

European Integration of Ukraine: the Perspective of Ukrainians and Poles

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Abstract

Despite the fact that discussions have focused on the Association Agreement and resolving the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine as a turning point in EU-Ukraine relations, we look at the European integration of Ukraine from the perspective of public opinion. This is important because public opinion is one of the most important EU factors that may affect European integration and Europeanization processes in the EU countries. This article provides among other aspects the answer to the question: What are the positive and negative effects of the integration of Ukraine into the EU, in the opinion of Polish entrepreneurs?

Keywords: Ukraine, European Union, European integration, entrepreneurship

Introduction

European integration has become one of the most important topics in the public debate not only in Ukraine, but also in Europe. The importance of foreign policy priorities and the issue of European integration, especially in terms of the Association Agreement and military action in eastern Ukraine, is becoming increasingly important not only in Europe but also worldwide. The future of European integration increasingly depends on the views and opinions of its citizens (Ilonszki 2009). Despite the fact that all discussions have focused on the Association Agreement and resolving the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine as a turning point in EU-Ukraine relations, we look at the European integration of Ukraine from the perspective of public opinion. Particularly important are the main findings as to the opinion of Polish entrepreneurs on the European integration of Ukraine with the EU, and the specific features and trends in the beliefs and attitudes of Polish entrepreneurs in this field. Among the EU countries, Poland is the closest neighbor of Ukraine. Therefore, it is important to survey Polish entrepreneurs who cooperate with Ukrainian partners or are active on the Ukrainian market. This is extremely important at present, because public opinion is one of the most important EU factors that may affect European integration and Europeanization processes in the EU countries (Muller 2011). Today it is more important than ever that European integration is carried out not only at the level of the political elite, but to an equal degree at the level of direct relations between communities and within them. Underestimating the role of social attitudes to the course of that process—both in the period before accession and after achieving membership—can cause (and in fact causes) fluctuating ratings on integration, with a tendency to increase Eurosceptic attitudes. The issue of awareness is particularly important in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where the European integration processes are related to closing the civilization gap that arises both from the differences in the history of the individual communities and different experiences of living in political systems that promote fundamentally different attitudes and behavior. The destiny of EU-Ukraine relations and Ukraine's European integration will largely depend on social attitudes and the perceptions of what is happening in the field of Europeanization processes in Ukraine.

So far, mainly due to the dynamic nature of the changes taking place in Ukraine, there are no comprehensive studies examining the issue of European integration of Ukraine. The published studies cover only a narrow view of selected socio-economic or political issues. Hence it seems the more reasonable to focus on analyzing the process of Ukraine's European integration from the perspective of public opinion and the opinion of entrepreneurs, especially in Poland, representing in a way the point of view of entrepreneurs from other EU countries.

Thus having defined the main research objective, this article provides answers to the following questions: What do Ukrainians and Poles think about the European integration of Ukraine? What stands in the way of progress towards European integration of Ukraine? What do Polish entrepreneurs think about the possibility of European integration, and do they support that direction of integration? What are the positive and negative effects of Ukraine's integration into the EU, in the opinion of Polish entrepreneurs?

In search of answers to those questions, the authors present the results of public opinion surveys conducted in Ukraine¹ and Poland² and the results of research conducted among Polish entrepreneurs who cooperate with Ukrainian partners (authors' own research at the University of Information Technology and Management).

1 Methodology

A survey was conducted among Polish companies cooperating with Ukrainian partners or operating on the Ukrainian market. This group is particularly interested in regulation of relations with Ukraine. Sampling was purposive and random. 246 interviews (CATI) were conducted, including 196 with exporters to the Ukrainian market in the period from 12 November to 20 December 2013. In statistical terms, the sample is not representative for companies in Poland (or for all companies cooperating with Ukraine), but equal geographical distribution and diversification by branch and size of the enterprise have been ensured.

2 European integration of Ukraine: what is the public opinion?

The prospect of extending EU borders is always a stimulus to conduct public opinion surveys both in countries that aspire to the association and in countries already associated. Such activities were common before Polish accession to the EU, when studies concerned either the sentiments among Poles or their closest EU neighbors, the Germans (Dolińska and Fałkowski 2001). At present analogous projects can be observed presenting opinions on the relations of Ukraine and the EU (including Poland) and Poland and Ukraine.

2.1 The opinion of the residents of Ukraine

Ukraine is extremely diversified in regional terms. This applies in particular: relations with Russia, feelings about the state of the country, orientation toward political and economic reform, support for more local autonomy or centralization, and finally integration with the EU. The source of regional differences (especially between East and West) is historical experience, economic structure, ethnic composition, ties to bordering states and language (Kubicek 2000). The attitude of Ukrainians to Ukraine's integration with the European Union is shown, among others, in the report *European Integration of Ukraine: Experience of Yesterday for Development of Tomorrow* (Zolkina 2013). More on this topic can be found in the study Public Opinion Survey Residents of Ukraine, of 14–26 March 2014. The studies in Ukraine show that:

- What Ukrainians think about the association with the European Union depends on the region in which the respondents live. The diversity of opinion stems from ethnic differences (Barrington 2001), which translate into the territorial system, and with the age of the respondents.

1. See: Public Opinion Survey Residents of Ukraine. March 14–26, 2014. [@:] <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2014%20April%205%20IRI%20Public%20Opinion%20Survey%20of%20Ukraine.%20March%2014-26,%202014.pdf>.

2. See: Public Opinion Research Center. Available from: <http://www.cbos.pl/EN/home/home.php>.

In March 2014, 52% of respondents were for Ukraine's accession to the EU (in March 2012, the number reached 36%).

- An alternative for association with the EU is a Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. In March 2014, 27% of respondents were for Ukraine's accession to the Customs Union (in March 2012, the number was 43%).
- According to Ukrainians, the main benefits of the association are: free movement of people abroad (34,7%), raising living standards of people (28%), easier access for youth to study at European universities (24,3%), improving the provision of goods (16,1%), facilitating movement of the country towards modern European civilization (16,1%). 27,7% of respondents thought that the association was of no benefit to Ukraine.³
- Negative effects of association with the EU according to Ukrainians are: emigration of Ukrainians (31,1%), deterioration of relations with member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (22,5%), inflow of foreigners, selling out the country (22%), unemployment (17,5%).
- The main barriers for EU-Ukraine association are: insufficient level of Ukraine's economic development (34,5%), low level of living standards in Ukraine (32,4%), problems with democracy (Cameron 2007) and human rights in Ukraine (22,6%).

Zolkina (2013) said that "public opinion is one of the most crucial domestic factors which can influence European integration and Europeanization processes from inside the country." She sees the development of future relations between Ukraine and the EU as depending heavily on public attitudes and perceptions of what has been going on in the field of Europeanization processes in Ukraine.

2.2 The opinion of the residents of Poland

Research on the perspective of Ukraine's accession to EU structures is an important subject of theoretical and empirical study in Poland. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) determines the eastern dimension of EU policies and provides a basis for strengthening the relations between the EU and former Soviet Union countries. The program was supported by Poles from the beginning. In Poland, opinions on that are presented mainly by the Public Opinion Research Center (PORC). According to a study before the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, which took place on 28–29 November 2013, the expansion of cooperation was accepted by about two-thirds of Poles (64%), and nearly one quarter (24%) were against. In comparison with the results of 2008 and 2009, a decline can be seen in support for strengthening cooperation with the countries of the former Soviet Union. In 2009, acceptance for developing cooperation was expressed by 77%, while 9% of respondents were against it. The decline was explained by lower support for the development of European integration in Poland and higher skepticism about further improvement of Polish-Ukrainian relations (due to previous historical events).⁴

According to the presented opinions of Poles, Ukraine should become a member of the EU in the future. But it is a distant perspective. Only every fifth respondent (20%) stated that the accession process should take place as soon as possible. More than half (54%) said that "there was no hurry." 9% of respondents were opposed, while 17% were unable to give an opinion.

The fact that the Association Agreement with the EU was not signed by Ukraine at the summit in Vilnius has not changed the opinion of Poles much. In a study conducted in January 2014, a greater part of respondents still declared that Ukraine should in the future become a member of the EU, but in the opinion of 47% of the respondents "there is no hurry". The percentage of those who said Ukraine should associate with the EU immediately slightly rose (from 20% to 26%) and those who opposed the association (from 9% to 11%). That was likely impacted by news of social protests in Ukraine. It can therefore be concluded that the opinions of Poles expressed in relation to the EU-Ukraine association are constant.

According to a PORC survey, the majority of Poles say that close cooperation of Ukraine with the EU is in the interest of Poland. In January 2014, that opinion was supported by 65% of

3. [In the journal European practice of number notation is followed—for example, 36 333,33 (European style) = 36 333.33 (Canadian style) = 36,333.33 (US and British style).—Ed.]

4. Before the summit of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in Vilnius, CBOS, BS/158/2013, Warsaw, November 2013.

respondents (in 2004 by 67%). In contrast, 14% of respondents believed that cooperation between Ukraine and Russia would be more beneficial for Poland. More than half (52%) said that close cooperation with the EU was in the interests of Ukraine, while for 22% of the respondents cooperation with Russia would be more advantageous for Ukraine. According to almost every fifth Pole (19%), Ukraine should look for another way to resolve the situation, because a choice between the EU and Russia is not beneficial for the country.

Although Ukraine's association with the EU would be beneficial for Poland, according to the respondents it should be postponed. But Poles agree to other measures that would liberalize trade with Ukraine and facilitate border crossing. 68% of respondents expressed support for the gradual reduction of tariffs on trade between Ukraine and Poland and the EU (10% opposed), and 57% agreed to the abolition of visas for Ukrainians (29% were opposed to that). The lowest support was given to the postulate to make it easier for Ukrainians to work in Poland. 49% of respondents agreed with it, while 41% opposed.

At the time when PORC conducted surveys on EU-Ukraine association among Poles, the research team at the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszow conducted studies on trade relations between Poland and Ukraine (Lewandowska, Inglot-Brzęk, and Harysym 2014). The main objective of the research conducted among entrepreneurs was to determine the barriers to trade relations with Ukraine. The survey on entrepreneurs' opinions on the association of Ukraine with EU countries was complementary to the main part of the study devoted to economic cooperation between Poland and Ukraine.

2.3 The opinion of Polish entrepreneurs

The study assumed that Polish entrepreneurs who cooperate with partners from Ukraine would naturally be interested in issues concerning the association of Ukraine with the EU. Based on the obtained results it can be said that every fourth respondent (25,1%) was not interested in those issues. Only a third of entrepreneurs (33,9%) declared they followed closely what was happening regarding the association with the EU.

Interest in the association of Ukraine is closely associated with better knowledge about integration (statistically significant correlation, V Cramera 0,521, approximate significance $< 0,001$). An entrepreneur was more interested in the issues of association, the better informed he felt he was. The relationship between interest and knowledge allowed us to construct an index of attitudes (Cronbach's alpha = 0,803)⁵. Polish entrepreneurs can be divided into:

- uninterested and uninformed — 23%;
- moderately interested and informed — 44,6%;
- interested and well-informed — 32,4%.

The impact of interest and knowledge on opinions on the benefits of Ukraine's association with the EU for Polish entrepreneurs was diagnosed (statistically significant correlation, V Cramera 0,219; approximate significance $< 0,001$). 5,7% of respondents said that the association would be bad for Polish entrepreneurs. Such statements were characteristic for uninterested and uninformed entrepreneurs. An opposite opinion was expressed by 76,5% of the respondents.

Businesses were asked to identify their perceptions of the benefits and barriers resulting from Ukraine's association with the EU. 40 entrepreneurs from a group of 246 respondents (16,2%) were unable to give any answer. 17 respondents (6,9%) expressed negative opinions. Other respondents pointed to various benefits.

Polish entrepreneurs see mainly the benefits of easier cooperation and expanding the market. Significant is also the elimination of customs duties, customs clearance, abolition of visas, easier procedures and abolition of bureaucracy.

5. Cronbach's alpha is a measure specifying the consistency of the items making up the scale which is a number from 0 to 1. At the level of 0,803 it means that the respondents gave similar answers to individual questions, which in this case means that the persons concerned feel well informed. By assigning responses from 1 to 5 the results for the two questions were added up. On this basis a new scale was created, which adopted the values from 2 to 10. The scale was recoded to new values: (2–4) uninterested and uninformed; (5–7) moderately interested and informed, (8–10) interested and well-informed.

Tab. 1. Benefits resulting from Ukraine's association with the EU (multiple answers possible)

| Theme | Percentage of answers |
|--|-----------------------|
| Easier trade cooperation | 28,2 |
| Market expansion, a large new market | 18,4 |
| Profits, benefits | 15,5 |
| Easier procedures, reducing bureaucracy | 11,2 |
| Abolition of customs barriers | 7,8 |
| Easier customs clearance | 4,9 |
| Development of companies in Poland, increase in production | 4,4 |
| Elimination of barriers | 4,4 |
| New opportunities | 3,4 |
| Faster journey, lack of visas | 2,9 |
| Open and accessible market | 2,9 |
| Competition | 2,4 |
| Secure trade without risk | 1,9 |
| Clear legislation | 1,0 |
| Market proximity | 1,0 |

Tab. 2. Barriers resulting from the association of Ukraine with the EU

| Negative effects | Ambiguous answers |
|--|--|
| • corruption | • refused to answer |
| • unfavorable, other standards | • need to look from the perspective of Ukrainian businessmen |
| • less competitive with Russia | • does not matter to me |
| • not a euro-enthusiast | • good for some and bad for others |
| • low competitiveness | • lack of a clear statement from Ukraine—EU or Russia? |
| • outflow of Polish business to Ukraine, but also receptive market | • level of development in Ukraine too low to develop cooperation with the EU |
| • loss of livelihoods | • cooperation in the past had no problems |
| • loss of market outlets | |
| • the West will skip Poland and collaborate more with Ukraine | |
| • too strong impact of the Ukrainian market | |

Polish entrepreneurs are mainly concerned that Ukraine's association with the EU will reduce the competitiveness of Polish exports. The Ukrainian market will be "awash" with goods from the West. Just associating with the EU will not change much. Corruption and different standards of business functioning will not disappear in Ukraine. Some entrepreneurs also gave ambiguous answers. Entrepreneurs also consistently agreed on the benefits and risks that EU-Ukraine association would bring for Polish trade and investments in the Ukrainian market. Only 2,4% of respondents expressed negative opinions in that regard.

The relationship between evaluation of the impact of EU-Ukraine association on Polish exports, imports and investments forms the assessment index.⁶ When entrepreneurs were asked whether they personally supported Ukraine's association with the EU or if they were against it, 78,4% of respondents said they supported the association, and 4,5% indicated opposition.

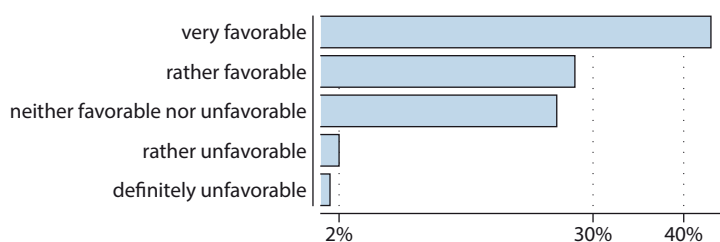
6. Cronbach's alpha 0,934 (calculated to evaluate the benefits associated with export, import, investment) means that if the respondent pointed out that the association of Ukraine with the EU will bring Poland benefits associated with exports, they probably also pointed to the benefits of imports and investment. By assigning responses from 1 to 5 the results for the three questions were calculated. On this basis, a new scale was created, which adopted the values from 3 to 15. The scale was recoded to new values: (3–5) definitely unfavorable; (6–7) rather unfavorable, (8–10) neither favorable or unfavorable, (11–12) rather favorable, (13–15) very favorable.

Tab. 3. The impact of EU-Ukraine association for Polish exports, imports and investments. V Cramera values between answers for question: “What impact do you think will the association of Ukraine with the EU have?”

| | Exports of goods from Poland to Ukraine | Import of goods from Ukraine to Poland | Investments of Polish companies in Ukraine |
|--|---|--|--|
| Exports of goods from Poland to Ukraine | 1,000 | 0,802*** | 0,764*** |
| Import of goods from Ukraine to Poland | | 1,000 | 0,874*** |
| Investments of Polish companies in Ukraine | | | 1,000 |

Note: Evaluation statements on a five-point scale, where 1 means definitely unfavorable; 5 – definitely favorable preferred; $N = 246$.

*** $p < 0,001$

**Fig. 1.** What impact do you think the association of Ukraine with the EU will have on export, import and investment?**Tab. 4.** The impact of EU-Ukraine association on Polish entrepreneurs

| | Index of interest and knowledge | Generally speaking, do you think Ukraine's association with the EU is good for Polish entrepreneurs? | The assessment index | Do you personally support the association of Ukraine with the EU or are you against it? |
|--|---------------------------------|--|----------------------|---|
| Index of interest and knowledge | 1,000 | 0,219*** | 0,213*** | 0,213*** |
| Generally speaking, do you think Ukraine's association with the EU is good for Polish entrepreneurs? | | 1,000 | 0,495*** | 0,548*** |
| The assessment index | | | 1,000 | 0,413*** |
| Do you personally support the association of Ukraine with the EU or are you against it? | | | | 1,000 |

Note: $N = 246$

*** $p < 0,001$

The responses showed a consistent opinion on the impact of the EU-Ukraine association on Polish entrepreneurs. Answers to the five questions were indexed to obtain a generalized opinion about the impact of Ukraine's association with the EU on the functioning of Polish entrepreneurs operating on the Ukrainian market.

It should be emphasized that among Polish entrepreneurs cooperating with Ukrainian partners, or operating on the Ukrainian market, only 3,7% believe that EU-Ukraine association will bring negative consequences for them, and so they do not support the process. 8,1% of the respondents consider that if Ukraine did not sign the Association Agreement, it would bring benefits to Poland,

Tab. 5. Generalized opinion on the impact of EU-Ukraine association on Polish entrepreneurs

| Theme ^a | The incidence | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|---------------|------------|
| Definitely unfavorable | 1 | 0,4 |
| Rather unfavorable | 8 | 3,3 |
| Neither favorable or unfavorable | 42 | 17,1 |
| Rather favorable | 93 | 37,8 |
| Definitely favorable | 102 | 41,5 |
| Total | 246 | 100,0 |

Note: By assigning responses from 1 to 5 the results for the five questions were calculated. On this basis, a new scale was set to values between 5 and 25. The scale was recoded to new values: (5-8) definitely unfavorable, (9-13) rather unfavorable, (14-17) neither favorable nor unfavorable (18- 21) rather favorable, (22-25) definitely favorable.

^aQuestions: (1) assessing the impact of the association on Polish entrepreneurs; (2) assessing the impact on exports of goods from Poland to Ukraine; (3) assessing the impact on the import of goods from Ukraine to Poland; (4) assessing the impact on Polish investments in Ukraine; (5) personal support for Ukraine's EU association – reliability of the index of opinion; Cronbach's alpha = 0,892.

Nearly half (47,6%) of the surveyed entrepreneurs are not able to make such an assessment. In contrast, 45,3% of respondents expressed the belief that not signing the Association Agreement would be disadvantageous for Poland. Evaluating the current relations between Ukraine and the EU, Polish entrepreneurs said that they brought the same benefits to both sides (58,4%). Every fourth respondent (27,2%) said the relations were more favorable for Ukraine. The opinion that the main beneficiaries were the EU countries was indicated by 14,5%. Polish entrepreneurs believe that Ukraine should integrate with the EU, but only in a scope and at a pace which will be in its favor (58,4%), 36% of respondents say that the integration should take place as soon as possible. In contrast, 5,6% of respondents believe that Ukraine should not integrate with the EU.

Conclusions

The Association Agreement can be a chance for Ukraine to make significant modernization changes. Furthermore, the agreement on free trade zone, which although in the short and medium term may lead to increased imports of Ukraine from the EU, including Poland, may in the long run result in growth of Ukrainian exports to EU markets. Ukraine signing the Association Agreement may be a chance for other Polish companies. Yet that will concern mostly large companies which already have experience in EU markets. In the short term, it is they that can take over the Ukrainian market, together with other EU corporations, mainly due to cheaper products and their good quality. Only in the long run will Ukrainian entrepreneurs benefit—those who survive the competition from the EU market, joined by foreign investors.

One of the perspectives in the discourse on EU enlargement to other countries is given by public opinion research. These studies are one of the main sources used for understanding social attitudes, opinions and sentiments towards important political, economic and social problems and issues. They are therefore an important stage in the development of social processes, including the integration processes in Europe.

Studies carried out among Ukrainians show that most of the country's residents support integration with the European Union. The number of supporters of integration increases. However, it is a greatly simplified proposal. Ukraine is highly diversified in territorial terms. While integration with the EU is supported by 90% of people in the west of the country and 70% in its center, there are only 29% euro-enthusiasts in the south and 20% in the east. In the East there is strong support (59%) for a customs union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Another feature that varies the opinions of Ukrainian people is age. The majority of young people (up to 29 years of age) support integration with the EU. The older the age of the respondents, the less support for integration with the EU.

Although support for the enlargement of the EU is consistently high in Poland (three quarters of Poles support it), it is falling. In a recent study, almost half of Poles said that when it came to the integration of Ukraine with the EU, there was no need to hurry. At the same time two

thirds of Poles believe that close co-operation with Ukraine is in the interest of Poland. Therefore respondents indicated the need for a gradual reduction of tariffs and abolition of visas. Polish entrepreneurs thus agree with the principles of free movement of goods, services and people. Free movement of workers is so far out of the question.

Polish entrepreneurs who cooperate with partners from Ukraine showed a higher level of support for Ukraine's European integration than average Poles. According to Polish entrepreneurs, Ukraine's integration will primarily facilitate cooperation and expand the market, which will in turn bring benefits and profits. Therefore, more than a third of the entrepreneurs (36%) noted that the integration of Ukraine into the EU should take place as soon as possible (the opinion was expressed by every fourth Pole). Only about 5% of the surveyed companies considered Ukraine's integration with the EU unfavorable for Polish entrepreneurs. About 80% of the respondents expressed an opposite opinion. Opinion on the interest of Poland was slightly different. Only 45% of businesses see the benefits for Poland resulting from EU enlargement to encompass Ukraine. 8,1% of the respondents indicated lack of any benefits. It is significant that almost half of the surveyed entrepreneurs could not assess the implications for Poland resulting from further EU enlargement. This may be due to the fact that respondents indicated low degree of interest and knowledge in matters concerning the association of Ukraine with the EU. Their opinions result rather from their experiences than from their commercial cooperation and from the ability to assess their own benefits and losses than from thorough knowledge of the enlargement of EU structures.

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