

## **UKRAINE AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: CURRENT STATE**

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There are different types and degrees of integration. The EU and its member states, to varying extents, have long been engaged in promoting closer economic ties with Ukraine. This policy of economic engagement has been the cornerstone of the EU's appeal to many of its neighbours, often enticing them to appeal for even closer ties and even full membership.

The Association Agreement signed in 2014 between Ukraine and the EU represents a significant shift in bilateral relations. But president Petro Poroshenko's vision of Ukraine applying for EU membership in 2020, alongside the Association Agreement itself, has taken a backseat lately as the conflict in the east simmers and the country's economy hangs on by a thread.

And while the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, has passed a number of sweeping reforms in the past year, a good portion of them have been aimed primarily at securing funds from the IMF and other donors in order to fill the state's depleted coffers.

The absence of substantive reforms and persistently high levels of corruption has led to a number of local groups of highly-educated professionals, like the Reanimation Package of Reforms, to pressure the government to follow through on their reform promises.

At present, the prospects of Ukraine being ready to apply for EU membership in 2020, much less becoming a member in the near future, are grim. Despite the European Parliament and Verkhovna Rada ratifying the Association Agreement in 2014, it still needs to be ratified by all 28 EU member states. So far, only six have done so.

These changes would take years to prepare and implement, though the financial cost to both Ukraine and the EU would be minimal when compared to major infrastructure projects and future economic stabilization packages.

And in order to entice the Ukrainian government to get on board, the EU could ensure that the reforms would meet some (though not all) key elements of the Copenhagen Criteria, an essential set of criteria that any country interested in being an EU member must meet. In time, if both parties are interested, EU membership prospects could be honestly assessed and the partnerships and trust needed to start down that long road would already be established.

The gains to be made from such a comprehensive series of reforms, be they economic development or an effectively functioning democracy with strong

institutions, could extend well beyond Ukraine, all the while realizing one of the Maidan's key demands: justice.

### **References:**

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