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# SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Economic and Legal Issues

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## Institutional-Economic and Transport-Logistics Features of Ukraine's Integration into the EU

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### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

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The article is devoted to a comprehensive study of the institutional, economic, and transport and logistics aspects of Ukraine's integration into the European Union. The impact of economic asymmetry, structural differences in economies, and institutional barriers on the pace of Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU is analyzed, as well as the importance of state policy and legislative reforms in the implementation of European integration processes. Particular attention is paid to the development of transport infrastructure, the integration of logistics routes into the European TEN-T network, and the effectiveness of multimodal and intermodal transportation in ensuring exports and economic stability, especially in conditions of war and limited access to seaports. The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines systemic, institutional, and structural-functional analyses, as well as statistical, comparative, and historical-logical methods, which allow us to identify key stages of Ukraine's European integration and assess their economic and infrastructural consequences. The article examines Ukraine's European integration since 1991 through the lens of economic asymmetry, institutional transformation and external factors. It is established that over three decades, GDP per capita in Ukraine grew, but in 2024 amounted to only USD 4,800 compared to over USD 30,000 in the EU-27, confirming a significant gap. Internal obstacles (1990s transformational recession, inflation) are combined with external ones ("integration without membership" until 2014). Scientific significance lies in systematizing integration stages: from the Partnership Agreement (1994) to the Association (2014) and transport laws of 2021–2022. It has been argued that deep deregulation, modernization of grain export logistics, and harmonization of standards are necessary to accelerate convergence. Priority areas are proposed: transit simplification, customs digitalization, and multimodal transport development. The results are of practical importance for shaping the EU integration strategy during wartime and post-war periods.

### KEYWORDS

European integration, economic asymmetry, macroeconomic stabilization, institutional barriers, transport and logistics infrastructure, multimodal transportation, national security.



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# СОЦІАЛЬНИЙ РОЗВИТОК: економіко-правові проблеми

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## Інституційно-економічні та транспортно-логістичні особливості інтеграції України до ЄС

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### СТАТТЯ

### АНОТАЦІЯ

#### Дослідницька

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Статтю присвячено комплексному дослідженню інституційно-економічних та транспортно-логістичних аспектів інтеграції України до Європейського Союзу. Проаналізовано вплив економічної асиметрії, структурних відмінностей економік та інституційних бар'єрів на темпи зближення України з ЄС, а також значення державної політики та законодавчих реформ у реалізації євроінтеграційних процесів. Особливу увагу зосереджено на розвитку транспортної інфраструктури, інтеграції логістичних маршрутів до європейської мережі TEN-T та ефективності мультимодальних і інтермодальних перевезень у забезпеченні експорту й економічної стійкості, особливо в умовах війни та обмеженого доступу до морських портів. Методика дослідження ґрунтується на міждисциплінарному підході, що поєднує системний, інституційний та структурно-функціональний аналізи, а також статистичний, порівняльний та історико-логічний методи, що дають змогу виокремити ключові етапи євроінтеграції України та оцінити їхні економічні та інфраструктурні наслідки. У статті проаналізовано процес європейської інтеграції України з 1991 року через призму економічної асиметрії, інституційних трансформацій та зовнішніх факторів. Встановлено, що за три десятиліття ВВП на душу населення в Україні зріс, але у 2024 році становив лише 4 800 дол. США проти понад 30 тис. дол. США у ЄС-27, що підтверджує збереження значного розриву. Виявлено, що внутрішні перешкоди (трансформаційна рецесія 1990-х, інфляція) поєднуються з зовнішніми (формат «інтеграція без членства» до 2014 р.). Наукова значущість полягає у систематизації етапів інтеграції: від Угоди про партнерство (1994) до Асоціації (2014) та транспортних законів 2021–2022 рр. Обґрунтовано, що прискорення конвергенції потребує глибока дерегуляція, модернізація логістики зернового експорту та гармонізація стандартів. Запропоновано пріоритетні напрямки: спрощення транзиту, цифровізація митних процедур, розвиток мультимодальних перевезень. Результати мають практичне значення для формування стратегії євроінтеграції у воєнний та повоєнний періоди.

### КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

європейська інтеграція, економічна асиметрія, макроекономічна стабілізація, інституційні бар'єри, транспортно-логістична інфраструктура, мультимодальні перевезення, національна безпека.

## **1. Introduction**

The need for European integration of Ukraine arose immediately after the restoration of independence in 1991 and remains central to the political and economic discourse of the state. It combines strategic interests of national security, the need for macroeconomic stabilization and the desire to modernize institutions in accordance with European standards. For more than three decades, European integration has been identified as a priority in state strategies and program documents, in particular in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union (1994) [20], the Association Agreement (2014) [16] and several legislative acts regulating the transport and logistics sector [14]; [15].

The complexity of the problem is explained by a combination of internal and external factors. Internal obstacles are primarily related to the fact that in the first years of independence, Ukraine experienced the difficulties of a transitional economy, which was characterized by a deep transformational recession of the 1990s. Between 1991 and 1999, Ukraine's real GDP more than halved, and inflation reached thousands of percent per year [18]. These trends contrasted sharply with the economic stability of the EU countries, which were at the same time completing the creation of the Single Internal Market (Single Market) and moving towards the introduction of the euro.

External factors further complicated the process of Ukraine's European integration. The EU traditionally viewed Ukraine as a neighboring state without a clear prospect of membership, as evidenced by the nature of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1994), which focused on political dialogue and economic cooperation rather than association or future accession [21]. Thus, Ukraine's initial relations with the EU were shaped in the format of "integration without membership," which left considerable uncertainty.

One of the key problems on the path to Ukraine's integration into the EU is economic asymmetry. Thus, as of the early 2000s, GDP per capita in Ukraine was 6–7 times lower than the EU average [6]. And in 2024, despite some growth over the last two decades, this gap remained significant: about 4,800 US dollars compared to over 30 thousand dollars in the EU-27 [6]; [18]. This situation corresponds to the conditions described in the convergence theory of the neoclassical model of economic growth, where countries with lower starting indicators can develop faster, but only if there is institutional stability, openness and access to investment [9]; [13].

No less important challenge is the structural differences between economies. Ukraine has traditionally remained an exporter of raw materials and products with low added value (metallurgy, agricultural sector), while the EU economy is characterized by high diversification, dominance of service sectors and innovative technologies [1]; [11]. This means that integration occurs not only between economies with different income levels, but also between economies of different types.

A separate dimension is institutional constraints. According to the studies of Rabinovych (2022) [17] and Dimitrova and Dragneva (2023) [4], the weakness of the administrative system, corruption and insufficient efficiency of public administration in Ukraine slow down the implementation of the *acquis Communautaire* ("community asset"). This forms an "institutional gap" between Ukraine and the EU, which is as important as the macroeconomic one.

Of particular importance in process integration is transport and logistics. Ukraine has historically acted as a transit country, but weak infrastructure and inefficient governance have limited the realization of this potential [2]; [19]. Only after the signing of the Association Agreement (2014), and especially after 2022, when the agreement on "transport visa-free travel" was concluded and accession to the Convention on Common Transit was made, transport integration became a strategic factor in maintaining exports and foreign exchange earnings [7]; [22].

Thus, the problem of Ukraine's European integration lies in the need to overcome economic and institutional asymmetry, harmonize the structure of the economy, ensure effective implementation of legal norms and at the same time develop transport and logistics infrastructure, which is the basis for the practical implementation of integration processes. Not only the pace of convergence with the EU, but also the stability of the Ukrainian economy in modern conditions, depends on the solution of these tasks.

## **2. Literature Review**

Ukraine's European integration is a topic that has received extensive coverage in the works of both Ukrainian and foreign researchers. The scientific discussion of this issue has formed around several key areas: macroeconomic analysis, empirical studies of the impact of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (hereinafter referred to as the DCFTA), institutional analysis, and the transport and logistics dimension.

Macroeconomic approaches are covered in textbooks and monographs on macroeconomics, in which integration is often viewed through the prism of theories of economic growth. Neoclassical models, in particular the Solow model, show that countries with a lower level of development have the potential for faster economic growth if they have access to capital and technologies from developed partners [9]; [13]. In this regard, domestic economic literature emphasizes that integration with the EU can become a catalyst for convergence between Ukraine and more developed countries [12]. And openness and development of international trade in macroeconomics is interpreted as an important factor in accelerating economic growth [10], which is also empirically confirmed.

Empirical studies of the impact of international integration, in particular DCFTAs, have been the subject of detailed quantitative assessments in the works of Ukrainian researchers. In particular, Movchan [11] used a general equilibrium (CGE) model to assess the distributional effects of DCFTAs and concluded that the benefits of integration outweigh the possible losses, but the social consequences are uneven. Adarov and al. [1] showed that the creation of a free trade zone contributed to the growth of Ukraine's GDP, increased investment attractiveness and export diversification. Frey [8], in turn, using a microsimulation model, proved that trade liberalization deepens income inequality, since its benefits are concentrated in certain population groups.

The institutional dimension of research on the issues of European integration focuses on the fact that the Association Agreement is not only a trade instrument, but also a legal and administrative instrument. Van der Loo [21] sees it as an example of "integration without membership", which involves the implementation of a large part of the *acquis Communautaire* without guaranteeing membership. Dimitrova and Dragneva [4] argues that the process of Europeanization of Ukrainian institutions has a long-term effect, but its effectiveness is limited by the weakness of the administrative system. Rabinovych [17] adds that the institutional capacity of the state is a determining factor in the speed and efficiency of the implementation of EU norms. In the same context, Buzogány and Varga [3] emphasize the importance of coalition actions of business and civil society organizations, which create additional pressure on the government to accelerate the implementation of reforms.

The transport and logistics dimension are a separate research area of European integration. Ukrainian researchers emphasize the importance of the development of multimodal and intermodal transportation. N. Stepanenko and V. Stepanenko [19] emphasize the importance of Ukraine's integration into the European transport network TEN-T as a condition for increasing competitiveness. Bielova et al. [2] analyze the barriers to the development of multimodal transportation, including imperfect legislation and a lack of investment. After 2022, a new body of research appeared, emphasizing the importance of transport integration in wartime. Fernandes et al. [7] analyze how the war in Ukraine has changed European transport chains, and Yanovska et al. [22] focus on grain export logistics, which have become critical for global food security.

Thus, the analysis of modern scientific publications demonstrates that the integration of Ukraine into the EU is considered by modern researchers in a multifaceted way, namely: through macroeconomic theories of convergence, quantitative models of the impact of the DCFTA, research on institutional capacity and practical transport and logistics dimensions. Accordingly, the scientific problem lies not only in measuring economic benefits and losses, but also in understanding how integration transforms institutions and infrastructure, which, in turn, determine the real possibilities of economic rapprochement of Ukraine with the European Union.

## **3. Problem Statement**

The aim of the article is a comprehensive scientific understanding of the institutional, economic, and transport and logistics features of Ukraine's integration into the European Union, in particular, identifying the patterns and stages of this process, assessing the impact of institutional transformations

and transport and logistics changes on economic convergence with the EU, as well as identifying key factors that contribute to or limit the effectiveness of European integration in the face of modern challenges.

#### 4. Methods and Materials

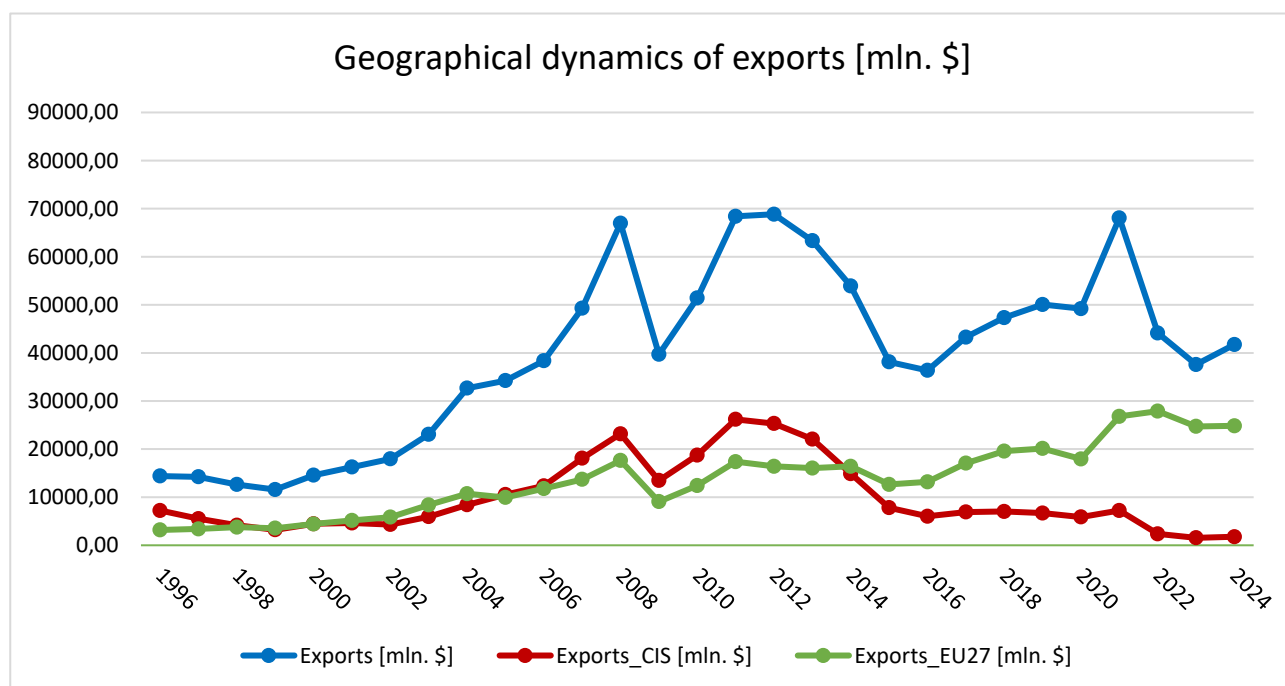
The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines economic, institutional and logistical aspects of Ukraine's European integration. For a comprehensive analysis, systemic, structural-functional and institutional approaches were used, which allow us to consider the integration process as an interconnected set of economic, legal and infrastructural transformations.

Methods of analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction and generalization made it possible to identify the regularities of the formation of European integration processes and assess their impact on economic dynamics and the development of transport and logistics infrastructure. Comparative and statistical analysis was used to compare the indicators of economic development of Ukraine and the EU countries and determine the level of integration. The key stages of European integration were identified using the historical-logical method, which allowed us to systematize the process based on changes in the political, economic and transport and logistics spheres.

The information basis of the study is official data from Eurostat, the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, the World Bank, the IMF, as well as analytical materials from leading national and international research centers.

#### 5. Results and Discussion

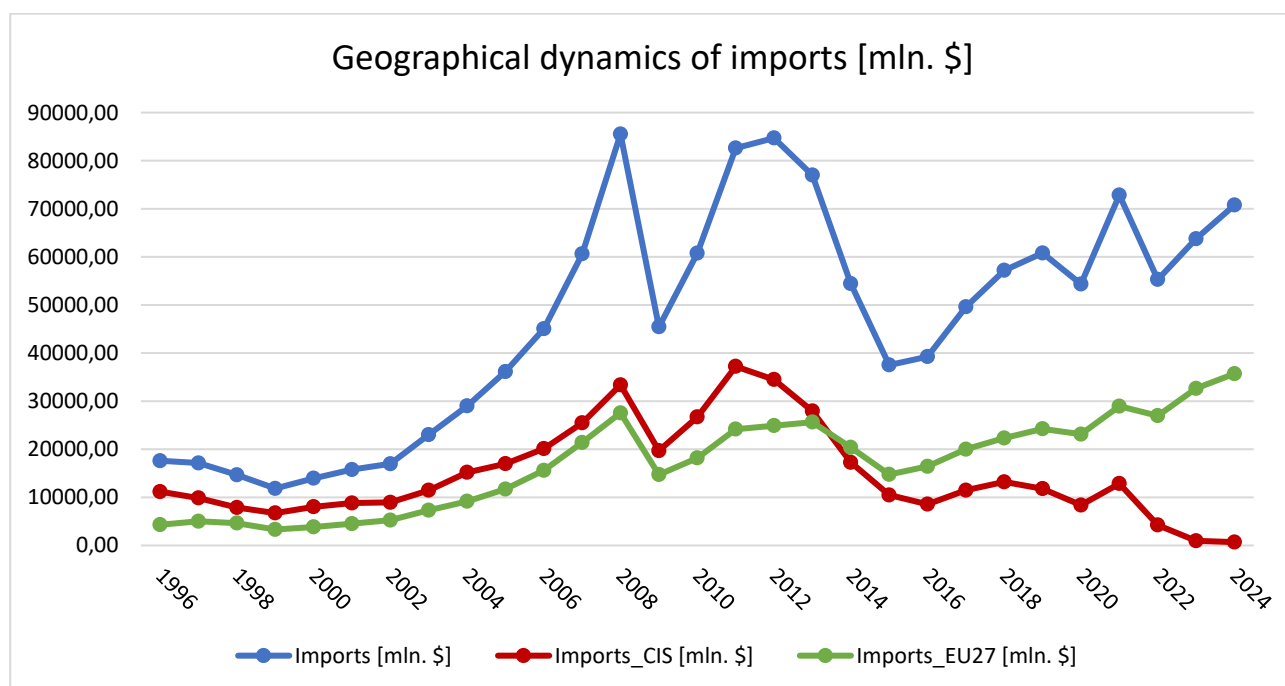
The starting point for studying the trends of Ukraine's economic integration with the EU is the analysis of foreign trade statistics, which clearly demonstrate the gradual deepening of economic cooperation with the European Union (Figures 1–4).



**Fig. 1. Geographical dynamics of exports, million USD**

Source: Compiled by the authors based on [18].

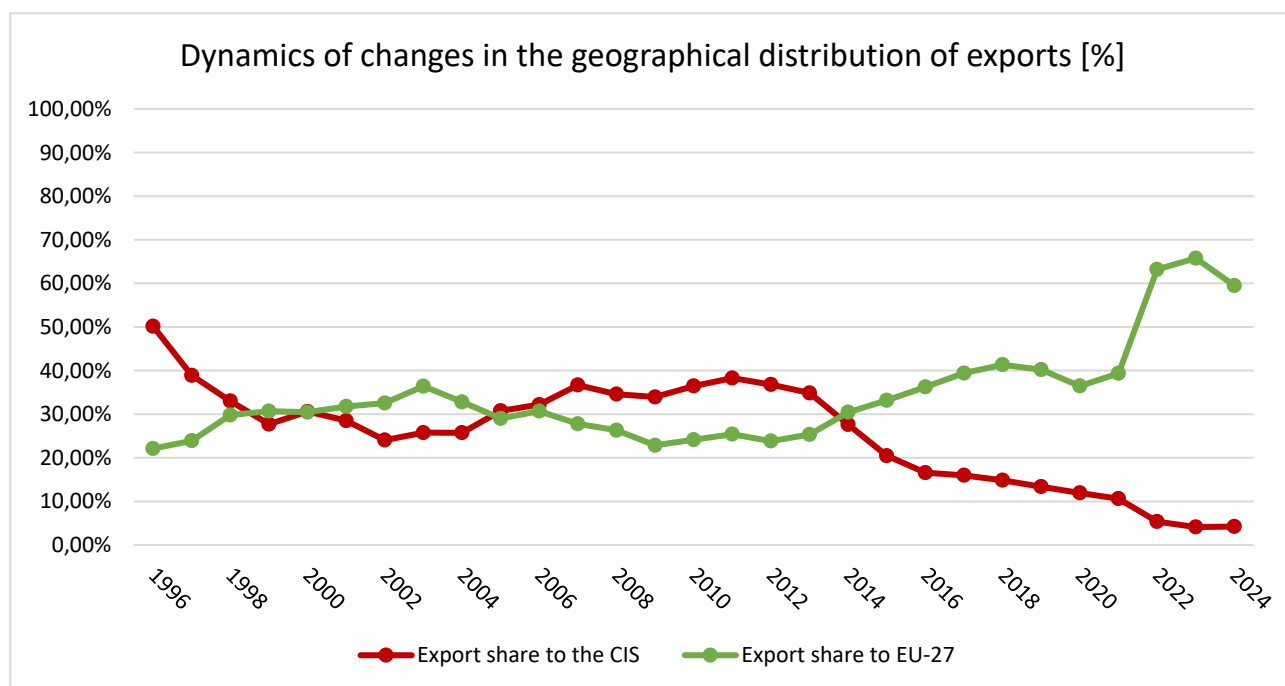
Fig. 1 shows the dynamics of Ukraine's exports for 1991–2025 in terms of geographical structure. It can be seen that in the 1990s the CIS market remained dominant, but since 2004 the EU's share has been steadily growing. After signing the Association Agreement and introducing the DCFTA, the EU consolidated its position as Ukraine's main trading partner, which was especially evident in 2014–2024.



**Fig. 2. Geographical dynamics of exports, million USD**

Source: Compiled by the authors based on [18].

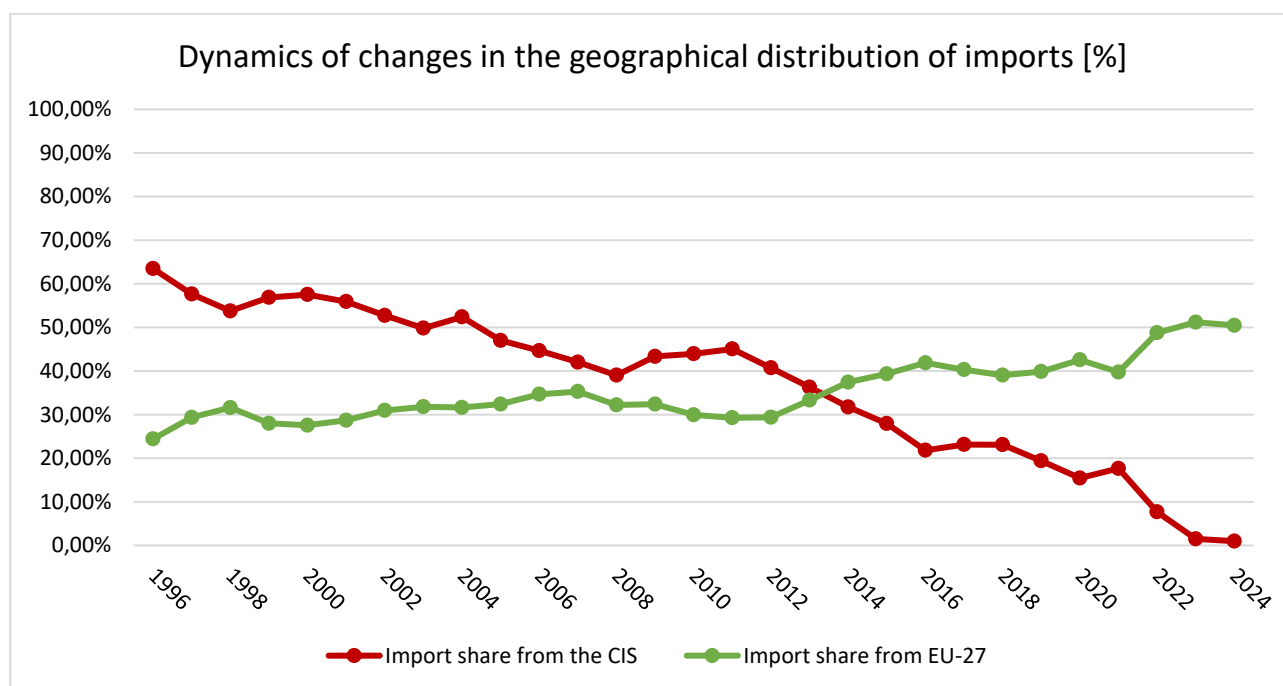
A similar trend is observed in Fig. 2, which reflects the dynamics of imports. While in the 1990s, supplies from Russia and other post-Soviet states prevailed, Ukraine gradually reoriented itself to the European market. This is due to both trade liberalization and the desire of businesses to adapt production to EU standards.



**Fig. 3. Dynamics of changes in the geographical distribution of exports, %**

Source: Compiled by the authors based on [18].

Fig. 3 illustrates the share of Ukrainian exports to the EU and the CIS in percentage terms. The data confirm a structural shift: if in the mid-1990s the CIS share exceeded the EU share by several times, then after 2014 the situation changed to the diametrically opposite one – more than 40% of Ukrainian exports are steadily directed to the European Union.



**Fig. 4. Dynamics changes geographical distribution import, %**

Source: Compiled by the authors based on [18].

No less revealing is Fig. 4, which shows the change in the share of imports. The gradual diversification of supply sources and the reduction of dependence on the Russian market indicate a purposeful policy of economic integration and Ukraine's desire to ensure energy and technological security through cooperation with the EU.

Overall, the above reflects a key trend: within three decades of the restoration of independence, a radical reorientation of Ukraine's foreign economic relations from the post-Soviet space to the European Union took place. This process became the material basis of Ukraine's political and economic integration into the EU, which is further examined by distinguishing four stages of Ukraine's integration into the EU, each of which had its own political and economic characteristics and reflected Ukraine's gradual rapprochement with the European Union.

The first stage – 1991–2003 – the first steps of integration and economic transformation. What is decisive for this period is that since the declaration of independence, Ukraine has identified the European direction of development as a strategic priority, although in the 1990s, this course was often declarative. In 1994, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU was signed, which entered into force in 1998 and created the basis for political dialogue, trade and economic cooperation, but did not yet foresee the prospects of membership [21].

The economy of Ukraine during this period was in a deep transformation crisis. During 1991–1999, GDP more than halved, industrial production fell by 48%, and inflation in 1993 exceeded 10,000% [18]. In such conditions, foreign trade with the EU was of limited importance, although the share of exports, which arrived in the European and market.

It is obvious that the transport sector of the Ukrainian economy felt the consequences of the general economic crisis. The volume of freight transportation decreased by 2.5 times compared to 1990, and the infrastructure suffered from chronic underfunding [19]. Ukraine retained its transit potential, but did not use it fully, which did not contribute to accelerating the overcoming of crisis processes in the economy.

The second stage – 2004–2013 – political changes and rapprochement with the EU. The defining event in this period was the “Orange Revolution” of 2004, which became a turning point in the political history of Ukraine. It clearly fixed the pro-European course of the state. During this period, Ukraine joined the “Eastern Partnership”, and in 2007 began negotiations on an Association Agreement with the EU.

The macroeconomic situation in 2000–2008 was characterized by high rates of economic growth: the average annual GDP growth was about 7%, which corresponded to the laws of “catch-up development” [9]. However, the global financial and economic crisis of 2008–2009 led to a 15% drop in

GDP and demonstrated the vulnerability of the domestic economy. economy dependent on the export of metals and chemical products [1].

There were gradual changes in the field of logistics and transport. Freight transport by rail remained key for the export of metallurgical products, but the volume of road transport began to grow due to gradual integration with European markets [2]. The lack of modern infrastructure and complex customs procedures were still serious barriers to the development of the freight transportation and transport logistics market.

The third stage – 2014–2021 – the Revolution of Dignity, association and conclusion of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. During this period, it was the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 that radically changed the political and economic course of Ukraine. The refusal of the Yanukovich government to sign the Association Agreement with the EU caused mass protests, which ended with a change of power and the final choice of the European vector. In June 2014, the Association Agreement with the EU was signed, and the DCFTA began to operate in 2016.

At this time, the EU became Ukraine's main trading partner, accounting for over 40% of exports [5]. The structure of exports changed, with a decline in supplies of metals and chemicals and an increase in the share of agricultural products. This reflected, on the one hand, Ukraine's loss of industrial potential, and, on the other, a reorientation towards more competitive segments.

The transport and logistics sector of Ukraine has received a new impetus for development at this time. The Law of Ukraine No. 1887-IX "On Multimodal Transportation" [14] established the legal framework for integration into the European transport system. The role of road transport has increased: the volume of cross-border road transport to EU countries doubled in 2014–2020 [19]. Ukraine has gradually adapted its standards to European requirements in the field of transport and logistics.

The fourth period – 2022 – until now – war and accelerated integration. At this time, the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022 became an unprecedented challenge for the economy and society of Ukraine. The GDP drop in 2022 was about 29% [18]. The loss of access to seaports on the Black Sea has sharply reduced export opportunities, especially for grains and metals.

In these conditions, transport integration with the EU has become critically important. An agreement on "transport visa-free travel" was concluded, which allowed Ukrainian carriers to carry out cargo transportation to the EU without the need to obtain separate permits. Ukraine joined the Convention on Common Transit (NCTS) [15], which significantly simplified customs procedures. In 2022, the EU also included Ukrainian transport routes in the TEN-T network [13].

Therefore, the importance of road transport in transportation has increased significantly: in 2021, about 35% of agricultural exports were transported by road, while in 2023 this figure exceeded 65% [22]. At the same time, the sharp increase in the load on the infrastructure revealed bottlenecks: insufficient throughput capacity of checkpoints, a lack of modern logistics centers, and a shortage of rolling stock.

Ukraine's economy became even more dependent on the agricultural sector during this period. According to the European Commission [5], in 2022–2023, more than half of exports were agricultural products. This made the functioning of transport corridors critical not only for the Ukrainian economy but also for world food security.

Summarizing the features of the above stages, it should be noted that each stage of integration was accompanied by important macroeconomic changes. In the 1990s, it was about stabilization after a deep recession. transformational recession, in the 2000s – about rapid growth with high dependence on raw material exports, in the 2010s – about reorientation towards the EU and adaptation to the DCFTA conditions, and in the 2020s – about the survival of the economy in war conditions, which is largely due to accelerated transport integration with the EU.

In the difficult conditions of war, the transport sector, especially freight transportation, has become one of the key elements of Ukraine's integration with the EU. If at the initial stages it only reflected the infrastructure features and general trends of the economy, then in 2022–2024 it was its ability to ensure exports that determined the economic stability of the state. As Fernandes et al. emphasize [16] and Yanovska [22], transport and logistics integration has become a practical dimension of Ukraine's economic rapprochement with the EU, without which macroeconomic and political declarations would remain unrealized.

## 6. Conclusions

Ukraine's European integration is a complex and multifaceted process that combines political decisions, economic transformations and institutional changes. European integration processes in Ukraine are taking place gradually, in several stages, each of which has its own characteristics and consequences for the development of the state.

Summarizing the European integration processes in Ukraine, the following key conclusions should be highlighted:

- European integration has become a determining factor in the transformation of Ukraine's economy, changing its structure, sales markets, and institutional foundations;
- All stages of integration confirm the provisions of the convergence theory: a country with a lower level of development can benefit from access to more developed and capacious markets and technologies, but the speed and quality of this process depend on overcoming institutional barriers, in particular corruption and weak public administration, which remain the main obstacle to integration;
- Integration is accompanied by an uneven distribution of benefits: the agricultural sector benefits the most, while industry and mechanical engineering often lose competitive positions [1]; [11];
- Logistically – the transport sector, especially freight transport, has become crucial after 2022. Its integration into EU systems (NCTS, TEN-T, visa-free travel) has become not only a condition for trade, but also a guarantee of economic stability.

The prospects for Ukraine's further integration into the EU depend on its ability to combine macroeconomic stabilization, structural reforms, and infrastructure modernization. If institutional barriers are overcome and the transport and logistics system is integrated into the European network, Ukraine will be able to fully realize the potential of convergence and gradually noticeably to reduce the gap in development levels with EU countries.

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