

## CIVIL SOCIETY IN UKRAINE: TRANSFORMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND WARTIME CHALLENGES

### ГРОМАДЯНСЬКЕ СУСПІЛЬСТВО В УКРАЇНІ: ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ У КОНТЕКСТІ РЕАЛІЗАЦІЇ КУРСУ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОЇ ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ ТА ВИКЛИКІВ ВОЄННОГО ЧАСУ

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**Abstract.** *The article examines the relationship between the processes of civil society development and implementation of European values in the context of Ukraine's European integration course. The article also highlights theoretical approaches to defining civil society as an autonomous social sphere functioning on the principles of self-organization and mutual responsibility. The basic principles underlying the concept of European values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law, equality and solidarity are analyzed. The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in promoting these values in modern Ukraine, in particular in wartime, is considered. Particular attention is paid to the transformational processes in public consciousness of Ukrainians to the strengthening of markers of European identity, which has gained new meaning as a result of the full-scale war. The article analyzes the current state of legal and regulatory support for the functioning of civil society institutions, including recently adopted laws of Ukraine, as well as the Roadmap on the Functioning of Democratic Institutions, which defines the direction of reforms in civil society development, the implementation of which is a prerequisite for starting negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU. The key challenges for the development of civil sector under martial law are identified and the potential for its participation in the implementation of European integration policy is outlined. Summarizing the research results, we can conclude that civil society in Ukraine, despite the difficult circumstances of wartime, demonstrates a growing institutional capacity and plays an important role in strengthening democratic practices, adapting European values and consolidating society.*

**Keywords:** *civil society in Ukraine, European values, legal framework of civil society.*

**Abstract.** *У статті досліджується взаємозв'язок між процесами розвитку громадянського суспільства в Україні та імплементацією європейських цінностей у*

контексті євроінтеграційного курсу держави. Висвітлюються теоретичні підходи до визначення громадянського суспільства як автономної соціальної сфери, що функціонує на принципах самоорганізації та взаємної відповідальності. Здійснено аналіз основних засад, на яких ґрунтується концепція європейських цінностей, як-от повага до людської гідності, свобода, демократія, верховенство права, рівність і солідарність. Розглянуто роль організацій громадянського суспільства у просуванні цих цінностей в сучасній Україні, зокрема в умовах воєнного часу. Особливу увагу приділено трансформаційним процесам у громадській свідомості українців, зокрема посиленню маркерів європейської ідентичності, що набуло нового значення внаслідок повномасштабної війни. У статті проаналізовано сучасний стан нормативно-правового забезпечення функціонування інститутів громадянського суспільства, включаючи нещодавно ухвалені закони України, а також Дорожню карту «Функціонування демократичних інституцій», яка визначає спрямованість реформ у сфері розвитку громадянського суспільства, реалізація яких є необхідною умовою для відкриття переговорів про вступ України до ЄС. Визначено ключові виклики для розвитку громадянського сектору в умовах воєнного стану та окреслено потенціал його участі у реалізації політики європейської інтеграції. Узагальнення результатів дослідження дозволяє зробити висновок, що громадянське суспільство в Україні, попри складні обставини воєнного часу, демонструє зростаючу інституційну спроможність і виконує важливу роль у зміцненні демократичних практик, адаптації європейських цінностей та консолідації суспільства.

**Ключові слова:** громадянське суспільство в Україні, європейські цінності, правова база громадянського суспільства.

**Introduction.** The relevance of the article is due to the fact that in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, transformation challenges and implementation of Ukraine's European integration course, the analysis of the role of civil society as a tool for promoting and rooting European values is of particular importance. Current social and political processes require an updated scientific understanding of how the basic European values of freedom, equality, rule of law, and solidarity are implemented in Ukrainian society through the activities of civil society organizations and initiatives. At the same time, the state and potential of civil sector in wartime, when democratic practices face restrictions but at the same time retain an important function of social consolidation, need to be analyzed.

The scientific significance of the article is in a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis of the relationship between the processes of Europeanization, and formation of civic identity and development of civil society institutions in modern Ukraine. The paper systematizes the main value principles of the European Union and attempts to determine the level of their implementation in the Ukrainian context. The article also summarizes the latest regulatory and program initiatives aimed at developing the civil sector. The attitudes of public consciousness in terms of perception of European values are analyzed based on the latest sociological data.

The proposed conclusions have practical significance for further research in political science, sociology, law and European integration policy, and can be used in the development of state strategies to support civil society in wartime.

**The purpose of the research.** The purpose of the article is to comprehensively study the role of European values in the formation and development of civil society in Ukraine in the context of the European integration course, transformational changes and martial law. The focus is on the analysis of the mechanisms through which civil society institutions contribute to the consolidation of the European community's value orientations in the political, legal and social life of Ukrainian society. The research aims not only at theoretical generalization, but also at practical understanding of the potential of civil sector as a driver of democratic change and a guarantor of social stability in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

To achieve this goal, it was necessary to analyze the concept of civil society, its functions and nature of its interaction with state institutions on the basis of modern European approaches; to determine the components and content of the European values forming the basis of the European

Union's identity and to consider them as a methodological basis for analyzing transformation processes in Ukraine.

The research tasks also include the need to study the dynamics of transformation of public opinion on the European identity of Ukrainians, based on sociological research, and to determine social and cultural barriers to the implementation of European standards; to analyze the latest legal acts and strategic documents that regulate the functioning of civil society organizations in Ukraine, in particular in terms of ensuring public consultations, local democracy and transparency of governance; to study the specifics of functioning of civil society under martial law, in particular in volunteering, humanitarian response, veteran support, human rights protection, and mobilization of local communities, and to assess the level of its institutional capacity.

**Literature review.** Among the most important research studies analyzing the current problems of civil society organizations in wartime are analytical reports of the National Institute for Strategic Studies (State of development, 2024). These studies analyze the challenges faced by civil society in wartime, political and legal framework for the functioning of civil society, current problems of forming a network of civil society organizations, and specifics of communication between them and the authorities. It is also worth noting large-scale sociological research “Civil society of Ukraine in the context of war” conducted by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (Civil society, 2024). This research is devoted to a comprehensive sociological analysis of such aspects of the functioning of civil society organizations as the level of public trust in them, volunteering, provision of social services, assessment of communication with the authorities, and CSOs' involvement in international advocacy. The results of an expert survey of CSO representatives on the needs of public sector in wartime, conducted by the East Europe Foundation, are important for understanding the complex of problems analyzed in this article (Needs and Challenges, 2023). The subject of the analysis was the changes in CSOs that occurred with the beginning of war, the problems faced by CSOs in their activities, and the assessment of CSO project activities and organizational capacity. It is appropriate to point to the research “The impact of martial law on public participation in Ukraine” conducted by the Council of Europe, which analyzes the specifics of interaction between civil society organizations, community residents and local self-government authorities (Impact of martial law, 2022). However, the problems of the role of European values in the development of civil society in Ukraine and their impact on transformational changes in wartime remain inadequately studied in many aspects. This article is devoted to the analysis of these problems.

### **Main Research Results**

#### *European values and development of civil society*

The term “civil society” is usually understood as an activity carried out by individuals or social groups that are not governed by state institutions. The European Economic and Social Committee in its Resolution “The role and contribution of civil society organizations in the building of Europe” defines several components of civil society (Opinion, 1999). This is a cultural process, which refers to a certain code of values applied to members of society. Pluralism for each member of the community or various social groups. Autonomy, when institutions independent of the state protect their values. Civil society is also based on a “culture of solidarity,” which is manifested in the willingness to limit one's own interests and take on obligations for the common good. The basic component of civil society is public consciousness, which is based on communications focused on public opinion. The substantive characteristics also include a guarantee of citizens' participation in political institutions and the activities of public initiatives and interest groups. The Resolution defines that the fundamental elements of civil society include education that helps to transmit basic values; responsibility, since civil society is a place where its members are responsible to each other, and subsidiarity, when the key role in social practices is assigned to basic link of social system.

The EU defines civil society organizations as a set of organizational structures whose members share common goals and responsibilities in the public interest, and act as intermediaries between the authorities and citizens. According to this Resolution, civil society organizations include: labor market participants (social partners); organizations representing social and economic participants who are not partners; non-governmental organizations uniting people for a common cause (environmental organizations, human rights associations, consumer associations, charitable

organizations, etc.); public organizations established to achieve certain goals (youth organizations, family organizations, etc.), in which citizens participate in local and municipal life; religious communities.

The Articles 1-2 of the Treaty of Lisbon, which establishes the European Union, define the fundamental values of the Union, which is based on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The Treaty states that these values are common to states where pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail. These articles of the Treaty state that the purpose of the European Union is to promote its values and the well-being of its peoples. In its relations with other countries, the EU supports and promotes its values and interests (Treaty, 2007). Despite the fact that there is no single “canonical” list of European values, most researchers agree that the basic legal constructs of European values are enshrined in the above Treaty and the European Convention on Human Rights (European Convention).

According to the results of the study “Finding a new consensus on European civil society values and their evaluation” conducted under patronage of the European Economic and Social Committee, European values are the basis of the European Union (European, 2020). According to the authors of the study, the EU is more than just an economic project, it is a union of values, the sustainability of which depends on the daily work of civil society organizations in the EU Member States. The study proves that the values of democracy, rule of law and solidarity are fundamental to the work of civil society organizations in the EU and play a key role in building an inclusive and just society. This study analyzes the difficulties in implementing European values in EU countries. In particular, these include the spread of populism and extremism, financial constraints, and a lack of understanding of solidarity, which is sometimes perceived mainly as local or national rather than pan-European. The results show that there are significant differences in the implementation of these values across European countries. In Western Europe, countries demonstrate a stable environment for civil society, while in Eastern and Southern Europe, organizations face political pressure, limited civic space, and lack of funding. At the same time, the key role of civil society organizations in promoting values is emphasized. It is concluded that European values, in particular democracy, rule of law and solidarity, are the fundamental for activity of civil society organizations and contribute to the development of inclusive, democratic and sustainable societies. Despite the different legal and social environments in EU countries, European values remain a common reference point for most civil society actors.

For the conditions of Ukraine, it is important to conclude that, despite the differences in the functioning of civil society organizations (CSOs) in different European countries, they continue to play a crucial role in promoting European values, facilitate citizen engagement in decision-making, and provide oversight of government activities. The European experience of CSOs is valuable for Ukraine in the context of its European integration course, as the activation of activity of public sector will contribute to implementing reforms, promoting civic participation and strengthening democratic institutions.

The functioning of civil society is the most favorable environment for implementation of basic European values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality before the law, rule of law and protection of minority rights. At the same time, the affirmation of these values in social and administrative practice is directly related to the activities of civil society institutions. Therefore, existence of an effective civil society is essentially the alter ego of the embeddedness of these European values in society. Civil society is formed precisely because there is freedom and pluralism in society, which are protected by law, and there is an awareness of their value. Therefore, in authoritarian regimes, civil society structures exist as a form of imitation, not as a space for uniting citizens' activities to achieve socially significant goals.

Therefore, when we talk about the need for Ukrainian society to master European values on the way to implementing Ukraine's European integration course, we mean, first of all, the mastery of certain European values as fundamentals of social practice, including the development of civil society organizations. Today, Ukrainian society is at the stage of forming an effective civil society, and thus mastering the practical significance of European values.

It must be noted that understanding of such phenomena as democracy, equality before the law, rule of law, minority rights, pluralism and their implementation in social practice is much more complicated by the specifics of wartime, which means that during this period some rights and freedoms are restricted according to the current legislation for security reasons. However, despite these restrictions, the process of implementing European values continues, and democratic practices are limited but not stopped. Civil society, as a sphere of social activity autonomous from the state, continues to function, which in turn contributes to consolidation in wartime.

The dramatic consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war became a catalyst for Ukrainian society to realize the fundamental values of the European community. The aggressor's aggressive actions and genocidal policies aimed at destroying Ukrainians clearly demonstrated the importance of preserving Ukrainian identity. In this context, it is worth mentioning the PACE Resolution "Countering the erasure of cultural identity in war and peace" (2024), which states that Russia uses "cultural cleansing" as a weapon to destroy cultural identity, values, historical heritage, literature, traditions and language. The Resolution defines such actions as war crimes and crimes against humanity, and that they indicate a genocidal intent to destroy Ukrainian identity and culture. As stated in the Resolution, these actions are a genocidal campaign by the Russian Federation against the Ukrainian people (Countering , 2024).

Based on the above definitions, civil society can be understood as a social and economic sphere autonomous from state institutions, which functions on the principle of self-organization of citizens. In this context, civil society is in a relationship with the state, depending on the historical context. It can be a confrontation in authoritarian states, or it can be a partnership in a democratic state. For its part, the state can either hinder the development of civil society or support its formation.

This approach to understanding civil society is directly connected with the development of democratic practices in post-totalitarian countries. This aspect is relevant for Ukraine, where activity of civil society organizations contributes to the establishment of democratic practices, especially at the local level.

The development of civil society is of particular importance in the context of the European integration course, when state institutions are being transformed and fundamentals of the state of law are being formed. In fact, the problems of development of civil society in modern Ukraine are more often studied in this problematic range. Namely, in the context of CSOs' contribution to the implementation of European social and political practices.

#### *Perception of European values in public opinion*

In the context of the topic of our research, we will analyze the dynamics of Eurocentric markers of Ukrainian identity. The social and economic transformation processes that took place after Ukraine gained state independence contributed to the destruction of ideological attitudes on which the idea of the "Soviet type of person" was based, and to the formation of markers of new Ukrainian identity. It was a complex and controversial process of establishing national self-determination of Ukrainians and awareness of themselves as Europeans.

Over the past decades, Ukraine has been undergoing a process of strengthening civic identity. According to monitoring studies of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, in 1992, only 46% of respondents associated their primary identification with Ukrainian citizenship, while in 2023, 80% of respondents indicated this (Ukrainian society, 2023. p. 331).

The Eurocentric component of Ukrainian identity is gradually developing: in 2005, 36% of respondents said that they feel like Europeans, in 2023, the number increased to 51%. At the same time, the processes of strengthening both national and Eurocentric cultural identification continue. According to Razumkov Center, in 2006, 7% of respondents said that they identify themselves with a pan-European cultural tradition, while in 2023 this figure was 10%. Accordingly, in 2006, 56% of respondents identified themselves with Ukrainian cultural tradition, in 2023 their number increased to 81% (Identity, 2023).

The European vector of development is associated with ideas about the future. The results of Razumkov Center's survey show that in 2006, 16% of respondents believed that a pan-European cultural tradition would prevail in Ukraine in the future (in 20-25 years), compared to 24% in 2023. The process of strengthening Eurocentric markers in public consciousness contributed to the formation of a critical majority of supporters of Ukraine's pro-Western course in society. According

to the Sociological Group “Rating”, 85% of Ukrainians support joining the EU, 82% – NATO (All-Ukrainian survey, 2023).

At the same time, the process of Europeanization is associated with considerable mental and socioeconomic difficulties. For example, according to a survey conducted by Razumkov Center in 2023, 43% of respondents did not feel like Europeans. Among the reasons why they do not identify themselves as Europeans, 56% of these people indicated a low level of kindness, 21% indicated a low level of culture and education, 32% – “non-European” consciousness, 39% – language barriers, 45% – social and cultural living conditions, 23% – religious identity [13]. Data from monitoring studies by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine show that public consciousness maintains a fairly high level of commitment to authoritarian political attitudes. Thus, 57% (2021) of respondents believed that “a few strong leaders can do more for the country than all the laws and discussions” (Ukrainian society, 2021. p. 636).

Unfortunately, this trend continues to this day. For example, according to the results of 2025 survey, despite the fact that the European model of social order is attractive to most Ukrainians, a significant number of respondents (69%) nevertheless believed that a political system with a “strong leader who is independent of parliament and elections” is quite suitable for Ukraine (Red Lines , 2025).

Social surveys suggest that in recent years, Ukrainian society has been increasingly committed to the European integration course and gradually strengthening the markers of European identity. At the same time, there are no reasons to assert that Ukrainians at some point all at once became carriers of European identity, as there are mental and socioeconomic factors that currently prevent this from happening. The potential for adherence to authoritarianism still persists in the public consciousness. The social and political orientations of Ukrainians are largely vague when it comes to basic guidelines of social development. Therefore, Ukrainian public opinion is going through a stage of comprehending the content of European identity. Martial law has accelerated this process in many ways, making society more united in its resistance to aggression. But there is still serious humanitarian and cultural work ahead to implement identity policy, which should be aimed at mastering European values (Valevskyi, 2024). In this regard, support for the development of civil society is one of the important aspects of forming the components of the European identity of Ukrainians.

#### *Legal and regulatory initiatives for the development of civil society institutions*

The agenda includes a set of issues related to the need to develop a legal framework for the functioning of civil society. As noted by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), when assessing the role of civil society in the context of Ukraine's European aspirations after Euromaidan, the activities of civil society institutions are an important factor in the context of implementing the objectives of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. EESC emphasized the need to invite a wide range of Ukrainian civil society to participate in cooperation to promote political, social and economic consolidation of Ukraine on the way to realizing its European aspirations. To implement the objectives of the Association Agreement, EESC recommended developing bilateral cooperation between partner civil society organizations in the EU and Ukraine to share best practices and strengthen social and civic dialogue. In particular, according to the provisions of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, a joint Civil Society Platform was established, which included EESC members and representatives of Ukrainian civil society. The main purpose of the Platform was to monitor the implementation of the Association Agreement and to accept proposals from civil society on its implementation (Opinion, 2015). Subsequently, the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform took part in the process of monitoring the implementation of the Ukraine Facility Plan and ensuring the implementation of reforms (Ukraine Facility, 2025).

As Ukraine gained EU candidate status, the importance of developing civil society institutions was raised to a new level. In May 2025, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved roadmaps on the reforms in the areas of rule of law, public administration, and functioning of democratic institutions. The development and approval of these documents is a prerequisite for starting negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU.

The Roadmap on the Functioning of Democratic Institutions defines a set of measures to strengthen and develop democratic processes in Ukraine and covers four areas: overall framework

of democracy; electoral process; functioning of parliaments within a democratic system; role of civil society (Ukraine has approved, 2025). The document was the result of cooperation between 40 government agencies, 25 civil society organizations and international technical assistance projects, which was coordinated through expert consultations and discussions with the European Commission.

In the said Roadmap, section Role of Civil Society contains 35 measures aimed at:

- adopting documents on the development of civil society and implementation of European standards in the functioning of civil society organizations;
- ensuring public consultations and involving civil society in public policy making;
- implementing modern standards of transparency in the activities of state authorities;
- promoting the development of volunteering and other forms of public participation, including local democracy;
- improving the mechanism for providing financial support to civil society institutions and improving the conditions for their provision of social services;
- facilitating interaction between civil society and law enforcement and prosecution authorities.

The implementation of these measures will contribute to the formation of a more developed legal framework for the functioning of civil society institutions according to the practice of European countries. The implementation of the measures set out in the Roadmap will also make it possible to implement the best European practices in the activities of Ukrainian public associations.

An important event in the development of legal framework for CSOs was the definition of the list of legal acts planned for approval in 2025-2026 Action Plan for Promoting Civil Society Development in Ukraine for 2021-2026 (On Approval, 2025). The plan defines 34 different tasks aimed at strengthening the functioning of CSOs – from developing the volunteer movement and improving the mechanisms of local democracy to inter-sectoral cooperation.

Among the urgent tasks of developing the legal framework for the functioning of CSOs, which are formulated in the said Plan, it is advisable to pay attention to taking measures to ensure the adaptation of Ukrainian legislation on public participation in the formation and implementation of state policy and solving local issues to the legislation of the European Union. According to this task, proposals for amending legal and regulatory acts should be developed to adapt them to EU legislation.

Thus, the agenda includes the task of timely approval of legal acts specified in these program documents. This will be a significant test for Ukrainian politicians and public figures of their ability to implement systemic reforms.

It is worth noting that the Parliament of Ukraine adopted a number of new laws that significantly expand the legal space for civil society organizations, giving them more opportunities to influence decision-making at the local and national levels.

In this context, first of all, it is necessary to point out the Law of Ukraine On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine On Local Self-Government, which amended the current legislation defining the mechanisms for exercising the rights of Ukrainian citizens and public associations to participate in local self-government, and to receive information on the activities of local self-government authorities and officials (On Amendments, 2024). This Law expands the forms of participation of territorial community in resolving local issues through a local referendum, general meeting of community residents, and public hearings. It provides for the participation of community residents in planning and allocating local budget funds, conducting public consultations, and participating in advisory and consultative self-government authorities. A significant innovation of the new Law is that it defines a mechanism for public assessment of the activities of local self-government authorities and officials. According to the approved Law, local authorities are obliged to provide organizational and technical assistance in conducting all forms of public participation. In general, it can be noted that the adoption of this Law was a significant step in the development of local democracy. The implementation of its innovations will help to expand the influence of mechanisms of local democracy and public participation on the practice of self-government, and to increase the effectiveness of influence of community residents on self-government authorities.

The adoption of the Law on Public Consultations in 2024, which is one of the structural beacons of the Ukraine Facility program, was of great importance for the development of civil sector (Public Consultations, 2024). The approved Law defines the principles of citizen participation in decision-making by government and local self-government authorities through consultations and discussions, in particular when adopting regulatory legal acts, strategic decisions, or programs. Prior to the adoption of this Law, consultations were mandatory for state authorities and only advisory for local self-government authorities. However, these requirements were often ignored. The new Law stipulates that public consultations must be conducted by all executive, local self-government and other public authorities. The Law determines the procedure for initiating and conducting consultations, forms and tools for public participation in consultations (meetings, surveys, public hearings, electronic consultations), and the terms of discussions and mechanisms for taking proposals into account. It is planned to create a single online platform for interaction with citizens and civil society organizations. The adopted Law provides a comprehensive approach to the development of legal framework for CSOs, creating conditions for cooperation between citizens and government.

There is an urgent need to update the regulatory framework for the activities of public councils under the executive authorities. This conclusion follows from a separate study of the activities of public councils conducted by the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers with the support of OSCE in October 2024 (Report on the results, 2024). According to the study results, as of mid-2024, public councils functioned under the vast majority of central executive authorities and regional state administrations. At the same time, about a third of public councils, during all the years of their activity, did not perform a number of functions that they are supposed to perform (submitting proposals for organizing public consultations, resolving problematic issues in government activities, drafting regulatory legal acts, etc.). The study also revealed a number of problems in the relations between the authorities and public councils. In particular, it was found that only about half of the executive authorities provide public councils with draft regulatory legal acts on which public consultations are held. There are significant problems in establishing feedback, and the authorities often ignore the conclusions and proposals of public council. It is concluded that public councils in their current form do not properly fulfill advisory and consultative functions for which they were created.

Based on the study conducted, representatives of the executive authorities and public councils who participated in the study developed a number of proposals for changes in the functioning of public councils. The proposals were put forward regarding the need for changes in the regulatory documents defining the mechanisms for the formation of public councils. The implementation of the proposals will require a significant update of the regulatory documents defining the mechanisms for the formation of public councils, their scope of competence and functions.

#### *Functioning of CSOs in wartime*

In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the role of civil society organizations has significantly increased, as they took part in supporting national resistance, protecting democratic values and ensuring the resilience of Ukrainian society. The activities of Ukrainian CSOs in wartime have a wide range of directions: various forms of humanitarian response to the consequences of hostilities (providing medical care to the affected population, including psychological support, providing food, hygiene kits, non-food items, assistance to internally displaced persons), support for local democracy, cultural and youth policy, and various forms of veteran support.

As of December 2023, 208.3 thousand non-profit organizations were registered in Ukraine, almost 10% of which were charitable foundations, and 27.6% were various public associations. Almost 7 thousand people were registered in the Register of Volunteers of Ukraine. In general, the number of charitable organizations increased by 43% in 2021-2023 (State of development, 2024).

The overall assessment of the capacity of public sector in Ukraine is assessed using the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index, which is based on seven indicators: 1. legal environment; 2. organizational capacity; 3. financial viability; 4. advocacy; 5. service provision; 6. sectoral infrastructure; 7. public image. The assessment uses a scale from 1 to 7 points, where 1 is the most enhanced CSO sustainability and 7 is the most impeded CSO sustainability. According to the study conducted by the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research, the Sustainability Index in



2023 was 3.0 points, which shows a slight improvement compared to 2022, when the index was 3.1 points. The increase in CSO Sustainability Index compared to 2022 was due to a slight increase in three indicators, which increased by 0.1 points, namely, CSO's organizational capacity – 3.0 (3.1 in 2022); service provision – 2.9 (3.0 in 2022); and sectoral infrastructure – 3.0 (3.1 in 2022). Other indicators (legal environment, financial viability, advocacy, and public image) remained unchanged during the study period (CSO Sustainability, 2023). Thus, despite the difficulties of wartime, civil society organizations manage to maintain their ability to operate effectively.

In general, the activities of civil society organizations in wartime proved their effectiveness, serving as a guarantee of national resilience and mobilization of Ukrainians. The civil society organizations in wartime invariably have a fairly high level of trust among the population. For example, in pre-war 2021, 47% of respondents in a sociological survey conducted by Razumkov Center said they trusted CSOs. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the level of trust has increased and amounted to 59% in 2024 and 61% in 2025 (Assessment of the situation, 2025).

In October 2024, the European Commission presented Ukraine 2024 Report, which provides a detailed assessment of the state of reforms implemented in the context of European integration (Ukraine Report, 2024). Regarding the state of civil society, the Report states that despite the difficult wartime conditions, CSOs in Ukraine continue to contribute to the resilience of society by helping to fulfill many social functions. It is noted that civil society remains a key element of Ukrainian democracy. Ukraine has a policy and legal framework to facilitate the activities of volunteer CSOs. It is claimed that despite the restrictions imposed during martial law, CSOs continue to operate relatively unhindered. The registration of non-governmental organizations is simple, affordable and transparent, however, there are cases when excessive bureaucratic requirements and inspections by various state authorities during the registration process can create delays and difficulties for CSOs in practice. However, in the broader context, there is constructive cooperation between the authorities and CSOs. At the same time, the Report indicates that the number of reports of pressure on civil society organizations and investigative journalists has increased since 2023. This includes threats and intimidation of journalists, social activists, and lawyers. It is noted that these cases are being investigated by the National Police and the Security Service, and government officials publicly condemn these actions and claim an impartial investigation. It is emphasized that measures to ensure the safety of social activists should continue to be taken.

The Report notes that the Ukrainian government expanded its state funding programs for CSOs. Several strategic documents were approved, the implementation of which promotes the involvement of civil society. It is noted that in June 2024, the Law on Public Consultations was adopted, which requires broad and mandatory consultations by state authorities and local self-government authorities when making decisions.

### **Conclusions**

1. European values are the fundamental for the development of civil society, forming its normative and value basis and determining the priorities of social interaction in democratic states. The implementation of fundamental European values in social and governance practices is a guideline for EU candidate countries, including Ukraine. In the context of Ukraine's European integration, the implementation of basic European values (respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law, and solidarity) is of key importance for the institutionalization of civil society.

2. It is proved that the activity of civil society organizations in Ukraine is becoming increasingly important in the process of implementing the European integration course. The role of CSOs is manifested in supporting reforms, participating in public policy making, ensuring social mobilization and protecting democratic principles in wartime. Despite a number of objective constraints inherent in wartime, civil society organizations demonstrate adaptability and institutional sustainability.

3. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, civil sector performs not only the functions of humanitarian response, but also of consolidating society, protecting its value identity and legitimizing the European choice. The spread of attitudes about European values as an alternative to aggressive authoritarianism helps to strengthen the pro-Western course in public consciousness.

Our research proves that civil society organizations in Ukraine retain their ability to act as subjects of mobilization, humanitarian response and protection of democratic values despite the challenges posed by the war.

4. The analysis of trends in public opinion shows a growing level of support for European integration among Ukrainians, and a gradual strengthening of the Eurocentric component of civic identity. At the same time, mental barriers remain – significant part of the population does not identify themselves as bearers of European values, while maintaining fondness for authoritarian models of governance. This makes it necessary to implement cultural and humanitarian work aimed at implementing European values in public consciousness of Ukraine.

5. The legal framework for the functioning of civil society organizations is actively developing, including the adoption of important legal acts aimed at developing the practice of public consultations and expanding the institution of local democracy. The agenda includes the implementation of the tasks for the development of civil society set out in the approved Roadmap on the Functioning of Democratic Institutions (2025). Achieving these benchmarks creates conditions for institutionalizing public participation in governance processes at various levels, and is a prerequisite for starting negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU.

6. Currently, civil society organizations in Ukraine operate in a complex context that combines democratic aspirations with the challenges inherent in martial law (restrictions on rights, lack of resources). CSOs play a critical role in promoting European values. They facilitate citizen engagement in decision-making processes, provide oversight of government activities, protect human rights, and support social solidarity, which in Ukraine is primarily focused on overcoming the trauma of the Russian-Ukrainian war and supporting vulnerable groups of the population.

7. The activities of civil society organizations are currently an important tool for the implementation of European values in Ukrainian society. Successful implementation of European values in the practice of public administration, social interactions and political participation is impossible without strengthening the civil sector. Therefore, ensuring the further development of civil society is a prerequisite not only for meeting criteria for Ukraine's EU membership, but also for building a sustainable, inclusive and democratic state in the postwar period.

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