. Nonetheless, his initiative continues to elicit responses from various officials, including the President.

The advocates behind the petition have notably influenced political discourse by creating the electronic petition and raising public awareness about the issue, drawing attention to material or corrupt interests.

The mass media play a crucial role in shaping the quality of politics. Despite the ongoing war, the government has not imposed significant military censorship. Although the *United News* telethon faces strong criticism from the opposition and civil society organisations, alternative perspectives on war, peace, and public administration continue to find space in public discourse.

As most citizens now obtain news from the internet, any systemic restrictions are unlikely to be effective.

At the onset of the full-scale invasion, investigative journalists primarily focused on documenting war crimes committed by the Russian military and addressing related security concerns. Since the autumn of 2023, a growing number of articles centred on anti-corruption investigations have emerged in the public sphere, particularly from media outlets such as Bihus.info, Nashi Hroshi, Skhemy, Slidstvo.info, and others.

Ukrainian society often receives these journalistic works with considerable distress. Nevertheless, they serve as a crucial safeguard against actions that could undermine the efforts of both the military and civilians in their struggle for the state's future survival.

12   https://petition.president.gov.ua/petition/204906.

On June 20, 2024, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law of Ukraine on Public Consultations in its second reading and as a whole. This process was both lengthy and inclusive. The law establishes the core principles of public consultations for developing and implementing public policy as well as addressing local issues.

However, the law does not apply to Members of Parliament (MPs) or the President, though it does cover central and local governments. The legislation will come into effect twelve months after the end of martial law.

This law formalised a non-binding practice shaped by the influence of certain heads of central authorities or local self-government bodies, as defined in the hromada (community) charter. For instance, the inclusive approach of developing any draft law with stakeholder involvement already fosters a positive reputation for the initiative in Ukraine, particularly when referenced by the Venice Commission or ODIHR in their conclusions on draft laws.

Even amidst the protracted war of attrition that Russia has waged against Ukraine in retaliation for its independence, Ukraine has the opportunity to strengthen its democratic practices without a formal election process. The negotiation of Ukraine's EU membership can reinforce structural reforms within democratic institutions and promote the country's progress during wartime.

Moreover, steady, professional, and balanced preparations for future elections will signal to the public that Ukraine's democratic practices are resilient and not solely dependent on the current leadership.

Yana Okhrimenko

Corruption and Ukraine's EU Integration

Overcoming corruption is one of the key conditions for Ukraine's accession to the EU. In addition to creating formal obstacles to EU integration, corruption in Ukraine, in particular, inhibits economic growth, creates conditions for a large informal sector, and harms the establishment of closer cooperation with EU Member States at the sectoral level. Thus, corruption often serves as an indicator or concomitant factor of other structural problems, complicating the process of Ukrainian EU integration. Thus, an approach to combating corruption that ignores the complexity of this phenomenon and is based exclusively on the fulfilment of formal institutional requirements can hardly be effective in Ukraine.

This report aims to formulate key recommendations for Ukraine to make the fight against corruption more successful. To this end, we analyse the key economic threats of corruption and the potential impact they have on Ukraine's accession to the EU. In addition, we discuss the economic context of corruption in the country and the structural problems that exacerbate its impact. We also present the main trends regarding various aspects of corruption in Ukraine. The conclusions and recommendations are presented in the last section.

Corruption as an Obstacle to Economic Integration with the EU

In the last available Enlargement Report for Ukraine published in 2023,[1] the European Commission highlights the fight against corruption as one of the key conditions for Ukraine's accession to the EU. However, corruption is not only about the so-called 'fundamentals of the accession process.' This phenomenon carries numerous risks and creates barriers to economic integration with the EU, in particular, hindering income growth, contributing to the shadow economy, and hampering cooperation at the sectoral level. The rest of this section is devoted to a detailed analysis of the factors listed above.

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1   Ukraine Report 2023 – European Commission (europa.eu) (available here and further: 20 March 2025).

The Impact of Corruption on Income and Prospects for Economic Convergence

Per capita income in Ukraine is about 29% of the EU-27 average. Ukraine is only slightly ahead of Moldova, remaining behind the rest of the Member States and EU candidate countries.

In addition, Ukraine falls behind in other indicators related to the economic foundations of EU accession (i.e. a functional market economy and the ability to cope with competition in the internal market).[2]

GDP per capita (% from the average indicator value for EU-27) in Ukraine and the EU Member States and candidate states in 2023.
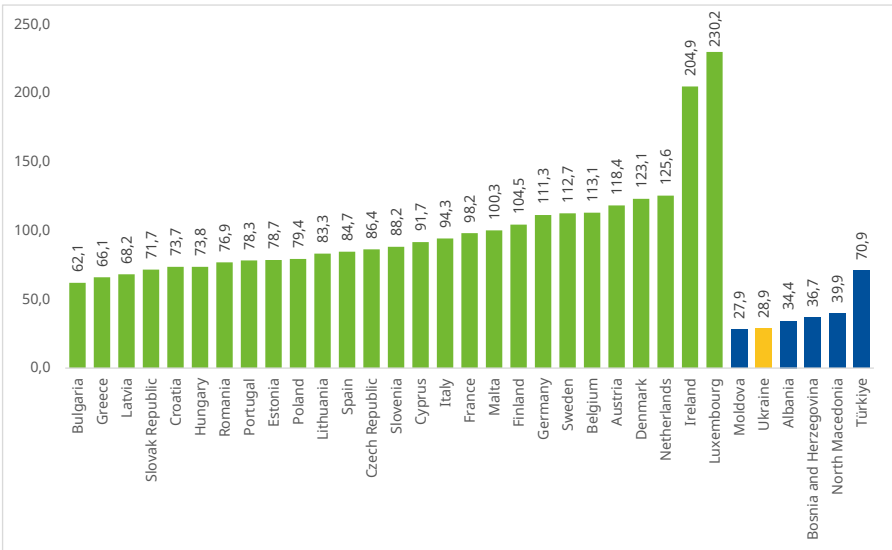
Source: CES calculation and visualisation of CES based on GDP per capita data, PPP (current international $) | Data (worldbank.org).

The Ukrainian economy will need a number of structural reforms to approach the income and economic development levels of the EU Member States. Corruption reduces the effectiveness of public investment[3] and negates incentives

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2   See: CES research on the prospects of EU accession for Ukraine Economy Review in November. Centre for Economic Strategy, *EU Accession Negotiations: Is the Ukrainian Economy Ready?*, *Economy Review* (ces.org.ua).

3   D. de la Croix, C. Delavallade, *Growth, Public Investment and Corruption with Failing Institutions*, *Economics of Governance*, 10, 2008, pp. 187–219, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10101-008-0057-4.

for private investments.[4] Thus, this phenomenon slows down the pace of economic growth in Ukraine.

Corruption and the Shadow Sector

The shadow sector (also known as the 'informal sector') refers to economic and entrepreneurial activity beyond the regulation of the state. According to the most current estimates for 2020,[5] Ukraine is ahead of the absolute majority of EU Member States and candidate states in terms of the relative size of the shadow sector, which accounts for 46% of official GDP (while the maximum rate among EU Member States and EU accession candidates is 28.4% and 42.8%, respectively). It is also worth noting that since 1990 the value of this indicator in Ukraine has not fallen below 42% of official GDP, so this is a long-term problem.

Estimated size of the shadow sector (% of official GDP) in Ukraine and EU Member States and candidate states in 2020
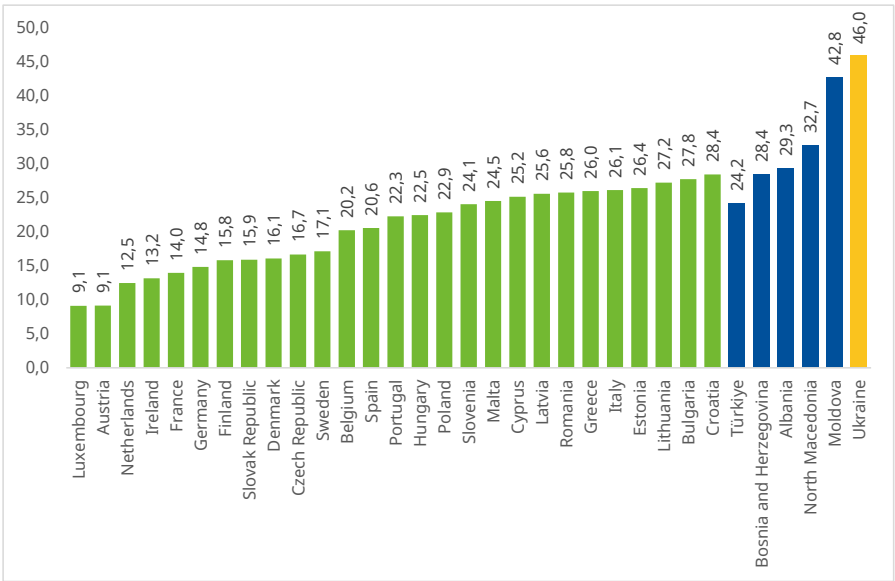
CES visualisation based on C. Elgin, M.A. Kose, F. Ohnsorge and S. Yu, *Understanding Informality*, CERP Discussion Paper 16497, Centre for Economic Policy Research, London 2021, Informal Economy Database (worldbank.org). Note: Estimates based on the dynamic general equilibrium model were used.

While this link may not seem obvious, the level of corruption and the relative size of the shadow economy are closely related, especially in lower-income countries. In developed countries, public goods provided by the state – the rule of law, compliance with contracts, and national defence – serve as incentives for most entrepreneurs to stay within the formal economy and legal framework. However, in the absence of the above-mentioned benefits, the motivation to 'stay in the shadows' is much stronger, even if it requires paying a bribe. Thus, in less developed countries, there is a high probability of both a high level of corruption and a significant shadow sector that mutually reinforce each other.[6,7,8]

The significant size of the shadow sector in Ukraine is the cause of a number of systemic economic problems that create barriers to EU membership. In particular, the possibility of developing and implementing an effective and predictable fiscal and monetary policy is significantly limited, since a significant share of production is beyond the regulation of the state. Similarly, interventional and sectoral policies also have limited impact.

Corruption as an Obstacle to Cooperation with European Manufacturers at the Industry Level

Full-fledged economic integration of Ukraine into the domestic market requires the enhancement of cooperation at a sectoral level, that is, between associations of producers and individual enterprises. Corruption undermines trust – a fundamental element of business relationships. European businesses may be cautious with regards to cooperation with Ukrainian partners if they perceive a high risk of corrupt practices. Corruption is also associated with higher costs (these can include both direct costs, such as bribes and other informal payments, and indirect costs, such as inefficiencies, delays, etc.). In addition, it is necessary to remember EU legislation and international treaties and conventions ratified in EU Member States (in particular, the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Officials in International Business Transactions[9])

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6   A. Dreher and F. Schneider, 'Corruption and the Shadow Economy: An Empirical Analysis', *Public Choice*, 144, 2010, pp. 215-238.

7   I.M. Ouédraogo, 'Governance, Corruption, and the Informal Economy', *Modern Economy*, 8, 2017, pp. 256–271.

8   L. Batrancea, A. Nichita, I. Batrancea and L. Gaban, 'The Strength of the Relationship Between Shadow Economy and Corruption: Evidence from a Worldwide Country-Sample', *Social Indicators Research*, 138, 2018, pp. 1119–1143, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-017-1696-z.

9   Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions – OECD.

provide for legal liability for entrepreneurs who engage in corruption (even if it is a bribe for foreign government officials and business representatives).

Corruption in Ukraine: Key Trends

Since 2012, the level of corruption in Ukraine has significantly decreased, among other reasons, due to European integration reforms (see Fig. 3). However, the indicator remains markedly lower compared to EU Member States, where the average value of the Corruption Perceptions Index is 64.

Corruption Perception Index in Ukraine in 2012–2023
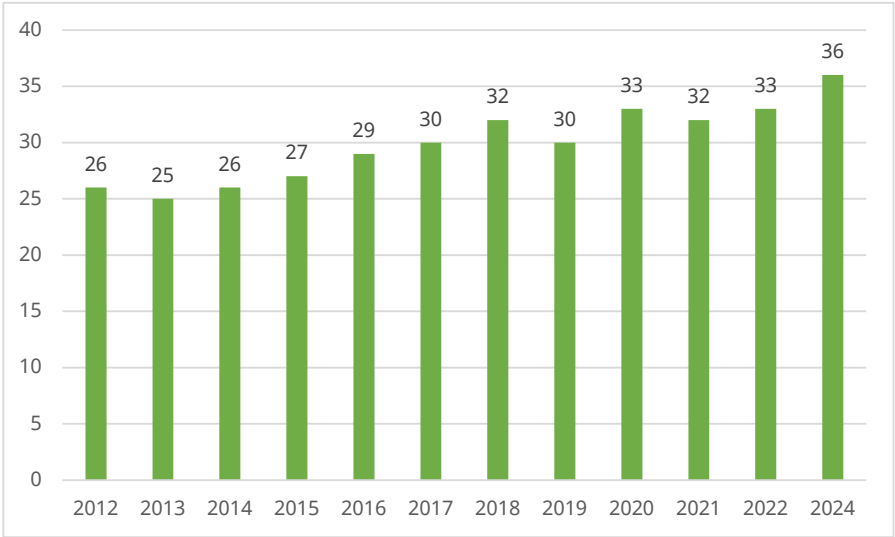
Source: Ukraine – Transparency.org. Note: scale from 0 (maximum level of corrupt practices) to 100 (minimum level of corrupt practices).

According to 50.6% of the Ukrainian population in 2023, reform of the judicial system (including institutions executing court decisions) is a priority area in the fight against corruption. It is worth noting that the share of the population sharing this opinion has increased compared to 2021 and 2022. Customs reform is in second place – 37.8% of respondents in 2023 considered this area a priority. In third place is state and municipal healthcare: in 2023, 29.6% of the population considered this area a priority (while in 2021 the respective share was 46.9%).[10]

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10   Source: National Agency for Corruption Prevention and InfoSapiens, *Corruption in Ukraine 2023: Understanding, Perception, Prevalence*, 2023. The population survey was conducted using compu-

Information on the proportion of the population that has personally encountered corruption in various fields is presented in Fig. 4 (the statistics above apply only to respondents who interacted with the relevant authorities in the last 12 months; the questions concerned any situations with signs of corruption). It should be stressed that there is a rather significant gap between perceptions of corruption prevalence and actual corruption experience: 24.3% of the population noted that in 2023 the level of corruption 'increased considerably' compared to 2022. However, this estimate does not correlate with the change in the proportion of respondents who encountered corruption personally (see Fig. 4). Perhaps the reason is that the majority of respondents consider political corruption at the highest level to be more common and dangerous; at the same time, this opinion is formed under the influence of media discourse, and not from one's own experience.[11]

With respect to personal experiences with corruption (and not perception), education and medicine remain stable areas where 'everyday' corruption is most widespread. However, it should be borne in mind that in Ukraine, the salaries of doctors are quite low, not only in comparison with their foreign peers, but also with other industries.[12] At the same time, in Ukraine, the state guarantees unconditional and free medical care, which is practically unheard of in other EU countries (for comparison, in Poland there is compulsory and voluntary state medical insurance – more affordable than private medicine, but not free). The gap between the demand for public health services and their supply, combined with insufficient staffing, leads to corruption risks. The situation is quite similar in the field of primary and secondary education.[13]

It should be noted that public services (including service centres of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, centres for the provision of administrative services, the activities of law enforcement agencies) seem to be the least corrupt.
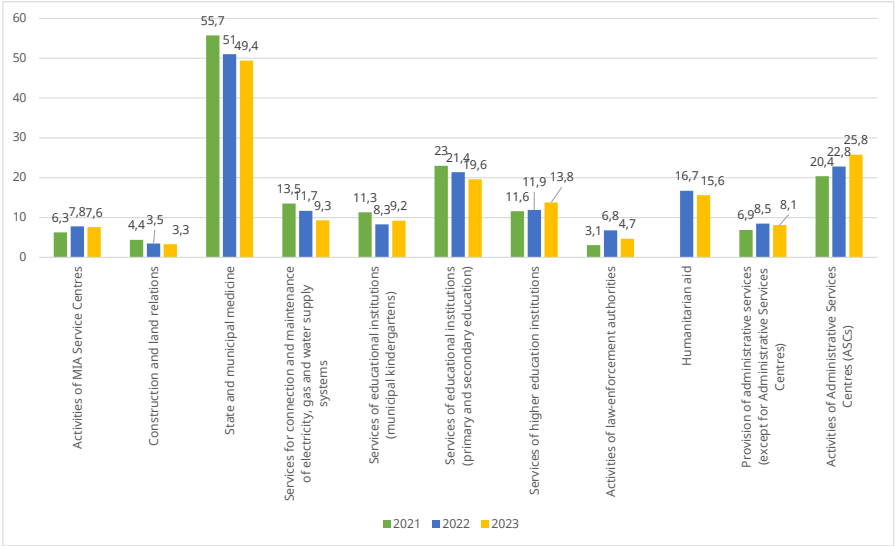
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terised personal interviews (CAPI). The sample size in 2021, 2022, and 2023 was 2,636, 2,646, and 2,488 respondents, respectively. For all waves of the survey, the samples were stratified by region and settlement type. The maximum theoretical error of the population sample does not exceed ±2 percentage points.

11   Source: National Agency for Corruption Prevention and InfoSapiens, *Corruption in Ukraine 2023: Understanding, Perception, Prevalence*, 2023. The population survey was conducted using computerised personal interviews (CAPI). The sample size in 2021, 2022, and 2023 was 2,636, 2,646, and 2,488 respondents, respectively. For all waves of the survey, the samples were stratified by region and settlement type. The maximum theoretical error of the population sample does not exceed ±2 percentage points.

12   See up-to-date statistics on average salaries by job vacancies: Average salary in Ukraine – Work. ua.

13   See up-to-date statistics on average salaries by job vacancies: Average salary in Ukraine – Work. ua.

Corruption experienced by the population according by sector in 2021–2023
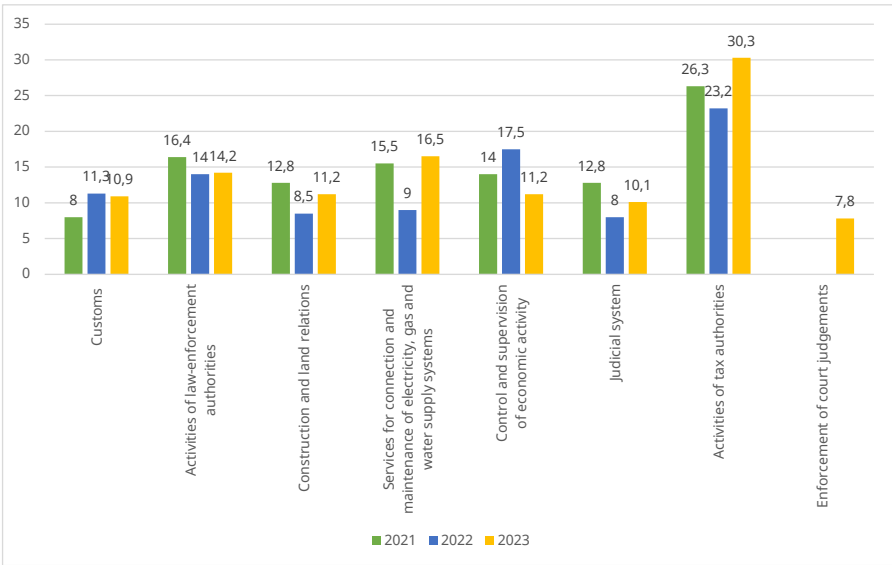

Source: National Agency for Corruption Prevention and InfoSapiens, *Corruption in Ukraine 2023: Understanding, Perception, Prevalence*, 2023. The population survey was conducted using computerised personal interviews (CAPI). The sample size in 2021, 2022, and 2023 was 2,636, 2,646, and 2,488 respondents, respectively. For all waves of the survey, the samples were stratified by region and settlement type. The maximum theoretical error of the population sample does not exceed ±2 percentage points. Statistics are given for respondents who interacted with the relevant authorities during the last 12 months (both the experience of the respondents and the experience of their family members are taken into account).

From a business perspective, customs reform is of paramount importance for success in the fight against corruption (in 2023, this opinion was shared by 58.3% of respondents, and this indicator did not undergo significant changes compared to 2021). Second place is occupied by the sphere of public procurement and services related to the construction, repair, and maintenance of highways – 33.4% of respondents consider these a priority. Judicial system reform is in third place, and it is a priority for 31.7% of respondents. At the same time, reforms of business control and supervision bodies, as well as the provision of administrative services, are among the lowest priority areas in the fight against corruption in the opinion of business representatives.[14]

14   Source: National Agency for Corruption Prevention and InfoSapiens, *Corruption in Ukraine 2023: Understanding, Perception, Prevalence*, 2023. The population survey was conducted using computerised personal interviews (CAPI). The sample size in 2021, 2022, and 2023 was 1,093, 1,224, and 1,203

Corruption experienced by business according by sector in 2021–2023

Source: National Agency for Corruption Prevention and InfoSapiens, *Corruption in Ukraine 2023: Understanding, Perception, Prevalence*, 2023. Note: in 2021–2022 the area 'Judicial System' also included the activities of enforcement bodies; in 2023 these areas were separated. The business survey was conducted by Computer-Aided Telephone Interview (CATI). The sample size in 2021, 2022, and 2023 was 1,093, 1,224, and 1,203 respondents, respectively. The maximum theoretical error of the sample of entrepreneurs does not exceed ±3 pp. The statistics are given for respondents who interacted with the relevant authorities in the last 12 months (both the experience of respondents and the experience of employees of their organisations are taken into account).

With respect to personal experience with corruption among business representatives (see Fig. 5), the activities of tax authorities traditionally remain the most corrupt area. In second place are services for the connection and maintenance of electricity, gas, and water supply systems, followed by control and supervision of economic activities in third place. It should be noted that the proportion of entrepreneurs who encountered corruption when interacting with law enforcement agencies is much higher than the corresponding share among the population – 14.2% versus 4.7% in 2023.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Corruption violates key European values, thus creating obstacles for Ukraine's accession to the EU. However, corruption also acts indirectly as a barrier to

respondents, respectively. The maximum theoretical error of the entrepreneurs sample does not exceed ±3 percentage points.

economic integration because it inhibits the pace of economic growth, contributes to the growth of the informal sector of the economy, and prevents closer cooperation with European partners at the sectoral level. Thus, Ukraine must adopt a comprehensive approach to the fight against corruption. Key conclusions and recommendations are given below:

In countries with relatively low income, there is a direct relation between corruption and the relative size of the informal economy, and Ukraine is no exception. Expansion of the shadow economy creates incentives for corruption, while corrupt practices by government officials create the basis for economic activity outside the regulation of the state. **To be successful, the fight against corruption in Ukraine must be accompanied by the de-shadowing of the economy.**

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), despite its reliability and reputation, still does not reflect the level of corruption. Ukrainian studies indicate significant discrepancies between perceptions and actual experiences of corruption among businesses and the public. The fight against corruption, among other things, means wider and more frequent coverage of various cases of abuse of power in various fields, which naturally affects perceptions of the prevalence of this phenomenon. **Thus, conclusions about successes in the fight against corruption in Ukraine should be drawn on the basis of a wider set of analytical tools than the CPI.**

To a large extent, 'everyday' corruption in Ukraine is a direct consequence of structural problems in the public and communal sectors. For example, free medicine and education, combined with fairly low salaries of specialists in these areas, naturally lead to corruption (in this context, it serves as a stabilisation mechanism, since neither market forces nor state regulation are effective). **Reform of the remuneration policy for civil servants and employees of the public and communal sector should contribute to reducing the level of corruption in Ukraine.**

Biographical notes

Olha Aivazovska (Ольга Айвазовська) – is the Chair of the Board of the Civil Network OPORA, an expert in electoral law and political processes. She is a graduate of the Draper Hills Summer Fellowship on Democracy and Development at Stanford University and the Ukrainian School of Political Studies. She is an initiator of electoral law reform campaigns and has led extensive, impartial election monitoring efforts in Ukraine. Since 2016, she has served as an expert representing the Ukrainian side in the political working group of the Trilateral Contact Group during the Minsk negotiations on resolving the conflict in Donbas. Since 2018, she has chaired the board of the International Renaissance Foundation. She has repeatedly been listed among the most influential women in Ukraine.

Krzysztof Izdebski – lawyer and activist working for transparency in public life. Member of the board and director for advocacy and development at the Stefan Batory Foundation. Member of the Programme Council of the Osiatyński Archive and the Consul Democracy Foundation. Fellow of the Marshall Memorial, Marcin Król and Recharging Advocacy Rights in Europe programmes. Member of the OECD Innovative Citizen Participation Network. He specialises in access to public information, reusing public sector information and the impact of technology on democracy.

Yevhen Hlibovytsky (Євген Глібовицький) – political scientist and journalist, communication specialist, co-founder and director of the Borderland Institute, lecturer at the Kyiv-Mohyla Business School and the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE), member of the Ukrainian National Broadcasting Council, founder and partner at pro.mova, a company specialising in strategic consultancy and marketing. He is a co-founder of the Ukrainian independent online television Hromadske.TV. He is also a member of the Nestor Expert Group and the University Group.

Yana Okhrimenko (Яна Охріменко) – senior economist at the Centre for Economic Strategy in Kyiv, who focuses on projects related to European integration. From 2019 to 2023, she served as a researcher and lecturer at Łazarski University in Warsaw and the University of Warsaw. She is the author of

publications on international economics, institutional economics, and micro-economics, including On Social Norms: *The Collection of Theoretical and Empirical Findings* (2021). She also co-authored the report *Challenges of Ukraine's Accession to the EU: Polish-Ukrainian Roadmap*, published by the Stefan Batory Foundation in 2025.

Olesia Ostrovska-Liuta (Олеся Островська-Люта) – manager and curator of contemporary art, general director of the Mystetskyi Arsenal museum and art complex in Kyiv (since 2016). She holds a degree in cultural studies from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. In 2014, she served as the first deputy minister of culture under Yevhen Nyshchuk. She is the initiator of the Book Arsenal literary festival, launched in 2019, recognised as one of the most important literary events in the world and awarded, among others, the British International Excellence Awards. In 2019, she received the Women in Arts award.

This collection of texts presents the phenomenon of corruption in Ukraine, placing it within the broader context of contemporary culture, institutions, democracy, as well as the complex relationship between Ukrainian society and the state over the past several decades. The texts included here also address more universal issues, extending beyond the borders of Ukraine and Europe and beyond the strictly regulatory aspects of the corruption phenomenon, touching on the human entanglement in power relations. The authors also consider psychological, historical and systemic factors that are too rarely discussed, as well as attempt to capture the roots, nature and consequences of the crisis of citizens' trust in the state.