



## **PAX Ukraine Alert 2:**

# **Ukraine Needs an EU Accession Process 'Plus'**

### **Summary**

- *To achieve stable, lasting, resilient, and locally owned democracy in Ukraine, the EU Accession Process alone is insufficient*
- *What is needed on top is additional nation-wide bottom-up activities and programming on participatory democracy and anti-corruption, an eye for regional differences, and strong support to trauma-healing, dialogue, reconciliation, and peace education*
- *What is needed throughout is an attitude of mutual respect and an exchange of equals, including learning from the lessons Ukraine can bring to the EU (courage and integrity, but also digital transformation and the resilience of a public sector that has shown the ability to continue delivering critical public services under extreme conditions)*
- *Otherwise, reforms risk getting stuck on paper in Kyiv or being met with strong resistance, despite current Ukrainian enthusiasm and the speed and integrity of reforms*
- *Lack of progress toward EU Accession and return to belligerent nationalism in the Western Balkans are an example not to follow*

*Based on its work there, in other conflict contexts, and input by partners from Ukraine where we work since 2014, PAX makes the following recommendations:*

- 1. Combine the formal Accession Process with bottom-up activities and programming on inclusive participatory democracy and transparent governance***
- 2. Design tailor-made approaches and ensure specific attention for each oblast (province)***
- 3. Support community peacebuilding, dialogue, and post-war reconciliation***
- 4. Invest in active citizenship and peace education in the school curriculum***

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Since the conclusion of the EU Association Agreement, Ukraine has speeded up reforms and made impressive progress. The granting of EU candidate status is seen by government and citizens of Ukraine as an important encouragement to continue working on reforms. To start and successfully conclude EU accession negotiations, hard work and good accompaniment<sup>1</sup> in the accession process are needed. But to overcome the legacy of the ongoing brutal war (and decades of oppression), prevent an increase of exclusive nationalism or revanchism, and firmly anchor Ukraine within the EU family, additional programs are needed that the Accession Process does not provide for. We have seen additional programming in other EU candidate states, but they were modest in volume and ambition. To truly meet the demands of Ukraine and its population, more substantive and long-term additional programs is required.

### The Ukrainian context and the EU accession process

The granting of candidacy status to Ukraine is a pivotal event in the history of both the European Union and Ukraine. Ukraine made earlier steps in this direction, from the 1990 students' protest through the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity (started as Euromaidan protest) in 2013-2014. Yet the further trajectory of Ukrainian accession depends on many factors, including the progression of the current intense phase of the war that started with the full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022. Ukraine has shown a resilience and resolve that have made clear that it is firmly committed to its European integration path, and (more) meaningful steps in that direction can and should be taken already now.

In this policy alert, PAX lays out the main challenges on the path to accession and beyond, and presents recommendations to ensure a comprehensive, citizenship based, democratic approach, and post-conflict addition to the accession process.

Together with its large network of local partner organizations, PAX has been involved in peacebuilding for over 30 years, in countries and regions outside the European Union such as Colombia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East, but also on the European continent including in countries that recently joined the EU, such as Slovenia and Croatia, as well as other Western Balkan countries still on the accession path.<sup>2</sup> PAX has previously analyzed the accession process, from a peacebuilding and citizens perspective.<sup>3</sup> Over the last ten years, improvement have been made but fundamental flaws and limitations are still there. PAX has been engaged in peacebuilding work in Ukraine since 2014 and this brief also reflects the views of our Ukrainian partners.

<sup>1</sup> As we will elaborate below, the accompaniment is not only the task for EU diplomats and experts, but also of the EU member states, civil society, and sectoral organizations.

<sup>2</sup> The Western Balkans states aspiring to join the EU are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North-Macedonia, and Serbia.

<sup>3</sup> See [On the Necessity of The Rehabilitation of the Citizen \(eplo.org\)](https://eplo.org/).

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The decision by EU leaders to grant EU candidacy status to Ukraine<sup>4</sup> is a political one, in reaction to the Russian invasion and ongoing war, and a reaffirmation to Ukraine that the EU sees its long-term prospects as part of the European Union, a gesture of support that answers the aspirations of the Ukrainian people. Moreover, it is a decision that needs to be followed by real and tangible efforts that citizens across Ukraine feel the benefits of and will want to support further.

The accession process involves compliance with the accession criteria (the *Copenhagen Criteria*), including the adoption and implementation of the *acquis communautaire*<sup>5</sup>. Throughout the accession process, there will be moments of decisions with a political character, but overall these are inherently technical and technocratic processes with focus on institutions, legislation, agreements, and instruments aimed at bringing aspiring members in line with the common standards agreed upon by EU Member States. These criteria are already challenging to fulfill in times of peace. The ongoing war and its consequences present additional challenges to Ukraine (and the EU) that may further complicate accession.

Ukraine has made a lot of progress on its path toward EU membership, in particular since 2014. At the same time, there is still a lot of work to be done. As Freedom House wrote about Ukraine just before the full-scale Russian invasion<sup>6</sup>: “Corruption remains endemic, and initiatives to combat it are only partially implemented. Attacks against journalists, civil society activists, and members of minority groups are frequent, and police responses are often inadequate.” In other contexts, we have seen that these trends tend to intensify rather than decrease during wartime<sup>7</sup>. In the Opinion of the European Commission on the Application for Membership of Ukraine, anti-corruption is explicitly mentioned: “further strengthen the fight against corruption, in particular at high level, through proactive and efficient investigations, and a credible track record of prosecutions and convictions.”<sup>8</sup>

The current EU accession strategy alone will not be sufficient to bring Ukraine to the European standards in a way that is truly sustainable and that will also strengthen the EU as a community of values and democratic practices. The lack of progress in several Western Balkan countries serves as a sobering example. One can blame the leadership of countries in the Western Balkans, but the EU accession strategy, due to its very nature, is part of the problem. PAX therefore pleads for ambitious additional programming that gives Ukraine the best possible chances to become a stable, vibrant democracy. Such additional programming should then also be applied to the Western Balkans and Moldova.

<sup>4</sup> See [2022-06-2324-euco-conclusions-en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#). See for the Commission’s Opinion on the EU membership application of Ukraine [Memo: Ukraine \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> See for the accession process [EU enlargement policy - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#), [Steps towards joining \(europa.eu\)](#). See for the current relations between EU and Ukraine [Ukraine \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>6</sup> See [Ukraine: Country Profile | Freedom House](#). For details and a link to the full Ukraine country report by Freedom see [Ukraine: Nations in Transit 2022 Country Report | Freedom House](#).

<sup>7</sup> See [INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS IN ARMED CONFLICTS \(democraticprogress.org\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Ukraine Opinion and Annex.pdf](#).

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Looking more closely at the Western Balkans, the European Court of Auditors concluded in a January 2022 report on EU support for the rule of law in the six Western Balkans countries<sup>9</sup> (costs: appr. € 700 million over the years 2014 – 2020), that *“EU action has had little impact in advancing fundamental rule of law reforms in the Western Balkans. (...) Some technical and operational reforms have taken place in the region. But in a context of insufficient political will and a lack of engagement, EU support has been largely insufficient to tackle persistent problems in areas such as the independence of the judiciary, the concentration of power, political interference, and corruption. (...) Measures to address weak administrative capacity and political will – which are both essential – are too few and often ineffective. (...) EU support for civil society is insufficient in meeting the needs of the sector and mostly based on short-term projects.”* Juhan Parts, responsible for the report, concludes: *“The modest progress made over the last 20 years threatens the overall sustainability of the EU support provided under the accession process. Constant reforms lose credibility if they do not deliver tangible results.”*

The fact that rule of law reform in the Western Balkans (so far) has not been successful does not automatically imply the same will happen in Ukraine. There are many differences and factors at play, in particular the political will at government level to genuinely engage in reform. But this example serves as a warning, as there are some significant similarities:

- Like the six states in the Western Balkans, Ukraine was part of a larger communist state that was totalitarian in nature, suppressed individual rights and freedoms and initiatives, and propagated a top-down 'friendship of the peoples' narrative that imposed artificial national unity while denying existing differences between population groups.
- Just as five of the Western Balkans states<sup>10</sup>, Ukraine will have to deal with the consequences of war. This may pose different, even greater challenges for Ukraine as there is a chance the accession process will start while the war is ongoing, or part of Ukrainian territory is not under control of the Kyiv government.

Demand and motivation to defend and further integrate European values are extremely high in Ukraine and in the current context, there is ample political will in Ukraine for reforms and the alignment with European norms, legislation, and procedures. Yet it is important to organize the accession path in such a way that progress can be made even when political will at the top lessens (as was the case during the Yanukovich period) or values of equality and non-discrimination suffer as a result of collective trauma inflicted by the current war.

To achieve stable, lasting, resilient, locally owned democracy in Ukraine the EU Accession Process alone is insufficient. What is needed is additional nation-wide bottom-up programming. This should include flexible mechanisms to support volunteer initiatives and projects and programs developed and implemented by among other NGOs, local and regional governments, churches, sectoral organizations (sport, culture, media,

<sup>9</sup> See for the press release [EU support for the rule of law in Western Balkans has had little impact on fundamental reforms \(europa.eu\)](#), and for the full report [Special Report 01/2022: EU support to the rule of law in the Western Balkans \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>10</sup> Albania is the exception: it was not part of Yugoslavia and stayed out of the wars that marked the disintegration process of Yugoslavia.

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trade unions, etc.), humanitarian associations, the education sector (from primary school to university), subnational judiciary, etc. There are numerous measures that can and should be taken to complement the formal accession process – both before and after formal accession. Support is preferably longer-term, providing certainty beyond the life span of short projects.

## Recommendations

### I. **Combine the formal Accession Process with bottom-up programming on inclusive participatory democracy and transparent governance**

For reforms to have a deep and lasting impact, comprehensive Ukrainian societal ownership of the process is paramount. Each step of the EU integration and accession process implemented by the central government must be made in partnership with local government, civil society organizations, and citizens in order to become truly integrated into Ukrainian political culture.

Ukraine's National Recovery Plan, published July 2022, does not pay sufficient attention to cooperation with civil society organizations, and the importance of continued decentralization.<sup>11</sup> Democratic participation though is one out of seven Lugano principles, endorsed at the Ukraine Recovery Conference URC2022, held in Lugano (4-5 July 2022).<sup>12</sup> The Lugano Declaration, the outcome document of the conference, "Invite(s) the private sector, academia and civil society as well as actors at sub-national level, such as cities, hospitals and others, to enter into partnership with Ukrainian counterparts."<sup>13</sup>

Throughout Ukrainian society, there is currently wide-spread enthusiasm and awareness of the importance of European values as defined in the Lisbon Treaty: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, many Ukrainians are conscious of defending these values on the battlefield. A strong wish to organize social and public life along these values, as an alternative to the 'Russian world' philosophy, results in solid public demand for reforms. However, there is not always a thorough understanding of the full set of European values and the concrete implications and operationalization in (local) politics and policies, where the effect on citizens' wellbeing can be initially negative. Capacity building on components of new legislation and institutional reform is needed along with support for inclusive decision-making and communication strategies at the local level to maintain the broad public support for Ukraine's European integration.

<sup>11</sup> [62c166751fcf41105380a733\\_NRC\\_Ukraine's\\_Recovery\\_Plan\\_blueprint\\_ENG.pdf\\_\(webflow.com\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Conference materials \(urc2022.com\)](#).

<sup>13</sup> [Outcome Document of the Ukraine Recovery Conference URC2022: 'Lugano Declaration' \(Lugano, 4–5 July, 2022\) - Ukraine | ReliefWeb](#).

<sup>14</sup> for a sort description [Aims and values \(europa.eu\)](#), for the full text of the Lisbon Treaty [C\\_2016202EN.01000101.xml \(europa.eu\)](#).

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#### 1. Foster democratic participation and citizenship from the grassroots level:

Democratization in post-war countries is not an easy process. We have seen democratic backsliding also in countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia and former Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> For that to be avoided, Ukraine needs ambitious programming to support civil society-led democratic initiatives at the grassroots level. European diplomats and donors must ensure that direct accountability vis-à-vis affected communities and citizens is adequately incorporated in the design and implementation of both reconstruction projects and reform processes. Preferably, the level of participation should not be limited to informing and consulting with citizens but consist in co-deciding and joint implementation where possible. This means that local demand must be leading, not the interests of big corporations or priorities determined behind a desk in an EU capital – or at a ministry in Kyiv, for that matter.

The martial law declared after the start of the full-scale invasion on 24 February impacts certain rights and freedoms of citizens and institutions – e.g., information rights. Depending on the further course and duration of the war, the upcoming parliamentary elections, scheduled for October 2023, may also have to be postponed. It is important to keep a sharp eye on the proper use of martial law and concrete measures affecting democratic processes (such as the establishment of Civil-Military Administrations in many *oblasts* and municipalities) and their prompt lifting as soon as the circumstances allow.

Supporting civil society, citizens' initiatives, and media in their capacity to hold authorities accountable to the citizens and supporting authorities at different levels to grow into their own democratic ambitions continues to be crucial. As soon as the war is over, martial law shall be lifted, and the system of checks and balances needs to be reintroduced to its full capacity. People in Ukraine are in their majority still critical on the government, some arguing that Zelenskyi should be held accountable. Almost all agree though that now is not the moment, as internal unity would undermine the common effort to defeat the enemy. At the current stage of events, people in Ukraine hold different opinions on issues of criticizing the government. Of course, the proper functioning of the checks and balances will help improve quality and local ownership of reconstruction and reform projects and thus strengthen legitimacy of the government at the national, regional, and local level. A lot may depend on the tone of criticism.

Citizen's willingness and capacity to play an active role and engage with authorities to ensure downward accountability increased tremendously over the past eight years and has already shown its results. From their part, many local governments also have increased both willingness and capacity to engage constructively with citizens. In fact, the war demonstrates how necessary and

<sup>15</sup> In its "Nations in Transit" 2021 report, Freedom House noted backsliding of democracy in a number of countries involved in war in the last decades, in the regions of former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union: Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Tajikistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and indeed Ukraine. See [NIT\\_2021\\_final\\_042321.pdf \(freedomhouse.org\)](#).

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effective decentralization has been and what potential it embodies. The success of the resistance put up across regions attacked by Russia can partly be attributed to the independence and sense of responsibility of local actors and their ability to take tailored response measures. These democratization processes need to be consolidated and expanded despite the pressure of wartime circumstances.

#### **2. Invest in coordination and quality of communication:**

The process of democratization, in which Ukraine has made significant progress since 2014, cannot be seen as being about laws and legislation alone. As the decentralization process of the past years has clearly shown, it is as much about building the capacity of local, district, and *oblast* authorities to implement this legislation in a way that engages and gives a voice to citizens. A first step in this process that is still difficult in many places is open and engaging communication from state authorities of all levels (as well as from donors and foreign NGO's) with the citizens they are meant to serve. Broadly investing in and mainstreaming these skills across all programs will ensure better, smoother, and more locally owned and sustainable results in all other areas mentioned here.

Citizens' engagement has been on the rise and the war seems to have further strengthened this, as can be seen from the number and quality of volunteer initiatives. The amount of international assistance and engagement has also drastically increased. On the local level, however, coordination among the different initiatives is often absent, resulting in loss of efficiency and motivation. Local civil society and authorities are deeply engaged in their respective activities, and outside assistance in the form of the initiation of coordination mechanisms can be beneficial to all those attempting to make reforms and assistance work. Humanitarian initiatives are to be seen as an integral part of this broader picture, as loss of human lives and damage to properties and livelihood as a result of the war carry the huge risk of citizens becoming too preoccupied with (mental and physical) survival to engage in reforms.

#### **3. Promoting transparent governance and tackling corruption:**

As a post-soviet state, Ukraine inherited a system in which corruption had been an indispensable component of human interaction. Previous governments, especially since 2014, made important steps in curbing this, yet a lot of work remains.<sup>16</sup> The current president was elected on an anti-corruption agenda<sup>17</sup>, and part of the challenges have been tackled on the national level with the ongoing judicial reform and transparency-increasing mechanisms such as online procurement systems.

<sup>16</sup> Transparency International registered a slow progress over the last ten years, see [2020 Corruption Perceptions Index - Explore the... - Transparency.org](#). Many observers expect that the strengthening of local governments will give extra impetus to anti-corruption processes in Ukraine.

<sup>17</sup> See for the election program <https://program.ze2019.com/>.



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It has been evident from many post-conflict countries that corruption can be a big risk in the rebuilding and reconstruction of a country.<sup>18</sup> The EU accession process will not automatically change this. On the contrary, with donors' urge to show quick results in reconstruction projects, risks of corruption are likely to only grow bigger.

There is thus a need for additional programming to strengthen bottom-up checks and balances and address specific war and post-war challenges, not only through national anti-corruption measures coordinated from Kyiv, but across the country, expanding civil society and local authorities' capacity to develop local anti-corruption mechanisms. Bottom-up checks and balances, professional and independent media and civil society watchdogs must be supported to ensure transparency and progress on anti-corruption.

#### II. More than Kyiv: Approach the whole of Ukraine, and each oblast specifically

While the formal accession will be negotiated and implemented between the Kyiv-based government and Brussels, the rest of the country, and the vast differences between *oblasts*, must receive due attention. All *oblasts* deserve their own tailored approach.

#### 4. Approach the whole of the country and the specific needs of each oblast and district

A core part of the accession process is necessarily focused on the capital and national authorities. Officials from Brussels will work with officials in Kyiv to adopt laws and regulations to align the Ukrainian body of laws with the Copenhagen criteria and the *acquis communautaire*. This work on national legislative progress and institution building is inevitably an important element. At the same time, Ukraine is larger in territory than any EU member state or candidate country (except for Türkiye), and has significant regional diversity, where *oblasts* have different natural and economic circumstances, history, social and religious landscape, and thus different needs and demands. All regions and all cities, towns and villages should experience the benefits of European integration and democratization, also during the accession process. Reforms implemented under the Association Agreement and Accession Process may take time before they lead to improvements in rural populations' access to improved education and health services and social and physical infrastructure. Seen from a rural municipality hundreds of kilometers from Kyiv, the government can often seem very far away, not only physically, but also in the amount of care and support that is experienced. Well-accompanied (local) democratization processes and meaningful civic participation, but also a good, need-tailored regional distribution of humanitarian, reconstruction and infrastructural support are therefore essential to keep citizens on board and actively engaged in the reform process. Support and public demand for the process of EU integration accession will surely

<sup>18</sup> See [Ukraine - Transparency.org](https://www.transparency.org) for more info, as well as this recent critical article of EUCRIM (European Criminal Law Associations' Forum): [War and Corruption in Ukraine - eucrim](https://www.eucrim.org/en/news/2022/09/war-and-corruption-in-ukraine).



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wane if citizens feel their interests are not taken into account and that the needs of their region are being neglected.<sup>19</sup> When certain reforms 'kick in', public support may also decrease.<sup>20</sup>

#### 5. Learn the lessons from EU accession history

History of previous EU accessions has shown that it can be more difficult to keep rural areas and peripheries on board in the EU integration process than urban centers. This can influence the political orientation of the country in the long run. Rural areas in the east and south of Poland received far less attention and resources than the capital and became strongholds of conservatives and Eurosceptics, whereas Warsaw, where capital and resources concentrated, remains more liberal (despite recent democratic backsliding). Ukraine is similarly Kyiv-centered, and it is thus extremely important to foster transformation across the country.

Lack of resources and benefits is not the only issue at stake. Communication (as explained under II.1.) is key: in order to prevent backlashes, Ukrainian authorities at different levels (and especially in rural areas) should receive assistance and incentives to engage their citizens right from the start in open conversations about some of the practical implications of implementing European values, of which some will run counter to traditional values.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the EU has for decades promoted technocracy as its vehicle for integration, thus almost on purpose not engaging citizens in processes that indeed require technical expertise, but over time leave citizens with a feeling of deficit of democracy and accountability. These issues need to be addressed across the EU but engaging broad (country-wide) groups of citizens in candidate members on the accession path could be a good start. It would be worth extending such comprehensive support to rural areas in Ukraine, not only during, but also in the years after the accession process, to deeply anchor European values and practices and help prevent backslides).

#### III. Address the consequences of war: Support community peacebuilding, dialogue, and post-war reconciliation

#### 6. Invest in community peacebuilding, inter-community dialogue and reconciliation

In a post-war situation, especially in one with easily identifiable victims and perpetrators, there is the danger that a culture of peace and democracy, which we consider as required for the kind of EU membership that we support (but which is not part of the formal membership criteria), is overshadowed by a culture of victory and/or victimhood. In times of war, things are black and white, and dialogue with 'others' becomes logically, practically, and emotionally problematic. When the war is over, the 'going for victory' mentality must change (back) into one of dialogue and defining – in an

<sup>19</sup> See [Balkans losing hope of progress on EU membership | Reuters](#).

<sup>20</sup> This was the case in most if not all of the countries that have joined the EU since 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the protests from faith-based communities throughout Ukraine when the government ratified the Istanbul Convention in July.

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inclusive way – the common good. Respect and consideration towards minorities must be fostered and encouraged, especially in a post-war context, where ethnic and cultural majority dominance typically becomes stronger.

Therefore, the EU should support inclusive citizenship by means of inter-community, inter-group, and inter-cultural dialogue in Ukraine – in partnership with government actors as well as civil society working toward minority participation. In that process, access for women to decision-making in politics and state bodies has to be improved.

This requires new thinking. In February 2018, the European Union declared reconciliation to be one out of six 'flagships' in the new Western Balkans strategy,<sup>22</sup> but it did not incorporate a working definition, an operationalization plan, or a specific budget. PAX has repeatedly asked European diplomats how societies and political elites were to shape their initiatives to work towards reconciliation. All too often the answer was: 'that is largely the work of civil society.' The reality is that the *acquis communautaire* and Copenhagen criteria were not written for post-conflict societies and do not include smartly defined indicators for reconciliation, which the (pre-)accession instruments are simply not suitable to promote post-conflict peacebuilding. Additional facilities must be developed and put in place.

Post-war reconciliation in the case of Ukraine is not so much about relations between different language, religion, or political communities. It is too early to start engaging Ukrainians in dialogue or reconciliation processes with Russians, but that will become important work once the war is over. Apart from dealing with the hatred toward Russians, there is need for bringing together the vastly different experiences Ukrainians have lived during the war: those who stayed, those who left (inside Ukraine or abroad), those who lived through occupation, those who lost family members or their homes, business, and other important belongings due to the fighting, those who volunteered, and those who did not.

Among communities that lived through occupation, there are tensions between those (suspected of) collaborating with the occupational forces, those who did nothing, and those who actively resisted.<sup>23</sup> These rifts can easily be exacerbated after the war if the ones who stayed behind, the 'heroes' of the war, claim a certain standing in society and perhaps more access to reconstruction resources than others. Restoration and revitalization of the social fabric will require targeted dialogue and peacebuilding programming. Dealing with the trauma and aftermaths of war through community dialogue will be essential to avoid fragmentation of society and a backlash in living the values of inclusion and equality.

<sup>22</sup> See press release, with link to the full document: [Strategy for the Western Balkans: EU sets out new flagship initiatives and support for the reform-driven region \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>23</sup> Example shared by one of PAX' local contacts: in the village, suspicion rose towards residents of a house that was not damaged. Was this coincidence, or was there a form of cooperation with the Russians?

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#### 7. Transitional justice: foster true transition from war to post-war

Ukraine is very vocal about its ambition to join the European Union, but government officials have also talked about military-tech as the driver of reconstruction. Will post-war Ukraine be a militarized democracy after the model of Israel - a country in which securitization is dominant and omnipresent and many things are black or white? Such an approach could endanger democratic development and creativity, and lead to situations in which Ukrainian authorities or groups of citizens engage aggressively with Russian citizens remaining in Ukraine after the war, complicating democracy, the rule of law, and the EU accession process.

This topic is closely related to issues of accountability for war crimes. Both government and citizens of Ukraine want and demand such accountability. Reform of the judiciary is central to the EU accession process, but the indicting and trying of suspected war criminals is not part of the Copenhagen criteria. Yet a process of accountability and (fair) distribution of reparations is an important element of processing and leaving behind the brutalities of the current war. We strongly believe that both retributive justice and comprehensive processes of restorative justice including local components will be needed in the pursuit of sustainable peace in and for Ukraine. Both deserve better attention within the framework of additional programming.

#### 8. Move past victimhood by involving communities in reconstruction efforts

War has an enormous impact on people and communities. External support, such as reconstruction projects, can help surviving communities to move beyond victimhood and dependency, if shaped in a needs-based, transparent way. People in Ukraine have both willingness and the capacity to get actively involved in projects of reconstruction and the reshaping of public space. The agency that this provides them with can help to deal with trauma, find new purpose in their life, and revitalize connections within their communities. This can also help provide space for (cross-)community healing and a sense of joint purpose to rebuild common physical space. PAX published a separate [Policy Alert on The Principles of a Citizens based Reconstruction](#) in Ukraine where this and other recommendations on best practices for reconstruction are elaborated on.

#### IV. Focus on sustainability

To ensure reforms take hold and last beyond the current political and societal momentum and withstand future temptations to fall back, accession and reconstruction processes need to be tied into broader societal transformation processes such as educational reform, energy transition, and forging (local and sectoral) connections to EU member states.

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#### 9. Use Ukraine's education reform to anchor European values and active citizenship

Within the current decentralization process and educational restructuring and reform (optimisation of education infrastructure on the municipal level and implementation of the 'New Ukrainian School' program), Ukraine has started the process of transforming its educational system away from soviet heritage and toward a "school where students 'listen to other's opinions, learn to think critically (...) and to be responsible citizens." We know from other post-conflict contexts, as well as from Ukrainian counterparts, that in order to achieve the critical thinking, overcome collective trauma and grow resilience and tolerance for diversity, history education in which different voices are heard and stories are shared that move beyond 'good' and 'evil' is crucial. Assistance from both EU member states' Ministries of Education, civil society and schools can be of great help in the creation of suitable materials and the training of teachers. Experiences from EU member states that have been through similar transition processes (e.g., Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) may prove extra valuable.

#### 10. Use the momentum for energy transition

As prof. Timothy Snyder noted, "*Russia's war on Ukraine can be understood as a kind of preview of what uncontrolled climate change will look like: petulant wars waged by mendacious hydrocarbon oligarchs, racial violence instead of the pursuit of human survival via technology, shortages and famine in much of the world, and catastrophe in parts of the global South.*"<sup>24</sup> The Donbas region where the war started over in 2014 is a traditional coal mining area and a symbol of the fossil fuel-driven growth that has proven destructive for the planet. The sector was on its way to become economically non-viable; the war and huge destruction in this region have speeded up the transition. Post-war reconstruction, in combination with Ukraine's path to adjust to EU (technical) standards, should be used as the unique momentum to make a drastic and abrupt energy transition, align with the EU Green Deal, while making use of the country's technical expertise (especially the eastern *oblasts*, with large numbers of technically skilled workers and Kharkiv's universities) and IT capacities to get rid of fossil fuels that have been used to take the country 'hostage'. Rather than a top-down process, the focus should be on local initiatives in this direction that have already started.<sup>25</sup>

#### 11. Extend cooperation to partnerships in different sectors

Whereas the European Commission, working from Brussels and its Kyiv delegation, is accompanying Ukraine through the implementation of the Association Agreement and conducting the formal negotiation process toward accession, bringing Ukraine into the EU is done best when these processes are accompanied by a broad sectoral approach, where sectoral and professional organizations from all member states are actively invited to join the process by means of cooperation with their counterparts in Ukraine. In such partnerships and exchanges, the natural focus will not be on the *acquis communautaire*, laws and regulations, but on hands-on learning about democratic and

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/ukraine-war-democracy-nihilism-timothy-snyder>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/09/11/ukraine-russia-sustainability-00054910>.

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inclusive practices as developed in EU member states and the creativity and dedication of Ukrainian organizations and citizens. This can happen among professionals (academics, cultural organizations, healthcare institutions, local governments, environmental organizations, experts in urban planning, trade unions, youth workers) as well as volunteer organizations (sports clubs, people supporting local multi-religious initiatives, neighborhood initiatives).

Such exchanges and partnerships not only help to show solidarity with Ukraine, but also offer a multitude of (mutual) learning opportunities for people from all layers of society, thus bringing Ukraine and the EU closer on all levels and motivating Ukrainian counterparts to engage in reform processes way before there are benefits of formal accession progress trickle down to the cities, towns, and villages. In the same vein, if Ukrainian refugees currently residing in different EU countries can be maximally engaged in their own sectors and spheres of interest, this creates linking and learning that will in all cases benefit both sides involved and strengthen real and viable ties between Ukraine and the EU at all levels.

#### Contact details

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