

A Democratic Roadmap for Ukraine



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Since February, debates about international responses to the Ukraine war have naturally focused on very immediate imperatives — supplies of weaponry, sanctions on Russia, emergency relief, the adjustment of energy policies. As these continue to be of paramount importance, issues related to the medium and longer term are also coming into view, not least because of events on the ground.

As the international community begins lifting its collective gaze to this horizon, a sequenced roadmap is needed to guide support for Ukraine. Ministers, officials and civil society representatives reflected on this challenge at the [Forum 2000 recently in Prague](#). They stressed that issues tightly related to democracy should constitute a unifying thread for such a roadmap. This short contribution explores a selection of democracy-related priorities from among the large number of issues that future support to Ukraine will need to encompass.

WAR FIGHTING

Helping Ukraine fight the war undoubtedly remains the most pivotal priority and even more so given the extraordinary recent feats of Ukrainian forces. Western countries' supplies of weapons have made a difference, even if more could have been offered and delivered more quickly. As Ukrainian forces make such impressive gains on the ground, the international community needs to accelerate and step up the supply of weapons.

Notwithstanding the Ukrainian advance, many military experts still expect a drawn-out conflict, possibly without any singular moment of definitive resolution, shifting into a phase of different tactics on the ground. Ukrainian territorial gains mean military support is even more necessary, not that external powers can now step back. As ground needs to be held against likely Russian counterattacks, now is a moment for increased support from external powers in order to influence such a defining moment in the conflict.

The dramatic events on the ground also require a roadmap towards broader types of external support. The international community will need to contribute fully and effectively to the next stage of war fighting. Ukrainian forces will need a reliable supply of more arms and also weapons that bestows them with more

advanced capacities. But a longer-term roadmap for support must also channel a broader kind of support.

The international community must prepare for different kinds of scenarios ahead, as Ukrainian advances that seemed improbable until recently open up a range of possibilities. International support will need to contribute towards longer term capacity building for Ukraine's military capabilities. This will require a more hands-on strategy beyond simply sending weapons – while governments will insist on not crossing established redlines against actual fighting on the ground.

This wider approach to warfighting should entail more focus on qualitative aspects of full-spectrum social and political resilience, with military and wider societal actors working together to help the consolidation of territorial control. As a concrete policy deliverable, the international community should create a dedicated initiative and funding for '*Ukrainian social resilience for war*'. Ukrainian civil society already has a record in contributing to self-defence functions: this needs further support and encouragement. A whole-of-society approach should provide a bridge between war fighting and governance aspects of a long-term roadmap for Ukraine.

RECONSTRUCTION

Many governments and international organizations have already advanced in their thinking about longer-term help for Ukraine's reconstruction. Ukrainian ministers, officials and civil society organizations have pushed for such plans to be more firmly developed and rolled out, while also cautioning that a focus on reconstruction should not supplant help for fighting the war.

Much focus has already homed in on the need to expedite reconstruction. Debate has understandably prioritized the need for creative kinds of funds, guarantees, insurance, loans and private-sector involvement as ways to make sizeable funding available without undue delay. Policy debates are rightly centred on how to structure funding mechanisms so as to mobilize public and private resources as quickly and effectively as possible.

While it is understandable that much focus will be on helping cover immediate financing needs to emergency relief, Ukrainians have argued that financing for reconstruction must fit a long-term plan for the country's economic, social, political, and ecological transformation. It is imperative that the most urgent reconstruction support be delivered quickly; but speed should not diminish careful consideration of these longer-term dynamics.

Building on the important Ukraine national recovery plan drawn up in Lugano in July, a longer-term roadmap must stress that the qualitative political aspects of reconstruction are no less important than the quantitative elements of external support. So far, the priority has been, in the words of one official, 'to keep the government standing'; it must gradually also facilitate systemic change and resilience. Ukrainians' concerns regarding corruption, human rights and the need for deeper political reforms that existed before the invasion should not be overlooked, even as the war has of course pushed other issues to the forefront of the policy agenda.

Reconstruction should assist in a gradual move back to open politics in Ukraine. Even if the international

community should take care not to overload political conditionality in the short term, reconstruction funding should not inadvertently displace a focus on continued democratic reform. Political issues should not hold up immediate support but nor should they be unduly delayed to supposedly latter stages of reconstruction.

The short- and long-term are interlinked. Private sector investors have stressed that full judicial reform would encourage them to commit more funds in the short-term to play a part in reconstruction. The democratic and civic management of energy transition issues will also be a priority, as Ukraine will come out of the war in a changed energy-security environment.

Civic tolerance for elite corruption and state-capture is likely to be lower in the future, and international donors must take care not to become associated with old practices so roundly rejected by Ukrainian society – a lesson to be drawn from international efforts in other conflict environments. There must be full transparency and accountability over reconstruction aid. Aid should in this way contribute to and indeed be an integral tool for strengthening democratic accountability and citizen engagement. In the absence of such new democratic mechanisms, reconstruction support could set back political reform and work at odds with anti-corruption aims.

Alongside the necessary focus on physical rebuilding and humanitarian relief, funders could set up a ringfenced '*Political reconstruction*' basket to coalesce support for this objective and involve civil society scrutiny over this. Ukrainian civil society organizations have reiterated that the tragedy of the war must be used to usher in more open, localized and rights-oriented economic and political models. As one influential Ukrainian civic leader put it at the Forum: 'green reconstruction and the empowerment of civil society and women'. While Ukrainian civil society organizations have adjusted to work with the government during the invasion, they stress the importance of international powers helping spur a deeper democratization as the conflict unfolds.

EU ACCESSION

The EU's granting of candidate status to Ukraine is arguably the most significant European policy change to have been taken since February. The Forum 2000 heard European ministers stress unequivocal support for Ukraine's entry as full EU member. German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock promised: 'Ukraine will become an EU member. Full stop.'

Naturally, concerns remain that some member states might endlessly delay or block Ukraine's accession. Yet the accession promise has undoubtedly become firmer. Perhaps the most pertinent debate now is about the so-called pre-accession preparations designed to lead Ukraine along the path towards membership.

In other pre-accession contexts, critics have chastised the EU for being too passive – for making a membership offer and then not doing enough to help candidates fulfil the entry preconditions. Skeptical observers feel that in this way democracy-related entry criteria have become used as a means of preventing further enlargement more than they reflect a genuine desire to help in political reform. In Ukraine's case the stakes are so high in how pre-accession is managed that fundamental rethinking is urgently needed. The EU must move from passive to active pre-accession support. Polish foreign minister Zbigniew Rau called in the Forum for 'a very transparent and very dynamic accession process'.

There is fairly widespread agreement that the EU needs to foreground agility and candidates' concrete needs and avoid unnecessarily burdensome harmonization in the short term. A focus is taking shape around the idea of intermediate stages offering some specific elements of membership prior to full accession. Policymakers have, for example raised the idea of bringing Ukraine fully into the framework of the European Green Deal as quickly as possible.

Previous pre-accession processes have been governed

by a tone of what candidate states must do to satisfy the European Union. In the case of Ukraine, the frame should be equally one of what the EU can do concretely and proactively to satisfy Ukraine.

One example of this lies in the area of disinformation. European ministers have rightly stressed how the war needs to be won in the digital realm as much as on the battlefield. This will require far more extensive support to Ukraine and other Eastern European partners in advanced counter-disinformation strategies, taking on board what has worked and not worked in such efforts in the last several years. The EU has funded work in this area and invited Ukraine into the Digital Europe initiative. This kind of highly geostrategic support needs to be strengthened and made part of the capacity-building accession process far more than in the past and tailored to the unique needs of Ukraine's candidacy.

Quite a few reports and articles have made the case for phased integration; beyond making this general call, the crucial need is to create political processes that increase pressure on EU member states to deliver this. The EU stresses reform benchmarks – steps in reform processes that candidate states must meet. But benchmarks should apply both ways: if and when Ukraine and other candidates advance in their reforms, reciprocal benchmarks could and should apply to the EU in delivering tangible benefits and moving the accession process forward.

The European Political Community that is to be launched on October 6 should be framed in these terms. It should be a platform designed in part to help pre-accession, in addition to its geopolitical aim of bringing together the wider community of European nations. As one part of the European Political Community, an independent civic body could be tasked with preparing a running assessment of '*Opportunities to accelerate accession*' and keep member states true to their promises not to delay this process unnecessarily.

GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC COORDINATION

Beyond North American and European support for Ukraine, the war has generated commitment to wider global cooperation to uphold democratic norms. International action on this dimension is just as important as support specifically for Ukraine and is an area especially in need of upgrade.

A common refrain is that the war behooves democratic nations to work together to defend democratic norms well beyond Ukraine itself. As President Zelensky said at the Forum 2000 Conference: 'We need a world equipped to deal with tyrants.' And as Prime Minister Fiala also stressed, the war 'is about the whole system of international relations' and requires 'more consistent support to democracies around the world'.

The debate so far has focused on whether non-Western democracies have been willing to sanction or condemn Russian actions. Differences remain on this question, of course, and these are likely to endure. However, it is time to move this debate into a new phase. The fact that many democracies 'do not want to take sides' should not preclude efforts to deepen cooperation between democratic nations across the world on matters of open politics. This cooperation is overdue and has arguably lagged behind the deeper coordination between authoritarian leaders that has taken shape in recent year.

Leaders of African, Asian and Latin American democracies have made the point that as Western democracies enjoin others to support Ukraine more fully, in parallel they must do more to address others' concerns and also to reduce the double standards in

their foreign policies. The Spanish foreign minister José Manuel Albares has suggested, for example that the EU needs to address Latin American states' most immediate needs for food security and the like if it is to gain their full solidarity in shaping the post-Ukraine invasion international order.

A roadmap for international support should commit to a fundamentally new approach to global democratic coordination based in such mutual reciprocity. The Ukraine invasion makes upgraded and qualitatively new forms of intra-democratic cooperation more necessary. The invasion should be harnessed as a catalyst that contributes positively to ideas and initiatives to take this forward. This could be given concrete form through a non-state *Commission on Global Support for Democracy* tasked with rethinking how democratic coordination needs to change to bring in more actors from all regions of the world and these a more leading role in defining this. Working to uphold democracy globally is an agenda that goes far beyond questions of sanctioning Russia or containing China – even through much current commentary tends to reduce it to these issues.

This wider agenda might not seem directly relevant to Ukraine's immediate needs. And indeed, there should not be any distraction from these priorities. Yet a clear theme taking root in current policy debates is that short term and long-term concerns need to dovetail with each other. A much wider and more political international support agenda can itself add ballast to Ukraine's stunningly impressive efforts and the country gain a wider network of allies for the longer-term.

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