



**Ukraine-related agenda for Spain's
presidency in the EU:
recommendations from Ukraine**

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Ukrainian expectations from Madrid's presidency

Spain's presidency of the Council of the EU will take place under circumstances that are of crucial importance for Ukraine not only in the light of Russian aggression, but also Ukraine's advancement towards membership in the European Union. Therefore, Ukraine is counting on the strong position of Spain regarding the continuation of already initiated sanctions, financial, defence and humanitarian support until the end of 2023 and for 2024, as well as strengthening of bilateral cooperation both with Spain and the EU.

Prospects of the new Spain-Belgium-Hungary TRIO

For Ukraine, the presidency of the TRIO of France, the Czech Republic and Sweden was full of significant transformations in the approaches of the EU in terms of political ambitions and practical initiatives. It is important to maintain this tendency during the Spanish presidency and to secure this approach for the new TRIO of presidencies, which begins in July 2023. At the same time, Spain and Belgium should demonstrate principled position in order to prevent Hungary from promoting initiatives that may covertly or openly harm solidary pressure on Russia as an aggressor state.

Under these circumstances, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of Spain's leadership for discussions at the highest level and the promotion of strategic decisions. In this regard, it is possible to highlight **a number of Ukraine-related priorities and initiatives that are worth to be included into Spanish presidency agenda, and which play an important role in Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression and Ukraine's integration into the EU.**

Support of Ukraine for the victory over the aggressor

The European Union as a collective actor of security and defense policy demonstrated itself at a sufficiently high level not only in the form of support from member states, which provided support to Ukraine at the bilateral level, but also in the form of unprecedented decisions at the supranational level. Therefore, the main task at the moment can be defined as the systematization and prolongation of already existing initiatives at least until the end of 2024, make these tracks sustainable and extend scope of Ukraine's involvement into EU's defense and security policy by opening access to certain EU's projects:

- to secure long-standing financing to some effective instruments, namely European Peace Facility to ensure continuous channeling of military assistance to Ukraine, and EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) to make EU's member states role in military trainings sustainable.

- to transform ad-hoc initiatives into longer-term aid projects and instruments. In particular, to extend and systemize the practice of common ammunition procurements for Ukraine, which set a precedence and should serve for timely and constant supplies to Ukraine on the basis of longer-term procurement strategy.
- to include Ukraine into collective defence initiatives of the EU. This can be part of strategic approach and can start with Ukraine's access to Permanent Structured Cooperation projects (PESCO).

Moreover, the political and historical connection of Spain with certain regions and states of the Global South allows us to propose a bilateral partnership in increasing the number of countries in Africa and LAKB, which will share the positions of the civilized world in Russia's war against Ukraine. It is expedient for Madrid and Kyiv to jointly approach the planning of the relevant thematic section during the EU-CELAC summit, which has already been proposed by the Spanish side during the presidency of the EU Council.

Deepening and expansion of sanctions pressure on aggressor state

Despite the adoption of unprecedented sanctions against Russia, some critically important areas remain outside the official sanctions pressure. So, although in fact the export of Russian gas to the EU countries has been stopped, official sanctions that would regulate this have not yet been introduced. The first stage of the reorientation of European economies to alternative sources for importing natural gas should be followed by a systemic solution – the introduction of full sanctions on gas supplies from Russia. The political leadership of Spain, which systematically promotes the transition to green technologies and energy, will allow to combine national and supranational priorities and support Ukraine in the fight against Russian aggression.

Additionally, the EU has to work on improvement of already existing sanctions mechanisms to increase their effectiveness. In particular, screening and secondary sanctions against intermediaries engaged in evasion schemes, sanctions for military-civilian enterprises operating under different Rosatom auspices. Discussion of sanctions on Rosatom have to be finally accelerated as well.

Practical steps towards possible confiscation of frozen Russian funds

The possible confiscation of frozen Russian assets remains an extremely sensitive topic for most of the foreign partners of Ukraine, but a systemic response must be encouraged and adopted at the supranational level. Intensification of discussion on reconstruction of Ukraine will steadily return Ukraine and its partners to the question of the latter's readiness to confiscate Russian assets and use them for compensation of damages caused to Ukraine by Russian aggression. In addition, there is an increasing need for the synchronization of such preparatory work between the EU, the USA and Great Britain.

NATO and the EU: a joint guide of reforms from Madrid to Vilnius

The Madrid Declaration of the NATO Summit laid the foundations for strengthening the defense and deterrence elements of the North Atlantic Alliance, and also proposed a Comprehensive Package of Assistance to Ukraine. NATO summit in Vilnius should become a strategic bridge from the initiatives proposed in Madrid to the creation of a real mechanism for Ukraine's integration into NATO. It is important to develop a map of reforms implementation, which will correspond simultaneously to the fulfillment of obligations for integration both with the EU and NATO.

Strengthened political consultations 27+1

This practice proved to be efficient political instrument and should continue. Formalization of a similar approach will not only help European partners receive first-hand information about the situation in Ukraine, but will also allow Ukrainian government to quickly adapt their management models to European practices. However, the main goal of the active involvement of Ukrainian side in the internal issue-focused meetings of the EU may be the rapid sectoral integration of Ukraine into the internal market of the European Union.

Opening of negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU by the end of 2023

Understanding the political election cycles in the EU, as well as the time frames and procedures of the European Union in terms of enlargement, Spanish presidency itself will lead to the intensification of the EU-Ukraine bilateral agenda. Not only the political establishment, but also Ukrainian society is waiting for a positive signal from the EU in assessing progress in the implementation of reforms in the next EU Enlargement Package in October 2023. In this case, under the presidency of Spain until the end of 2023, Ukraine will have a historic chance to open negotiations with the EU regarding membership.

Sectoral integration and respect for bilateral obligations between the EU and Ukraine

Ukraine declared implementation of the Association Agreement and DCFTA in particular to be a priority, and also proposed a Priority Action Plan for the medium-term perspective. However, the recent interventions of national governments in the competence of the European Commission have demonstrated a complete disregard to the agreements and procedures established by the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine. Spain, in accordance with the stated priorities of the presidency, can contribute to the restoration of a fair framework of cooperation between the EU and Ukraine.

Reconstruction of Ukraine

The issue of reconstruction of Ukraine is also on the agenda of the European Union and Ukraine. Numerous conferences and debates on the principles of reconstruction and the participation of private European business are taking place in Brussels and the capitals of EU member states. In June 2023, the next significant step towards the systematization and activation of international cooperation in reconstruction issues will take place in London. It is important that during the presidency of Spain it will be possible to ensure the unification and formalization of the rules of the Platform for the Reconstruction of Ukraine.

International tribunal for Russia

Support for the idea of a special international tribunal for Russia for crimes committed as part of its aggression against Ukraine can be a separate topic for strengthening the synergy between Ukraine and the European Union. As of now 30 countries have already confirmed their support to the international tribunal and most of them are members and candidates for EU membership. In this regards it is important to deepen the dialogue, on the one hand, about the format of the tribunal, and on the other hand, regarding the support of the idea at the EU level.

Official Madrid has a good chance to make its presidency in the EU have historical significance at the end of the current five-year term of the European Parliament and the current composition of European institutions. Priorities of the Spanish Presidency in the EU, which were announced by the Spanish government, indicate an ambitious and thoughtful approach to the preparation of strategically important initiatives for the European Union. The readiness of official Madrid to defend the concept of "Open strategic autonomy" of the EU may indicate a deep understanding of the challenges the union and its member states are facing amid geopolitical transformations in the world. Intensification of the dialogue between Madrid and Kyiv, which will include recommendations from Ukraine to the Spanish agenda, will clearly have a key impact on Ukraine's movement towards membership in the EU and even NATO, and on the stability of support for Ukraine in its defense against Russian aggression.

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