FROM REVOLUTION TO TRANSFORMATION AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: UKRAINE AFTER THE MAIDAN REVOLUTION

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Abstract

This paper explores the challenges and opportunities of post-Maidan Ukraine's transformation and European integration. It suggests that despite a series of hindrances to post-Maidan Ukraine's state-building, ranging from separatism to residual oligarchic influence and authoritarian legacy, the country has demonstrated strong resilience and persistence in asserting its European orientation. The paper offers a more dynamic structure - agency interplay approach to account for the dynamics behind post-Maidan Ukraine's state-building. It contends that despite constraining external conditions, domestic actors remain the key agents to shape the process of country's transformation and approximation towards Europe. Therefore, the implementation of fundamental economic and political reforms has a great deal to do with the governments' ability to overcome bureaucratic resistance to change, eliminate systemic corruption and diminish major oligarchs' considerable influence in Ukraine. This study enquires into the dynamics of post-revolution Ukraine's democracy consolidation and European integration amid the mounting confrontation in the EU-Russia contested neighborhood.

Keywords: Ukraine, Maidan Revolution, European Integration, state-building, EU-Russia neighborhood

1. Introduction

This paper explores post-Maidan state-building in Ukraine, with a focus on the country's political and economic transformation and European integration. There has been a tendency among students of post-soviet studies to treat the Ukrainian Maidan as the last anti-Soviet or even first "postcolonial revolution", that challenged nonconfrontational, conformist, and "emotionally positive" approaches to the analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet society and culture (Zhuk, 2014; Gerasimov, 2014). Gerasimov (2014) has framed the Maidan as a postcolonial revolution "because it is all about the people acquiring their own voice, and in the process of this self-assertive act forging a new Ukrainian nation as a community of negotiated solidary action by self-conscious individuals" (Gerasimov, 2014). Not only did Maidan express Ukrainians' "choice for Europe," but also forged the beginnings of a new Ukrainian identity (Diuk, 2014). As a matter of fact, the Maidan Revolution is a demonstration of Ukraine's strong resilience and persistence

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in asserting its European orientation. Yet the "choice for Europe" does not smoothly translate into substantial Europeanization and full-fledged democracy building. Clearly (2016) notes that the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine would provide grounds for great optimism and get hailed as triumph of democracy over authoritarianism – leading Ukraine to its rightful place as a free, democratic state in Europe (Clearly, 2016). Yet, as a result of the devastatingly influential oligarchy's resistance to reforms, Ukrainians would end up disappointed.

Some observers have been increasingly critical of post-revolution state–building in Ukraine, given the persistence of endemic corruption and oligarchy, as "a core of oligarchs has remained stable and that their strategies to exert political influence have remained largely unchanged" (Pleines, 2016). It is argued, that while there have been major changes in the balance of forces among the key Ukrainian oligarchs, these changes have not eradicated the oligarchic system per se (Konończuk, 2015). Rather, oligarchs have maintained their prominent positions in Ukrainian politics and economy. The oligarchs selectively support new laws and reform that seem conducive to maintaining and increasing their wealth and fiercely oppose to those that may somehow jeopardize their positions (Bayramov and Marusyk, 2019).

Overall, Ukraine's greater engagement with the EU manifested in the implementation of the Association Agreement (AA) signed in June 2014 has sparked optimistic commentaries about soon-to-be fundamental economic and political reforms across the country.

The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement is largely viewed as an innovative legal instrument providing for a new type of integration without membership. As a unique form of political association and economic integration, it is characterized by three specific features: comprehensiveness, complexity, and conditionality (Petrov et al., 2015).

Several observers have framed the AA as a vital tool for building Ukraine's resilience against Russian coercion, given that its implementation will allow Ukraine to derive benefits in the short-to-medium term, at the very time when "Russia is sparing no efforts to inflict harm on the Ukrainian economy to punish the country for its European orientation" (Wolczuk, 2014) Clearly, the mounting assertiveness of "competing governance provider" Russia towards the EU's greater engagement with Ukraine has posed significant challenges to its EU approximation.

By focusing on Ukraine, it seeks to provide insights into integration without membership dynamics between the EU and its Eastern neighbors. It explores the relationship between domestic change and dynamics of European integration processes in Ukraine amid external constraining conditions stemming from Russia.

Building on the contention that "despite the increasing external competition over the post-Soviet space, domestic actors remain the key agents to account for the pattern of change in the contested neighborhood" (Ademmer, Delcour and Wolczuk, 2016), it focuses on agency-level factors in explaining Ukraine's "European transformation."

This paper is an in-depth case analysis, that uses policy analysis to examine the core dynamics of post-revolution transformation and European integration processes in Ukraine. The case study of Ukraine and Armenia serves as a plausibility probe that illustrates the integration without membership dynamics between the EU and its Eastern neighbors.

This study offers a more dynamic structure - agency interplay approach in terms of explaining the anatomy of post-Maidan Ukraine's state-building.

Elites are viewed as the key agents in nation-building (Stråth, 2008, p. 21). Political elites compete with one another to have their preferred national self-image become the national identity

and define the state's interests (Clunan, 2009, p. 14). In doing so, they seek to enhance national self-esteem, which entails using value rationality to uphold or create a legitimate social order that institutionalizes values, norms, beliefs, and procedures that give them a positive self-image of their country (Clunan, 2009, p. 14).

The study builds its empirical argumentation by analyzing a broad variety of sources, including the newspaper articles, observations from political speeches, official documents, and interviews.

2. Surviving as a "Contested Neighbor": Ukraine between the EU and Russia

According to widely held beliefs, the conflict in Ukraine is a culmination of a long-term crisis in EU–Russia relations (Haukkala, 2015). As a matter of fact, the post-Maidan ordeals and crucibles confronting Ukraine are suggestive of the challenges of Europeanization in the EU-Russia contested neighborhood, where the EU's "transformative power" and region-building policies are faced with Russian "authoritarian resistance" and "region-spoiling" measures (Ambrosio, 2016; Delcour and Wolczuk, 2017).

The ongoing crisis in Ukraine is a testament to the volatile new phase of the EU-Russia relations in their common neighborhood, fraught with the Kremlin's unshakable determination to obstruct further Europeanization in the sphere of its "privileged interests." When viewed from Brussels, Eastern Partnership (EaP) would step up EU's "constructive engagement" with its neighborhood, with the view to transforming it into an area of democracy, peace and prosperity (Haukkala, 2018, p. 84). Meanwhile, the Kremlin would treat the EaP as European intrusion in its sphere of influence, as for Russia, converging with the acquis means a shift away from what ties EaP countries have with Moscow (Delcour and Kostanyan, 2014, p. 3).

In effect, the EU and Russia find themselves locked in parallel rather than complementary relations with the 'shared' region, each attempting to institutionalize their respective political orders (Korosteleva, 2016). Russia's mounting assertiveness has been manifested in its unrelenting efforts at promoting its preferred vision of order beyond its borders in the form of Eurasian Economic (Customs) Union launched in 2010. As a long- term project aimed at regaining the Russian control over post-Soviet space, the Eurasian Union was bound to collide with the Eastern Partnership as the European and Russian visions for the 'shared' eastern neighborhood remain self-centred and exclusionary (Korosteleva, 2016).

This initiative has serious implications for EU-Russia relations in general and the EU's strategy in the post-Soviet space, i.e., the 'shared neighborhood', in particular. Essentially, Ukraine found itself in a "normative battleground" where Russia would spare no effort to prevent Ukraine's further rapprochement with the EU (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2012).

While Ukraine stood up for its European choice, it is obvious that the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation continue to weigh heavily (European Commission, 2018, p. 18). The hybrid war inflicted on Ukraine in Donbass, has led to a situation, where instead of building democratic institutions, Ukraine is forced to build up its military capabilities and stand up for its territorial integrity.

Ukraine has placed a great deal of faith in the EU approximation, as a magic tool for addressing the challenges facing the country. Yet, well informed observers note that the EU's passiveness amid Crimea's annexation and full-blown escalation of the Ukrainian crisis, showed

that the EU is not organizationally geared up for geopolitical contestation [with Russia], and thus (Maass, 2019, 11) does not have much to alleviate Ukraine's plight.

There has been a broad consensus among observers that sanctions and pressures on Russia mask the West's lack of vision regarding the stabilization of Ukraine and the larger region' (Mass, 2019, p. 12). Meanwhile the EU's capabilities in its response to the Ukraine crisis were undermined by the lacking effect of the restrictive measures to either coerce Russia's policy or contribute to peacebuilding (Mass, 2019, p. 12).

That said. the EU constitutes a strong market power in its own right but a weak security power -institutionally ill-equipped to purposefully mobilize its market power to pursue high-politics goals (Gehring and Urbanski, 2017).

The European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM), which was established in December 2014, was meant to mark the EU's presence in Ukraine's resilience building. It aimed to assist the Ukrainian authorities towards a sustainable reform of the civilian security sector through strategic advice and practical support for specific reform measures based on EU standards and international principles of good governance and human rights (EUAM Ukraine, 2019).

However, as Mass aptly notes, considering Russia's affirmative foreign policy towards Ukraine, the EUAM's outreach capabilities as a non-executive mission merely reflect the EU's lack of capabilities and opportunities (Maass, 2019, p. 15). Not surprisingly, there has been public disillusionment with the EU taking a back seat and some European countries' indifference towards the Russian aggression inflicted on Ukraine, and not least, with the neutral rhetoric some European diplomats use to describe the conflict (Gressel, 2019). Yet despite the expectation-reality gaps, the EU, with its transformative power remains the most desired partner in Ukrainian public consciousness (Gressel, 2019).

The question remains as to what extent Ukraine's "choice for Europe" will lead to significant economic and political reforms, thus making Ukraine a full-fledged member of European family of democracies.

3. The Priorities of Political Reforms in the Context of Ukraine's European Integration

One of the intriguing questions revolving around post-revolution state-building in Ukraine is whether and to what extent the domestic change will lead to eradicate its deep-rooted authoritarian practices. This has a great deal to do with the interests, perceptions and preferences of powerful local actors, often called the 'gatekeeper elites' (Kakachia et al., 2019, p. 4).

There are some concerns regarding the domestic actors' role in Ukraine's democratic transformation and European integration. Centralization of power remains a significant problem in Ukraine. Volodymyr Zelensky capitalized on his huge popularity and through snap elections significantly consolidated his power. He is largely treated as a "savior" capable of putting Ukraine on the path to prosperity and democracy. Meanwhile, the huge power in the hands of a charismatic leader is fraught with power abuses in the absence of powerful opposition and vibrant civil society. There has been a strong tendency in Zelensky's discourse to style his regime as "people's government" or "people's servant" that introduces a new form hyper-democratic interaction between state and society (Zelensky, 2019). More specifically, the discourse on the

"people's government" or "people's servant" may well reach a point, at which there is a blurred line between state and society. The Ukrainian President has tended to distance himself from his predecessors and other presidents due to his resolve to bring people to power "who will serve the people" (Zelensky, 2019). Meanwhile, the success of democratic reforms in Ukraine significantly depends on its shift from a charismatic leadership to functional democratic institutions.

Clearly, one of the key elements of democratic consolidation is institutionalization, aimed at translating individuals' visions into policies sustained by appropriate structures, rules, and procedures. This comes down to "transforming the accidental arrangements, prudential norms and contingent solutions . . . into relationships that are reliably known, regularly practiced and normatively accepted" (Usul, 2010, p. 4).

As a matter of fact, Ukraine's post-Soviet institutional legacy, characterized by lack of legitimacy, stability, and durability, would be long unfit to serve societal interests, thus obstructing country's democratic development (Rybiy, 2013, p. 401).

Studies show that despite the advances in democratization following the Maidan revolution, the essential features of Ukraine's party system have not undergone significant changes. As a result, the institutional bases of the Ukrainian party-political landscape and parliamentary politics have not been solidified (Fedorenko, et al., 2016). The factors hindering institutionalization of political parties, include their organizational weakness, characterized by uncertain ideological platforms, frequent name changes, financing, lack of accountability and poor communication with their voters. Not surprisingly, there has been low level of trust in and identification with political parties across the Ukrainian society (Rybiy, 2013, p. 402).

Essentially, like many other post-Soviet countries, Ukraine is faced with "party presidentialization" syndrome – remarkable indicator of an insufficient institutionalization of party politics. The inherent unsustainability and instability of the Ukrainian regime has been vividly manifested in mass mobilizations against Leonid Kuchma regime in the 2004 Orange Revolution, and similarly by the mass protests that led to the collapse of Viktor Yanukovych regime in 2014 (Sedelius, 2015, p. 124).

While there is no denying that Ukraine is undergoing large-scale reforms during Zelensky's presidency, Inna Sovsun, a member of the Ukrainian opposition party Holos (Voice) notes that the centralization of power remains a significant problem as it is unclear who the next president will be and how he or she will use or misuse that power (Euronews, 2020).

Therefore, the depth and sustainability of democratic reforms considerably depends on Zelensky's political will to institutionalize state-building by subjecting it to institutional performance and strength.

To make all these happen, it is essential for Ukrainian civil society is to overcome its own limitations so that it can better hold the government accountable.

Indeed, it is impossible to underestimate the contribution of the civil society groups to post-Maidan reform process. The largest and most visible reform network is the Reanimation Package of Reforms (RPR) – comprised of multiple NGOs, reform groups and experts, who develop, promote, and in some cases even implement judicial, anticorruption and economic changes (Smagily, 2017). NGOs would closely monitor the set-up of two major anticorruption agencies, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (NAPC) and push for transparency and accountability.

The EU reports would give credit to the Ukrainian civil society that "continues to play a very active role in the promotion, design and oversight of reforms, especially in the areas of anti-corruption, judiciary, human rights, decentralization, energy, and healthcare... Ukrainian civil society organizations continued to take an active part in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Platform and the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform foreseen by the Association Agreement" (European Commission, 2018, p. 5).

While civic activism has been pivotal to the 2014 Maidan Revolution a question remains as to if the civil society has evolved into an agent of democracy in Ukraine. Way (2014) notes that the demonstrations leading the revolution "showed the Orange Revolution was not a one-time fairy tale, but a feature of Ukraine. Civil society exists" (Way, 2014, p. 35). Nevertheless, he suggests that it would be misleading to treat the successful actions by protesters or even civil society representatives per se as s shift in a robust or "emerging" civil society (Way, 2014, p. 41). Thus, the question remains as to if protests are organized by well-established and institutionalized organizations, or do groups emerge spontaneously out of the protests themselves?

Some commentators note that civil society organizations and activists need to move beyond the victory in the street and pursue victory in town halls and elections, with the growing realization that "the Maidan" now needs to be in people's minds and behavior rather than in downtown Kyiv (Smagily, 2017; Diuk, 2014).

In terms of the weakness of civil society organizations, Minakov (2014) notes that it has not been uncommon for them to get misused by the oligarchy. Well acknowledging the capacity of civil society organizations, the oligarchic groups would strive to use them to maintain their wealth and political power (Minakov, 2014). Meanwhile, certain NGOs in Ukraine were tempted to cooperate closely with major oligarchs, such as Ihor Kolomoisky and Viktor Pinchuk and to satisfy their cravings for influence and protection. It follows that while robust civil society organizations have a crucial role in Ukraine's democratization, the activities of "pocket" organizations may negatively impact country's transformation, while serving oligarchic interests.

Shapovalova and Burlyuk (2018) emphasize the two dimensions of turning the civil society into a powerful agent of democracy. The first dimension comes down to the changes in the nature of civil society relations with the state and society and its potential and ability to induce reform, or what is referred to as "change on the outside" (Shapovalova and Burlyuk, 2018). The second dimension has much to do with the nature of civil society *per se* i.e., with the way it is organized and operates, or what is referred to as "change on the inside." These changes are deemed critical to boosting the actorness of civil society organizations, and thus equipping them to fulfil their duties of representing citizens' interests and influencing policy making, while contributing significantly to civic education and democratic socialization of the Ukrainian society (Terzyan, 2020a, p. 189).

Therefore, those changes are critical to boosting the actorness of civil society organizations across Ukraine. This in turn, has a great deal to do with the development of adequate institutional and professional capacity in civil society organizations and networks to influence policy making and influence its implementation is essential.

Overall, for domestic actors' responsiveness towards the EU policies, it is necessary to achieve a reasonable balance between executive and legislative power, with a vibrant civil society capable of holding domestic incumbents accountable.

In terms of the negative impact of local powerful groups on Ukraine's transformation, it is obvious that overcoming the oligarchic resistance to reforms has been one of the formidable challenges on the path to Ukraine's democratic consolidation. The influence of oligarchic groups has been one of the core features of Ukrainian the mid-1990s. Even though there have been changes in the balance of power among the biggest oligarchs, many remain influential and privileged in Ukraine. By taking over the key economic assets and media in these countries, oligarchs have been equipped with tools for exerting an oversized influence on incumbents. The oligarchy is entrenched to the point where the vacuum created by the diminishing influence of certain oligarchic groups, such as ones of Renat Akhmetov or Renat Firtash, gets instantly filled by other oligarchs like Ihor Kolomoyskyi (Terzyan, 2020b, p. 224). Studies show that since the Maidan revolution, the sharing out of monopolies among leading business groups has continued and there has been slow progress on de-monopolization (Lough and Dubrovskiy, 2018). Therefore, even though the oligarchs have lost considerable ground since 2014, they keep retaining significant residual influence in Ukrainian economy and politics. While former president Poroshenko was trying to balance various oligarchs' interests, he continued to be one of them, and expanded his business interests into agriculture, defense, and energy sectors. Meanwhile, Poroshenko's perceived conflict of interest contributed to low public's trust in the central government (European Parliament, 2017). Some observers note that Ukrainian oligarchs tend to apply the "rule by law" rather than "rule of law". Meanwhile, in conditions of systemic and, judicial corruption, the law becomes a purchasable commodity (Bayramov and Marusyk, 2019, p. 80).

Essentially, oligarchs tend to selectively support new laws and reform that seem conducive to maintaining and increasing their wealth and fiercely oppose to those that may somehow jeopardize their positions (Bayramov and Marusyk, 2019). Therefore, the reduction of their influence over the Ukrainian economy and politics should top Zelensky's domestic agenda.

4. Ukraine's Economic Reforms: Challenges and Opportunities in the EU Approximation

The hardships of post-Soviet transition, compounded by oligarchs' outsized influence over the Ukrainian economy have long condemned the Ukrainian population to lack of economic opportunities, unemployment and poverty. Therefore, by making a choice for Europe, the Ukrainian people hoped to get the best chance to clean up their country's long-corrupt economy and political realm (Aslund, 2014).

Indeed, Ukraine's subscription to the Association Agreement with the EU has opened huge opportunities for large-scale economic reforms. It includes a comprehensive agenda for bilateral cooperation and contains binding, rules-based provisions aiming at the export of EU rules and values (Petrov and Elsuwege, 2016).

Studies show that Ukraine performed best in implementing reforms when it faced precise demands from the EU (Fedorneko, 2017). More specifically, Ukraine has made considerable progress on reforms in energy, public procurement, public administration, and law enforcement sectors (European Parliament, 2017). Energy security-related issues have occupied a prominent position in the EU-Ukraine partnership. In essence, Poroshenko's government placed a special emphasis on reforming the gas sector, as a critical step to build resilience against Russian "energy

weapon" and made crucial strides in cutting subsidies on natural gas – previously misused by Ukrainian elites to ensure electoral support (Forbes, 2019).

The EU has been supporting Ukrainian government's efforts to reshape country's gas sector focusing specifically on reinforcing Ukrainian gas storage system and developing a business model for the new transmission system operator (European Neighbors, 2018). The EU reports note that in terms of legal approximation, Ukraine has adopted strategies and implemented laws on energy performance, covering the issues of energy efficiency, fuel diversification, renewable energy, and environmental protection (European Commission, 2018, pp. 14-16). To further this, Ukraine and the European Union signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Energy Partnership in November 2016, aimed at fostering Ukraine's full integration into the EU energy market, as well as enhancing mutual energy security and environmental sustainability (Mission of Ukraine to the European Union, 2017).

The EU has promoted energy sector reform in Ukraine through the EU4Energy initiative – which includes a four-year EU technical assistance program (2016–2020). The program specifically focuses on legal approximation with Eastern Partnership countries, with the view to crating electricity and gas markets promoting energy efficiency (EU4Energy, 2019). The bilateral energy partnership arrived at a major accomplishment in June 2019, when the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine ratified the renewed energy Annex XXVII to the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union (Government Portal, 2019). This envisages EU energy rules transfer to Ukraine, with the view to the latter's integration into the EU's internal energy market (Government Portal, 2019). Indeed, the ratification of the energy annex is of crucial relevance in terms of Ukraine's compliance with the EU requirements and policies.

Nevertheless, Bayramov and Marusyk (2019) note that, despite remarkable natural gas and electricity reforms having been undertaken, Ukraine still has significant work to do in order secure its energy future (Bayramov and Marusyk, 2019). There has been little progress on the transformation and modernization of Ukrainian energy systems, compounded by Ukrainian elites' selective implementation of the European rules. Namely, despite the Ukrainian leadership's proclaimed openness to profound Europeanization in the field of energy, the pre-existing, deep-seated preferences of those elites have perpetuated the opaque gas trading system. Thus, the biggest question to be addressed by Zelensky's government is whether it has the capacity and political will to fully implement the EU-backed energy reforms (Bayramov and Marusyk, 2019).

In terms of broader economic reforms, it is noteworthy that because of provisional application of the AA/DCFTA the EU has become Ukraine's largest trade partner by far, representing 42% of total Ukrainian external trade (European Commission, 2018, p. 12). In 2017, exports from the EU to Ukraine, and imports from Ukraine to the EU increased by respectively 22% and 27.2% (European Commission, 2018, p. 12). Moreover, Ukraine has improved its business environment in recent years, though this progress is stalling to some extent. According to the World Bank's Doing Business survey, Ukraine ranked 76th in 2018, which was an improvement from 80th in 2017, and 142nd in 2010 (European Commission, 2018, p. 9).

Remarkably, since 2014, the EU and the European Financial Institutions have mobilized a package of more than €15 billion in grants and loans to support the reform process, with strong conditionality on continued progress (EEAS, 2019a).

The Ukrainian government has made considerable progress on EU approximation in the areas of trade, customs, SPS, intellectual property, and social policy (European Commission,

2018). Besides, Ukraine has marked accomplishments in public procurement reforms, introducing a higher level of transparency on budget transactions and beneficiaries of procurements. In December 2015, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the law 'On Public Procurement', and a Public Procurement Reform Strategy (Roadmap) was adopted in February 2016 to harmonize legislation with the EU acquis (European Parliament, 2017, pp. 20-21). Yet, studies show that there has been a slowdown in terms of legal approximation, as by the end of 2016, only 36 of 126 planned EU legal acts had been implemented, with only 23 of them fully (European Parliament, 2017 p. 16).

Notably, the Ukrainian government has prioritized tax reforms and strived to simplify tax systems. More specifically, Poroshenko proposed the "new philosophy" in taxation to simplify tax for small businesses and attract investors. The Ukrainian government's decision to shift the corporate tax burden from company profits to distributions has been welcomed by investors from Europe (Lomas, 2018). Overall, the tax system reforms in Ukraine include: **i**mplementation of a cap and eventual removal of agricultural subsidies; implementation of a centralized database of locally set tax rates (land and property taxes)**;** introduction of uniform reporting on profit for corporations**;** elimination of 18 percent tax on dividends paid by those that do not pay profit tax; elimination of 15 percent tax on interest paid on syndicated loans, etc. These reforms, among other accomplishments, have led to the elimination of an export tax on grains and oilseeds as well as that of 29 different permits and licenses mainly in agriculture, coupled with improvement of land property rights (Atlasnetwork, 2018).

Admittedly, the fight against systemic and rampant corruption is a top priority on the path to fundamental economic reforms. Not surprisingly, Poroshenko's government would repeatedly pledge to fight against corruption and eliminate its systemic nature. In 2015, the Ukrainian government set up the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, as well as the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, to investigate corruption cases and identify corrupt practices of Ukrainian officials. Moreover, Poroshenko introduced the anti-corruption court aimed at rooting out entrenched corruption (Terzyan, 2019) . Poroshenko's government significantly reduced the corruption, particularly in the gas, banking, and government procurement sectors, yet there was little progress on the fight against judicial corruption (European Commission, 2018). Even though the judicial reform was hailed by Poroshenko as "the mother of all reforms" (Jarabik and De Waal, 2018) there was not much to reinforce government's pledges of fundamental reforms.

The renewal of the judiciary continued with the newly established Supreme Court becoming operational in late 2017. However, there have been only few convictions in high-level corruption so far and none of them concerned top-level officials (European Commission, 2018, p. 1). Ukraine improved its ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index since 2013, yet it was still the 120th least corrupt nation out of 175 countries in 2018 (Terzyan, 2019).

Meanwhile, rampant corruption and weak rule of law would considerably undermine the overall progress Ukraine had made with other reforms (Gressel, 2019). In essence, Poroshenko's steady decline as a political powerhouse significantly owed to his failure to eradicate corruption. Meanwhile Zelensky scored high amid popular disillusionment with Poroshenko's inability to defeat corruption and raise living standards. From the outset of his presidency, Zelensky targeted fight against corruption as a top priority of his domestic agenda. "Let me name the key tasks

facing my team. It is to eradicate corruption and create an independent court system" (Reuters, 2019).

Zelensky's anti-corruption campaign has led to investigations into former President Petro Poroshenko and his allies" (Deutsche Welle, 2019). Notably, keen to give a new impetus to new Ukrainian government's fight against corruption, during the 21st EU-Ukraine Summit, EU Commissioner Hahn**,** signed with his Ukrainian government counterparts four programs, amounting to €109 million from the Commission's 2019 annual support package to Ukraine (European Commission, 2019).

Overall, the implementation of fundamental economic reforms has a great deal to do with the governments' ability to overcome bureaucratic resistance to change, eliminate systemic corruption and diminish major oligarchs' considerable influence in Ukraine. Thus, the success of both Volodymyr Zelensky's economic reform agenda considerably depends on the broader anti-corruption efforts.

5. Conclusions

This paper contributes to existing literature on post-revolution state-building, as well as on the relationship on the domestic change and European integration in post-soviet countries, by examining the case of Ukraine. Based on the previous discussion, there are three main concluding observations to make regarding Ukraine's trajectory after the Maidan Revolution.

First, and in terms of the dynamics behind domestic change and European integration, the domestic actors remain the key agents to shape the process of country's transformation and approximation towards Europe. The sustainability of democratic reforms considerably depends on the government's ability to institutionalize state-building by subjecting it to institutional performance and strength. This, in turn, has much to do the advancement of a vibrant, value-based and issue - specific civil society that is able to hold incumbents accountable and thus make democratic consolidation irreversible. Besides that, it is critical to diminish the oligarchic influence in Ukrainian politics and overcome its resistance to reforms.

Second, in terms of Ukraine's economic transformation and EU approximation, the country has made considerable accomplishments, including energy, public procurement and tax reforms. Ukraine's responsiveness towards the EU policies has led to economic and legal approximation with the EU, including but not limited to the areas of social policy, customs, and trade. The latter is of crucial relevance, as the EU has become Ukraine's largest trade partner with increasingly positive impact on improving country's business environment. To further the processes of EU approximation, Ukraine needs to step up its anti-corruption efforts, focusing specifically on the fights against judicial corruption.

Third, in terms of the EU's state-building actorness in post-Maidan Ukraine, unlike Russian affirmative foreign policy towards Ukraine, Brussels has appeared considerably constrained to offer much in the geopolitical contestation with the Kremlin. Nevertheless, Ukraine's "European transformation" is essential for building country's resilience against Russian policies.

Further research is essential to explore the dynamics of Ukraine's further approximation towards the EU, focusing specifically on the effects of Association Agreement/DCFTA implementation.

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