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STRENGTHENING LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AS A KEY VECTOR OF REFORMING UKRAINE'S REGIONAL POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION*

Background. *The beginning of negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the European Union in June 2024 marked the country's transition to a qualitatively new stage. In this context, territorial communities acquire particular significance. The article examines the potential of Ukraine's territorial communities in the process of European integration through the prism of strategic development, institutional capacity, and the spatial approach to regional policy. The analytical basis of the study consists of the principles of the Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030) and materials of the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON).*

Methods. *The article uses a set of methods. The method of comparative analysis is applied to identify common and different development trends of Ukraine and the EU Member States in the field of regional policy, as well as to assess Ukraine's readiness for integration into the European space. The method of content analysis is applied. The systemic and structural-functional methods made it possible to study territorial communities as holistic systems and to reveal the interconnections between the institutional, spatial, and strategic aspects of their development in the context of European integration.*

Results. *The results of the study demonstrate that the territorial communities of Ukraine are consolidating their role as key subjects of regional policy and active participants in the process of European integration. Their role in the implementation of reforms is steadily increasing. At the community level, the principles of sustainable development, subsidiarity, multi-level governance and territorial cohesion defined in the Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030) are practically implemented.*

Conclusions. *To ensure the effective progress of Ukraine in the process of European integration, coordinated actions of public authorities, territorial communities, and civil society institutions are necessary. The further development of Ukraine's regional policy should be based on the principles of partnership and the effective use of EU financial instruments. The future of Ukraine in the EU largely depends on the potential of its territorial communities.*

Keywords: *territorial communities, regional policy, European integration of Ukraine, strategic planning, Territorial Agenda 2030, ESPON, local self-governance, spatial development.*

Background

In June 2024, Ukraine officially commenced negotiations for accession to the European Union. This process involves the implementation of 35 policy chapters and EU legislation, grouped into six clusters. Opening and closing negotiations in each chapter may require a significant amount of time. At the same time, Ukraine must already undertake its "homework," that is, aligning national, regional, and local policies with EU standards. In this context, territorial communities function not merely as implementers of state policy but as active actors capable of influencing the level of European integration at the local level.

However, following the onset of Russia's full-scale aggression, Ukrainian territorial communities have faced unprecedented challenges: the destruction of infrastructure, migration processes, losses of human capital, and business closures. These factors have significantly increased the risks of reduced community capacity for strategic planning, mobilizing funding, and implementing long-term projects.

The aim of this article is to investigate how territorial communities realize their role in Ukraine's European integration process. It examines which instruments can be applied to implement EU standards, particularly in the

context of Chapter 22 "Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments" within Cluster 5 of the negotiation process, which defines how EU Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund are planned, approved, and implemented. This chapter focuses on reducing interregional disparities, supporting socio-economic development, and strengthening territorial cohesion.

The study of territorial cohesion policy instruments is highly relevant for Ukraine, which underscores the significance of this article.

The purpose of the article is to substantiate the conceptual and methodological foundations for strengthening local self-government as a key vector of regional policy reform in Ukraine within the context of European integration. The study aims to identify the institutional, spatial, and strategic dimensions of this transformation, assess the readiness of territorial communities to implement European principles of multi-level governance and territorial cohesion, and propose directions for adapting Ukraine's regional policy framework to the standards and practices of the European Union.

Sources. In preparing this article, the provisions and analytical findings of a range of international and European

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strategic documents were utilized, which outline contemporary approaches to territorial development, spatial cohesion, and sustainability. In particular, the analytical framework was based on reports from the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON), including the *State of the European Territory Report* (2019) and the *European Territorial Reference Framework* (2019), as well as the Seventh Report of the European Commission on Economic, Social, and Territorial Cohesion (2017). These documents highlight key trends, challenges, and development priorities of European Union territories, serving as benchmarks for assessing the capacity of Ukrainian territorial communities in the context of European integration.

The methodological foundation of the study also drew upon contemporary international and European policy frameworks, including:

- The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015);
- The Paris Climate Agreement (2015);
- The New Urban Agenda of the United Nations (2016);
- The European Commission analytical document *"Towards a Sustainable Future for Europe by 2030"* (2019);
- The European Commission proposal on the future EU Cohesion Policy for 2021–2027 (2018);
- The Urban Agenda for the EU (2016);
- The New Leipzig Charter (2020);
- The Cork 2.0 Declaration on the sustainable development of rural areas (2016).

The legal and regulatory context of the study encompasses a number of key European Union regulations, including:

- Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, establishing general provisions for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF, including ERDF and ESF);
- Regulation (EU) No 2022/562, which amends the Cohesion Policy framework 2014–2020 under the *Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe* (CARE) initiative;
- Regulation (EU) No 2025/773, containing recommendations for integrating the Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030) into European Semester mechanisms and enhancing the role of integrated territorial development instruments.

A key conceptual reference is the Territorial Agenda 2030, a political document adopted by the Council of the European Union and the ministers responsible for spatial development, which defines strategic directions for Europe's territorial policy until 2030. The provisions of TA2030 form the methodological basis for understanding the potential of Ukrainian territorial communities in implementing regional policy and integrating into the European territorial cohesion framework.

Methods

To obtain the results in this study, a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach was employed, combining classical scientific methods of analysis with innovative design-thinking tools. In particular, a content analysis of strategic and regulatory documents of Ukraine and the European Union was applied to identify points of convergence between the regional policies of both parties. The case study method provided an in-depth understanding of specific community development practices in post-war conditions.

Additionally, design-thinking tools (DesignLab approach) were integrated into the study to account for the needs of

community residents and to develop prototypes of solutions with stakeholder involvement. This method involves creating solutions with the active participation of users (community residents and stakeholders) through empathetic understanding of their needs, iterative testing, and prototype development. It encompasses the following stages:

- Empathy – in-depth study of community residents' experiences (through interviews and observation);
- Problem definition – clear articulation of local challenges and needs;
- Ideation – creative sessions to develop innovative solutions;
- Prototyping – creation of project or strategy models;
- Testing – evaluation of proposed solutions in small-scale pilot formats.

The inclusion of this method adds interdisciplinary depth and aligns with contemporary European approaches to public governance. TA2030 and EU Cohesion Policy particularly support bottom-up approaches to development, emphasizing planning "from the ground up" with active community participation. Thus, the methodology employed by the authors combines analytical, empirical, and innovative design-based approaches to achieve a deeper understanding of the role of territorial communities in Ukraine's European integration process (Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions ..., 2024).

Results

Since 2014, Ukraine has made significant progress in decentralizing power and reallocating financial resources to expand the authority of local self-government bodies. The institutional reforms carried out facilitated the consolidation of small settlements into capable territorial communities, which were granted substantially broader administrative and budgetary capacities. By 2022, the total volume of local budgets amounted to UAH 418 billion (UAH 555.1 billion including transfers), representing 24.4 % of the state budget.

However, the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation in February 2022 radically altered the context for implementing decentralization policy. The war caused extensive economic and social damage, jeopardizing the effectiveness of local governance. Approximately 30 % of Ukraine's territory is currently mined, nearly one-fifth is under temporary occupation, and active hostilities continue in seven regions. Economic losses are estimated at over USD 600 billion, with an average real GDP reduction of around 40 %, and reconstruction and recovery needs reaching USD 411 billion. According to the UN, since the onset of the war, 6.2 million citizens have left the country, while about 5 million have become internally displaced due to loss of housing, territorial occupation, or regular shelling, primarily in the southeastern regions.

Under these circumstances, local communities find themselves in an extremely difficult position. The destruction of communication and engineering infrastructure, disruption of local self-government operations, loss of human capital due to professional migration and demographic decline, and the reduction of economic activity all significantly limit their financial and managerial capacities. The decrease in local budget revenues, coupled with reductions in tax income, narrows communities' opportunities for strategic planning, investment project development, and mobilization of external resources.

Despite these challenges, the commencement of Ukraine's negotiations for EU membership creates a new structural framework for the development of local self-

government. Participation in the European integration process requires communities to enhance their institutional capacity, adapt management approaches to EU standards, and actively engage in regional development programs. Inaction at this stage may result in the loss of potential opportunities for integration into European initiatives, limited access to international funding, and reduced influence over the allocation of external resources.

To align domestic policy with European principles, the government established a set of priorities in the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine Resolution No. 695 dated August 5, 2020, "On Approval of the State Strategy for Regional Development for 2021–2027" (On approval of the State Strategy..., 2020). These priorities correspond to EU approaches to cohesion policy and include the development of community institutional capacity, digitalization of management processes, citizen engagement in decision-making, inter-municipal partnerships, and support for innovative economic development of regions. These guidelines provide communities with the opportunity to act proactively – not to wait for the conclusion of the EU negotiation process, but to take an active role today in shaping a new model of regional resilience and development.

Territorial communities possess a range of opportunities that arise within the context of European integration. First, participation in national, regional, and international programs – particularly EU programs supporting regional development, infrastructure, digitalization, and environmental sustainability. Second, active engagement with EU grant funding or participation in joint projects with European partners (interregional, cross-border). Third, the implementation of EU standards in local self-government, including openness, transparency, citizen participation, digitalization, and accountability. Fourth, the application of a strategic spatial approach to community development through the assessment of territorial potential, the use of analytics, and scenario-based planning, as proposed by TA2030 and ESPON.

In particular, TA2030 emphasizes that territorial development requires consideration of the specific characteristics of each location, coordination between levels of government, and across policy sectors. According to TA2030, territorial cohesion is one of the objectives of the European Union enshrined in the Treaty on European Union: "The Union shall promote economic, social, and territorial cohesion and solidarity among Member States" Article 3 (Consolidated version of the Treaty ..., 2016). As indicated in TA2030, territorial cohesion entails fostering balanced and harmonious development both between countries, regions, cities, and communities, and within them, ensuring a future for all territories and people in Europe based on territorial diversity and the principle of subsidiarity.

Territorial cohesion implies the creation of more equitable opportunities, particularly in access to public services for individuals and enterprises, regardless of their location. Territorial cohesion strengthens European solidarity, promotes convergence, and reduces disparities between more developed territories and those with lower economic prospects or lagging behind. At the same time, territorial cohesion enables all territories to realize their full potential by leveraging local resources and advantages through place-based investments. This benefits both Europe as a whole and each individual country.

TA2030 highlights the importance of strategic spatial planning and outlines guidelines for its development while

calling for the strengthening of the territorial dimension of sectoral policies at all levels of governance. TA2030 aims to promote an inclusive and sustainable future for all territories and to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Europe (Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals 2020 ..., 2020).

Paragraph 11 of TA2030 notes that "regional and local authorities may require external support to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. Such support can be provided under the EU Cohesion Policy and Rural Development Policy within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which set corresponding objectives and investments for all regions. This is particularly important for territories with less favorable development prospects, those that are lagging behind, as well as territories facing permanent natural or demographic constraints" (Territorial Agenda 2030: A future for all places ..., 2020).

The European Green Deal, together with the Investment Plan for a Sustainable Europe and the Just Transition Mechanism, as well as related EU sectoral policies and the Long-term Vision for Rural Areas initiative, create opportunities for synergy between TA2030 and the overall strategies and policies of the EU. At the same time, ESPON provides tools that enable communities to understand their position in terms of territorial capacity, connectivity, and potential, as well as to compare themselves with similar European territories. Thus, a territorial community can become a "point of application" of European integration: a local actor implementing concrete projects, shaping strategy, and demonstrating the ability to adapt to the European system (A Sustainable Europe by 2030, 2019).

Ukraine should leverage the proposed tools and approaches to strengthen the capacity of territorial communities. This should be a priority of the country's regional policy.

The analysis of the aforementioned tools and approaches allows for the formulation of an action strategy for communities, which consists of several stages:

1. Assessment of the starting point: collection of data on infrastructure, demographics, economic activity, and environmental resources; SWOT analysis with an emphasis on territorial characteristics (e.g., connectivity, accessibility).

2. Definition of goals and priorities: alignment with the priorities of TA2030 and national strategic documents, such as development of institutional capacity, digitalization, citizen engagement, and partnerships.

3. Scenario-based spatial planning: identification of possible development scenarios for the territory considering resource constraints, risks (war, demographic losses), and potential development corridors (transport, digital infrastructure, green economy).

4. Ensuring citizen and stakeholder participation: utilization of local democracy instruments—public hearings, e-participation platforms, participatory budgeting – to foster inclusive strategy development.

5. Development of a project portfolio in accordance with European standards: projects should align with EU program logic (e.g., sustainability, digitalization, innovation), include clear indicators, financing plans, and collaboration with European partners.

6. Monitoring, evaluation, and adjustment: implementation of a system of indicators (social, environmental, territorial) to assess performance, draw lessons, and disseminate successful practices.

7. Integration at regional and national levels: community strategies should be harmonized with regional

plans and national policy, ensuring coordination and scalability of successful practices.

This approach enables communities not merely to wait for the opening of negotiation chapters with the EU, but to take an active stance, act today, and shape their development within the European space.

Despite the existing opportunities, communities face a number of significant obstacles. First, limited resources – financial, human, and technical – may prevent the simultaneous implementation of all steps. Second, administrative weaknesses in local governance, a lack of experience in international projects, and insufficient project management capacity. Third, unequal opportunities between communities – larger and better-resourced communities can progress more rapidly, while less-resourced ones may lag behind. Fourth, the security situation related to the war generates high risks: projects may be halted, funding delayed, and infrastructure damaged. Fifth, the need to align with national policy and secure state support – without adequate national coordination, local efforts may remain fragmented.

Thus, a key conclusion can be drawn. Ukraine's EU integration process opens substantial potential for territorial communities. Even in the context of the ongoing war, their role can be active and constructive: developing strategies, mobilizing resources, and implementing European standards. Frameworks such as TA2030 and analytical resources like ESPON support these efforts by enabling the design of local policies that account for spatial specificities, multi-level governance, and inter-territorial cooperation. The development of strategies at the local level, alongside the implementation of tools of local democracy and citizen participation, contributes to shaping Ukraine's national regional policy, including in Chapter 22 of the EU negotiations. Territorial communities need to understand their role, challenges, and opportunities, and to identify which actions and solutions will be most effective.

Given the complex security situation associated with the ongoing war, additional risks emerge that may lead to project stoppages, funding delays, and damage to critical infrastructure. This factor complicates both the planning and implementation of innovative and investment projects. Furthermore, the need to align local initiatives with national policies and secure state support remains critical. The absence of effective coordination at the national level can result in fragmented efforts, thereby reducing the overall effectiveness of community development.

Addressing these risks in scientific research requires a comprehensive approach, which includes prioritizing first-wave projects, establishing strategic partnerships with non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and international donors, as well as active coordination with state development programs. It is also important to gradually build community capacity through training, experience sharing, and the creation of inter-municipal coalitions capable of consolidating resources and distributing risks.

In the context of international experience and European practice, it is particularly promising to take into account programs implemented within the framework of European regional policy. A central concept of this policy is the principle of cohesion, which aims to ensure genuine unity within the European Union by addressing socio-economic disparities between countries and regions. This approach is fundamental for promoting sustainable development and reducing the risks of social polarization (A Better Life in Rural Areas, 2016).

Cohesion policy represents the European Union's most extensive financial initiative: in the current programming period, approximately one-third of the EU's combined budget – around €392 billion – is allocated specifically to this policy. A significant portion of these funds is aimed at supporting weaker and less developed regions, as well as strengthening their integration and cooperation with economically more advanced member states (Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions ..., 2024).

Funding is implemented through several structural funds, each serving specialized functions:

- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which invests in urban and regional infrastructure development, stimulates innovation, and enhances competitiveness;
- Cohesion Fund (CF), which allocates resources to environmental projects and transport infrastructure development in low-income countries;
- European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which supports initiatives aimed at increasing employment, vocational training, and fostering an inclusive and equitable society;
- Just Transition Fund (JTF), which provides support to regions facing the greatest challenges in the transition toward climate neutrality.
- Several key EU support programs are available to Ukraine as part of the EU's Neighborhood and Regional Cooperation Policy:
 - Programs under the Neighborhood Policy, providing financial and technical assistance to strengthen institutional capacity;
 - Cross-border and transnational cooperation programs within Interreg, aimed at enhancing regional partnerships;
 - Specific sectoral programs, targeting particular areas of development;
 - Ukraine Facility, a dedicated support program designed to respond to the country's current challenges and needs.

Of particular importance for Ukraine is the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, launched in 2009. It covers six Eastern European countries and is part of the Neighborhood Policy, financed through the Global Europe Instrument (NDICI). This instrument aims to strengthen partnerships, promote stabilization, good governance, and enhance resilience in partner countries (EU External Investment Plan, n.d.).

Currently, most projects and programs implemented in Ukraine with EU support are financed through this instrument. According to the "Moving Forward Together" portal, Ukraine is implementing over 250 projects and programs aimed at supporting reforms, socio-economic development, and the capacity building of communities. A detailed description of these initiatives is available on the official website: <https://eu4ukraine.eu/projects-ua>.

For the current programming period, the European Union has identified five priority areas of support for Ukraine, which align with the EU's key strategic goals in regional development. These priorities are integrated within the concept of regional cohesion, aimed at addressing socio-economic disparities and promoting sustainable territorial development.

The defined priorities include: a resilient and integrated economy; accountable institutions, rule of law, and security; environmental protection and climate resilience; sustainable digital transformation; and a sustainable, gender-balanced, fair, and inclusive society.

The implementation of these priorities is carried out through a range of comprehensive programs that support

key reforms aligned with both international standards and Ukraine's national challenges. Among these are U-LEAD, focused on strengthening decentralization and local self-government; EU4PAR, an initiative for public administration reform; EU4PFM, which enhances public financial management; EUACI, an anti-corruption initiative promoting transparency and accountability; EU4Digital, which drives digital integration; EU4Environment and EU4Energy, targeting environmental sustainability and energy security; as well as programs supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, vocational education, and local resilience, including EU4Business, EU4Skills, and EU4ResilientRegions.

Within these initiatives, support is extended not only to state institutions but also to territorial self-governing communities, civil society organizations, research institutions, universities, and business entities, reflecting a multisectoral approach to development.

An important instrument for enhancing institutional capacity is technical assistance under TAIEX and Twinning, which provides expertise exchange and support for the implementation of European standards—critical for adaptation to EU membership requirements.

Cross-border and transnational cooperation programs, financed within the framework of the Interreg initiative, adhere to the principles of multi-level governance and promote cooperation between Ukraine and neighboring countries. Among the programs available to Ukraine, notable examples include the Poland–Ukraine and Hungary–Slovakia–Romania–Ukraine cross-border initiatives, Romania–Ukraine, as well as transnational projects under the Black Sea and Danube programs. These instruments contribute to the expansion of socio-economic linkages and the development of resilient macro-regional strategies.

Of particular importance is the LIFE program, one of the European Union's leading financial mechanisms for environmental and climate initiatives. It supports nature conservation efforts, facilitates the transition to a circular economy, promotes climate adaptation measures, and fosters the development of alternative energy sources. Ukraine's participation in this program represents a precedent for non-EU countries and opens new opportunities for integrating the country into the European environmental framework.

It is crucial to emphasize that the implementation of these priorities and programs occurs within the context of the Copenhagen criteria, which require candidate countries to maintain stable democratic institutions, a functional market economy, and the capacity to assume EU membership obligations. To support this process, the EU applies the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), which provides the necessary financial and technical resources for conducting structural reforms. In particular, Ukraine has developed a Recovery and Reform Plan, implemented with IPA support and coordinated with other international donors, thereby enhancing the potential of the Ukraine Facility program.

Thus, the combination of local experience and international best practices within the framework of European financial and technical instruments creates the conditions for overcoming existing barriers and enhancing the capacity of local communities. However, as indicated by the scholarly discourse, the success of this process depends not only on financial support but also on an integrated systemic approach, which entails consistent coordination, the development of institutional capacity, and

effective risk management, particularly in the context of a complex security environment (Bristow, & Healy, 2015).

In summary, it should be noted that in the process of European integration, Ukraine is undergoing a profound transformation of its public administration and regional policy system, which involves strengthening the role of local self-government. This constitutes one of the key prerequisites for building an effective, democratic, and transparent governance model based on the values and standards of the European Union.

The reform of regional policy should rely on the principles of subsidiarity, partnership, transparency, inclusiveness, and sustainable development, which define contemporary European cohesion policy. The implementation of these principles will contribute to improving decision-making efficiency at the local level, ensuring balanced territorial development, and strengthening citizens' trust in public authorities.

A critical component of this process is enhancing the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies and territorial communities, enabling them to design and implement their own development strategies in accordance with regional needs and European best practices. In this context, the effective use of European Union financial, technical, and institutional resources is particularly relevant, including programs under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI – Global Europe), European cohesion policy, the European Green Deal initiative, as well as cross-border and interregional cooperation projects. The mobilization of these resources can serve as a catalyst for sustainable regional development in Ukraine and accelerate its integration into the European economic and political space.

Thus, the reform of regional policy and the strengthening of local self-government should be viewed not only as a domestic political process but also as an integral part of Ukraine's integration into the European governance and sustainable development framework. The utilization of EU potential and resources will foster the consolidation of territorial communities, enhance their competitiveness, promote social cohesion, and contribute to achieving the strategic goals of the UN 2030 Agenda.

Discussion and conclusions

The findings of the study confirm that strengthening local self-government constitutes a key vector in reforming Ukraine's regional policy within the framework of European integration. At the current stage, following the official launch of accession negotiations with the European Union, territorial communities have become the fundamental institutional level for implementing the principles of the *Territorial Agenda 2030* (TA2030), particularly territorial cohesion, balanced development, and polycentric governance.

The analysis demonstrates that the potential of Ukrainian communities in the European integration process largely depends on their institutional capacity, strategic planning ability, and effective management of spatial resources. In this regard, the approaches developed by the *European Spatial Planning Observation Network* (ESPON) are of particular relevance, emphasizing the importance of spatially oriented governance, policy integration, and multi-level coordination between national, regional, and local actors.

In the context of post-war recovery, territorial communities play a decisive role in ensuring socio-economic resilience, restoring infrastructure, and attracting investment. The research findings highlight that strengthening financial autonomy, fostering partnerships among local

authorities, businesses, and civil society, as well as embedding transparency and accountability principles into local governance, are consistent with EU standards and enhance regional competitiveness.

At the same time, significant challenges remain. These include disparities in community development, limited human resources, insufficient access to financial instruments, and weak coordination across levels of governance. Addressing these challenges requires the establishment of an effective multi-level governance system, the improvement of fiscal decentralization mechanisms, the expansion of inter-municipal cooperation practices, and the adoption of spatial analysis tools promoted by ESPON.

In conclusion, strengthening local self-government is not only a cornerstone of democratic governance but also a prerequisite for Ukraine's integration into the European regional policy framework. The implementation of European approaches to territorial development management will enhance community resilience, improve resource efficiency, and foster a new model of regional policy grounded in the principles of cohesion, inclusiveness, and sustainable development.

Future research should focus on developing practical recommendations for adapting *EU Cohesion Policy* instruments to Ukraine's post-war recovery context and on creating a methodological basis for spatial planning aligned with the best practices of EU member states.

Authors' contribution: Svitlana Kustova – conceptualization of the theoretical foundations of the study, synthesis and analysis of collected materials. Tetiana Palamarchuk – development of the methodological framework of the research, formulation of the analytical model of regional policy reform, interpretation of results

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ЗМІЦНЕННЯ МІСЦЕВОГО САМОВРЯДУВАННЯ ЯК КЛЮЧОВОГО ВЕКТОРА РЕФОРМУВАННЯ РЕГІОНАЛЬНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ УКРАЇНИ В КОНТЕКСТІ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОЇ ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ

Вступ. Наголошено, що початок переговорів щодо вступу України до Європейського Союзу в червні 2024 ознаменуватиме перехід країни на якісно новий етап. У цьому контексті особливого значення набувають територіальні громади. Досліджено потенціал територіальних громад України у процесі європейської інтеграції через призму стратегічного розвитку, інституційної спроможності та просторового підходу до регіональної політики. Аналітичну основу дослідження становлять принципи *Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030)* та матеріали *European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON)*.

Методи. Використано метод порівняльного аналізу для виявлення спільних і відмінних тенденцій розвитку України та держав – членів ЄС у сфері регіональної політики, а також для оцінювання готовності України до інтеграції в європейський простір. Застосовано метод контент-аналізу. Системний та структурно-функціональний методи дали змогу виявити територіальні громади як цілісні системи та виявити взаємозв'язки між інституційними, просторовими й стратегічними аспектами їх розвитку в контексті європейської інтеграції.

Результати. Розкрито, що територіальні громади України консолідують свою роль як ключові суб'єкти регіональної політики та активні учасники процесу європейської інтеграції. Їхня роль у впровадженні реформ неухильно зростає. На рівні громад практично реалізуються принципи сталого розвитку, субсидіарності, багаторівневого врядування та територіальної згуртованості, визначені в *Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030)*.

Висновки. Визначено, що для забезпечення ефективного поступу України в процесі європейської інтеграції необхідні скоординовані дії органів державної влади, територіальних громад та інститутів громадянського суспільства. Подальший розвиток регіональної політики України має ґрунтуватися на принципах партнерства та ефективного використання фінансових інструментів ЄС, адже майбутнє України в ЄС значною мірою залежить від потенціалу її територіальних громад.

Ключові слова: територіальні громади, регіональна політика, європейська інтеграція України, стратегічне планування, *Territorial Agenda 2030*, *ESPON*, місцеве самоврядування, просторовий розвиток.

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