





VOCAL EUROPE


Event Report

Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic Integration: What is next?

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On 18 October 2018, **Vocal Europe** and **Science 14** hosted an expert panel to discuss key topics surrounding the Ukraine accession process to the EU and NATO, as well as the implications that EU association holds for a region that is increasingly seen as a geopolitical target by other powerful players.

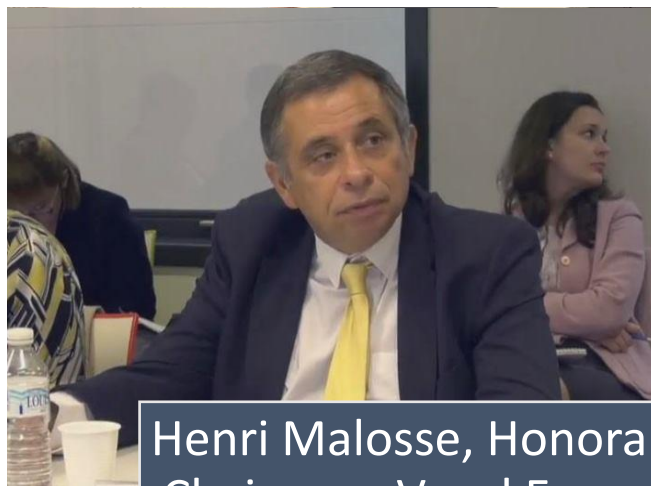
Background

On July 8, the National Security Law came into force in Ukraine. Ukraine's integration into the European space, European Union and NATO membership are mentioned by the law as part of the fundamental national interests of Ukraine. It is expected that full implementation of the National Security Law will deepen Ukraine's Western integration, especially since there has been a significant transformation in public opinion regarding Euro-Atlantic integration.

Ukraine's President, Petro Poroshenko, has repeatedly stated that Ukraine's integration to the EU and NATO are the country's top foreign policy priorities, and they should be included in the constitution. Ukraine's relationship with the European Union is on a steady track, as the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU, and visa-free travel for Ukrainian citizens entered into force in 2017. Ukraine and NATO cooperate in a wide range of areas, as part of NATO's open door policy, reiterated at the latest Brussels Summit. Ukraine's NATO membership, as always, might face powerful opposition from Russia.

Event

The talks were opened by moderator **Ebubekir Isik**, Policy Analyst at Vocal Europe and Researcher at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), who welcomed the participants and introduced the topics of the debate.



**Henri Malosse, Honorary
Chairman, Vocal Europe**

Henri Malosse, Honorary Chairman of Vocal Europe and Former President and Member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), shared his experience working on Ukraine, and presented two attitudes that he sees nowadays in the Brussels bubble, which he considers unacceptable. Malosse headed the EESC delegation to Kiev, where he stressed the need to reform Ukraine and to fight corruption. He engaged with Ukrainian civil society, always ready to explain how the EU can increase cooperation, which he regards as fundamental for the interests of both sides.

Today, there are two things which he considers as unacceptable as in the talks he hears in the “Brussels bubble”. The first unacceptable thing is the consideration that “we should continue business as usual”, especially the occupation of Crimea.

From the EU side, there is no agreement among the head of states and the political elites on what is the direction of Europe, and this is an urgent and persistent problem. From the Ukrainian side, Henri Malosse said, the country has shown that it has made the decisive steps towards the EU. According to Malosse, the corruption in Ukraine is not bigger than corruption in other European countries such as Romania and Bulgaria. The major step now is to be taken by the EU, to give Ukraine a clear view of the nature of their future relations.

“We are not going to ask Ukraine to choose between Russia and the EU, because Russia is in Europe and you cannot choose your neighbors. Russia and the EU will always be neighbors of Ukraine.”

“Push the Ukrainians to choose, to make the right choice, to sign the agreement, to develop contacts of course with some advantages, but we thought of giving them what we have all in mind, the idea of the perspective of joining the EU.”

“The world is moving very soon, and the EU is moving very slow. We don't combat for the European vision. We should, from the EU side, be clear about what we can have in mind for a perspective of integration for the European project.”

“We are a strong European family, join together and we form a stronger EU with you”.

Dr. Olena Carbou, Executive Director and Co-founder of Ukrainian Think Tanks Liaison Office in Brussels, outlined a picture of the upcoming electoral year both in Ukraine and in the EU. She talked about the consequences this may have, and the risks that these elections may trigger, but also about the hope surrounding them.



Dr. Olena Carbou, Executive Director,
Ukrainian Think Tank Liaison Office

She began by discussing surveys and polling data about EU and NATO integration. Half of Ukrainians are in favor of EU membership and an absolute majority considered that Ukraine should continue reforms, regardless of the prospect of EU membership. A third of Ukrainians believe in pushing Ukrainian authorities to do more reforms.

Regarding NATO, the number of those in support of membership is increasing: 67% of respondents would say “yes” to NATO membership, because it would provide a guarantee for Ukraine’s security, which remains a concern due to the aggression of Russia and the war eastern Ukraine.

Dr. Carbou spoke of the issues that the election will highlight and hopefully go on to tackle issues such as corruption, electoral reform, the threat from Russia and cooperation with the EU.

“We are witnessing a growing number of professionals of the younger generation are leaving the country, this not an exception for also other Eastern European countries.”

“Thinking about the political actors, the thoughts of the experts is that the reactive pro-Russia political parties will have no future in Ukraine and will not be successful in the results, but the danger is in the hidden agenda of some political parties and actors, and they will not openly play the Russian card. We have to be very careful in analyzing the messengers, the actions, and whether or not they really go through in line with the European perspective and the European intentions of Ukraine”.

“The continuous aggression of Russia and the attempts to influence the situation in Ukraine with all instruments: propaganda, impact on the political actors, and so on. And of course, the open military actions.”

“The movement of cooperation has never been so wide and deep in Ukraine, and institutionalized relations with the EU is one of the hopes for the future for Ukraine. Other hopes are the practical alignment with NATO standards, free media, and of course the continuous will of the Ukrainian citizens to make the countries fully aligned with the principles of Europe”.

H.E. Ihor Turianskyi, Retired Ambassador of Ukraine, highlighted that much has been said about integration of Ukraine into EU and NATO. Relevant provisions were inserted in and deleted from key legislation documents, including the latest fundamental ones of the domestic and foreign policy adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament in 2010. Where NATO is concerned, today these provisions are stated as follows:

- To deepen cooperation with NATO, with an aim of complete membership
- Ensure integration with the European political, economic and legal sphere, aiming for full membership.

Turianskyi stated that he had different figures than those of Dr. Carbou. According to his information, 56% population favor EU and NATO membership, and 44% are against. He explained that the numbers depend on the agency that conducts the surveys.

There are several reasons, according to Turianskyi, for this. Firstly, because the political forces in Ukraine, including those in Parliament and outside of it, continue to have completely different positions towards the present and the future of Ukraine.

Secondly, he argued that the political will to fulfill obligations in relation to the possible EU membership is not necessarily channelled into into the fight against corruption and the implementation of reforms. Next, he added that Ukraine has proclaimed that the country will fully support human rights and rule of law. “But some events took place last summer, which show that us that Ukrainian reality is far from these provisions.”

Turianskyi added that the government had not paid enough attention to the issue of other countries, such as Hungary, which has been giving passports to Ukrainian citizens, and now the relationship with Hungary has become one of contention. Ukrainian citizens who are now Hungarian nationals do not know the state language, Ukrainian, and only now has the government acknowledged the existence of this problem.



H.E. Ihor Turianskyi, Retired
Ambassador, Ukraine

“Ukraine is a country of multinational patterns, many nationalities are in the territory being Ukrainian citizens. Many years ago, Russia began to issue Russian passports to citizens in Crimea being Ukrainian nationals. Hungary began to issue passport to nationals living in the Transcarpathia region. Romania also began to issue their passports, violating all international rules. From the point of view of Ukrainian law, double citizenship is prohibited.”

“Certainly, taking the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in 2019, the campaign of which has already started, ordinary people are disoriented by the statements of influential politicians.”

“We have in Ukraine a big Turkish community. Two members of this community have been taken out from the territory of Ukraine to Turkey, and are now in custody. The government of Turkey and the security service and prosecutor general office are there. This is like a game of football: security service says this is a business of office Prosecutor General, the office of Prosecutor General kicks the ball to Ministry of Internal Affairs. I would like to inform you about this, taking into account that situation is not solved finally and nobody knows what will be in the future concerning the Turkish community living in Ukraine.”

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Michael Emerson, Senior Fellow and Associate Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), discussed the upcoming Ukrainian elections and the platforms of the prominent politicians in the running and said that Yulia Tymoshenko seems to be the most prominent of the politicians but that because she proposed a very populist economic program. He went on to question whether Ukraine could accede to the three “unions”-Customs Union, Digital Union and Energy Union- it wishes to become a part of.



Michael Emerson, Senior Fellow,
Center for European Policy Studies
(CEPS)

He spoke of the conflict with Russia, in which Ukraine has taken a very hardline approach to the occupied territories by imposing a blockade but also about the proposals on the table; in this regard, he thinks, the reopening of the Minsk Peace Process or elections in the territory seem implausible.

By addressing the European Neighborhood Policy, he compared the situation in Ukraine to that in the Balkans. He pointed out that although relations between the EU and each Balkan nation is different, the same strategy is being applied and needs a rethink when the next European Commission takes over.

“Tymoshenko seems to be the most prominent figure at the moment. She has published an economic program which is the most jaw-dropping populist absurdity one could imagine”.

“The relations with the EU, testing the ground of whether Ukraine could accede to three unions: Customs Union, Digital Union and Energy Union. Broadly speaking, this was a very thinly conceived set of political propositions. We need to understand the political interest in having some big items that politicians can hold on to, the Customs Union actually is a bad idea. That ball has dropped effectively. The Energy Union idea is more substantial, but the useless language of the union is rather loose, and the Digital Union is also a foggy question.”

“What to do with the occupied territories? (...) Kiev has adopted a very hard attitude in forcing a blockade attitude, people constantly outraged across the border. I feel that this is a very questionable move in terms of the prospects of reintegration”.

“There are ideas on whether the UN Peacekeeping Force could reopen the dormant Minsk Process. The proposals there are looking at this particular report, it becomes rather implausible. They want to improve free and fair elections, state of the rule of law in the Donetsk occupied territory. They can have no illusions about it, it is a micro-mafioso state and it is extremely dangerous and individuals to go in here if they want to express any democratic opinion. It is a wrong way”.

Bruno Lété, Senior Fellow, Security and Defense German Marshall Fund (GMF), focused on the role the United States plays in Ukraine's future and what can be expected in the near future from the Trump administration.

He began by emphasizing that only Ukraine can decide its future by pursuing domestic reforms to make accession to the EU and to NATO a reality, and although Ukraine is not the same country it was five years ago, work still needs to be done.

The foreign policy of the Trump administration towards Ukraine, Lété explained, has not changed drastically from that of his predecessor. There is bipartisan support for Ukraine in the United States Congress and key Trump administration officials are also a reason to feel confident that Washington will remain engaged with developments in Kiev.



Bruno Lété, Senior Fellow,
German Marshall Fund (GMF)

“Ukraine is in charge of its own Euro-Atlantic integration. It’s not that the Europeans and the Americans and NATO that will go to Ukraine. It is Ukraine that has to get its aspirations right. Ukrainians have to help Ukraine. Western nations can support Ukraine’s’ aspirations but everything starts in Kiev and the other urban centers across the country”.

“I would probably argue that the Trump administration is not such a bad deal for Ukraine. If you see what has been happening so far, we can actually see that there is not much change compared to Obama’s policies”.

“Would I say these things are happening because Washington is so thrilled to be helping Ukraine? Perhaps yes. Is there some sort of self-preservation in these policies? Probably, as well”.

“In any case, we should not only look at the White House but there are many people in the Trump administration who are also supporters of Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration. I think about, for instance, Fiona Hill, who is Europe Director at the NSC. I think about Mattis, who is the Defence Secretary. Those are people in the administration that are very supportive of Ukraine’s ambitions and I think we should take this into account”.

“And when it comes to our dear President in the White House, there again, ironically enough, it’s quite a positive thing that as long as the collusion probe is going on against Donald Trump, I think Ukraine can basically sleep tight”.

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