

Integration Challenges of Ukrainian Anti-Corruption Reform on the Way to EU

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Abstract. The purpose of the article is to study the challenges faced by the Ukrainian anti-corruption reform on the way to the European Union. The following methods of scientific knowledge were used in the research process: dialectical; historical and normative; analysis and synthesis; logical; normative and dogmatic; monographic; statistical; summarization. The anti-corruption reform in Ukraine, launched in 2014 after the Revolution of Dignity, proved that victory over corruption is possible only under the condition of effective prevention, fair punishment for crimes, political will and constant control by society. The anti-corruption measures taken by our leadership, which were the result of the expression of the civil position of our compatriots in 2014, were considered. The challenges faced by anti-corruption institutions when launching their activities were studied. The results of anti-corruption strategies adopted in different periods were examined. The comments of our international partners regarding the methods of carrying out anti-corruption reforms, as well as recommendations for their improvement, were analyzed. The relevant conclusions, based on the research results, were made.

1. INTRODUCTION

Article 49 of the Treaty establishing the European Union (Maastricht Treaty) enshrines that any European State, respecting the EU values and undertakes to contribute to their development may apply to join to the organization (Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union, 2012).

On February 28, 2022, Ukraine applied for the EU membership, and on June 23 of the same year the organization granted our State the status of a candidate for accession along with certain requirements, the fulfillment of which is a pre-condition for the EU's decision to initiate membership negotiations with Ukraine. They are: (1) Constitutional Court's reformation; (2) prolongation of judicial reform; (3) strengthening anti-corruption measures; (4) combating money laundering; (5) passing law against oligarchy; (6) bringing Ukrainian legislation in line with the European one; (7) strengthening the protection and realization of the national minorities' rights.

As one can see, to obtain the EU candidate status, not only the geographical criterion stipulated by the Maastricht Treaty should be fulfilled, but also a number of other ones – political, economic, and social. These are the so-called Copenhagen criteria, adopted in Madrid in 1995 to assess the State's ability to fulfill the obligations of the Union's member. Compliance with these criteria indicates that the country is legal and democratic one; it respects, protects and implements the rights of citizens.

The Copenhagen criteria consist of three blocks. The first or political criterion is achieving the stability of the functioning of institutions ensuring the realization of human rights, respect for the rights of minorities and their protection. In fact, this criterion expands and clarifies the requirement enshrined in Art. 49 of the EU Treaty, linking its implementation with the presence of relevant bodies and mechanisms in the State. The second (economic) criterion assumes the existence of an effective market economy in the country, as well as the ability to be competitive within the European Union market. The last one is the country's capacity to assume the responsibilities of accession, including compliance with the goals of the political, economic and monetary union (Trahniuk, Vytvytsky & Shpak, 2021, p. 35).

The most questions about Ukraine on the road to EU integration arise precisely because of corruption, which has long since become a systemic phenomenon and is rooted in all areas of our lives.

Thus, according to the data of the survey on the level of corruption level survey, the main direction in combating corruption for both legal entities and Ukrainian citizens is the cleansing of the judicial system from this phenomenon. For the Ukrainians, the following areas are preferential ones (high to low): health care; law enforcement; public sector of the economy (27%), tax and customs; elections. For business entities, the most important spheres are: law enforcement, tax and customs; electoral process; health care; defense and security (National Agency on Corruption Prevention, 2022).

Despite the measures taken by our State, the establishment of anti-corruption institutions and the introduction of the same practices, the results are quite modest. Our European partners continue to emphasize that without overcoming this negative phenomenon, the "door" to the European Union will remain closed for us. Consequently, the implementation of an effective anti-corruption reform is an urgent issue; even though it is one of the most complex and comprehensive, it directly affects all reforms carried out in Ukraine.

Respectively, the aim of the research is to study the challenges faced by the Ukrainian anti-corruption reform on the way to the EU.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The problems of anti-corruption policy, in particular, the implementation of anti-corruption reform, were highlighted in the numerous scientific works by Ukrainian scientists. As Odd-Helge Fjeldstad and Jan Isaksen (2008) correctly point out, anticorruption efforts should be grounded on estimating the most harmful corruption types for each State's development.

Shcherbakovsky et al. (2020) state that combating this phenomenon is one of the most important challenges facing by Ukrainian security forces and our country's future greatly relies on its positive outcome. Having analyzed judicial practice, the authors come to the conclusion that there are two main problems affecting the investigation and prosecution of this kind of offense: 1) the suspected are mostly high ranking officials, who may use their ties and influence the outcome of the trial; 2) operatives, investigators and prosecutors are not always competent enough for investigation corruption offences; they need to enhance their professional level to collect comprehensive evidence base sufficient for objective consideration of the case.

According to Bondarenko et al. (2020), it is Ukrainian citizens who tolerate corruption in the society. On the one hand, people wish to fight corruption, but on the other one – they allow the possibility of solving the issue for money (bribes). This standpoint is completely in line with the opinion by A. Argandoña (2017), who examines facilitating payments or petty corruption as generalized and deeply rooted form of corruption in many countries, which does not attract much attention because of its little impact on the overall situation. However, such a dismissive attitude negatively influences the effectiveness of the whole anti-corruption campaign. These views reflect the standpoint by Y. Mény and L. de Sousa (2001), who understand corruption as deviant behavior or activity occurring either entirely within the public sector or at the intersection of public and private interests, involving public officials and elected representatives as key participants in such transactions.

The later research by Bondarenko is dedicated to anti-corruption institutions, which she split into the highest agencies of power (top government agencies), specially authorized anti-corruption actors (SAPO, NABU, NACP, SAC) and others authorities of state power and local self-government (the National Police; the State Bureau of Investigation) (Bondarenko et al., 2021). The scholars stress on the need to clearly separate their responsibilities, as duplication of powers may negatively influence their efficiency. Di Mascio et al. (2020), who state that specialized independent anti-corruption institutions are key to success in the fight against corruption, are of the same opinion.

Lisitsyna et al. (2022) convince that with introducing martial law corruption in Ukraine has acquired new forms, which, according to the laws of wartime, may be attributed to treason. Considering this fact, the legislator amended the Criminal Code accordingly, having established appropriate liability for corruption offenses committed under martial law. The protocol for investigating them was changed as well.

Yatsyna, Y., & Kudinov, I. (2023) state that this phenomenon has become a global problem affecting the countries' development. Innovative analytical-statistical technologies can become an effective corruption prevention tool due to digital technologies dissemination and the greater access to important data and information. The same view is shared by Agarwal and Maiti (2020), who claim that digitization and effective e-governance can reduce the corruption level in each State.

Reznik et al. (2023) claim that judicial reform for fighting corruption is essential for Ukraine, however nowadays the implemented measures are fragmented and not systematized. The most crucial objective under current conditions is to constantly change the citizens' attitude towards the judiciary, the proceedings and the judges themselves.

Odolko et al. (2023), having studied Anti-corruption Strategy as the main document on combating this phenomenon, come to the conclusion that it is grounded on the following principles: optimizing the functions of state and local self-government; advancing the digital transformation of public administration, and enhancing transparency through data disclosure; creating more accessible and lawful ways for meeting the needs of business and population; ensuring the inevitability of legal accountability for corruption and related offenses; fostering social intolerance toward corruption; promoting a culture of integrity and upholding respect for the rule of law should also remain top priorities.

3. METHODOLOGY

The dialectical method provided a comprehensive analysis of corruption as a systemic issue that hinders Ukraine's European integration efforts.

The historical and normative method enabled an examination of corruption in Ukraine across various historical stages of development since 2014.

The method of analysis and synthesis helped to outline the anti-corruption measures implemented by the country's leadership at each stage.

The logical method was employed to explore the perspectives of international partners on Ukraine's anti-corruption strategies and their recommendations for improvement.

The normative and dogmatic method was utilized to analyze legal frameworks regulating the activities of anti-corruption agencies and the principles of state anti-corruption policy.

The monographic method facilitated the study of works by Ukrainian and foreign scholars on corruption, the development and implementation of anti-corruption policies, and the execution of anti-corruption reforms.

The statistical method was applied to assess corruption levels in Ukraine during specific periods and to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures based on public perception.

Finally, the summarization method was used to consolidate the conclusions drawn from the research.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Prerequisites for Anti-Corruption Reform in Ukraine

Corruption in Ukraine is an old and deeply rooted phenomenon. It is one of the most considerable hindrance to the State's efficient and sustainable development preventing economic growth and foreign investing. It influences all spheres of the people's life undermining faith in public institutions, justice, confidence in future prospects of the country, destroying the belief that the matters can be solved within the legal framework, thereby causing social and political polarization. Efforts to prevent corruption offences cannot be deemed entirely effective due to the impact of various legal, organizational, theoretical, and methodological factors. Addressing this challenge necessitates comprehensive structural and systemic measures, strategic planning, and the development of a robust theoretical and methodological framework for preventing and combating corruption offences (Shopina et al., 2022, p. 116).

Unlike earlier anti-corruption efforts, particularly those following the Orange Revolution of 2004–05, Ukraine has made

significant strides since 2014 in establishing a solid foundation for combating corruption in public life. Recent reforms have gone beyond mere rhetoric, enhancing transparency, limiting opportunities for corrupt practices, and creating specialized agencies to investigate and prosecute high-ranking officials suspected of corruption. The process of reforming State authorities in Ukraine, initiated in 2014, has indicated that combating corruption is possible only in case of its prevention, fair prosecution of those guilty, strong political will, and continuous public oversight. According to the research, mass protests in 2013–2014 were largely due to this phenomenon. According to the results of the Global Corruption Barometer study, held in 2013, 36 % of Ukrainians were willing to go out on the streets protesting against it (Law of Ukraine No. 2322-IX, 2014).

"In 2014, people came to the Maidan and expressed their position very clearly: they expected justice and life without corruption. These are very difficult, ambitious goals. We support all efforts to achieve them", – remarked Remi Dufлот, the Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Ukraine (Transparency International Ukraine, 2021).

4.2. Legislative Changes and the Establishment of Anti-Corruption Institutions

The result of the expression of the civil position of our compatriots was passing the Law of Ukraine "On Corruption Prevention", which establishes the legal and organizational framework for the country's corruption prevention system, defines preventive anti-corruption mechanisms, and outlines procedures for addressing corruption offenses. The named act (Law of Ukraine No. 1700-VII, 2014) also established the National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP) as a central specific executive body, responsible for shaping and implementing state anti-corruption policy. The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU), whose primary mandate is investigating corruption and other criminal offenses committed by high-ranking officials threatening national security, was created under the Law No. 1698-VII (2014). The National Anti-Corruption Council was formed as an advisory body to the President of Ukraine, tasked with systematically analyzing the state of corruption combating and prevention, estimating the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies, and overseeing counter-corruption measures (Decree of the President No. 808/2014, 2014). The purpose of the Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2014–2017 (Law of Ukraine No. 1699-VII, 2014) was solving corruption-related problems as one of the Ukrainian society priorities. The aim of the last Strategy is to create a decision-making system regarding anti-corruption policy with the involvement of representatives of civil society, as well as the building public support in overcoming corruption; ensuring transparency in political party financing and elections, reducing corruption risks in elected bodies, strengthening public oversight, and bringing professional and ethical public service in line with international standards; implementing effective anti-corruption programs in State institutions and enterprises, increasing transparency in their operations, and reforming public procurement laws to eliminate corruption risks; eradicating corruption in the justice system and law enforcement agencies; enhancing business integrity, ensuring access to socially significant information for detecting corruption, and establishing mechanisms for the effective investigation and prosecution of corruption-related crimes (Law of Ukraine, No. 2322-IX, 2022).

In 2015, the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) was created, which was one of the requirements for Ukraine's visa-free regime with the EU. This institution is responsible for supervising the implementation of laws during the pre-trial investigations conducted by NABU (National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine).

After the launch of the work of NABU and SAPO and preparation of the first indictments, it became clear that ordinary courts, the level of trust that was already at its lowest, would not be able to objectively consider cases of this category, because there was a great risk that officials of higher level would use their connections to influence judges to secure a court decision in their favor. The establishment of a specialized anti-corruption court in Ukraine was among the key recommendations of the OECD in its assessment of the country's anti-corruption reforms (Drozd et al., 2020, p. 173). Thus, on September 05, 2019, the work of the High Anti-Corruption Court, which is authorized to deal with cases against top corrupt officials, was launched.

4.3. Obstacles and Challenges in the Implementation of Anti-Corruption Reform

It was expected that the adoption of such progressive legal instruments and establishment of specialized anti-corruption institutions, would significantly reduce corruption; however, this did not happen. In 2014, Ukraine ranked 142 (26 points) out of 175 countries by the level of perception of corruption, then in 2015 it took 130th place (27 points) out of 168 countries, and in 2016 – 131st place (29 points) out of 176 countries. According to the Global Corruption Barometer study, as of November 2016, Ukraine ranked first among the countries of Europe and Central Asia in the rating of negative public perception of the State's efforts to combat corruption (Transparency International, 2017).

This situation arose due to a significant delay in the launch of work of the said agencies. For example, in 2015, the NABU Director Artem Sytnyk stated that many people from "the old system" did not want the Anti-Corruption Bureau to work. In particular, this concerned the General Prosecutor's Office, which feared losing the monopoly right to prosecute its employees (Official website of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, 2015). In 2020, after the appointment of Iryna Venediktova as the Prosecutor General, there was the practice of manually transferring individual criminal proceedings against high-ranking officials from NABU to other, more loyal, pre-trial investigation bodies, which was completely illegal and aimed at protecting those involved and hindering the investigation (Hryshchuk, 2020).

There were also scandals during the process of SAPO establishment. At the end of September 2015, the former European Commissioner for Justice, Consumer Rights and Equality Věra Jourová visited Kyiv, after which the European Union formed its position on establishing anti-corruption prosecutor's office. Brussels called this situation unacceptable, because the Verkhovna Rada, when adopting laws on the NABU launch, changed them in such a way that this agency ceased to be de facto independent and received a clear connection with the "old prosecutor's office" (Sydorenko & Sushko, 2015).

After the resignation of the chairman in summer 2020, SAPO did not have a legitimately elected leader for more than a year due to the fact that the winner of the open competition was a representative who was not loyal to the authorities. The US and the EU demanded the election of the next SAPO head by the end of 2021; this requirement is also written in the memorandum on cooperation between our State and the IMF. Due to the unjustified delay of this process, the US publicly called on the members of the SAPO Leadership Election Commission to respect their own procedures and make the right decision, as well as not allow corrupt external forces to block the course of the case (BBC News Ukraine, 2021).

As for the Anti-corruption Strategy, adopted by the Law No. 1699-VII (2014), it identified 10 problems and, accordingly, 10 goals with specially designed activities. However, as of March 2017, only 20% of measures were implemented, 44% of them were partway realized, and 36% of measures were not performed at all. Thus, it is indicated that no goal was fully achieved, the goal was partially achieved in 80% of cases, and the goal was not achieved in 20% of cases (Khavroniuk, 2017).

In 2020, the situation, unfortunately, has not changed: the effectiveness of countering corruption remained at a low level – according to the population, corruption ranks second among the main problems of Ukraine – after military operations in Donbas. According to the survey on the effectiveness of anti-corruption institutions using a 5-point scale, where 1 means that the fight against corruption is completely ineffective and 5 is very effective, the following results were obtained • NACP – 2, 09 points; • NABU – 2.15 points; SAPO – 2.09 points; • SAC – 2.04 points (Vološevych et al., 2020).

On October 27, 2020, the CCU passed a decision that affected the entire anti-corruption system in the country – in a closed session judges declared unconstitutional some rules of the Law of Ukraine "On Corruption Prevention" and the Ukrainian Criminal Code, which became invalid on the day the Court adopted this decision. By its decision, the CCU exempted officials from criminal liability for knowingly misreporting and intentional failure to file declarations. This decision significantly undermined achievements in the combating corruption area and made the effective work of the National Agency on Corruption Prevention impossible (the Agency lost its authority to control the timeliness of declarations, check the completeness and reliability of information, make requests and receive explanations from the declaration actors; it was deprived of the opportunity to consider and respond to complaints, including from whistleblowers; the Agency has lost the right to make protocols on administrative violations, to send requests and to receive explanations from individuals (Official website of the National Agency on Corruption Prevention, 2020). Thus, the result of such CCU decision was a significant threat of the destruction of anti-corruption infrastructure after seven years of work on its creation and development.

4.4. Current State and Prospects of Anti-Corruption Policy

The all-out assault by the Russian Federation posed a significant test for all Ukrainian state institutions, including anti-corruption ones. Despite certain wartime restrictions, these bodies continued their work, yielding noticeable results (Marchenko, 2023, p. 62).

In June 2022, Ukraine adopted the Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021–2025, aimed at making substantial progress in preventing and combating corruption while ensuring the coherence and systematic implementation of anti-corruption efforts across all levels of government. This document identifies corruption as a major barrier to sustainable economic growth and the development of efficient democratic institutions. Unlike the previous strategy, which prioritized the establishment of modern legal anti-corruption mechanisms and the creating specialized bodies for fighting it, the new approach focuses on their effective realization (Official website of the National Agency on Corruption Prevention, 2022).

The current Strategy is combining of two attitudes: it not only defines the key spheres of further improvement of corruption prevention and countering it, but also the most priority areas from the perspective of overcoming this phenomenon. A harmonized composition of these methods will not only allow to cut corruption down, to strengthen citizens' trust in the authorities, but also to significantly accelerate Ukraine's socio-economic growth.

On July 28, 2022, Oleksandr Klymenko, who won a transparent selection procedure and passed the necessary pre-appointment check, was the head of the SAP. Having significant previous experience in the fight against corruption, the newly appointed head promised to actively cooperate with all law enforcement agencies in this area to overcome this common "internal enemy". The assignment of the SAPO head served as a catalyst for accelerating investigations into high-level corruption.

The International Monetary Fund also states certain achievements of Ukraine's anti-graft efforts; in its Report on Ukraine for July 2023, in particular: keeping the list of war sponsors (a kind of reputational lever of influence on the international companies activities) by the NACP and including 2 of the 3 biggest international financial institutions providing activities in our State (they represent 10% of the banking system's assets and have been designated as international sponsors of the war due to the ongoing operations of their subsidiaries in Russia); NABU and SAPO investigations and the arrest of the Supreme Court's head; implementing more than 70% (as of March 2023) of non-military procurements through Prozorro procurement system with disclosure of the final owners of the procurement participants. IMF notes that Ukraine's anti-corruption endeavor in wartime in restoring declaring property assets of public officials, prevent the distortion of the electronic declaration system, increase the institutional capacity of the SAPO to investigate the crimes of top officials are important for strengthening public trust, the trust of donors and private investors, and as well as for the promotion of EU membership (International Monetary Fund, 2023).

Notably, Ukraine scored 36 out of 100 in the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), ranking 104th out of 180 countries. The country's three-point increase marks one of the most significant improvements globally over the past year. Moreover, Ukraine was among the 17 countries in this year's CPI to achieve its highest score ever. (Transparency International and Transparency International Ukraine, 2023).

Since 2014, over 10 years, our country has added 11 points to the study. Growth even during a full-scale war in the Corruption Perceptions Index–2023 became possible due to productive activities of anti-corruption institutions. The leadership of the OECD's ACN noted Ukraine's progress in establishing anti-corruption institutions, and also praised their achievements. These conclusions are important, because the European Commission will take them into account when making a decision on the proper progress in reforms and the fulfillment of the criteria for initiating discussion on the joining our country to the EU (Official website of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, 2023).

Unfortunately, there are corruption scandals even "within the walls" of anti-corruption institutions. For example, in May 2024, NABU Director Semen Kryvonos suspended his first deputy, Hizo Uhlava, from performing his duties during pre-trial investigation for a possible leak of information at the Bureau. On September 03, 2024, the latter was released; the official reason was the violation of the oath of the civil servant and the rules of ethical behavior. In turn, Uhlava is preparing a lawsuit against his former head and is cooperating with NACP as a whistleblower, accusing NABU management of pressure aimed at forcing him to resign, as well as of the fact that decisions in the Bureau are made under the influence of external factors, of bias and political involvement.

It should be noted that statements about the unreliability of NABU were made even before. A clear example is the cases of anti-corruption officers against former Minister of Infrastructure Volodymyr Omelian. He repeatedly stated that the detectives were biased towards the case against him due to political involvement. Both cases against him collapsed in the courts, but NABU did not officially apologize to the ex-minister for illegal criminal prosecution and damage to business reputation. There is also concern about violations of the presumption of innocence by NABU, as in the cases against Mykola Solskyi and People's Deputy Serhii Kuzminykh. The Kharkiv human rights group also criticized NABU for statements violating the presumption of innocence. The real reason for the persecution of Solski is considered to be the reform of the land market in Ukraine (Podoliak, 2024).

However, regardless of individual names, lawyers and legal practitioners agree that even with all the claims NABU and SAPO show better results than other judicial and law enforcement bodies. Unfortunately, scandals with individual officials can arise in any country – no one is immune from this; and the mistakes of specific people do not mean that the system does not work as a

whole. It is only important that they draw correct conclusions from these situations, amend existing mistakes and prevent them in the future.

For the further successful fight against corruption, the European Commission recommends that our State continue to thoroughly investigate this type of crime, forming a reliable evidence base for further prosecutions and issuing appropriate decisions in cases of top corruption, including the arrest and confiscation of criminal assets. We should also strive for prompt and successful realization of the current Strategy. It is necessary to continue streamlining and improving criminal legislation. Manage ever-increasing occupancy, it is necessary to increase the staff of anti-corruption institutions. Besides, the SAPO should receive additional protection from potential external interference by enhancing the procedures for selecting its head and key officials, strengthening its autonomy, and improving its reporting system (European Commission, 2023).

The White House, in turn, also recommends to increase the number of investigators by at least 300 people; to amend the legislation to clarify the relationship between the SAPO's head and the Attorney-General to strengthen the procedural independence of the SAPO, as well as to grant it separate powers regarding extradition and providing mutual legal assistance; to strengthen the forensic capacity of NABU in compliance with global standards and guarantees; to amend legislation to increase the number of judges and allow certain cases to be heard by one judge instead of by a panel of three judges, which will facilitate fair and efficient consideration of the growing number of corruption cases (Official website of the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, 2023).

It is worth noting that these acts show not only the demands of our foreign partners, but also the needs of Ukrainian citizens. According to a sociological survey conducted at the end of 2023, corruption risks are a concern for 88% of Ukrainians. The public views corruption as the greatest threat to Ukraine's reconstruction, citing two key factors: lack of oversight leading to the embezzlement of funds (79%) and the resurgence of corruption schemes (75%). (Transparency International and Transparency International Ukraine, 2023).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The provided data indicate that Ukrainian society is deeply concerned about the presence of this phenomenon in all spheres of life and understands that it may become the main impediment to receiving help from our international partners and a tangible obstacle on the way to the post-war recovery of the country. This is due to the fact that corruption not only hampers economic development of the State, but also negatively influences direct international investments and cross-border acquisitions (En Xie, Reddy & Jie Liang, 2017). Currently, we are fighting not only with an external enemy – the Russian Federation, but also with an internal one – total corruption, and therefore the continuation and strengthening of anti-graft efforts is necessary not only for the foreign partners, but for our society as well.

Granting of EU candidate status to Ukraine in June 2022 undoubtedly accelerated the country's reform efforts in this area: transparency has been improved, the opportunities for corrupt practices have been restricted, new agencies for investigating and prosecuting high-level officials suspected of corruption and corruption-related offences have been established, the judiciary was renewed. However, significant work remains: to handle the increasing workload within the anti-corruption system, it is essential to expand the number of NABU employees, SAPO prosecutors, and judges of the High Anti-Corruption Court. Another key priority is the reform of the forensic service to ensure NABU's timely and uninterrupted access to forensic expertise in high-level corruption investigations. Additionally, substantive and procedural criminal legislation must be refined, as existing issues with its quality and application have already led to the closure of relevant criminal cases.

Moreover, SAPO requires stronger safeguards against potential external interference. This can be achieved by enhancing the selection procedures for its leadership and key officials, strengthening its organizational and procedural independence, and improving its accountability framework. The Anti-Corruption Strategy must continue to be implemented effectively and on schedule, while the legislative framework for whistleblower protection should be finalized in full compliance with EU standards. Furthermore, an urgent step is the removal of provisions currently restricting the NACP's authority from the Law of Ukraine "On Corruption Prevention".

Given the fact that efficient anti-graft reform and corruption elimination are among the main requirements for Ukraine's EU membership, this study may be useful in the context of decision-making concerning the steps to be made and measures to be taken to overcome this negative phenomenon in our country. The prospects for further research are considering the results of implementing the indicated proposals and examining their effect on the socio-economic and political situation in the State.

Future research on this topic should focus on evaluating the long-term effectiveness of Ukraine's anti-corruption reforms in the context of European integration. It would be beneficial to conduct comparative studies with other countries that have successfully implemented similar reforms to identify best practices. Additionally, further investigation is needed into the role of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in enhancing transparency and preventing corruption. Exploring the societal impact of anti-corruption measures, including public trust in institutions and legal frameworks, could also provide valuable insights. Finally, an in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by anti-corruption institutions during wartime and post-war recovery would help refine strategies for ensuring sustainable governance and adherence to EU standards.

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