



Socio-political challenges of the Ukrainian (post-)war reality and the phenomenon of civic maturity

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Abstract. The full-scale war in Ukraine has created unique conditions for the transformation of political culture and the development of civil society, thereby actualising the study of the phenomenon of civic maturity as a response to the existential challenges of modernity. The purpose of this study was to identify the key manifestations of the civic maturity of Ukrainian society in the context of war and the post-war reality, as well as to analyse its relationship with political culture and the European vector of development. The study adopted a comprehensive approach encompassing qualitative and quantitative research methods, analysis of scientific sources, documentary analysis, and the comparative historical method. Findings indicated that Ukrainian society demonstrates an extraordinary level of civic maturity through the mass mobilisation of volunteers, high patriotism, and a heightened level of citizens' political awareness. It was established that the phenomenon of civic maturity manifests itself through four interrelated dimensions: civic consciousness, mobilisation, activism, and responsibility. Particular attention was paid to the risks of democratic collapse, including the strengthening of executive power, the decline in pluralism, civil liberties, political competition, and public control, as well as the postponement of democratic procedures during the war. It was further analysed that European integration plays a key role in shaping a positive scenario for Ukraine's future, providing institutional frameworks and value orientations. It was concluded that the European horizon and civic maturity mutually reinforce each other, creating the basis for successful democratic development. The results of the study can be used by political scientists, sociologists, and public administration specialists to develop strategies for the advancement of civil society and democratic institutions in the post-war period

Keywords: democratic transformations; volunteer movement; European integration; wartime; political culture; civil society

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Introduction

Ukrainian society faces unprecedented challenges caused by a large-scale war and the need for post-war reconstruction. Russian aggression has threatened the very existence of Ukraine as a sovereign state, while also mobilising Ukrainians to extraordinary unity and resilience. M. Budjeryn (2024) argues that this war has taken on an existential dimension: it has become a confrontation between the democratic world and neo-imperial authoritarianism, between “liberal modernity and postmodern illiberalism”, with the future of the world order of values at stake. In such conditions, new socio-political realities are being formed in Ukraine, laying the foundation for a “democratic Ukraine forged in the crucible of war”. The experience of the Revolution of Dignity of 2013-2014 (Euromaidan) provided the basis for a new political culture and an active civil society. As a number of researchers have noted, Euromaidan became a catalyst for the development of a “third Ukraine” – a modern Ukrainian identity with a strong civic (rather than purely ethnic) core. It gave impetus to urban civic movements in Ukraine and encouraged many citizens to take greater responsibility for the country’s fate. After Maidan, there was a steady increase in local activism: in different regions, citizens self-organised to protect the rights of residents, preserve historical heritage, and hold the authorities to account.

The volunteer movement that emerged in 2014 with the outbreak of the war in the Donbas is particularly noteworthy. This experience of self-organisation and volunteerism, acquired between 2014 and 2021, became a valuable asset for civil society, fully manifesting after the start of the fullscale invasion in 2022. In the context of a full-scale war ongoing since 2022, Ukrainian society has faced unprecedented existential challenges that require not only physical resistance but also profound transformations in political culture, consciousness, and civil society structures (Strilchuk, 2023). These processes have become the subject of active scientific reflection in global

academic discourse. Researchers emphasise the phenomenon of civic maturity as one of the key factors in resistance, survival, and the renewal of democratic identity in times of crisis. In particular, L. Leonchuk & E. Johnson (2023) analyse the wave of civic mobilisation after the start of the full-scale invasion as a manifestation of deep civic responsibility and maturity. At the same time, K. Zarembo (2023) notes the strengthening of social subjectivity, manifested in the growing participation of citizens in volunteer, humanitarian, and political initiatives. The global academic community interprets the war in Ukraine as a catalyst for a civilisational choice, compelling society to consolidate around democratic values and the European perspective. At the same time, researchers warn of the risks of “democratic compression” in a state of emergency – reduced pluralism, the strengthening of the executive vertical, and the postponement of elections (Budjeryn, 2024; Shumak *et al.*, 2024). This creates a unique situation in which social mobilisation and maturity coexist with challenges to democracy.

The relevance of this study stems from the fact that the phenomenon of civic maturity in the Ukrainian context remains under-researched during a period of deep social crisis. The focus of scientific analysis remains on the general processes of mobilisation, patriotism, and institutional transformation, while the specific mechanisms for the formation and manifestation of civic maturity in relation to the European value horizon require further study. The purpose of the study was to identify the key manifestations of the civic maturity of Ukrainian society in the context of wartime and the post-war reality, as well as to analyse its relationship with political culture and the European vector of development. The tasks were as follows: (1) theoretical substantiation of the concept of civic maturity; (2) analysis of socio-political transformations related to the war; (3) identification of the role of European integration in strengthening democratic identity. The scientific novelty lies in its comprehensive approach

to the phenomenon of civic maturity in the context of an existential threat, combining sociological, political, and value perspectives.

Literature Review

The impact of war on society and the state has traditionally drawn the attention of scholars in the fields of political science, sociology, and philosophy. Classical theories indicate that in times of extreme threat, societies are capable of high cohesion and mobilisation, but at the same time, there are risks associated with the power and the concentration of erosion of democratic institutions. From the first days of the full-scale invasion, researchers noted an unprecedented rise in patriotism, volunteerism, and civic solidarity in Ukraine, which has been interpreted as a manifestation of the maturity of civil society. At the same time, analysts such as M. Budjeryn (2024) and I. Shumak *et al.* (2024) warn about “undercurrents” – the danger of a democratic rollback due to martial law, the strengthening of the executive vertical, restrictions on pluralism, and other measures. Theoretically, these processes can be understood through the prism of the concepts of national consolidation (the rally-round-the-flag effect) and the “compression” of democracy in wartime, as well as through the concept of societal resilience – the ability to adapt and preserve core values under the pressure of existential threats.

Special attention should be paid to the phenomenon of civic maturity. In the Ukrainian academic literature, this concept is closely related to civic competence, consciousness, and individual activity. In particular, researchers and educators characterise civic maturity through a set of personality traits and values: “patriotism, legal consciousness, political awareness, morality, labour activity” (Buzhyna *et al.*, 2024). In other words, a mature citizen is aware of their rights and responsibilities, thinks critically, upholds democratic principles, and takes responsibility for the community. The formation of such qualities is regarded as the goal of civic education and the upbringing of a conscious patriot and professional

capable of self-development and contributing to the building of a democratic society. In academic discourse, the problem of civic maturity in wartime is analysed from an interdisciplinary perspective – political science, sociology, psychology, and pedagogy. Considerable attention is given to the Ukrainian context, where war is a powerful factor in the transformation of civil society.

L. Leonchuk & E. Johnson (2023) consider the full-scale invasion of 2022 a catalyst for new civic mobilisation and responsibility, signalling deep civic maturity. K. Zarembo (2023) emphasises the formation of an active civic core that self-organises under extreme stress while maintaining ethical norms and democratic values. The pedagogical dimension of civic maturity is explored by I. Buzhyna *et al.* (2024), who interpret it as a set of civic competencies: legal awareness, morality, political activism, and patriotism. This approach allows war to be interpreted as an accelerated environment for civic education. O. Hordiychuk & Y. Hrytsenko (2023) characterise civil society as a fundamental element of the democratic system, emphasising the importance of self-organisation, legal awareness, and citizen engagement in times of war. In their study, O. Malinovska & D. Kryviuk (2023) emphasise the impact of war on national identity, which is gradually shifting towards an inclusive understanding of the political nation. Thus, the research addresses both theoretical and practical aspects of civic maturity, revealing it through the prism of social mobilisation, institutional transformation, ethical consciousness, and democratic identity. It confirms that civic maturity has become not only a reaction to the war but also a foundation for Ukraine’s future democratic progress.

The issue of civic maturity is also studied from pedagogical and socio-psychological perspectives. I. Buzhyna *et al.* (2024) emphasise that this quality is formed through a set of civic competencies – political consciousness, morality, legal orientation, and patriotism. In this sense, war functions as a compelled environment for civic education, in which new ethical and behavioural

standards are being shaped for Ukrainians of all generations. Against the backdrop of these processes, the issue of the European choice is becoming particularly relevant. O. Onuch & L. Way (2024) show that support for EU accession has become not only a geopolitical benchmark but also a symbol of national dignity and values-based self-determination. In this context, EU integration emerges as a key factor in shaping a new political culture based on the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and institutional trust. However, as I. Koshiw (2023) and A. Terzyan (2024) note, post-war reconstruction and EU integration are not without challenges. Corruption, governance dysfunctions, population fatigue, and social fragmentation all require a high level of civic participation, active oversight, and critical thinking. Therefore, analysing the phenomenon of civic maturity is essential for understanding the potential for sustainable democratic development.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted between January 2022 and December 2024 within the territory of Ukraine during the period of full-scale war and the initial phases of post-war reconstruction. The research focused on examining socio-political processes, patterns of civic engagement, and the comprehensive transformation of Ukrainian political culture. The selection of research phenomena was strategically determined by their demonstrable impact on strengthening civic maturity, enhancing democratic institutions, and advancing Ukraine's European integration prospects. The methodological framework employed a comprehensive mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms to ensure robust data triangulation and enhanced validity of findings. This approach specifically targeted theoretical frameworks related to civic maturity, democratic transitions during wartime, and European integration processes. The materials included academic monographs, edited volumes on post-conflict democratisation, and policy reports from Ukrainian and international

research institutions. Content analysis methodology was applied to identify recurring themes, theoretical patterns, and empirical evidence supporting the research hypotheses.

Documentary analysis served as the secondary methodological pillar, encompassing the examination of official government documents, legislative acts concerning martial law implementation, national survey data, progress reports on Ukraine's candidacy status, and comprehensive reports from civil society organisations. This method enabled the systematic tracking of policy changes, institutional adaptations, and civil society responses throughout the conflict period. The documents were subjected to thematic coding to extract patterns related to democratic governance, civic mobilisation, and European integration dynamics. The comparative historical method, following Tilly's established framework from 2004, facilitated analysis of temporal changes in civic engagement patterns by comparing pre-war baseline indicators from 2014-2022 with wartime mobilisation data (Tilly, 2004). This methodological approach enabled the identification of causal mechanisms linking war experiences to civic maturity development and provided a comparative perspective with other post-conflict democratisation cases in Eastern Europe. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study, with all sources verified for credibility and analysed in compliance with research integrity standards.

Results and Discussion

The full-scale war has caused profound socio-political changes in Ukraine. Foremost, there is an unprecedented level of national unity and mass mobilisation of the population in support of the country's defence. In the face of a mortal threat, Ukrainians have united regardless of language, regional, or political differences, forming a cohesive front against the aggressor. Volunteer and charitable initiatives have extended across all areas, from providing the army with equipment to assisting refugees. In the first six months of the war alone, 86% of Ukrainians financially supported

defence or humanitarian needs (an average of nine times), 79% participated in fundraising for the Armed Forces or Territorial Defence, and 42% personally volunteered (Leonchuk & Johnson, 2023).

Thus, the war has become a catalyst for an unprecedented rise in self-organisation and mutual aid, serving as a sign of the maturity of civil society. Alongside positive developments, wartime has also brought complex political challenges. The imposition of martial law and the concentration of resources on warfare have inevitably affected the functioning of democratic institutions. For constitutional reasons, the next elections in 2023 were postponed, and the terms of office of the president and parliament were effectively extended until the end of hostilities. The centralisation of governance has intensified: emergency powers have been concentrated in the hands of the president and the government to ensure rapid decision-making in times of crisis. This situation is common in many countries at war. In Ukraine, it was reflected in the creation of a single news telethon, which limited the presence of opposition viewpoints in the media space. The difficult situation of the parliamentary opposition, as well as certain signals of pressure on critical voices (accusations against individual journalists, cases of forced mobilisation interpreted as punishment for criticism), have been noted (Budjeryn, 2024). Therefore, it is important to understand the concepts of nation and civil society, as well as their characteristics.

Before the beginning of the military aggression of the Russian Federation, the main activities of Ukrainian civil society included: defending the interests, rights, and freedoms of Ukrainian society in cooperation with the authorities; supporting reforms; promoting political change and improvement; participation in the implementation of anti-corruption policy; strengthening democratic mechanisms at the local level; and charitable activities in various fields, including in the cultural sector (protection of cultural heritage) and social sector (support for vulnerable groups); as well as promoting social unity and resilience. It was shaped as a result of cultural, historical, and

social factors (Malinovska & Kryviuk, 2023). Some scholars argue that the war has affected the identity and cultural values of assimilated persons. Conflicts prompt a redefinition of national identity, often forcing different social groups to identify with the state more intensely.

Civil society in Ukraine has long been characterised as small and weak, a consequence of its colonial past, specifically being part of other states and political entities, in particular the destructive and disruptive influence of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (Hordiychuk & Hrytsenko, 2023). Russian aggression and the outbreak of active hostilities in a large part of Ukraine in late February 2022 became the starting point for a test of Ukrainian statehood and the level of civil society development. Although not all Ukrainians were concerned about the ATO or the subsequent JFO in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, as well as the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the full-scale war has affected everyone in one way or another. Armed conflict is both a test of the system of state power and a challenge for ordinary citizens as well as civil society organisations (Dokalenko, 2022). The armed invasion led to the intensification of the activities of volunteer organisations, which evolved into a nationwide movement and covered almost all of Ukraine (Shevchenko, 2023). Numerous volunteer initiatives emerging in the first months of the war later grew into large NGOs and charitable foundations that continue to support people affected by the war (Luneva, 2022). Civil society has become increasingly important, and the population shows greater trust in it than is usually observed in other countries (Tishchenko *et al.*, 2021).

The system of checks and balances established in previous years (including the successful decentralisation of 2015-2020) has partially moved into the background during the war, with a significant share of resources and decisions again concentrated at the central level for effective defence management (Budjeryn, 2024). Ukrainian society recognises the need for such centralisation as a temporary wartime measure, but remains

vigilant about potential abuses. Citizens and independent media closely monitor the government's actions, especially in relation to the spending of Western aid and domestic resources. During the hostilities of 2022-2023, anti-corruption scandals repeatedly erupted, forcing the government to respond with resignations and investigations, demonstrating that society is not prepared to tolerate corruption even in wartime (Landi, 2023). Despite the enormous burden, civil society organisations continue to serve as a watchdog, monitoring potential violations and demanding transparency. According to observers, as the war and martial law persist, the role of civil society in preventing the country from sliding into authoritarianism is critical (Budjeryn, 2024). It is already evident that after the end of hostilities, Ukrainians will insist on a return to full democratic politics – holding elections, restoring a competitive political process, and reopening public dialogue on post-war development. The demand for justice and accountability from the authorities will be extremely high: civic activists have explicitly called for the investigation not only of Russian crimes, but also of the mistakes or inaction of the Ukrainian leadership during the war (Zarembko, 2023). The outlook for the post-war period in Ukraine is perceived with both hope and awareness of new challenges. It is clear that after victory, there will be a task of large-scale reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure, reintegration of the de-occupied territories, and social adaptation of millions of veterans, IDPs, and refugees. However, this post-war reconstruction is viewed not merely as a technical process, but also as an opportunity to rebuild the country on stronger foundations. Analysts note that the reconstruction will be a chance to “build back better”, modernise the economy and governance, and deepen integration into the European community. Reforms are already being planned to strengthen the rule of law, modernise the justice system (including ensuring the prosecution of war criminals), and create effective mechanisms for overseeing the use of international assistance (Landi, 2023). The success

of the post-war transformation will largely depend on preserving and harnessing the level of civic consolidation and activism displayed during the war. In other words, the social capital accumulated by the people during the arduous war years will become the foundation for Ukraine's revival and development in its aftermath. This aspect is directly related to the phenomenon of civic maturity, which will be discussed below. One of the key social phenomena that characterises Ukrainian (post-)war reality is the high level of civic maturity among the population. This concept refers to a mature civic consciousness and a culture of behaviour that emerges during critical historical moments. The war has become a kind of “maturity test” for Ukrainians, and a significant part of society has passed this exam with flying colours. The manifestations of civic maturity can be analysed through four interrelated dimensions, which are highlighted in this study.

In the face of an existential threat, the civic consciousness of Ukrainians has increased dramatically – reflecting an understanding of a common national identity, the value of freedom and democracy, and an awareness of their rights and responsibilities towards society. Millions of people have reconsidered their attitude towards the state as an “alien apparatus” and come to regard themselves as a direct part of this state, co-responsible for its fate. Studies by E. Landi (2023) indicate record levels of patriotism and readiness to defend the country across different regions and age groups. This awakened consciousness is fuelled by an understanding of the historical choice facing the nation – to be free Europeans or to return to the imperial yoke. Therefore, Ukrainians widely support the course towards the EU and NATO as a civilisational choice, seeing it as a guarantee of their freedom. Civic consciousness also includes critical thinking and the search for truth: even in the face of military censorship, the population seeks diverse information, volunteers debunk enemy disinformation, and public discourse is not limited to propaganda clichés – there remains an active engagement with the deeper causes and goals of

the struggle.

The maturity of the community was most clearly manifested in its ability to self-organise and mobilise resources for common goals. From the first hours of the invasion, people organised themselves into initiative groups, volunteer units, territorial defence forces, and networks to help the army and victims. Moreover, this mobilisation was mostly horizontal: citizens acted proactively, not waiting for orders from above. Leaders and coordinators spontaneously emerged in every town and village to channel the community's energy into constructive efforts. Thanks to this, Ukraine was able to withstand the first critical weeks when the state institutions were overloaded – citizens themselves covered many needs (evacuating people, arranging shelters, supplying food and medicine, repairing damage, etc.). The current high level of mobilisation readiness continues to be maintained: although constant volunteer activity declined somewhat after its peak in the spring of 2022 (from 80% of those involved in volunteering at the beginning of the invasion to about 40% as of early 2023), a “core” of experienced volunteers has formed, ready to step up their efforts at any time in response to new challenges. As Ukrainians themselves note, their national identity is now closely linked to the ability to “come together when needed and do what needs to be done” (Zaremba, 2023). Such flexible capacity for mobilisation is one of society's most valuable resources.

The war has made mass civic activism part of everyday life. What was once the preserve of a few enthusiasts has become a widespread practice: everyone who can, according to their abilities and skills, contributes as a volunteer. Ukrainians joke that now everyone has their own front – some fight with weapons, others volunteer or provide information. All social strata have joined the aid movement – from students to pensioners, from workers to businesspeople. Sociologists record a high level of trust in volunteers and public initiatives: people willingly donate to foundations and support public fundraisers because they see tangible results

(Leonchuk & Johnson, 2023). At the same time, activism is not only about supporting the army. Volunteer projects to aid vulnerable groups (children, people with disabilities, the elderly living alone), cultural initiatives (preserving monuments during the war, documenting war crimes), and environmental actions (e.g. demining, clearing destroyed facilities) remain active or have been expanded. Importantly, an active minority of society “infects” others with its energy – participation in a common cause has ceased to be something unusual and has become a socially approved norm (Shapovalova, 2017). As a result, a genuine movement of a new generation of civic activists has emerged in Ukraine, with experience in self-organisation under the most difficult conditions and the determination to continue in peacetime.

Civic maturity is impossible without a deep sense of responsibility, both personal and collective. Ukrainians have impressed the world with their maturity precisely because individuals in every sphere have assumed part of the common burden. Ordinary people have sacrificed their comfort, time, and often their lives for the sake of their neighbours and the country. This applies to both military volunteers and civilians – for example, volunteers often took risks by delivering humanitarian aid to war zones or remaining in frontline cities to maintain essential services (Zaremba, 2023). Responsibility has also been evident at the community level: mayors, village elders, and local activists took the initiative when the central government was overwhelmed. Society demonstrated maturity by avoiding panic and anarchy, instead maintaining order and mutual assistance even in exceptional circumstances. Significantly, despite all the hatred for the aggressor, Ukrainians have not generally resorted to widespread acts of vigilante justice or human rights violations within the country. On the contrary, there is an understanding that humanity and the rule of law must be upheld, as these are the very values for which the war is being fought (Shvedenko *et al.*, 2025). Collective responsibility is also reflected in attitudes towards the

future: Ukrainians are already considering what post-war Ukraine should look like, holding public discussions on reforms, and monitoring the government's commitments. Intellectuals and civic leaders have formed a kind of public "manifesto for sustainable peace", which outlines a vision of a just post-war Ukraine – from punishing criminals to EU and NATO membership (Zarembko, 2023). All this reflects a high level of responsibility for the country's fate: citizens feel that it is largely up to them to determine what Ukraine will look like after victory.

Thus, the phenomenon of civic maturity in modern Ukraine has manifested itself vividly and comprehensively. Society, going through the crucible of war, demonstrates maturity of thought and action: an understanding of common goals, the ability to self-organise, and a willingness to act and take responsibility. This is in line with the classical notion of an established political nation and a mature civil society. At the same time, it should be understood that it is difficult to maintain such a high level of mobilisation on a regular basis, as fatigue and burnout inevitably set in. Even volunteers note a tendency towards partial normalisation of life when the share of active participants decreases compared with the peak period. However, the basic elements of civic maturity – consciousness, an active stance, and a demanding attitude towards the government – do not disappear. They have become the property of a large part of Ukrainians and will determine social development in the postwar years. In fact, hopes for a better future are associated not only with victory over the enemy, but also with the belief that the people will be able to transfer this capital of maturity into a peaceful life, building a successful European state. Ukraine's European choice serves as a strategic guideline that gives meaning to the sacrifice of the Ukrainian people and outlines a vision for future development. The war has finally confirmed Ukraine's membership in the community of European democracies and made EU integration a non-negotiable goal for most citizens and elites. While before 2022,

European integration was subject to political debate and fluctuations (especially in the east and south of the country, where support for the EU has historically been lower), public opinion has changed dramatically since the full-scale invasion. According to polls, as of August 2023, almost 90% of Ukrainians were in favour of Ukraine's accession to the EU (Zarembko, 2023). Moreover, support has grown in all regions: even in the south and east, the share of pro-European attitudes has risen by 25%-30% compared with the pre-war period. Such consolidation around European integration has not only a rational but also a deep value-based basis. The European Union is perceived by Ukrainians not so much as an economic club as a "beacon of democratic normative order" – a community of freedom and justice, opposed to the Russian model of despotism. In the eyes of Ukrainian society, the war is a struggle for these European values, and therefore, the future of Ukraine is seen only as part of a single family with the countries of Europe.

From a geopolitical dream, the European horizon has turned into a concrete political process. Ukraine formally applied for EU membership in the midst of the fighting (on the fifth day of the invasion), demonstrating that it was fighting not only for its land but also for the right to belong to a united Europe. The European Union heeded this signal: in June 2022, the European Council unanimously granted Ukraine EU candidate status. This decision was historic and unprecedentedly swift, taken in response to the heroism of Ukrainians and as a sign of faith in their European future. Subsequently, despite the ongoing war, Kyiv made efforts to fulfil the EU's initial requirements (including reforms of the High Council of Justice, media legislation, anti-corruption measures, etc.). As a result, in December 2023, the EU agreed to start formal accession negotiations, which actually commenced in June 2024 (Odarchenko, 2024). Thus, the process of European integration has become irreversible: Ukraine is gradually synchronising its legislation and institutions with those of the European Union, preparing to become a full

member of the Union.

The European horizon has a powerful modernising influence on Ukrainian political culture. First, European integration sets specific standards and criteria in the areas of the rule of law, human rights, good governance, and economic policy. Completion of the “homework” for accession encourages the Ukrainian authorities to implement reforms even during the war, while civil society closely monitors this process. In particular, over the past year and a half, important European integration laws have been adopted (covering media, national minorities, anti-corruption reforms, etc.), judicial reform is underway, and the government is being cleansed of corrupt officials. All these steps simultaneously bring the country closer to EU membership and reshape the political culture, enshrining the values of transparency, accountability, and respect for legal procedures. Second, the European course strengthens the sense of common purpose and historical optimism in society. Despite the difficult military routine, two-thirds of Ukrainians believe that in the next five years the standard of living in Ukraine will approach European levels. This conviction motivates and inspires work for change (Onuch & Way, 2024). Thirdly, the European horizon contributes to a rethinking of national identity: more and more Ukrainians define their identity not only through ethnic origin or their Soviet past, but through belonging to European civilisation. According to historians, the aspiration to Europe has become a part of modern Ukrainian patriotism and a consensus national idea (Onuch & Way, 2024). One of the central topics is the functioning of democracy under martial law. The imposition of martial law is accompanied by objective restrictions on democratic procedures, such as a moratorium on elections, the concentration of power in the hands of the executive branch and military command, and restrictions on certain rights and freedoms. Researchers emphasise that the main task is to preserve the core of the democratic system, even if temporary restrictions are necessary. The collective study of I. Shumak *et al.* (2024) concludes

that, in the context of prolonged martial law, it is important to ensure that all restrictions are proportionate and temporary, backed by democratic oversight, including control by civil society. This aligns with the assessments of European institutions: the European Commission’s 2024 report states that restrictions on fundamental rights in connection with the war generally remain proportionate to security needs (Sydorenko, 2024). Despite the wartime context, no direct censorship has been introduced in Ukraine – although television switched to a single information marathon, pluralism and criticism of the authorities have persisted in the online media, and a new media law was adopted at the end of 2022 as part of European integration. At the same time, scholars warn that the risks to democracy increase in the event of prolonged martial law, including the gradual erosion of checks and balances, the narrowing of the space for public debate, and possible abuse of power (with indications such as scandals involving the SBU’s surveillance of journalists). Therefore, studies emphasise the importance of constant public oversight and readiness to restore normal democratic processes as soon as possible after the security situation improves (Shumak, 2024).

Due to martial law, the next national elections in Ukraine have been postponed, raising questions about the government’s legitimacy in the long term. This topic has become the subject of both academic research and public debate. In an article by V. Lebediuk (2023) on political dynamics in Ukraine during the war, it is noted that holding elections in wartime is extremely difficult and risky, and that the Ukrainian authorities face a dilemma: on the one hand, pressure from certain external actors and adherence to formal democratic principles; on the other, the practical impossibility of organising elections safely and fairly. Most experts agree that the forced postponement of elections is a justified step to preserve Ukraine’s statehood. Importantly, Ukrainian society also supports this position. According to polls, 84% of citizens oppose holding

elections during the war, preferring to postpone them until the end of martial law; more than two-thirds of respondents agree that the president should continue to perform his duties until victory (Onuch & Way, 2024). Even opposition leaders share this consensus, publicly acknowledging that the government's legitimacy is underpinned by broad public support. O. Onuch & L. Way (2024) point out that despite the pause in the electoral process, Ukrainian politics remains pluralistic – the opposition continues to function, diverse opinions are expressed, and grassroots social mobilisation actively influences decisionmaking. This, according to the authors, is a sign of democratic resilience and augurs well for Ukraine's democratic development after the war. At the same time, legal scholars emphasise the need to develop in advance the legal mechanisms for holding elections in the post-war transition period. As noted by I. Shumak *et al.* (2024), Ukrainian researchers have explored the legal conflicts and organisational challenges of the electoral process under martial law and in the immediate post-war period. Their article addresses issues such as updating legislation, registering IDPs as voters, and ensuring the participation of the military and refugees in voting – all of which form part of the set of tasks that must be resolved before elections can be held safely. The authors' general conclusion is that democracy in Ukraine is currently "on pause" but not abolished – institutions should maintain continuity, and electoral processes should resume as soon as circumstances allow (Lebediuk, 2023). The dramatic changes in the security situation have challenged Ukraine to reconsider its public administration system. In the first days of the invasion, elements of over-centralisation were introduced in practice: critical decisions were made quickly at the central level, and military administrations were established in the regions. Some researchers refer to the temporary curtailment of public policy (e.g. the disappearance of public debates in parliament, the transition of most political forces to a stance of supporting

the government) for the sake of unity in the face of aggression. I. Pavchuk (2024) has studied the legal status of the newly created military administrations. He notes that military administrations have become a new institution of public authority that replaces or supplements local self-government in frontline or occupied communities. At the same time, the legislation contains gaps: for example, it does not provide an exhaustive list of grounds for the early termination of powers of local councils or for the introduction of military administrations at the community level. This has already caused conflicts – most notably the creation of the Kyiv City Military Administration, which prompted debate, as the Kyiv City Council continued to work, and the legal justification for the parallel existence of the military administration was not sufficiently transparent. I. Pavchuk (2024) concludes that the legislation needs to be improved to clearly define the limits of state interference in local self-government during the war, as well as the criteria for returning to a normal constitutional order at the local level. The issue of strategic development management in wartime is discussed in the article by D. Dzvinchuk *et al.* (2023). The researchers note that Russian aggression has disoriented the development planning system: government programmes and regional strategies have lost their relevance, as defence has become the priority. The authorities' efforts were focused on immediate responses, while a unified long-term strategy for the country's reconstruction and development remains under formation. The authors analysed the National Recovery Plan and other documents and concluded that the goals and activities of disparate programmes are not consolidated into a single strategic document that would set a coherent direction for development (Dzvinchuk *et al.*, 2023). They emphasise that the absence of such a national strategy creates a risk of uncoordinated actions among the regions in the post-war period. It is recommended that strategic planning processes be amended to ensure that the plans of individual communities and regions

are aligned with national goals and interregional solidarity. In other words, in the post-war period, a new approach to public development management is needed – one that is more integrated, takes into account the experience of the war, and involves all levels of government.

Another important topic is the fate of decentralisation reform during the war. On the one hand, the need for a single decision-making centre for defence has led to a certain step back towards the centralisation of power. On the other hand, it was the decentralisation achievements of previous years that largely contributed to the effective defence and viability of the home front, as local communities independently addressed humanitarian issues, hosted IDPs, and provided territorial defence. In their article, O. Kulinich & O. Popov (2024) emphasise that decentralisation has had a positive impact on the government's ability to respond to the challenges of war. They cite evidence that communities acted with flexibility and precision during the crisis: resources were quickly redistributed locally to meet priority needs, and decisions were taken locally that could not have been made effectively at the central level. Decentralisation enabled the attraction of additional resources (volunteer assistance, international grants) directly to communities, thereby increasing the resilience of the regions. At the same time, the authors note that the war has objectively slowed the planned development of communities, shifting it to a model of survival and mobilisation. In their view, the success of the decentralisation reform both during the war and in the post-war period will depend on the level of civic engagement and the involvement of residents in local decision-making. According to O. Kulinich & O. Popov (2024), the priority areas of decentralisation in post-war Ukraine should include strengthening the financial independence of communities, developing local democracy, and integrated, region-wide planning for reconstruction.

European experts confirm the importance of this: EU recommendations advise Ukraine to continue strengthening public administration

and decentralisation as a component of post-war reforms (Sydorenko, 2024). Corruption has traditionally been one of the main problems in Ukrainian politics, and the war has brought new challenges in this area. On the one hand, martial law requires the concentration of resources and may reduce the priority of anti-corruption measures. D. Kos (2022) – analysing the situation at the beginning of the war – stated that in 2022, the anti-corruption infrastructure (NABU, NAPC, SAPO, etc.) continued to operate, but its capabilities were limited and the appointment of leaders was delayed. The war creates new risks: weakened oversight, shortages of goods and funds, and a massive influx of Western aid all increase the likelihood of corruption. On the other hand, awareness of these risks has prompted the Ukrainian authorities to demonstrate political will to fight corruption even during active hostilities. In early 2023, a high-profile anticorruption purge took place: following a series of journalistic and NABU investigations, more than ten high-ranking officials, including a deputy minister and several heads of regional administrations, were dismissed or suspended (Koshiw, 2023). President V. Zelenskyy publicly announced a “zero-tolerance” policy towards corruption, assuring that there would be no return to past corrupt practices. These steps have been positively received both domestically and internationally as a signal that even on the “domestic front”, Ukraine continues to reform. Both of these trends are documented in academic publications. A. Terzyan (2024) notes that despite the war, Ukraine continued to implement anti-corruption reforms in 2022-2023: the National Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021-2025 was adopted, and the state anti-corruption programme for its implementation was approved. Moreover, in 2023, Ukraine slightly increased its score in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) – from 33 to 36 out of 100 – representing one of the most notable improvements globally for that period. This signals some successes, including improvements in the legal framework and institutions (such as

the launch of the High Anti-Corruption Court and the election of the head of the SAPO). However, the level of corruption remains high, and military circumstances have given it “new forms”: experts warn of risks such as the embezzlement of funds for reconstruction and the development of schemes involving humanitarian aid and military procurement (Terzyan, 2024). D. Kos (2022) warned that after the war, Ukraine’s anti-corruption system might be weakened, while the temptation to misappropriate some of the substantial reconstruction resources could be very high. Therefore, there is a need to establish mechanisms for the transparent and accountable distribution of international assistance, restore the full functioning of anti-corruption bodies, and strengthen the capacity of civil society to hold the authorities to account. It is important that the fight against corruption is one of the criteria for EU membership. The European Commission’s aforementioned conclusion noted that Ukraine had strengthened its anti-corruption institutional system and improved the prosecution of high-level corruption, although additional efforts remained necessary (Sydorenko, 2024). Recommendations for Ukraine include continuing to clean up the judiciary (as corrupt justice perpetuates impunity) and ensuring that the principle of “no impunity” for top officials is effectively enforced. Thus, the scientific discourse agrees that corruption remains a serious threat to post-war development, but there is also an understanding of the problem and a basis for overcoming it (institutions, public demand, international pressure). Victory in the war must be accompanied by a “victory on the anti-corruption front”, without which successful reconstruction and European integration will be impossible (Kos, 2022). Based on the findings of various studies, the main risks and prospects for Ukraine’s political development in wartime and post-war periods can be outlined. Among the risks, the most obvious is the weakening of democratic institutions due to the prolonged absence of elections and the concentration of power. Although martial

law is justified, researchers warn of the danger of becoming accustomed to it: if the war drags on, Ukraine may find itself without elections for four to five years, which will test the resilience of democratic traditions. There is a risk that certain elements of authoritarianism may take root (such as an overly centralised style of governance and the suppression of criticism under the pretext of military necessity). The second major risk is corruption and ineffective governance during the transition period. Unless transparency is ensured in the spending of reconstruction funds and full parliamentary and public oversight of the executive branch is restored, there is a threat that the persistent problems of Ukrainian politics will intensify and undermine the government’s credibility in the eyes of citizens and international partners (Mygal, 2023). The third set of risks is related to socio-political tensions in the post-war period: the return of millions of veterans and IDPs, the need to reintegrate the de-occupied territories, and the resolution of transitional justice issues for collaborators will all require considerable wisdom from the state to avoid internal conflicts. The political system must be prepared for the emergence of new actors – including a possible demand for the political representation of veterans and volunteers – and, if democratic channels of participation fail to function effectively, there is a risk of the radicalisation of certain groups. Finally, the impact of the war on international support remains an external challenge: the Ukrainian government must maintain the trust of the West by proving its commitment to reforms and a democratic course – otherwise, there is a risk of losing some aid or facing pressure to make compromises unacceptable to Ukraine. At the same time, the literature also notes significant positive conditions and prospects. First, the war has consolidated Ukrainian society around the idea of defending freedom and democracy. As noted, for example, by I. Shumak *et al.* (2024), the establishment of democratic values has become the basis for the consolidation of modern Ukrainian

society. Mass citizen participation in defence, volunteerism and mutual aid has strengthened civil society and generated an active demand for good governance from public authorities. According to the IISI, in 2023, more than half of Ukrainians expressed trust in civil society organisations, and the balance of trust in volunteers, the army and local government was record-breakingly positive. This means that social capital and civic awareness have increased, providing a solid foundation for the development of democratic institutions after the war. O. Onuch & L. Way (2024) noted the remarkable increase in the share of Ukrainians convinced that democracy is the best form of government (over 75% of citizens). Thus, the public demand for democracy and transparent governance has only strengthened during the war – Ukrainians are fighting not only for independence, but also for the right to live in a democratic state. This supports the expectation that, after victory, meeting this demand will become a top priority.

The next prospect is European integration as a framework for reforms. Despite the war, Ukraine achieved official EU candidate status in 2022–2023 and continued to implement the necessary reforms. The European Commission recognised that the key requirements of candidate status (including judicial reform, anti-corruption efforts and the law on national minorities) had been fulfilled (Sydorenko, 2024). Further progress towards EU membership will be a powerful incentive for political development: it will guard against authoritarian deviations, as democratic standards and the rule of law are mandatory. The prospect of receiving financial and expert assistance from the West for reconstruction also depends on adherence to the principles of good governance. Thus, Ukraine's European choice will serve as both a guide and a safeguard for the political system in the postwar period. As for institutional prospects, researchers expect a return to competitive politics after victory, although this politics will be different. Military experience is likely to change the configuration of the party system – as

V. Lebediuk (2023) notes, new political forces may emerge rooted in unity and the volunteer movement, while the old “pro-Russian” forces will not have legitimacy in the eyes of voters. The de facto ban on pro-Russian parties in 2022 and the general patriotic consensus among the main elites during the war created the preconditions for a more pro-European and reformist political spectrum in the future (Onuch & Way, 2024). In post-war Ukraine, the central political issues will be reconstruction, modernisation of the country, integration into the EU and NATO, and support for veterans – in other words, an agenda that unites the nation. Based on this, scholars make cautiously optimistic predictions: if Ukraine survives as a democratic state until the end of the war, then, after the victory, there is every chance not only of restoring but also of significantly strengthening democratic institutions. Ukraine's “warring democracy”, as the experts of the Centre for Political and Legal Reforms aptly put it, demonstrates resilience and can become even stronger after going through the crucible of trials (Shumak *et al.*, 2024). Specific prospects include holding fair elections as soon as the situation stabilises, restarting the decentralisation process in light of new realities, continuing judicial reform and cleansing the state apparatus, and integrating veterans into government and administration. Ukraine will have a unique chance to re-establish itself on the principles of integrity and efficiency.

The Ukrainian political system has faced unprecedented challenges since 24 February 2022. Academic studies conducted between 2022 and 2024 comprehensively cover these challenges – from preserving democracy under martial law, holding elections, ensuring good governance and fighting corruption, to continuing decentralisation and reforms. Despite the obvious risks of wartime, the overall tone of academic assessments is cautiously optimistic. The war has brought Ukraine not only destruction but also the consolidation of society, the rise of civil society, and a clear civilisational choice in favour of democracy (Fig. 1).

Wartime political challenges	
Institutional challenges	
→ Martial law restrictions	
→ Elections postponement	
Democratic compression	
→ Power concentration	
→ Reduced media pluralism	
→ Governance issues	
→ Corruption risks	
→ Resource oversight	
Civil society response	
→ Volunteer movement & Civic oversight	
→ Democratic vigilance	
→ Transparency demands	

Figure 1. Main challenges of Ukraine's political system during the war

Source: compiled by the author based on I. Koshiw (2023), M. Budjeryn (2024), and I. Shumak et al. (2024)

Researchers agree that if the war is successfully concluded, Ukraine has every opportunity to enter a new stage of political development – one that is more mature and sustainable. The foundations for this are already being laid: despite the military difficulties, the obligations for EU membership are being fulfilled, pluralism is being preserved, and the government's accountability to society is not being lost. The Ukrainian case has few historical parallels – a democracy

that continues to function under bombardment – and is therefore the subject of close attention by scholars. Their studies help to determine what decisions are needed for Ukraine's political system to emerge from the war, not weakened but reformed and strengthened. This would ensure that the sacrifices of the Ukrainian people are not in vain, and that, after the victory, the country will develop as a democratic, lawful, and effectively governed state (Table 1).

Table 1. Expected post-war changes in Ukraine's political system

Sphere	Current wartime state	Expected post-war changes	Timeline
Electoral process	Elections postponed due to martial law	Resumption of genuinely competitive elections with the emergence of new political forces	6-12 months after the end of the war
Democratic institutions	Centralised executive power	Restoration of the system of checks and balances	12-24 months
Civil society	High mobilisation and activism	Institutionalisation of volunteer networks	Ongoing process
Anti-corruption	Limited capacity, wartime risks	Strengthened institutions and enhanced transparency	18-36 months
Decentralisation	Partial rollback towards centralisation	Strengthened local governance informed by wartime experience	24-48 months
European integration	Candidate status achieved	Acceleration of full membership negotiations	5-10 years
Judicial reform	Continuing under EU pressure	Full independence and effectiveness	36-60 months
Media landscape	Single marathon format	Return to a pluralistic media environment	12-18 months

Source: author's analysis based on L. Leonchuk & E. Johnson (2023), K. Zarembo (2023), and A. Terzyan (2024)

The emerging Ukrainian political culture is being shaped by the war and the process of European integration, forming a synthesis of civic engagement and European values. On the one hand, the war has made society more cohesive, fostering trust in its own strengths and grassroots

initiatives. On the other hand, the European path provides a top-down direction for development, offering an institutional framework and value-based guidelines. A qualitatively new political reality is thus taking shape at the intersection of these two factors (Fig. 2).

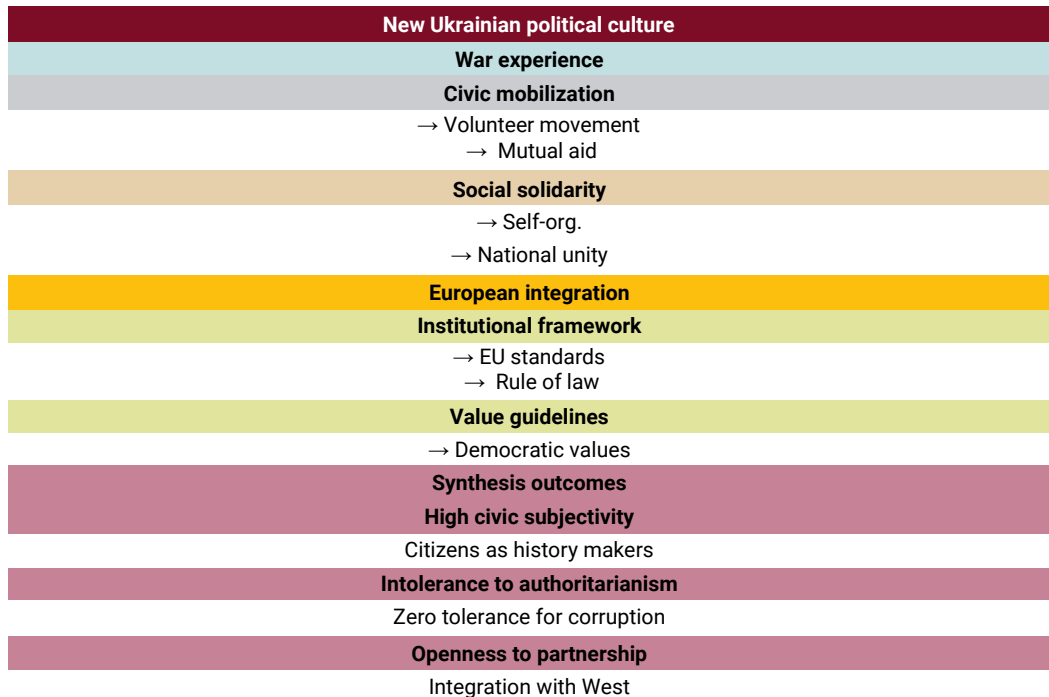


Figure 2. Formation of the new Ukrainian political culture

Source: developed by the author based on N. Shapovalova (2017), O. Onuch & L. Way (2024), and I. Buzhyna et al. (2024)

Its features include: a high level of citizen agency (with citizens seeing themselves as shapers of history rather than passive observers); intolerance of authoritarianism and corruption (given the immense sacrifices made for freedom, society will not tolerate any usurpation of power or return to the old order); openness to the world; and a desire for partnership with democracies (Ukrainians perceive themselves as an integral part of the Western democratic community). In broad terms, Ukraine's existential search for its place in Europe continues: Ukrainians are reinterpreting their historical trauma and experience

in order to integrate into the European community as an equal partner, while preserving their identity. Europe, for its part, is also learning from Ukraine's sacrifice and courage, and is increasingly recognising Ukraine as an indispensable part of a united Europe.

It is important to stress that the European perspective does not guarantee an automatic solution to all problems, but it does offer a roadmap for reforms and unites society around a positive vision for the future. In the post-war period, civil society – working alongside the government and with the support of European partners – is expected

to advance the country's progress through democratic transformation. According to researcher E. Landi (2023), Ukraine's civil society is already preparing to play a central role in post-war reconstruction, ensuring transparency, public oversight, and citizen involvement in decision-making. Integration into European institutions is viewed by both society and experts as a mechanism for safeguarding Ukrainian democracy from internal and external threats. Ultimately, EU membership will mean inclusion in the systems of collective security, the rule of law, and the single market – creating an environment fundamentally incompatible with authoritarianism. This civilisational choice, sealed by the sacrifices of Ukrainians, will be the most fitting tribute to their civic maturity.

Conclusions

The war in Ukraine and the ensuing post-war reality poses enormous socio-political challenges, but at the same time open new horizons for national development. The analysis shows that Ukrainian society has demonstrated an extraordinary level of civic maturity, responding to the existential threats of war with unity, self-sacrifice, and active participation in a common cause. The massive mobilisation of volunteers, high patriotism, maturity of thought, and citizens' sense of responsibility have significantly strengthened the country's defence capability and transformed the quality of interaction between the state and society. At the same time, the war has exposed the vulnerabilities of the political system – the risks of concentration of power, corruption, and erosion of democratic norms. Overcoming these risks forms part of public demand and is a prerequisite for a successful future.

The phenomenon of civic maturity in Ukraine should be viewed as a multidimensional concept, encompassing the maturity of consciousness, the ability to self-organise, a culture of activism, and a deep sense of responsibility. These qualities did not appear suddenly – their roots can be traced back to the events of recent decades, particularly the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of

Dignity. However, it was the extreme conditions of the war that fully unleashed the potential of Ukrainian civil society, tempering it and bringing it to a new level of maturity. The challenge now is to preserve and enhance this potential in peacetime, directing it towards the post-war reconstruction and modernisation of the country. The European horizon plays a key role in shaping a positive scenario for Ukraine's future. European integration has become a unifying idea for the Ukrainian nation, imparting meaning to the current struggle and outlining the desired model of the state – democratic, law-governed, and prosperous. Successful integration into European structures will require continued reforms and sustained civic engagement, which are the very traits that constitute civic maturity. Thus, the phenomenon of civic maturity and European perspectives are mutually reinforcing: mature citizens have secured a chance for a European future, and the European choice in turn motivates them to remain active and responsible.

In conclusion, it should be emphasised that Ukraine's path remains difficult. There are significant challenges ahead in terms of post-war recovery, economic reform, and healing social wounds. It will be crucial to maintain the democratic course: victory must be not only military, but also one of values. It is vital that Ukraine, having won, remains a democratic state – and this democracy should not merely survive, but be tempered in the fire of war, hardened and strengthened. Only under such conditions will the sacrifices and efforts of Ukrainians be fully justified, and the nation's historical existential quest will be crowned with success within the horizon of European prospects. Future research should focus on several critical areas. First, longitudinal studies examining the sustainability of civic engagement patterns as Ukraine transitions from wartime to post-war reconstruction will be essential in determining whether current levels of civic maturity can be maintained during peacetime. Second, comparative analysis with other post-conflict societies that have undergone European integration

processes could provide valuable insights into best practices and potential challenges. Third, an in-depth investigation of generational differences in the formation of civic consciousness, particularly among youth who have experienced formative years during the conflict, will be crucial for predicting long-term democratic development trajectories. Additionally, research into the specific mechanisms for translating wartime social capital into effective post-war governance structures represents a vital area for policy-relevant scholarship. Finally, ongoing monitoring of the relationship between European integration progress and democratic consolidation will provide essential evidence for both academic understanding and practical policy formulation in post-conflict democratic transitions.

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Анотація. Повномасштабна війна в Україні створила унікальні умови для трансформації політичної культури та розвитку громадянського суспільства, що актуалізує дослідження феномену громадянської зрілості як відповіді на екзистенційні виклики сучасності. Мета роботи полягала у визначенні ключових проявів громадянської зрілості українського суспільства в контексті воєнної та повоєнної реальності, а також аналізі її взаємозв'язку з політичною культурою та європейським вектором розвитку. У дослідженні використано комплексний підхід, що включає якісні та кількісні методи дослідження, аналіз наукових джерел, документальний аналіз та порівняльно-історичний метод. Було досліджено, що українське суспільство демонструє надзвичайний рівень громадянської зрілості через масову мобілізацію волонтерів, високий патріотизм та зрілість мислення громадян. Було встановлено, що феномен громадянської зрілості проявляється через чотири взаємопов'язані виміри: громадянську свідомість, мобілізацію, активізм та відповідальність. Особливу увагу було приділено ризикам демократичного згорання, зокрема посиленню виконавчої влади, зниженню рівня плюралізму, громадянських свобод, політичної конкуренції, суспільного контролю та відтермінуванню демократичних процедур під час війни. Було проаналізовано, що європейська інтеграція відіграє ключову роль у формуванні позитивного сценарію майбутнього України, надаючи інституційні рамки та ціннісні орієнтири. Було узагальнено, що європейський горизонт та громадянська зрілість взаємно підсилюють один одного, створюючи основу для успішного демократичного розвитку. Результати дослідження можуть бути використані політологами, соціологами та фахівцями з державного управління для розробки стратегій розвитку громадянського суспільства та демократичних інститутів у повоєнний період.

Ключові слова: демократичні трансформації; волонтерський рух; європейська інтеграція; воєнний час; політична культура; громадянське суспільство