

# REFORMING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN UKRAINE: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND EU ALIGNMENT

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**Abstract.** *The article aims to determine the development priorities of the public administration and territorial governance sector in Ukraine in the context of European integration and the EU enlargement process. The study identifies the main transformation challenges of the public administration sector; analyzes its institutional capacity and policy planning tools; and evaluates the potential for alignment with EU standards and priorities outlined in the Ukraine Facility Plan, the EU's Negotiation Framework (Cluster 1 - Fundamentals), and the Public Administration Reform Roadmap approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on May 14, 2025. The research uses a combination of content analysis, document analysis, and SWOT analysis. Quantitative data were obtained from the Decentralization Reform portal, and the SWOT analysis was applied to assess institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting public administration reform at the territorial level. The analysis shows that Ukraine's public administration sector demonstrates increasing institutional maturity but still lacks harmonized regional policy tools and sustainable inter-municipal coop-*

*eration mechanisms. The study identifies key development levers within the Ukraine Facility and recommends targeted administrative capacity building, policy coherence mechanisms, and inclusive governance models. The conclusions stress the need for systematic reforms that reflect both Ukraine's internal institutional dynamics and external integration commitments. The study confirms that strengthening local public administration is critical for Ukraine's European integration trajectory and supports EU accession through decentralized, transparent, and accountable governance mechanisms.*

**Keywords:** *administration, emergency circumstances, national security, local governments, European integration.*

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *administracija, ekstremalios situacijos, Europos integracija, nacionalinis saugumas, vietos valdžia,*

## Introduction

The sector of public administration and territorial governance plays a strategic role in Ukraine's democratic development and European integration. However, inconsistent terminology including references to the "sector of public management," "public administration and administration," or "public management of territories" has led to conceptual ambiguities in both academic and policy discussions. This study adopts the term "public administration and territorial governance sector" to align with EU terminology and recent Ukrainian legal reforms. The primary objective of the research is to determine the strategic development direction of this sector, particularly under the conditions of EU integration, the implementation of the Ukraine Facility Plan, and the Public Administration Reform Roadmap adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on May 14, 2025 (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 1973).

Previously, Ukraine's public administration sector was the foundation of the rule of law and the social contract to ensure citizen security (Decentralization 2023a). After the aggressor's full-scale invasion, territorial security has become critical, impacting Ukraine's EU obligations. European integration demands harmonization of national laws with EU law. The Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU guides reforms to align with EU standards in areas like territorial and population protection, environmental safety, and mitigation of natural, man-made, and military disasters (European Parliament 2023; Ukrinform 2024a).

The scientist Movchan, in his scientific works, considers the strategic direction in confronting existing security threats, which would provide an opportunity to prepare for their occurrence in more detail and more thoroughly. The Ukrainian state shows not only a worthy, but also a truly strong opposition to the aggressor country, repelling their attacks in various territories (Movchan 2022). It is noted that it is worth concentrating efforts on obtaining by representatives of public authorities and local self-government bodies of Ukraine, the relevant, appropriate knowledge and skills in preparing plans for emergency crises, conducting reviews on issues related to readiness, including organizing and implementing joint training exercises with NATO representatives (Mogil 2024).

From the perspective of institutional changes, the issue of civil society development in martial law in Ukraine is increasing and the role of the public administration sector strategy at the regional and local levels to overcome existing problems in the social, financial and market mechanisms of the state is studied by Bakhnovskaya & Koval (2016), Belikova et al. (2020), Borshchevsky et al. (2022) and Mogil (2024). Unfortunately, most scientific research is not devoted to issues of public administration and administration of territories in emergency situations in Ukraine and only partially outlines the issues of overcoming this situation in the country.

The priority of our research is to substantiate the vector of development of the public administration and administration sector of Ukraine in the context of strengthening security in emergencies and establishing effective coordination of local governments, territorial communities and civil society institutions, with the deepening of European integration cooperation with EU countries, taking into account the peculiarities of national policy.

## **Materials and Methods**

The methodological approach of this study is based on a combination of qualitative and analytical techniques aimed at evaluating the current state and future trajectory of Ukraine's public administration and territorial governance sector in the context of European integration. The methodological framework integrates document analysis, content analysis, and strategic assessment tools - primarily a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis - to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the institutional and political landscape surrounding administrative reform.

The first component of the research involved document analysis, which focused on key strategic and policy documents that define the parameters and expectations of Ukraine's administrative reform agenda. These documents include the Ukraine Facility Plan (2024–2027), the EU's Negotiation Framework for Ukraine (Cluster 1 – Fundamentals), the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, and the Public Administration Reform Roadmap, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on May 14, 2025. The document analysis allowed the researchers to identify formal obligations, institutional priorities, and legal milestones relevant to the development of the sector.

The second component consisted of content analysis of policy frameworks, legislative reforms, and decentralization measures that have been implemented since 2014. This analysis covered legal acts, governmental resolutions, and official reports from institutions involved in decentralization and administrative reform. Special attention was given to tracking the evolution of administrative functions at the local level, inter-municipal cooperation mechanisms, and transparency tools such as open data platforms. The data were sourced primarily from the official portal of decentralization reform in Ukraine and the websites of relevant ministries and EU support instruments.

The third methodological tool used was SWOT analysis, adapted to the context of administrative transformation. The SWOT framework allowed for a structured assessment of internal and external factors affecting reform implementation. Strengths were identified in areas such as legal compliance with EU standards, existing central-level administrative capacities, and digital governance tools. Weaknesses include fragmented regional policy, weak coordination across governance tiers, and insufficient local fiscal autonomy. Opportunities are provided by EU funding mechanisms, institutional twinning programs, and political support for integration. Threats include institutional fatigue, geopolitical instability, and resource constraints in post-war reconstruction.

The methodology does not involve primary empirical methods such as interviews or surveys; however, it is grounded in secondary data, legal analysis, and strategic policy documents with high institutional credibility. By triangulating insights from national legislation, EU policy benchmarks, and reform implementation data, the study ensures a multi-dimensional understanding of reform progress.

Overall, the combination of legal-institutional analysis, strategic content review, and structured SWOT assessment allows the research to balance normative, descriptive, and strategic dimensions. This methodological approach is particularly suited to the analysis of complex, multi-level governance reforms under conditions of post-conflict recovery and supranational integration.

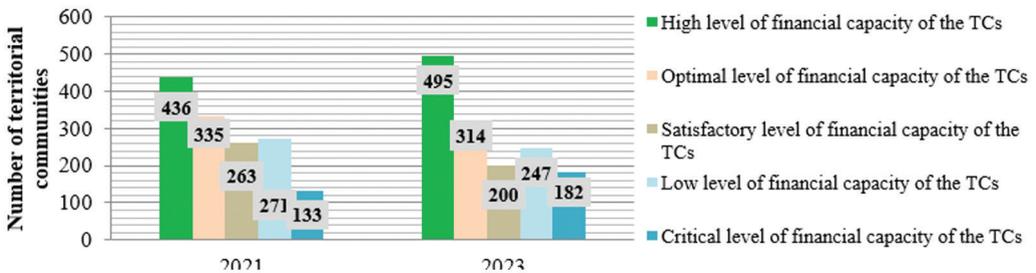
## **Results**

The full-scale military invasion of the aggressor country led to the temporary occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine, significant destruction of infrastructure, millions of internally displaced persons and a record decline in the country's economy. With the beginning of the full-scale aggression, almost 4 thousand settlements in 231 territorial communities were temporarily occupied. This applies to 11 regions of Ukraine - Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, Kherson (Ukrinform 2024a). The de-occupied territories require ensuring the sustainability and efficiency of public administration in accordance with current security, demographic and economic challenges, determining the procedure for the restoration of local self-government, creating conditions for the restoration and stimulation of economic activity, in

particular by defining new strategic guidelines for a consistent change in the structure of the economy in territorial communities (Karamyshev et al. 2021).

Strengthening the financial capacity of local governments in de-occupied territories requires the Government to implement new public management mechanisms to ensure effective restoration (Vorotin 2024). Measures may include: tax exemptions and simplified import duties for enterprises; easier procedures for changing land use for production; “freezing” pre-war credit obligations for damaged businesses; local tax holidays for private entrepreneurs; allowances for education, healthcare, utilities, and local government staff; soft loans for business creation or modernization; and other financial incentives to support micro and small enterprises, particularly food producers (Ukrinform 2024b). Territorial communities that were de-occupied during 2022-2024 require additional measures and recovery programs in accordance with the regional development strategy, taking into account the duration of the occupation. In 2023, the “Association of Unconquered Communities” was created, which united territorial communities that are under temporary occupation. The association is a platform for systematizing problems and finding solutions for their restoration and reintegration into the Ukrainian space (Ukrinform 2024b).

Within the framework of the mechanism of public management and administration of the territories of Ukraine in emergency circumstances in 2022-2023, the real capacity of territorial communities was assessed based on budget execution indicators for 2021-2023 (Fig. 3).



**Figure 1.** Dynamics of changes in the rating positions of territorial communities of Ukraine by level of financial capacity for 2021-2023

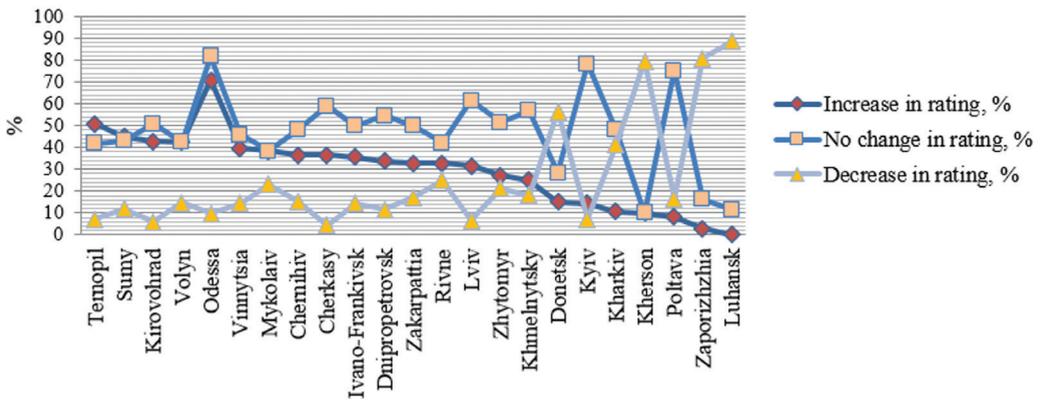
Source: developed by the authors

The 2023 local budgets adapted to martial law, ensuring key budgetary tasks and financing defense, support for displaced persons, recovery from Russia’s aggression, and socio-economic restoration (Decentralization 2023a). That year, 495 territorial communities (TCs) had high financial capacity, 314 optimal, 200 satisfactory, 182 critical, and 247 low – meaning 429 TCs (29.8%) were in the lowest categories. Critical levels were observed in 16 regions. Compared to 2021, communities with high and critical capacity grew by 59 and 49, while those with optimal, satisfactory, and low capacity fell by 21, 63, and 24, respectively. Given the geography and intensity of hostilities, a significant increase in territorial communities with a critical level of financial capacity was recorded in the Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Luhansk, and Kherson regions. Along with this, a significant number of territorial communities with a critical level of financial capacity remain in the Zakarpattia (15 TCs), Ivano-Frankivsk (14 TCs), Rivne (13 TCs), Chernivtsi (18 TCs) regions (Fig. 4).

Compared to 2021, in 2023, 424 TCs increased their rating positions. However, 327 TCs decreased their capabilities due to their relocation to safer and Ukrainian-controlled territories. Unfortunately, this led to a deepening imbalance in the level of financial capacity and, as a result, to the inability of communities to provide high-quality and full-fledged public services to community residents. Among the types of administrative units, 86 urban TCs, 122 settlement TCs, and 216 rural TCs increased their positions.

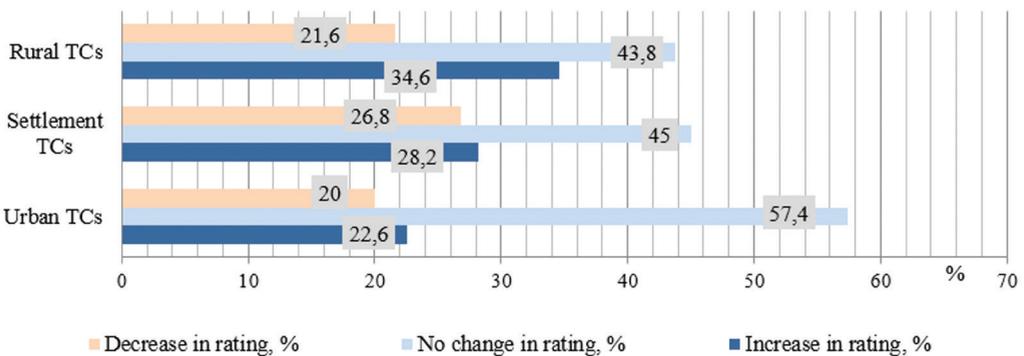
A decrease in positions was noted in 76 urban TCs, 116 settlement TCs and 135 rural TCs. The level of financial capacity in 218 urban TCs, 195 settlement TCs and 274 rural TCs did not change. That is, in 2023, almost half of territorial communities (47.8%) remained below the levels of financial capacity according to the indicators of 2021; 29.5% increased their rating and 22.7% decreased their indicators (Fig. 5).

Thus, in general, in Ukraine in 2023, more than 70% (1009 TCs) of territorial communities are in the range of high level of financial capacity, 34.4% (495 TCs) – optimal level, 21.8% (314 TCs) – satisfactory level and 13.9% (200 TCs) – critical level of capacity. Compared to 2021 (i.e., before the full-scale invasion), the number of territorial communities with a positive level of capacity has almost not changed (1034 TCs – in 2021, 1009 TCs – in 2023), which may indicate the effective adaptation of local budget policy to the security content of the public management and administration sector in emergency circumstances and wartime challenges.



**Figure 2.** Growth in the share of territorial communities between regions of Ukraine by the level of change in the rating position regarding financial capacity for 2021-2023, %

Source: developed by the authors



**Figure 3.** Dynamics of changes in the rating positions of territorial communities of Ukraine by types of settlements for 2021-2023, %

Source: developed by the authors

The change in the positions of territorial communities and their movement to lower (higher) categories of capacity is an objective phenomenon, which is due to the dynamics of the development of TCs and the impact of the war (Decentralization 2023b). At the same time, the increase in the differentiation of capacities will potentially lead to the inability of territorial communities to provide high-quality and full-fledged public services to the residents of their communities, as well as to the provision of public services of different quality (quantity) within the state, which is not fully consistent with the basic principles of the local government reform, namely the desire to ensure that citizens of different regions and communities have access to public services of the same quality (Potapenko et al. 2023).

The Concept of Reforming Local Self-Government in Ukraine proposed introducing prefects instead of state (military) administrations, which have largely transferred their powers to territorial communities. Prefects were to supervise the legality of local government decisions. However, constitutional changes were never made, and under martial law, they are currently impossible. Nonetheless, administrative supervision at the local level remains necessary (Barynova 2024). Draft law No. 4298 aims to reform state administrations into prefectural-type bodies to oversee the legality of local self-government rule-making (Centre of Expertise for Good Governance 2024).

The system of state administrative supervision over compliance with the law in a certain territory exists in many foreign EU member states. Thus, in Poland, voivodes are responsible for the implementation of government policy on the ground and exercise control over the legality of actions of local self-government bodies, while having broad powers, including the right to cancel illegal acts of local self-government bodies (European Charter 2017). In France, prefects coordinate the implementation of state policy at the local level and the provision of services to the population, and also have the right to take appropriate measures in case of violation of the law by local self-government bodies. Project No. 4298 proposes a model similar to the French one, when prefectural-type bodies will be able to suspend the effect of decisions of local self-government bodies and apply to the court for their cancellation, provided that their illegality is confirmed (Centre of Expertise for Good Governance 2024).

In this context, it is important to take into account the provision of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, according to which administrative supervision of the activities of local self-government bodies should be carried out only in cases and in accordance with the procedure provided for by law, and any interference should be proportionate to the importance of the interests being protected (European Charter... 2017). It is worth noting that Recommendation CM/Rec (2019) of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe requires member states to create a regulatory and institutional framework for supervising the activities of local authorities. The Council of Europe also issued an opinion on draft law No. 4298, which emphasized that Ukraine is the only European country that does not have a mechanism for administrative supervision of the legality of decisions of local self-government bodies.

In addition, it should be emphasized that the reform of local state administrations and the introduction of state administrative supervision over the legality of acts of local self-government bodies are part of the Plan of Ukraine within the framework of the Ukraine Facility and are enshrined among other tasks in the updated State Strategy for Regional Development until 2027 (Barynova 2024). The state, as guarantor of social and economic rights, must ensure equal living standards, which requires regulating (equalizing) the financial capacity of local self-government bodies to provide quality public administration in line with Ukraine's EU dialogue during Russian aggression. Since the full-scale invasion, all domestic revenues have gone to defence, now comprising about half the state budget, while civilian expenditures rely entirely on foreign aid. In 2024, Ukraine required 38 billion USD in external financing, receiving 1.35 billion USD in U.S. grants in November (part of 3.9 billion USD expected for the year) and 1.4 billion USD in October, including a 1.1 billion USD IMF tranche and a 0.3 billion USD Canadian loan (Fig. 6).

Foreign financing in October 2024 was insufficient to fully cover the needs of the state budget of Ukraine. The budget deficit amounted to 4.7 billion USD; 1.8 billion USD was spent on repayment of domestic and external debts. With the help of 1.4 billion USD of foreign aid, only 22% of the monthly need was covered. In January-October 2024, foreign aid covered 62% of the state budget's needs for additional

financing (Center for Economic Strategy of Ukraine 2024).

In 2022-2024, Ukraine received 100.79 billion USD of external financial assistance. Ukraine received the most funds during these years from the EU (40.5 billion USD), the USA (28.2 billion USD) and the IMF (11.4 billion USD). Significant amounts of financing also came from Japan (6.3 billion USD), Canada (5.4 billion USD) and the UK (2.6 billion USD). In total, the Ukrainian budget was financed by 27 different countries and organizations. Ukraine received 33% of the financing as a non-repayable grant, 67% as soft loans. For the most part, Ukraine will begin to repay the body of loans in several decades, and interest on the loans is minimal or non-existent.

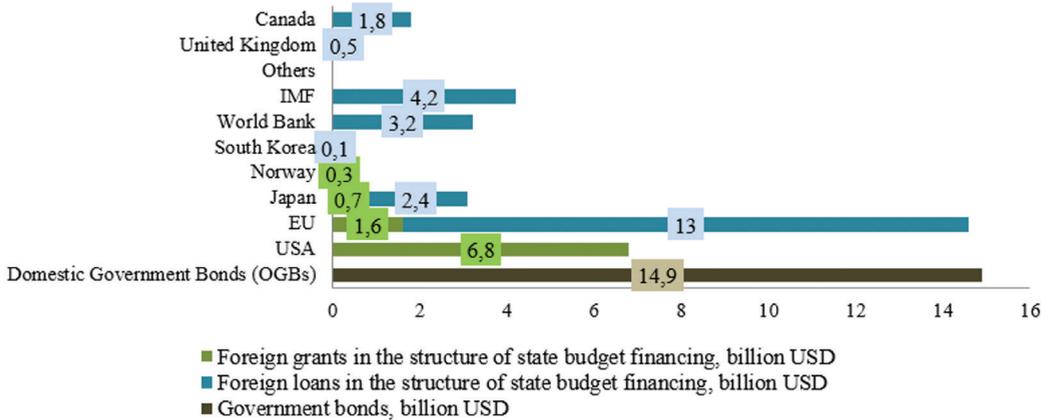


Figure 4. Structure of foreign financing of the state budget of Ukraine during the period of emergency from international and European partners for the 3rd quarter of 2024, billion USD

Source: developed by the authors

Despite the fact that the volume of financing provided to Ukraine is unprecedented, it is still less than the need. During the years of full-scale war, the state budget deficit exceeded 122 billion USD, of which about 33.5 billion USD was used to repay domestic and external debts. Thus, 100 billion USD of foreign funds covered 64% of Ukraine’s need for additional financing (Fig. 7).

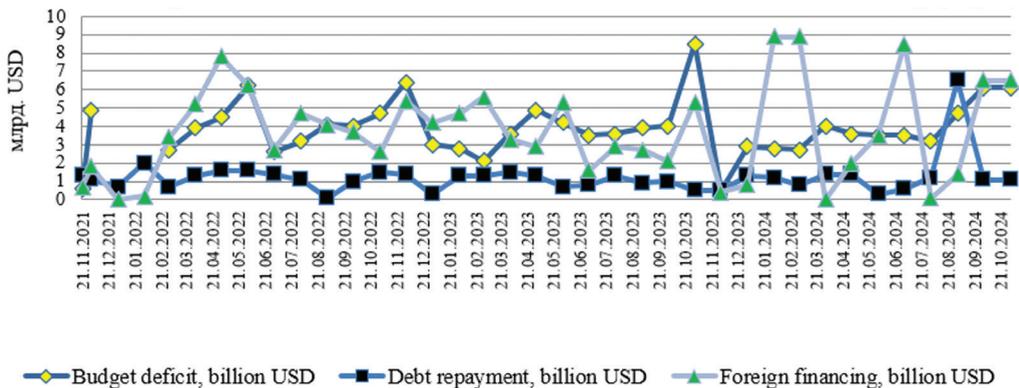


Figure 5. Dynamics of covering the budget deficit at the expense of European partners and repayment of debt under foreign financing in Ukraine from 2021 to 3rd quarter of 2024, billion USD

Source: developed by the authors

The experience of Eastern European countries also shows that positive progress and positive benefits of European integration in the form of increased foreign funding can be seen before the Ukrainian state officially joins the EU, because the integration process itself makes the state more attractive for financial investments. Of course, for this, Ukraine must carry out a number of reforms to accept new European regulations on eliminating threats to the security of public administration and territorial administration. Therefore, Ukraine and the EU must develop this strategy together (Gorodnichenko et al. 2022), because national interests are the main important state policy, which expresses the priority guidelines for the development of the nation and directs the actions of state authorities, local governments and civil society for the benefit of the Ukrainian people (Lyakh 2021).

Therefore, our state, as a future EU member, must establish a transparent and democratic system of administrative supervision over the legality of decisions of local self-government bodies at the legislative level, and the proposed amendments to the law “On Local State Administrations” should become, at the current stage, in conditions of martial law, a legal instrument for increasing the efficiency of public management and administration at the local level and implementing Ukraine’s European integration obligations.

## Discussions

The formation of new institutions of power in the new geopolitical realities of the sector of management and administration of Ukraine remains necessary in the difficult conditions of emergency circumstances in Ukraine (Vorotin 2024). To change the difficult situation, it is necessary to make territorial communities stronger and more successful. We need the tools of European regional policy and a circular model that uses new resources and management mechanisms to strengthen the potential of local administrative institutions, in particular, a unique model of the strategic course of a decentralized system of public administration and administration. In this system, the vision of effective regional development under the current conditions of further reform of the entire management and security system in Ukraine not only does not decrease, but on the contrary, it grows, acquiring a new quality and effectiveness in the face of real threats to the existence of the state (Ukrinform 2024a).

The European Council decided to start negotiations on Ukraine’s accession to the EU at the current difficult stage of state-building of the public administration sector in the country’s territories. New opportunities have opened up for Ukraine, the success of which now depends on civil society. Accordingly, important directions for the formation of capable territorial communities and real local self-government have already been formed: European integration instruments of regional and local development; strengthening the capabilities of local institutions; the impact of European integration processes on the Ukrainian business environment (Society and Environment 2022; Mogil & Dangadze 2024).

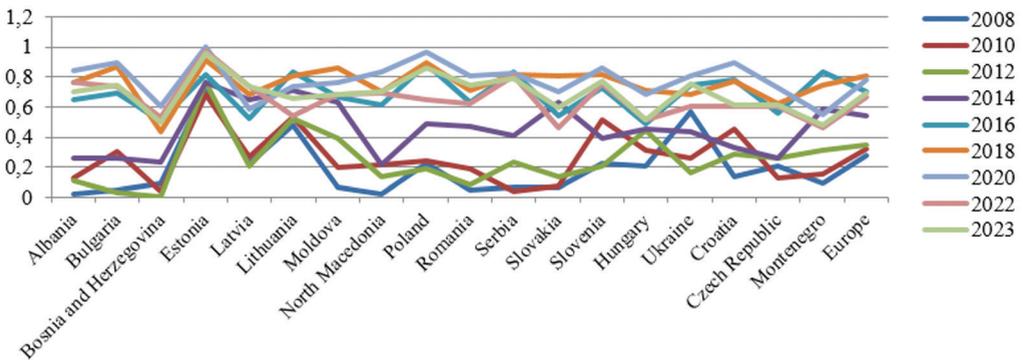
All Eastern European countries are working hard to become a full members of the EU. It should be noted that the recommendations of the European Commission have 9 main blocks, among which the reform of the sector of management and administration of territories is in the first place. It is important that the Council of the EU adopted resolutions that define its position on the key criteria for forming a coordination mechanism in the public administration sector and administration of territories of Ukraine. The conclusions will form the basis of the work of the European Commission on cohesion policy, which is a key objective of the EU to strengthen the economic, social and territorial integration of the EU into the Ukrainian space and reduce regional disparities (Society and Environment 2022; Mogil & Dangadze 2024).

The EU Digital Strategy aims to ensure a digital system of public governance and administration that is focused on civil society, local governments and the exercise of their powers, with a development trajectory to build four areas: digital skills, secure and efficient digital infrastructure and digital transformation of business and digitalization of public services. The development of digital technologies is also a priority for the EU’s strategic partner countries in building a more harmonized digital environment (EU4Digital,

2021; Fesenko & Fesenko 2023). The partner countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) face the challenges of developing a single digital market – investing in the capacity and innovation of the public administration sector; the competence of local governments; the security and cyber resilience of government institutions; the digital transformation of administrative services (Fesenko & Fesenko 2023).

To assess and monitor the mechanisms of e-participation (Fesenko & Fesenko 2016) implemented by the government and compare them between countries, the United Nations (UN) has introduced the E-Participation Index (EPI). When calculating e-participation, the UN takes into account three elements: e-information – providing citizens with access to information without or upon request; e-consultation – involving citizens in discussing public policies and services; e-decision-making – government institutions, local governments and civil society jointly develop policy options, components of administrative services and methods of their provision (Efremova et al. 2022).

However, there are some differences in the achievement of e-participation by governments in CEE countries. From 2008 to 2023, CEE countries achieved significant growth (Figure 8) – from 95% (Estonia) to 79% (Serbia) and demonstrated a level mostly above the European average (UN E-Government Knowledge Base 2024).



**Figure 6.** CEE countries ranking by E-Participation Index for 2008-2023

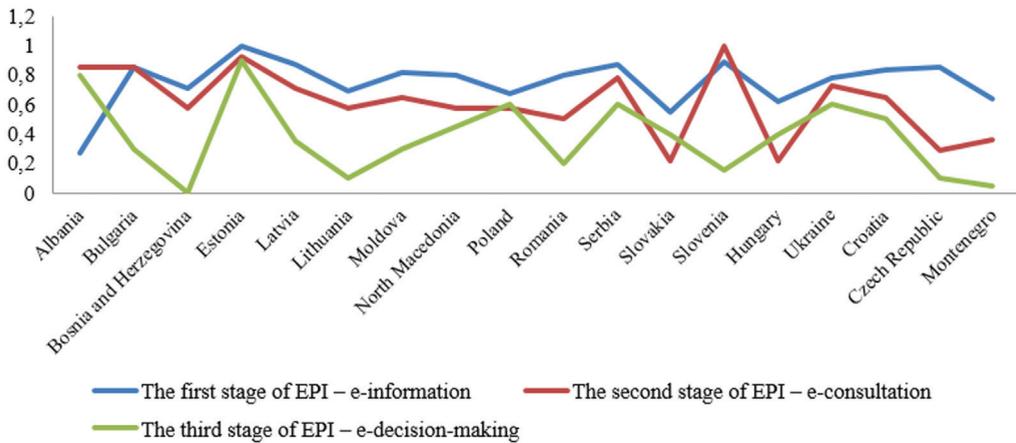
Source: developed by the authors

It should be noted that in 2023, the ERI indicators of the SEE countries significantly deteriorated compared to 2022. The smallest decrease occurred in Serbia (2.0%), Estonia (2.5%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (7.1%), Albania (7.9%), and the largest decrease was in Poland (32.8%), Slovakia (26.8%), Ukraine (24.9%), Lithuania (20.2%) and Romania (19.3%). The consequence of this anti-trend was that in 2024, the average European ERI indicator (ERI Europe Average = 0.6887) could not be overcome by: Bosnia and Herzegovina (0.4962), Lithuania (0.6557), Slovakia (0.5907), Hungary (0.5138) and Montenegro (0.4758).

To promote e-participation, countries need to create conditions for citizens to access public information upon request or without a request and demonstrate progress (e-information). Top SEE countries that have successfully passed the first stage of e-participation development (Fig. 9): Estonia (1.000), Slovenia (0.8909), Latvia (0.8727), Serbia (0.8727), Ukraine (0.7818).

The second stage of e-participation development (e-consultation) is characterized by the degree of involvement of civil society in e-administrative consultation. In the field of e-consultation among the SEE countries (Fig. 9), the greatest successes were achieved by Slovenia (1.000), Estonia (0.9286), Albania (0.8571) and Bulgaria (0.8571), Ukraine (0.7286), and the lowest results were achieved by Slovakia (0.2143), Hungary (0.2143) and the Czech Republic (0.2857). Public administrative consultations in the

form of online discussions are a popular way of coordinating the formation of citizens' opinions for further decision-making processes by local governments and territorial communities.



**Figure 7.** Ranking of CEE countries by stages of E-Participation Index (e-information, e-consultation, e-decision-making)

Source: developed by the authors

Leaders in the third stage of e-participation development – e-decision-making in 2023 (Fig. 9) were Estonia (0.9) and Albania (0.8), Poland and Ukraine (0.6). Bosnia and Herzegovina has a zero indicator of the empowerment of citizens to participate in the development of policy options. Relatively low indicators were obtained by Montenegro (0.05), Lithuania (0.1), the Czech Republic (0.1), Slovenia (0.15) and Romania (0.2). This indicates the need to support initiatives to open government data, develop applications using open data, and increase civic responsibility.

The 2021-2027 planning cycle includes five key EU provisions on Cohesion Policy (Regulation (EU), 2023). The European Union has created a new Just Transition Fund (FTF) to support the population, economy and environment of territories facing serious economic and social challenges related to the transition process to the EU's 2030 energy and climate targets (Regulation (EU), 2023). In particular, the FTF provides financial support to projects implementing a territorial just transition plan. It is developed and approved by the relevant territories of the EU Member States.

Today, the entire management system needs a significant update, since it is not ready for real integration into the EU. Representatives of the expert community, characterizing the most important areas (directions) of cooperation with the EU, highlight that cooperation with the EU in the field of security, 75%, and no less important aspect 76% determine the implementation of joint projects on the restoration and reconstruction of destroyed facilities in Ukraine. The importance of this direction is caused by significant large-scale destruction, including the energy infrastructure of the state, housing stock, as a result of the missile terror of Russia (Pashkov et al. 2022). It is noted that the main goal of the Plan is not only the restoration of destroyed facilities, but also the total transformation of the country into a new, European one, built on the principles of a green economy (Pashkov et al. 2022).

In 2023, support for Ukraine among European populations was significant. Russia's war strengthened political and public backing and expanded EU ties. Overall, 56% of EU citizens are satisfied with real support measures, including 72% of Poles, 57% of the French, 53% of Italians, 48% of Germans, and 40% of Cypriots (European Parliament, 2023). Most EU citizens see Ukraine as part of the European family: 66% believe it should join the EU when ready, and 71% already consider it part of the European community.

Two-thirds of EU countries (66%) support Ukraine's EU accession, though approval varies: Poland – 84%, France and Germany – 60%. Support for accession is highest in Luxembourg (38%), Greece (37%), Hungary (36%), Austria and Bulgaria (35%), and Cyprus and Slovakia (34%).

Three possible scenarios for the development of relations between Ukraine and the EU have been developed based on the status of a candidate country. The first scenario is “optimistic”: Ukraine's membership in the EU in the short term. Relations between Ukraine and the EU will develop actively despite the war, and accession negotiations will begin in 2024. Ukraine will be able to quickly implement reforms and bring its own legislation into line with EU legislation. The negotiations will be completed in 4-5 years. By 2030, Ukraine will receive the status of a full-fledged EU member. Thanks to this status, our state can fully take advantage of the benefits of the common market and common legal space (Society and Environment 2022; Ukrinform 2024b; Mogil & Dangadze 2024).

The second scenario is “pessimistic”: Will the EU survive until Ukraine joins it? Relations between Ukraine and the EU are not developing actively enough. The main factors that negatively affect these relations are the war in Ukraine, the low pace of reforms and implementation of legislation, and the high level of corruption in the country. The EU is experiencing a political crisis caused by geopolitical changes and the formation of a new international order, centrifugal tendencies, an increase in the number of Eurosceptics among members of the European Parliament, an increase in the number of EU member states that have a negative attitude towards the future enlargement of the EU, the lack of political unity among EU member states regarding the future of Ukraine, the withdrawal of a number of countries from the EU (for example, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, etc.). Accession negotiations have not begun. Ukraine has remained a candidate for EU membership for several decades (Society and Environment 2022; Ukrinform 2024a; Mogil & Dangadze 2024).

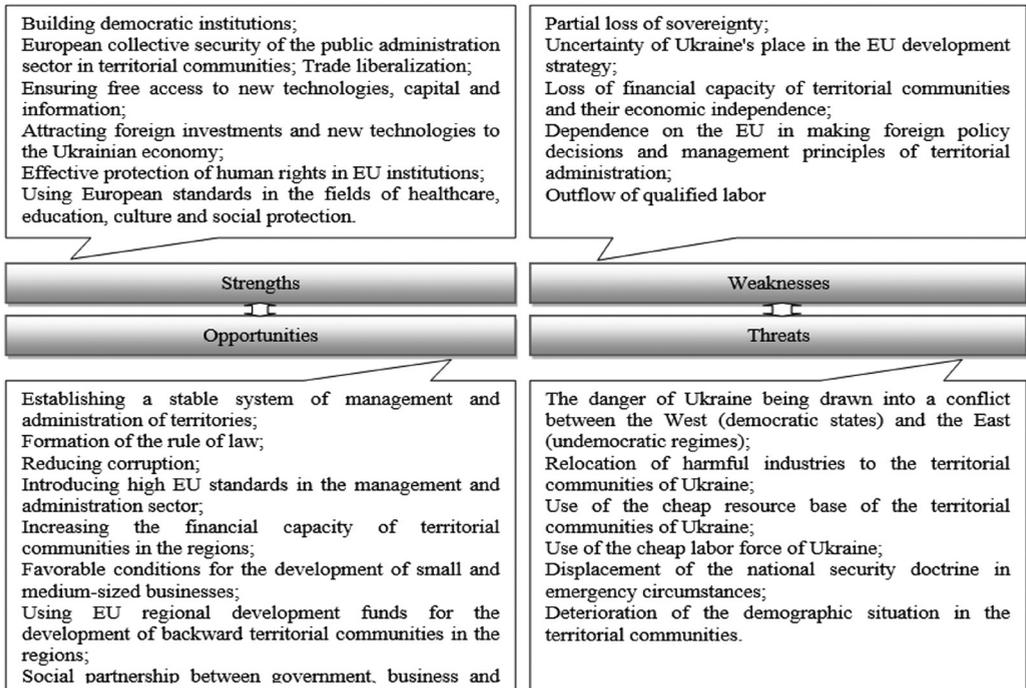
The third scenario is “realistic”: Ukraine's membership in the EU is a long-term prospect. Relations between Ukraine and the EU will develop with varying success. Political dialogue will be active. Reforms will be difficult, primarily due to the involvement of a large number of human and financial resources to counter Russian aggression. Ukraine will begin accession negotiations after the end (or “freezing”) of the war, in the second half of 2020. The EU will provide financial assistance to Ukraine for reforms, monitor compliance with the Copenhagen criteria, and assist in the reconstruction of Ukraine. The process of ratifying the accession treaty will last several years. Ukraine will become a member of the EU after 2035 (Mogil & Dangadze 2024).

Since Ukraine's European integration is a complex and long-term process, we have analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of Ukraine's integration into the EU, and also identified the expected opportunities and threats (Fig. 10).

The SWOT analysis (Figure 10) summarizes institutional and strategic factors affecting the development of the public administration and territorial governance sector in Ukraine. Among the strengths are the presence of a legal framework aligned with European standards, administrative capacity at the central level, and ongoing digitalization of public services. Weaknesses include uneven implementation at the local level, underdeveloped inter-municipal cooperation, and limited fiscal autonomy of local governments. Opportunities arise from EU support instruments, especially the Ukraine Facility Plan and the EU's negotiation framework (Cluster 1), which incentivize reform. Threats include potential political instability, institutional overload due to decentralization, and the risk of reform fragmentation. This matrix highlights the need for targeted capacity building, coordinated governance, and clear performance benchmarks to ensure that EU-aligned reforms deliver measurable results.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in its integrated analysis of Ukraine's public administration and territorial governance sector through the lens of strategic EU alignment mechanisms. Unlike previous studies, this research contextualises national reform processes within current international instruments, including the Ukraine Facility Plan and the EU's Negotiation Framework (Cluster 1 - Fundamentals). The proposed conceptual clarification of the sector and the adapted SWOT framework offer a novel evaluative

tool for monitoring reform readiness and implementation challenges under conditions of post-war reconstruction and European integration.



**Figure 8.** SWOT analysis of Ukraine's European integration and ensuring stable development of the sector of public management and administration in the territory

Source: developed by the authors

## Conclusions

The study confirms that the development of Ukraine's public administration and territorial governance sector is a critical factor in its EU integration process. The analysis shows that the sector has made measurable progress, particularly in legal harmonization and service digitalization, but continues to face significant challenges in policy coherence, institutional capacity at the local level, and strategic coordination across governance tiers.

Based on the findings, it is concluded that Ukraine's reform trajectory must be firmly anchored in the implementation of the Public Administration Reform Roadmap (2025) and the strategic opportunities provided by the Ukraine Facility Plan and EU negotiation instruments. The sector's further development requires operationalizing inter-municipal cooperation, professionalizing local public service, and establishing performance-based funding mechanisms to support decentralization. Special attention should be given to inclusive governance practices and digital innovations that improve transparency and accountability.

The study also demonstrates that a targeted approach - balancing the sector's internal strengths with external opportunities is essential for building administrative resilience and ensuring compliance with EU principles. Ukraine's accession prospects will depend not only on legal adjustments but also on the actual capacity of its territorial institutions to implement complex reforms in a coordinated and measurable way.

In summary, the reform of public administration in Ukraine is both a national priority and an interna-

tional requirement. Its successful implementation will strengthen state capacity, increase public trust, and bring Ukraine closer to full integration into the European political and administrative space.

## Data Availability Statement

The data used to support the findings of this research are available from the corresponding authors upon request.

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## UKRAINOS VIEŠOJO ADMINISTRAVIMO IR ADMINISTRAVIMO SEKTORIAUS PLĖTRA EKSTREMALIOMIS APLINKYBĖMIS

**Anotacija.** Šio straipsnio tikslas – nustatyti Ukrainos viešojo administravimo ir teritorinio valdymo sektoriaus plėtros prioritetus Europos integracijos ir ES plėtros proceso kontekste. Tyrime nustatyti pagrindiniai viešojo administravimo sektoriaus pertvarkos uždaviniai, analizuojami jo instituciniai gebėjimai ir politikos planavimo priemonės, vertinamas suderinamumas su ES standartais ir prioritetais, nustatytais Ukrainos paramos priemonių plane, ES derybų programoje (1 grupė – pagrindiniai principai) ir Viešojo administravimo reformos gairėse, kurias 2025 m. gegužės 14 d. patvirtino Ukrainos ministrų kabinetas, potencialas. Tyrime naudojama turinio analizė, dokumentų analizė ir SWOT analizė. Kiekybiniai duomenys buvo gauti iš Decentralizacijos reformos portalo, o SWOT analizė buvo taikoma siekiant įvertinti institucinius privalumus, trūkumus, galimybes ir grėsmes, turinčias įtakos viešojo administravimo reformai teritoriniu lygmeniu. Analizė rodo, kad Ukrainos viešojo administravimo sektorius tampa vis brandesnis instituciniu požiūriu, tačiau vis dar trūksta suderintų regioninės politikos priemonių ir tvarių savivaldybių bendradarbiavimo mechanizmų. Tyrime nurodomos pagrindinės Ukrainos priemonės plėtros svertai ir rekomenduojama tikslingai stiprinti administracinius gebėjimus, politikos suderinamumo mechanizmus ir įtraukiausias valdymo modelius. Išvadose pabrėžiama, kad reikia sistemingų reformų, atspindinčių tiek Ukrainos vidaus institucinę dinamiką, tiek išorės integracijos išipareigojimus. Tyrimas patvirtina, kad vietos viešojo administravimo stiprinimas yra labai svarbus Ukrainos integracijos į Europą procesui ir remia stojimą į ES per decentralizuotus, skaidrius ir atskaitingus valdymo mechanizmus.

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