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Ukraine

Gets Ready

for Europe

EU accession instruments can advance
the country's public administration reform.

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Executive Summary

Despite the unprecedented challenge of moving toward EU membership while warding off Russia's full-scale aggression, Ukraine continues to demonstrate rapid progress on its EU accession path. Official accession negotiations between Ukraine and the EU began in June 2024, and in November 2024, the parties finalized a bilateral screening of Ukraine's legislative and institutional compliance under the first negotiation cluster—the Fundamentals. This cluster, according to its special status in the EU's renewed enlargement methodology, opens first and closes last. In March 2025, Ukraine and the EU also completed the screening of Ukraine's compliance under cluster 2—the Internal Market. In April 2025, the parties finalized the screening of cluster 6—External Relations.

As European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has reiterated on multiple occasions, there is strong political will in Brussels to accelerate Ukraine's EU integration progress. This is especially timely given the growing geopolitical pressure on Ukraine's accession process and continued uncertainty over the future of US military aid, which leaves the EU as the main actor on which Ukraine can rely for its security.

EU Enlargement Commissioner Marta Kos stated earlier this year that she hopes to open as many as three clusters of Ukraine's accession negotiations—starting with Fundamentals—by the end of Poland's presidency in June 2025, and the remaining three during Denmark's presidency by December 2025. Kos also emphasized at the 2025 Munich Security Conference—where participants discussed security as “the most decisive element” of the enlargement process and recognized the role of Ukrainian accession in providing a strong security guarantee—that the EU is already “moving

two to three times faster” than in previous years on Ukraine's EU integration. In a recent statement to the European Parliament, von der Leyen echoed Kos by noting: “We are working hard with Ukraine to open the first cluster of accession talks, and to open all clusters in 2025. Ukraine joining our Union is the greatest guarantee of a just and lasting peace.”

This ambitious plan alone is a major breakthrough given the technical complexity of the process, the constraints imposed by martial law in Ukraine, and Hungary's recurrent veto on Ukraine's accession, which Kyiv and Brussels are working relentlessly to overcome. According to EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas, the EU is working on alternative plans if unanimity in the Council cannot be achieved.

Against this complex backdrop, it is as crucial as ever for Ukraine to maintain momentum and demonstrate that it is moving forward expeditiously with the necessary reforms in line with the EU *acquis* (body of laws). This, in turn, will require sufficient technical capacities and the sustained political independence of Ukrainian government institutions responsible for the implementation of the accession criteria. Crucially, **institutional capacity serves dual roles within Ukraine's EU integration: It is a tool for Ukraine's accession as well as a criterion against which Ukraine's progress is evaluated.** The greater the administrative capacity of institutions implementing the accession criteria, the greater Ukraine's ability to swiftly bring legislation into compliance with the EU *acquis*. At the same time, institutional capacities are reflected throughout the accession process in benchmarks that, if not reached, can impede the pace of negotiations.

Conditionalities and benchmarks put forward by international partners have driven Ukraine's phenomenal track record of implementing complex democratic reforms over the decade since the 2014 Revolution of Dignity. During the accession negotiation process, recommendations and other monitoring instruments the EU uses could serve as powerful tools to boost the institutional capacities of Ukraine's system of public administration. Significantly, existing EU instruments can be used to ensure a stronger focus on public administration reform. In particular, the negotiation framework for Ukraine already sets adequate sectoral administrative capacities as prerequisites for opening and closing each chapter. This report suggests that the EU should leverage these prerequisites to mainstream public administration reform within Ukraine's accession process.

Ahead of the upcoming transition from the Polish to the Danish presidencies of the Council of the EU, this report presents key assessments—including by Ukraine's leading civil society organizations—of the state of Ukrainian government institutions and of critical vulnerabilities for the EU accession negotiations. It presents an overview of the achievements of and remaining challenges to public administration reform in Ukraine and offers recommendations on how to address these challenges through EU accession instruments. The paper further assesses the role of Ukraine's vibrant civil society in advancing European integration and suggests strategies to ensure that it is meaningfully embedded in negotiations. It also calls for significantly stronger donor support for civil society's engagement in the accession

process.

The report suggests that furthering Ukraine's public administration reform will require informed, inclusive, and well-coordinated efforts from key stakeholders.

The EU should mainstream Ukraine's public administration reform and monitor the country's institutional capacity across all negotiation chapters.

- **The EU** should mainstream Ukraine's public administration reform and monitor the country's institutional capacity across all negotiation chapters, following the example of the mainstreaming of Ukraine's anti-corruption indicators.¹ The current negotiating framework can make the opening of negotiations on individual chapters of the Fundamentals cluster contingent upon meeting institutional capacity conditionalities.
- **The Ukrainian government** should acknowledge the centrality of public administration reform to the country's development prospects, particularly its EU accession, and accelerate reform implementation. It should also communicate these efforts to Ukrainian society, thereby boosting citizens' support for these critical transformations.
- **Civil society** should continue to participate in sectoral negotiation working groups, where they can provide expertise and closely monitor government efforts at all stages of the accession process.
- Finally, **technical assistance donors** should boost their support for Ukrainian civil society organizations engaged in the accession process and ensure their sustainability and uninterrupted operation.

The critical importance of public administration reform for the overall quality and speed of Ukraine's accession process calls for a considerably stronger focus on this reform area from international partners and the EU in particular. Setting interim benchmarks may not be the most effective approach, as it is likely to delay

progress on accession by complicating an already burdensome process with additional indicators. It is essential, however, that European partners enhance their focus on Ukraine's institutional issues when assessing each of the negotiation chapters across all clusters.

The Centrality of Public Administration to Ukraine's EU Accession Process

While Ukraine is progressing toward opening negotiations on the Fundamentals cluster, systemic issues in the structure of public administration are threatening to derail its plans for a swift EU accession. Low administrative capacities and poor coordination among Ukraine's state agencies remain significant roadblocks to advancing European integration. They prevent Ukraine from capitalizing on the window of opportunity for swift technical progress presented by the increasingly challenging geopolitical environment and the centrality of enlargement on the EU's political agenda.

Systemic issues in the structure of public administration are threatening to derail Ukraine's plans for a swift EU accession.

The significance of public administration to Ukraine's EU integration efforts is reflected in the country's accession framework with the inclusion of public administration reform in the Fundamentals cluster of the EU's revised enlargement methodology. In fact, according to the new methodology, Ukraine will only open accession negotiations with the Fundamentals cluster once it has delivered a roadmap for public administration reform, along with other opening benchmarks, including roadmaps for chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights), 24 (justice,

freedom, and security), and the functioning of democratic institutions, as well as an action plan for the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Following the completion of the bilateral screening of the Fundamentals cluster in November 2024 and the European Commission's subsequent presentation of its screening report in January 2025, the Ukrainian government approved a roadmap for public administration reform in May 2025, along with other opening benchmarks listed above, in close consultation with the Commission. The opening of negotiations on Fundamentals is now subject to the Council's unanimous approval.

Nonetheless, more can be done to advance Ukraine's public administration reform using EU accession tools. **This report recommends mainstreaming public administration reform throughout the accession process. It also recommends introducing holistic, cross-cutting monitoring based on the model of anti-corruption mainstreaming stipulated in**

the EU-Ukraine negotiation framework and the new enlargement methodology. It makes the case that public administration reform should become the new anti-corruption on the EU agenda for Ukraine.

The report emphasizes that existing EU instruments can be used to ensure a stronger focus on public administration reform without the need for major changes to the negotiation framework.

Notably, the agreed-upon negotiating framework for Ukraine has already established that the EU should consider administrative capacities within each sector when assessing whether to open and close negotiations on each cluster and chapter. However, existing conditionalities on administrative capacities have not previously been utilized to advance public administration reform. The EU should now make greater use of them to push the reform forward.

How Far Has Ukraine's Public Administration Reform Come?

After the Revolution of Dignity, public administration reform became a focal point of state modernization. In 2016, Ukraine adopted the Strategy for Public Administration Reform, envisioning a transition from post-Soviet models toward a public administration meeting European standards. This was followed by the adoption of the new Law on Civil Service, establishing the position of state secretaries in the sectoral ministries with a view to separating policy from politics as well as developing policy-making directorates to prioritize policy development within the executive branch.

Although these measures initially increased professionalism and transparency in the civil service, the reform quickly encountered significant setbacks. These were further exacerbated by changes in Ukraine's political leadership in 2019. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath led to the suspension of competitive hiring procedures for civil servants, resulting in declining levels of professionalism and heightened political influence over appointments. New regulations in this field have complicated access to the civil service, while arbitrary dismissals, arising as an unintended consequence of state agencies'

reorganizations, have contributed heavily to high staff turnover. Additional challenges arose from insufficient funding, poor coordination between the executive branch of the government and parliament, and a lack of results-driven implementation of many critical reform initiatives.

The start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 and the subsequent introduction of martial law imposed new challenges on Ukraine's public administration system and compounded the backsliding that had begun during the pandemic. The existential threat posed by Russia's invasion naturally shifted government attention and resources toward military and security issues, significantly limiting opportunities for structural reform. **The prevalence of short-term solutions and the constant need to adapt to crisis conditions has weakened the efficiency of state institutions and their capacities for systemic change.**

Under martial law, budget deficits restricted financing for systems of public administration, and the departure of employees abroad or their mobilization into the armed forces led to a significant brain drain. Further, the suspension of

competitive hiring procedures that began during the COVID-19 pandemic has persisted under martial law. While non-competitive appointments may be understandable in the administration of frontline territories, the effectiveness of the civil service in non-frontline zones is suffering.

Despite an ongoing full-scale war, however, public administration reform was never put on hold. The government has continued to transform public administration through digitalization of administrative processes, optimization of the organization of government agencies, and improvement of the civil service's efficiency.

Following the granting of EU candidate status to Ukraine in June 2022 and the opening of accession negotiations in June 2024, the pace of reforms in a number of policy areas significantly intensified, attesting to the power of the accession process to accelerate the convergence of candidate states with European standards. Nevertheless, public administration reform remains an area of slow progress within the Fundamentals cluster, which puts Ukraine's policy-making efforts across all sectors at risk.

Ukraine's systematic transformations over the last decade suggest that several key factors can improve the likelihood of success in public administration reform.

First, the consistent attention of the international community to specific reforms elevates their position on the government's agenda and draws the attention of Ukrainian society. It thus increases the prospects for sustainable and demonstrable results. Unfortunately, however, public administration reform currently remains among the least frequently mentioned areas of reform among Ukraine's international partners.

Second, popular support is critical for reforms to succeed. Demands from citizens for specific reforms significantly impact the likelihood of their progress and implementation. Public administration reform is complex in terms of both its implementation and the ease with which it can be effectively communicated to the public. Successfully communicating the details of each reform to society, with particular regard to the tangible impact that each reform will have on citizens' lives, can greatly improve the receptiveness of the Ukrainian government.

Third, the availability of human and financial resources is crucial for the advancement of reform. One of the tangible repercussions of the war has been a drastic and ongoing outflow of personnel from the public administration sector. Starting in February 2022, many civil servants (mostly women) were forced to leave the territory of Ukraine due to active hostilities. Initially, civil servants were allowed to work remotely. However, in April 2022, the government obligated most civil servants to return to their workplaces, forcing those who remained abroad to resign. This brain drain is also exacerbated by the low attractiveness of civil service on the job market, lower salary levels compared to other sectors, arbitrary payroll planning, and other challenges associated with civil service as a professional field. In 2022 and 2023, civil service staff turnover reached an alarming 20%, with over 24,000 civil servants resigning in the first ten months of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023. Further, few civil society organizations are currently involved in public administration reform, the result of a lack of available funding from donors, especially in comparison to that available for rule-of-law activities. The financial sustainability of public administration reform also remains a serious challenge, not least due to wartime economic planning. Advancing the reform will inevitably require increased funding and sustainable resource management mechanisms.

Finally, an important factor dictating the success of reforms is the relevant authorities' perception of them. The government often perceives issues of public administration as internal. They feel justified in exercising excessive discretion, maintaining limited external

communications, and failing to produce significant progress. Notably, aspects of public administration reform that have a direct impact on citizens have higher levels of popular support and demonstrate faster, more sustainable progress.

The EU's Assessment of Ukraine's Public Administration Reform

In October 2024, the European Commission released its second Enlargement Package report on Ukraine.² The report paid much greater attention to public administration reform than in the previous year. Notably, the Commission's recommendations in all key areas largely align with those of Ukrainian civil society.

In particular, in its 2024 report on Ukraine, the European Commission:

- recognized some positive momentum on public administration reform over the past year and pointed out that the strategic framework for public administration was in place;
- identified the 2023 adoption of the Law on Administrative Procedure, which aligns administrative procedures with EU standards, as among the most impactful reform milestones;
- noted that the implementation of the public administration reform strategy remained a key challenge;
- called for improving the division of powers in ministries between political appointees and state secretaries;
- stated the need to enhance the effectiveness of the Coordination Council for Public

Administration Reform of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine—an advisory body established to coordinate the implementation of public administration reform;

- called for stronger horizontal interagency coordination;
- indicated strong concerns about insufficient evidence-based policymaking and legislation, stressing that the quality of supporting documents, such as impact assessments and financial and economic feasibility studies, must be significantly improved;
- noted that the monitoring of implementation of laws was unsystematic and fragmented (this has become even more difficult under wartime conditions);
- positively evaluated Ukraine's notable successes in the digitalization of administrative services and improvement of civil servants' remuneration system, while pointing out they required further effort and focus;
- emphasized the need to step up human resource management as a key dimension of public administration;

- expressed concerns over the lack of transparency and competition in the selection of civil servants, to the detriment of professionalism, staffing stability, and the independence of the civil service.

These assessments affirmed many of the findings of the December 2023 SIGMA monitoring report on public administration in Ukraine,³ which had identified a lack of progress toward improving the system of public policy development and coordination.

Unfinished Public Administration Reform Impacts Ukraine's EU Accession Negotiations

Unfinished public administration reform has already had a negative impact on the establishment of the institutional structure of Ukraine's negotiations with the EU. This impact will become even more consequential once the parties begin to develop and implement negotiating positions.

One of the major vulnerabilities in the negotiation process is the creation of the working groups responsible for the development of negotiating positions, roadmaps, and other negotiations-related documents. According to standard practice, working groups are created on a sectoral basis, meaning that each negotiating chapter of the EU acquis is covered by the respective working group.

The negotiating groups are usually composed of representatives of the respective sectoral ministries and other institutions (civil servants with a specific expertise in the relevant area), a representative of the government coordination body (in Ukraine's case, the Government Office for Coordination of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, hereafter Government Office), and possibly representatives of civil society and other interested stakeholders (associations, businesses, and so on). A working group chair usually holds a political position (such as deputy minister), while the deputy chair is a civil servant of the highest

rank (for example, heads of policy directorates in the respective ministries). A representative of the Government Office serves as secretary.

The experience of the current and former EU candidate countries demonstrates that this composition enables effective coordination of the negotiation process. First, the model allows the process to move forward at the political level and speeds up bureaucratic procedures (that is, a deputy minister, as the working group chair, can sign the necessary documents and advance them to the next stage).

Second, having a civil servant with sectoral expertise in the position of deputy chair of a working group ensures a higher-quality negotiating position, generates institutional memory in the event of personnel changes in political positions, and facilitates horizontal coordination between ministries. A working group chair may be replaced as a result of a political reshuffle in the government, while a deputy chair would be less likely to be removed from office on political grounds.

Unfortunately, in Ukraine's case, the deputy chair position has yet to be introduced, as public administration reform remains unfinished and policy directorates have been established only in select sectoral ministries. Chairs of

policy directorates would normally serve as deputy chairs of respective sectoral working groups. This role could also be supported by a working group secretary, usually a representative of the Government Office. The secretary's task is to organize the activities of the working group and to serve as a liaison between the working group and the relevant state agency.

Implementation of public administration reform can ensure a clear division of powers, increase the capacity of ministries, improve coordination among various structures, and ensure the stability of the reform process.

Public administration reform remains a key tool to overcome these challenges. Its implementation can ensure a clear division of powers, increase the capacity of ministries, improve coordination among various structures, and ensure the stability of the reform process. In addition, the reform is an important element in fulfilling the 1993 Copenhagen eligibility criteria for EU membership.

Ukrainian legislation (a Cabinet of Ministers' decree) has established precisely the model described above. However, several factors hinder its implementation.

First, the Government Office needs strengthening. For instance, according to the staffing of the working groups, one representative of the Government Office may serve as secretary in as many as 11 working groups, which is hardly sustainable and may impede the quality of coordination. In only three cases was a representative of the Government Office appointed as secretary to just one working group.

Second, weak horizontal coordination negatively affects policymaking. As part of the public administration reform, Ukraine needs to establish an effective coordination system between ministries' policy directorates and other stakeholders.

Third, sectoral ministries lack properly organized policy directorates, and those that exist often demonstrate low performance in policy formulation and implementation.

This makes it difficult to synchronize actions among government agencies, which is essential to fulfilling the complex obligations to the EU.

However, creating a coordination body at the level of the deputy prime minister, the above mentioned Government Office, is hardly sufficient to overcome these challenges. Such a body should work transparently, be accountable, and facilitate effective interaction with all involved structures. The duties of the deputy chair of the working group on the implementation of EU law should be entrusted to the director of the policy directorate of the relevant ministry, which will ensure continuity of work, since the director, as a civil servant, will continue to perform tasks regardless of changes in political leadership.

This approach would help preserve institutional memory, as the director has in-depth knowledge of the specifics of the industry and experience in previous negotiations, which will ensure a smooth transition when the chair of the working group changes. In addition, it will roll European integration processes into the Ministry's strategic planning. This format aligns with European practice and will contribute to more effective negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU.

The existing Government Office requires a functional audit of its structure and the number of its expert personnel—institutional parameters

laid out at the Association Agreement's implementation stage—to prepare for the EU accession negotiations' more extensive and structured process.

Other key obstacles include insufficient political will, destructive politicization of processes, and staff instability caused by political appointments and dismissals. To overcome these challenges, Ukraine must optimize public policy structure and legislate relevant powers. The government should, therefore, accelerate the creation of policy directorates, ensuring proper funding and staffing and introducing a system for monitoring and evaluating their effectiveness. It is also essential to strengthen coordination between ministries and other agencies involved in the negotiation process.

Another issue that needs addressing is the combination of positions of deputy prime minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, chief negotiator, and minister of justice of Ukraine under the purview of one government official.

The negotiation process itself will require simultaneous coordination of complex technical work of multiple executive bodies, communications with international partners, and stakeholder consultations aimed at assessing the costs and projected impact of envisaged regulatory changes in each negotiating area. This excessive workload will almost inevitably reduce the effectiveness of the negotiation process. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice, which performs a wide range of functions, must constantly maintain its own managerial focus while fulfilling other functions.

This issue can be addressed by creating the position of deputy chief negotiator, a position that would support the chief negotiator's work and take on communication of EU accession efforts and progress to key stakeholders. Additionally, the structure of the Ministry of Justice should be optimized by transferring administrative functions to other state agencies. This approach would improve coordination, increase institutional capacity, and ensure proper focus on each sectoral area.

Mainstreaming as a Tool to Advance Ukrainian Public Administration Reform

Progress on public administration reform and the functioning of democratic institutions will be monitored throughout the negotiation process, as they are the first chapters to open and the last to close. That said, the current EU accession framework falls short of leveraging the whole host of enlargement tools at its disposal to more effectively guarantee progress on public administration reform and the functioning of democratic institutions—which lack interim

benchmarks. The enlargement framework currently prioritizes chapters 23 and 24, which remain the only chapters within the Fundamentals cluster to employ such benchmarks. Public administration and the functioning of democratic institutions allow the accession country more discretion in decision-making and interpretation. In practice, as the EU becomes less focused on certain areas, those areas simultaneously become less of a priority for the governments of

candidate countries, and vice versa. Thus, greater focus from the EU on public administration reform could prove useful for progress in Ukraine. Ukraine's experiences implementing both the Visa Liberalization Action Plan and the Commission's recommendation to begin accession negotiations attest to the fact that concrete requirements coupled with attractive incentives offer a higher likelihood of bringing about reform.

The EU could leverage the existing clause in the negotiation framework for Ukraine requiring an appropriate level of administrative capacity in each sector as a precondition for opening and closing negotiations on each cluster and chapter.

Alternatively—and more feasibly—the EU could leverage the existing clause in the negotiation framework for Ukraine requiring an appropriate level of administrative capacity in each sector as a precondition for opening and closing negotiations on each cluster and chapter. Although this clause is only partly related to public administration reform, its interpretation could be expanded to include institutional capacity and leveraged to streamline and embed public administration reform within

One way to advance public administration reform and the functioning of democratic institutions in the negotiation process could be to elevate them to the level of chapters 23 and 24, thereby enabling the use of interim benchmarks. However, this approach should be balanced against the risk of complicating an already burdensome accession process. As these areas mostly rely on state discretion, additional benchmarks may end up on yet another list of vague requirements that effectively undermine their own implementation and monitoring. Another key limitation stems from the fact that elevating public administration reform and the functioning of democratic institutions would require making changes to the enlargement methodology and negotiation framework, which has the potential to delay the negotiation process even further.

each negotiating chapter based on the example of anti-corruption mainstreaming in Ukraine's EU accession process. **This approach will facilitate the EU's mainstreaming of public administration reform during the negotiation process without requiring major changes to the negotiation framework.** Meanwhile, on the Ukrainian side, this would require the authorities to ensure a greater focus on strengthening the institutional capacities of the respective ministries and other executive agencies. Mainstreaming public administration reform would help ensure its more systemic implementation throughout the entire period of the negotiation process and would help prevent its backsliding.

Civil Society's Role in Furthering Ukraine's Accession Process

Ukraine's EU accession efforts have generally been inclusive and participatory, incorporating representatives of all key stakeholders, from

the government and parliament to civil society organizations, academia, and the business community. The Ukrainian government has

institutionalized civil society engagement in the accession process through its representatives in government working groups. Thirty-six working groups corresponding to the 33 negotiation chapters and three thematic areas have been created to ensure the development of Ukraine's negotiation positions, elaborate measures to implement EU recommendations, and provide analytical support to the Ukrainian delegation. These groups play a crucial role in refining legislative proposals, preparing for bilateral screening sessions between Ukraine and the EU, and expediting sector-specific integration in key areas.

While the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine remains the primary decision-maker responsible for the outcomes of accession negotiations, civil society profoundly contributes to this complex, time-sensitive process and has proven itself a reliable partner of the Ukrainian government since the Revolution of Dignity. Civic actors continue to play a crucial role in driving Ukraine's reform process, offering Ukrainian authorities relevant expertise, conducting policy analysis and monitoring, fostering an open dialogue and facilitating stakeholder coordination, providing advocacy support in respective areas, and ensuring policy coherence across sectors.

Leading civic actors see strong commitment and political will in the Ukrainian government to advance Ukraine's EU accession. However, they assess the state's institutional capacity for European integration as limited. Thus, civil society has been supporting efforts to build the capacities of government institutions to ensure the full and

prompt implementation of all necessary steps on Ukraine's path to EU membership. Public administration reform constitutes a critical element of this capacity-building process and will require continued strong coordination between the government and non-governmental actors.

Crucially, Ukrainian civil society has been provided tangible opportunities to influence the accession process. The inclusion of civil society actors in sectoral working groups has ensured their direct involvement in the development of roadmaps for accession chapters on the rule of law, the functioning of democratic institutions, and public administration reform.

The level of civic engagement varies significantly across working groups, however, leading to varied influence on aspects of the accession process.

Donors and international partners more broadly must pay closer attention to Ukraine's public administration reform agenda to enable civil society to more effectively contribute to this key, cross-cutting area of the accession process.

For instance, as many as 22 civil society organization (CSO) representatives have been involved in the work on Chapter 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and 11 CSO representatives on Chapter 24 (justice, freedom, and security). At the same time, only seven civil society representatives have been working on public administration reform. This is not to suggest the government is deliberately excluding civil society, but rather that this is a reflection of the number of Ukrainian CSOs that satisfy

the government's criteria for inclusion in the working groups. Namely, to participate in a working group, CSOs are expected to have prior experience implementing projects relating to the topic; preparing draft laws, reports, evaluations, and other analyses within the framework of

aligning Ukrainian legislation with the *acquis*; and collaborating with EU partners and participating in EU-funded research projects. There are very few CSOs with this kind of strong expertise in the area of public administration reform, as over the past years technical assistance donors have largely paid these organizations minimal attention and provided few resources, leaving them in dire need of funding.

Donors and international partners more broadly must pay closer attention to Ukraine's public administration reform agenda to enable civil society to more effectively contribute to this key, cross-cutting area of the accession process. This is particularly critical in light of reports that the Ukrainian government has considered entrusting civil society with a significant share of the work related to financial feasibility studies and assessments of the impact of harmonizing Ukraine's legislation with the EU's. Given the scale of this effort, doing so would engender new levels of donor support for civil society actors working

in the field of public administration reform.

Despite hosting a range of policy positions, strategic visions, capacities, and approaches to engaging with the government, Ukrainian CSOs are united by a common concern for Ukraine's security. Some are ready to directly coordinate their work with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, while others prefer to engage with the government from a distance, prioritizing their role as external watchdogs and civic oversight actors. Nevertheless, civic actors remain motivated by two overarching and interlinked objectives: defending Ukraine's sovereignty and independence and advancing its accession to the EU. For Ukraine, joining the EU is not only an opportunity for economic development and advancing the rule of law, but also a path to long-term European stability. The EU accession agenda thus remains essential for Ukrainian civil society and its further evolution.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Continued progress toward European integration—which is more urgent than ever in today's geopolitical context—will be contingent on Ukraine's ability to reform and enhance the efficiency of its public administration. Ukraine's system of public administration has successfully withstood the test of major crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic to more than three years of Russia's ongoing full-scale war of aggression. It has continued to perform its critical functions, testifying to the undeniable success of Ukraine's public administration reform and decentralization efforts over the last decade.

Public administration reform remains incomplete,

however, and progress is by no means irreversible or immune to rollbacks—particularly amid the immense pressures of martial law. Ukraine cannot afford further delays. Successfully reforming its public administration system will determine not only the quality of Ukraine's governance and the effectiveness of its response to Russia's full-scale aggression, but also its ability to seize the current window of opportunity to progress toward EU membership, notwithstanding the persistent risk of Hungary's blocking consensus in the Council. Implementing the policy recommendations outlined in this report will help boost the capacity of Ukrainian government institutions, improve their coordination, ensure a

clear division of powers, set the stage for sustainable progress on public administration reform, and facilitate Ukraine's smooth advancement toward EU accession.

The EU should make greater use of the instruments at its disposal to push forward public administration reform. **More specifically, it should leverage prerequisites for sectoral administrative capacities—an already existing instrument within Ukraine's enlargement framework—to mainstream public administration reform within the accession process and advance reform in key areas.**

It is Ukraine's institutional robustness and smooth coordination of all key agencies that will largely define the quality and speed of its EU accession.

of Ukraine and central executive bodies, which takes into account EU recommendations for Ukraine's public administration reform. This should also include: institutionally strengthening the Office for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration to improve the management of European integration processes; ramping up the strategic management capacity of the Secretariat of

the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to improve its ability to engage in the strategic planning of policies; and boosting the effectiveness and increasing the transparency of the Coordination Council for Public Administration Reform of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

- **Optimizing the functioning of ministries:**

Strengthening the institutional capacity and efficiency of Ukraine's public administration will require the government to minimize the burdens of carrying out public administration procedures. Optimizing the functioning of ministries will entail removing unnecessary administrative responsibilities, improving coordination and cooperation between the ministries and their subordinate bodies, and streamlining the structure of the Ministry of Justice and other state agencies responsible for aligning Ukrainian legislation with that of the EU.

- **Boosting the capacities of key coordinating institutions:**

Effectively managing a complex accession process will require greater capacities within key institutions. To that end, it is critical to adopt the new law on the Cabinet of Ministers

Mainstreaming public administration reform represents an investment in the pace of Ukraine's EU accession.

- **Enhancing the quality of policymaking:**

It is important to finalize, without further delay, the creation of policy directorates in sectoral ministries, approve a clear methodology for policymaking, and establish an effective coordination system between policy directorates in sectoral ministries and other stakeholders involved in the negotiation process. To help prevent fragmented decision-making on issues of European integration, it is also necessary to extend the application of public consultations legislation to initiatives proposed by members of parliament.

- **Improving the effectiveness of the civil**

service: The quality of Ukraine's public administration is intrinsically tied to the effectiveness of its civil service, making it vital to restore competitive selection processes for positions in non-combat zones and to limit non-competitive appointments

exclusively to frontline territories. Maintaining a high level of professionalism within the civil service will also require the development of safeguards against politically motivated dismissals of civil servants, completion of remuneration reform by implementing the law No. 4282-IX adopted in March 2025, and amendment of financial monitoring legislation to introduce voluntary asset declarations for category C operational-level positions. The government must also do more to mitigate the impact of high staff turnover on the effectiveness and professionalism of the civil service, particularly by improving their working conditions and preventing the loss of qualified personnel during the reorganization of state agencies. This issue can also be addressed by offering these civil servants equivalent or lower-level positions in other structural units of reorganized agencies to retain talent.

The limited institutional capacities of Ukrainian government agencies, particularly those directly engaged in the negotiation process, remain a

significant impediment to Ukraine's EU accession progress. And while a sense of the urgency of public administration reform has yet to set in in Kyiv or in Brussels, it is Ukraine's institutional robustness and smooth coordination of all key agencies that will largely define the quality and speed of its EU accession.

The quality of public administration is a direct determinant of Ukraine's ability to swiftly bring legislation into compliance with the EU acquis across the board. Thus, mainstreaming public administration reform represents an essential investment in the pace of Ukraine's EU accession. Although bringing this enhanced focus to Ukraine's institutional capacities will require additional effort and resources on the part of the EU, it can also be accomplished within the existing negotiation framework. Mainstreaming public administration reform within the EU accession process would give this critical element of Ukraine's successful integration a powerful and necessary boost.

1 Amanda Paul and Svitlana Taran, "[Ukraine's road to the EU: Getting fit to open negotiating clusters](#)", European Policy Centre, 28 February 2025

2 Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission, [Ukraine Report 2024](#), 30 October 2024.

3 OECD, [Public Administration in Ukraine: Assessment against the Principles of Public Administration](#), SIGMA Monitoring Reports, 6 February 2024.



Ukraine Gets Ready for Europe

EU accession instruments can
advance the country's public
administration reform.

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