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THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE HARMONIZATION OF THE LEGISLATION AND REFORM OF ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES OF THE CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

Background. *The article examines the role played by the European Union in ensuring the compliance of the legislation of candidate countries with EU law and the adaptation of administrative structures in candidate countries seeking to join the EU. Strict Copenhagen criteria characterize EU enlargement policy and require legislative and administrative reforms from candidate countries to bring legislation and management structures into compliance with EU standards. These reforms are critical to ensuring stable institutions, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Examining the transformative impact of these requirements, the presented research highlights how compliance with EU norms contributes to good governance, improved public service delivery, economic development, and strengthens institutional capacity in candidate countries.*

Methods. *Research methods are modern general and special methods of scientific knowledge, among which in particular: analysis was used to process scientific, analytical, and legislative sources; inductive and deductive – for analysis and generalization of information on the subject of research; forecasting and synthesis was used during the formulation of conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the study.*

Results. *The study of the role of the European Union in the harmonization of legislation and the reform of the administrative structures of the candidate countries showed that the influence of the EU is a decisive factor in the successful introduction of changes to the legal framework and the reform of the institutional system of these countries. It has been established that harmonizing national legislation with the *acquis communautaire* contributes to increasing the level of independence of justice, ensuring economic stability and social welfare in candidate countries. At the same time, financial and technical assistance from the EU contributes to accelerating the reform process.*

Conclusions. *The study confirms that assistance from the side of the European Union plays a decisive role in harmonizing legislation and reforming administrative structures in candidate countries. At the same time, effective implementation of EU governance standards ensures transparency, efficiency and accountability of public administration, which is important for EU integration. In future studies, it is planned to compare the success of reforms in different candidate countries to identify the best experience for its implementation in domestic practice.*

Keywords: *European integration, public administration, democratization, harmonization of law, Ukraine, EU, principles of European integration*

Background

Harmonization of legislation and administrative structures of candidate countries for joining the European Union is a complex process that is important in a scientific and practical context. The possibility of harmonizing national legal and administrative systems with the requirements of the EU requires comprehensive reforms, harmonization of legislation, strengthening of institutional favorability, and introduction of management standards following the principles of democracy, the right of supremacy, and the support of human rights. In the scientific context, the study of the impact of the EU enlargement policy on internal transformations in the candidate countries allows for a better understanding of the mechanisms of institutional changes, the effectiveness of national reforms, and the factors that contribute to or hinder the successful implementation of changes. In a practical context, the harmonization of law is a key condition for successful accession to the EU, contributing to increasing the efficiency of public administration, transparency, and accountability, improving the quality of services, and strengthening citizens' trust in state institutions. This requires close cooperation between the candidate countries and the EU.

The purpose of the article is to analyze and assess the role of the European Union in harmonizing legislation and reforming the administrative structures of candidate

countries for EU membership. consistent with the goal, the following tasks were formed: to investigate the context and prerequisites of the EU enlargement policy, to conduct an analysis of the harmonization of legislation and the process of management structures in the candidate countries, to assess the role of supporting the reforms of the European Union, in particular, financial and technical assistance, programs and tools that contribute to the successful implementation reforms.

The literature review showed that among domestic researchers, the harmonization of legislation and reforming of management structures within the framework of European integration, the following can be named:

- Hlushchenko (2004), who studied the processes of reforming European banking systems and the compliance of Ukrainian legislation in this area;
- Teremtsova (2011), considered issues related to the current problems of the European Union and its expansion, as well as analyzed the current state and development prospects;
- Chubai-Fedorenko (2012), who proposed a series of measures to deepen cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and the EU, in particular, critical problems and ways to solve them were outlined;
- Falaleieva (2017) analyzes the Copenhagen criteria as key conditions for acquiring membership in the European Union and their role in the processes of

European integration and cooperation of third countries with the EU;

- Bostan and Nemchenko (2018) analyzed the positive experience of the functioning of legislation in the field of combating corruption in Romania and prospects for Ukraine;

- Rybak (2020) identified the peculiarities of legal regulation in the field of labor law of the EU in the example of Lithuania and also suggested directions of borrowing from domestic legislation.

Among the foreign scholars who studied the issue of harmonization of legislation and reform of management structures in their countries, one can single out F. Sigér, who analyzes the economic integration and interdependence of Croatia in the context of the European Union (Sigér, 2020). J. Letnar Čerňič, M. Avbelj, M. Novak, D. Valentinčič found out the importance of the rule of law as the basis for the functioning of constitutional democracy in the context of the constitutional reform in Slovenia (Letnar Čerňič et al., 2019). Ziolo et al. (2022) established the relationship between digitalization of public services (e-government) and ESG factors (environmental, social and economic) in 26 European countries, and the positive impact of digitized administrative processes on sustainable development was noted (Ziolo et al., 2022).

Both directions of research are interrelated and highlight the complex nature of the process of European integration, reform of management structures, and harmonization of legislation. The study of these aspects and practices contributes to a deeper understanding of the European integration process in general, as well as the identification and implementation of best practices for the development of effective strategies and policies aimed at the integration of Ukraine into the European Union. At the same time, in our research, the main emphasis will be on clarifying the role of the EU in harmonizing legislation and reforming administrative structures in the candidate countries with the aim of further possibility of using positive practices during the implementation of relevant reforms in Ukraine on the way to full membership in the EU.

Methods

The research uses a complex of general scientific methods and special methods of scientific knowledge, among which in particular: the analysis was used to process scientific, analytical, and legislative sources; inductive and deductive – for analysis and generalization of information on the subject of research; forecasting and synthesis were used during the formulation of conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the study.

In addition, the analysis identified key factors that facilitate or hinder harmonization efforts and provided a detailed understanding of the dynamics. The study evaluates the effectiveness of various EU support mechanisms, including financial assistance, technical expertise, and institutional capacity-building programs to support the reform process.

Results

The enlargement policy of the European Union is one of the most important instruments of integration on the European continent. From the beginning of the existence of the EU, its founders sought to unite Europe around common values and economic interests. The first waves of enlargement took place in the 1970s, when Great Britain, Ireland, and Denmark joined the EU. In the following decades, the number of member countries increased to include countries from different parts of Europe, including Northern, Southern and Central Europe.

The 2004 enlargement was the largest in the history of the EU: ten new states joined the Union, including eight countries of Central and Eastern Europe. As noted by G. Chubai-Fedorenko, this expansion had a significant impact on the political, economic, and social landscape of Europe, radically strengthening the European identity and promoting the development of new forms of cooperation (Chubai-Fedorenko, 2012, p. 233).

One of the key aspects of the EU enlargement policy is the candidates' compliance with the so-called Copenhagen criteria, established at the European Council summit in Copenhagen in 1993 (Presidency conclusions, 1993). These criteria include three main groups of requirements:

- political criteria: the stability of institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for minorities. This means that candidate countries must have a stable and effective governance system that ensures transparency, accountability, and compliance with legal norms;

- economic criteria: the presence of a functioning market economy and the ability to withstand competitive pressure and market conditions within the EU. This requires the candidate countries to carry out economic reforms aimed at strengthening macroeconomic stability, developing the private sector, and improving the investment climate;

- institutional criteria: the ability to fulfill the obligations arising from membership, including compliance with the objectives of the political, economic, and monetary union. This includes the adaptation of national legislation to the *acquis communautaire* – the set of legal norms and standards of the EU.

The above shows that the EU enlargement policy has a significant impact on the candidate countries, stimulating them to carry out large-scale reforms in various areas. The process of adaptation to EU standards requires not only changes in legislation but also significant institutional transformations. This includes reforming public administration, the judiciary, anti-corruption agencies, and other key institutions.

For many candidate countries, the prospect of EU membership is a powerful incentive to implement reforms that can sometimes be politically and economically difficult. The EU provides significant support to these countries in the form of financial assistance, technical expertise, and experience exchange programs. This helps speed up the adaptation process and increase the level of preparation of the candidate countries for joining the EU. However, the process of integration into the EU is also accompanied by certain challenges. Candidate countries face the need to balance national interests with EU requirements, overcome internal political contradictions, and ensure public support for reforms. The successful passage of this stage depends on close cooperation with the European Union, as well as on the effectiveness of making changes to the legal framework of the candidate country (Teremtsova, 2011, p. 51–53).

Political barriers, economic difficulties, institutional weaknesses, and social contradictions are the main challenges in ensuring compliance with the legislation of the European Union (*acquis EU*) and management structures in candidate countries. Internal political conflicts and the lack of political will to carry out reforms can significantly slow down the process of ensuring compliance with legislation with EU law. For example, in some candidate countries, political confrontations between different interest groups can block the adoption of necessary legislative changes. Limited financial resources and economic instability can also create

significant obstacles to reforms. Some candidate countries are facing economic crises, which makes it difficult to finance modernization programs and the introduction of new management standards. The lack of institutional capacity and qualified personnel also complicates the implementation of reforms. Candidate countries should invest in the development of institutional capacity and ensure the professional training of public servants for the successful implementation of reforms.

At the same time, it is worth noting that compliance with the legislation of the European Union (*acquis EU*), and international agreements in the field of European integration is a key element of the process of integration of candidates to join the European Union. Therefore, the main legislative reforms in these countries should be aimed at harmonizing national laws with the *acquis communautaire*. This process requires significant efforts to adapt the legislative framework in various sectors to EU law. It is worth noting that special attention is paid to economic reforms because they include the adaptation of legislation that regulates the functioning of the EU single market. This, in turn, involves the adoption of laws that regulate competition policy, consumer rights protection, market supervision, and public finance management. Example:

In Ukraine, anti-monopoly laws were introduced that correspond to EU norms (On the Antimonopoly committee of Ukraine, 2024). These laws contributed to the demonopolization of the market, the development of healthy competition, and the facilitation of doing business; in Bulgaria, the reforms of the banking sector ensured the stability and transparency of financial transactions, which meets international standards of financial regulation and auditing (Hlushchenko, 2004, p. 39-47).

In addition, legal reforms cover changes in the justice system, including reforming the courts, ensuring the independence of judges, and improving access to justice. In particular, in Serbia and Slovenia, the reform of the judicial system was successfully carried out, which included the introduction of measures to ensure the independence of judges and increase the transparency of judicial processes. This contributed to increasing citizens' trust in the judicial system and improving access to justice (Letnar Černič et al., 2019, p. 38-42; Pejić, 2022, p. 80). In Romania, the National Anti-Corruption Administration was established, which allowed it to reduce the level of corruption and ensure accountability of public officials (Bostan, & Nemchenko, 2018, p. 10-15).

Adaptation of labor legislation, the system of social protection, and health care to EU standards is ensured by the implementation of several social reforms. This helps to create favorable working conditions, increase the level of social protection, and ensure access to quality medical services. As an example, Lithuania adopted new labor legislation that meets EU standards, improving working conditions and protecting workers' rights (Rybak, 2020). In turn, an electronic healthcare system was introduced in Estonia, which increased the efficiency of providing medical services (Makarenko, 2021, p. 119-122).

An equally important component of joining the EU is the implementation of management standards and the modernization of management structures in candidate countries. This process includes the introduction of administrative procedures that ensure transparency, efficiency, and accountability of public administration. Lithuania, in particular, implemented an e-government system that ensured the transparency of government processes and increased the efficiency of public service

provision (Ziolo et al., 2022, pp. 6-12). After all, transparency and accountability are fundamental principles of governance in the EU. Therefore, candidate countries must implement mechanisms that ensure the openness of government processes and the accountability of public officials. This involves the implementation of e-government systems, the publication of state data and reports, as well as ensuring citizens' access to information about government activities. The effectiveness of public administration requires optimization of administrative procedures and improvement of professional training of public servants. Candidate countries should introduce systems for evaluating the performance of government institutions and ensure continuous professional development of public servants (Falaleeva, 2017, p. 118-120). At the same time, examples of successful reforms in the candidate countries demonstrate the effectiveness of the implementation of EU standards and adaptation to the requirements of the European Union.

Therefore, the role of the European Union in supporting the compliance of the legislation of the candidate countries with EU law is an important component of the process of their integration. This support includes the provision of financial and technical assistance, the implementation of various programs, and the use of tools aimed at improving the effectiveness of reforms. Analyzing these aspects, it is possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the aid provided by the EU and determine which approaches most contribute to the achievement of the goals of reforming the legal framework of the candidate country and its public administration sector.

Financial aid from the EU, which is a key element in supporting reforms in candidate countries, should also not be underestimated. The EU allocates significant funds for various programs aimed at infrastructure development, economic stability, social development, and environmental protection. One of the most important financial programs is the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), which covers various sectors and provides flexible financing for the specific needs of each country. For example, Croatia, which joined the EU in 2013, received significant funding from the IPA to modernize its infrastructure and reform its public administration. These funds were directed to the improvement of the transport infrastructure, the modernization of the water supply and sewerage system, as well as to the reform of the justice system. Thanks to this financial support, Croatia was able to adapt more quickly to EU requirements and successfully complete the accession process (Sigér, 2020, pp. 73-81).

In addition to financial support that ensures the development of infrastructure and economic stability, the EU also pays considerable attention to improving the qualifications and technical development of public servants in candidate countries. This contributes to the effective implementation of reforms and the integration of European standards at all levels of public administration. In particular, technical assistance includes conducting examinations, providing consultations, and training officials in candidate countries. The EU sends its experts to conduct training, seminars, and workshops that help candidate countries implement European management standards. For example, in Serbia, the EU provided technical assistance for the development of new anti-corruption legislation and judicial reform. This assistance included the training of judges and prosecutors, as well as consultations on the implementation of best practices in anti-corruption activities (EU support for the rule of law in the Western Balkans..., 2022).

Also, for the effective implementation of reforms, the European Union uses various programs and tools aimed at comprehensive support of the candidate countries. In particular, one such program is TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange), which provides operational technical assistance from EU experts in various fields. TAIEX organizes study trips, expert missions, and seminars to transfer knowledge and experience on various aspects of legislation and governance (TAIEX institutional building tool, n.d.).

Another important tool is the Twinning program, which promotes cooperation between state institutions of EU member states and candidate countries. Within this program, partnerships are created between relevant bodies, which allows for the exchange of experience and the implementation of reforms necessary for the harmonization of law and accession to the EU (Twinning institutional building tool, 2022). For example, in Macedonia, the Twinning program helped to reform the health care system through cooperation with medical institutions in Germany and the Netherlands. This contributed to improving the quality of medical services and raising the level of medical care for the population (Varnaliev, & Madzova, 2015, p. 103–110).

It is also worth mentioning the Erasmus+ program, which supports educational and youth exchanges between EU member states and candidate countries. This program contributes to the improvement of the quality of the provision of educational services, the increase of academic mobility of students and teachers, as well as the development of youth initiatives. In particular, students from Ukraine, which is a candidate country, have the opportunity to study in EU universities, which allows them to acquire quality education and develop professional skills necessary for the future development of the country, which will become especially relevant in the conditions of post-war reconstruction of Ukraine.

Thus, the role of the EU in supporting the harmonization of law and reforming the administrative institutions of the candidate countries is extremely important. Financial and technical assistance, the implementation of such programs as TAIEX, Twinning, Erasmus+, and the use of such support tools as IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) contribute to the successful implementation of reforms and increasing the level of preparation of candidate countries for EU accession. Evaluating the effectiveness of this aid makes it possible to identify best practices and adapt approaches to the needs of each country, which ensures sustainable development and integration into the European space. These measures contribute not only to the implementation of European standards but also to strengthening the institutional capacity of candidate countries, ensuring long-term stability and development. Thanks to this support, countries can fight corruption more effectively, improve the quality of public administration, and create favorable conditions for economic growth. This, in turn, helps to strengthen democratic institutions and increase the level of trust of citizens in the government. Thus, EU aid is critically important for ensuring sustainable development and the successful integration of candidate countries into the European community.

At the same time, the above demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive approach to reforms and the need for close cooperation with the EU. At the same time, the successful implementation of reforms requires political will, economic support, institutional capacity, and

public support, which should ensure sustainable development and comprehensive integration of candidate countries into the European space.

Discussion and conclusions

The conducted study of the role of the European Union in harmonizing legislation and reforming the administrative structures of the candidate countries shows that the influence of the EU is a decisive factor in their successful implementation in these countries. The harmonization of national legislation with the *acquis communautaire* contributes to increasing the level of justice, economic stability, and social welfare in the candidate countries. Effective implementation of EU governance standards ensures transparency, efficiency, and accountability of the public administration sector, which are key conditions for EU integration.

Financial and technical assistance from the EU contributes to accelerating the process of ensuring the compliance of the legislation of the candidate countries with EU law. Support programs and instruments (in particular IPA, TAIEX, Twinning, and Erasmus+) play an important role in providing the necessary resources and expert assistance for the successful implementation of reforms. However, the effectiveness of this aid depends on the internal political will and institutional capacity of the candidate countries.

Based on the conducted research, the following recommendations can be formulated for the EU and candidate countries:

The EU needs to continue providing financial and technical support, ensuring stable funding for support and technical assistance programs. In addition, it is necessary to increase the flexibility of the programs by adapting them to the specific conditions of each country, taking into account their political, economic, and social contexts, which will allow them to respond more effectively to the challenges and needs of the candidate countries. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation is also important for the implementation of mechanisms for regular monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of support programs to identify best practices and adjust strategies in time; for the candidate countries, it is necessary to ensure the support of the reforms at the highest political level and the involvement of all interested parties in the process. It is also important to develop institutional capacity by investing in the development of the public administration system, ensuring the professional training of officials and the ability of institutions responsible for implementing reforms to effectively perform their functions, achieve set goals and objectives, adapt to changes, and ensure sustainable development. Active participation in EU programs such as TAIEX, Twinning, and Erasmus+ is another key element that allows us to make the most of opportunities to improve the level of knowledge and competencies of public servants on the way to integration into the European political, economic, and social space.

In further studies, it is planned to compare the success of reforms in different candidate countries to identify the best experience for its implementation in domestic practice.

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РОЛЬ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОГО СОЮЗУ В ГАРМОНІЗАЦІЇ ЗАКОНОДАВСТВА ТА РЕФОРМУВАННІ УПРАВЛІНСЬКИХ СТРУКТУР ДЕРЖАВ-КАНДИДАТІВ

Вступ. Розглянуто роль, яку відіграє Європейський Союз у забезпеченні відповідності законодавства держав-кандидатів праву ЄС та адаптації адміністративних структур у державах-кандидатах, які прагнуть вступити до ЄС. Політика розширення ЄС характеризується суворими Копенгагенськими критеріями і вимагає від держав-кандидатів законодавчих та адміністративних реформ для приведення законодавства та управлінських структур у відповідність до стандартів ЄС. Ці реформи мають вирішальне значення для забезпечення стабільних інституцій, демократії, верховенства права та прав людини. Досліджено трансформаційний вплив цих вимог та визначено, як дотримання норм ЄС сприяє належному управлінню, покращенню надання державних послуг, економічному розвитку та зміцнює інституційний потенціал у державах-кандидатах.

Методи. Використано сучасні загальні та спеціальні методи наукового пізнання, серед яких: аналіз застосовано для опрацювання наукових, аналітичних та законодавчих джерел; індуктивний та дедуктивний методи – для аналізу й узагальнення інформації з тематики дослідження; методи прогнозування та синтезу допомагали в ході формулювання висновків та рекомендацій за підсумками дослідження.

Результати. Дослідження ролі Європейського Союзу в гармонізації законодавства та реформуванні управлінських структур держав-кандидатів показало, що вплив ЄС є вирішальним фактором для успішного внесення змін до нормативно-правової бази та реформування системи інституцій цих країн. Встановлено, що гармонізація національного законодавства з *acquis communautaire* сприяє підвищенню рівня незалежності правосуддя, забезпеченню економічної стабільності та соціального добробуту в державах-кандидатах. При цьому фінансова та технічна допомога з боку ЄС сприяє прискоренню процесу проведення реформ.

Висновки. Підтверджено, що допомога Європейського Союзу відіграє вирішальну роль у гармонізації законодавства та реформуванні адміністративних структур у державах-кандидатах. При цьому ефективне впровадження стандартів управління ЄС забезпечує прозорість, ефективність і підзвітність публічного управління, що є важливим для інтеграції в ЄС. У майбутніх дослідженнях передбачено порівняти успішність реформ у різних державах-кандидатах з метою виявлення найкращого досвіду для його імплементації у вітчизняну практику.

Ключові слова: євроінтеграція, публічне управління, демократизація, гармонізація права, Україна, ЄС, засади євроінтеграції

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