The Possible EU-Enlargement to Ukraine

11 FEBRUARY 2024

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As Russia initiated its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, after almost a decade of frozen conflict, the entire European Security Structure was thrown out of balance. This action accelerated Ukraine's desire to join the European Union (EU). Joining the EU is tied to a list of requirements the applicants must fulfil, also known as the Copenhagen Criteria. The main issue with Ukraine's application lies in its only partial fulfilment of these criteria. Knowing the likelihood of Ukraine's accession to the EU is of great relevance due to the possible effects it can have on the EU regarding the division of future power, possible policies, and the EU's relationship with

Russia. It is highlighted that as of right now, only two out of five criteria are fully fulfilled. This brief will first introduce the Copenhagen Criteria, and in a second step it will elaborate on Ukraine's (non)fulfilment of these criteria.

The Conditions for EU-Membership are defined by the Copenhagen Criteria. They say that:

Obstacles to Ukraine's EU-Accession

There is little doubt that Ukraine wants to join the European Union as fast as possible. President Zelensky himself declared: "Our future is in the EU" (France24, 2023). Despite the obvious aspirations, the country has, a few obstacles remain for quick assesion in the future.

In 2023, it was reported that Ukraine had met two of the necessary conditions for EU- Membership. According to a European Union Report, conditions were met in the area of media law and judicial reform (Baczynska, 2023).

However, issues in other areas prevent Ukraine from being the perfect candidate. Thomas Graham from the Council on Foreign Relations wrote:

"Particularly challenging for Ukraine will be meeting the criterion that calls for "stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities." Despite its current self-image as a brave defender of the West's freedom against Russia's imperialist aggression, Ukraine has in fact made little progress in consolidating democratic rule since it gained independence in 1991: Freedom House has consistently rated it as only "partly free." (Graham, 2024).

Despite this, Ukraine has made progress in the fight against corruption, something the country has struggled with for a long time. Despite Ukraine's struggle to the Russian Invasion, the country has been quite successful in that area:

„Ukraine recorded solid progress last year in its long struggle with corruption, according to the latest edition of Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Wartime Ukraine climbed twelve places in the 2023 edition of the annual survey to rank 104th among 180 featured countries, increasing its anti-corruption score from 33 to 36 out of 100. "Ukraine's growth by three points is one of the best results over the past year in the world," noted Transparency International in the report accompanying the new edition of the ranking, which was released on January 30" (Dickinson, 2024).

Ukraine's way to an EU or even NATO-Membership is likely going to take it's time, however one thing is certain: Europe will support Ukraine. As Ursula von der Leyen has said:

"There is a long road ahead, but Europe will be at your side every step of the way, for as long as it takes, from these dark days of war until the moment you cross the door that leads into our European Union." (Barber, 2023).