

EU-Ukraine Summit: a cautious extension of cooperation

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The 23rd EU-Ukraine Summit took place on 12 October in Kyiv, with the participation of President Volodymyr Zelensky and Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, as well as President of the European Council Charles Michel, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell. During the meeting, an agreement on a common airspace liberalising the rules of air transport was signed, along with agreements on Ukraine's accession to EU programmes: research, culture and innovation funding. The final declaration stressed the efforts made by the Ukrainian government to deoligarchise the country and the steps taken to combat corruption. Efforts to extend cooperation and further support reforms in the country were also declared. Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity was also condemned and Moscow, as a party to the conflict, was called on to take responsibility for ending the war in Donbass.

Commentary

- The signing of three agreements – on the so-called 'open sky' and on Kyiv's participation in EU programmes supporting scientific research and cultural projects is the practical and positive outcome of the summit. The agreement on the creation of a common airspace provides for Ukraine's gradual accession to the common aviation market and removes restrictions and limitations on flights between the parties, guaranteeing open competition between carriers. Its implementation is expected to improve transport links and to make them more frequent and cheaper. This, in turn, will facilitate contacts between people and increase trade. Another two agreements – on Ukraine's participation in Horizon Europe and the Euratom research and training programme (with budgets of €95.5 billion for 2021-2027 and €1.38 billion for 2021-2025, respectively) and the Creative Europe programme (budget of €2.44 billion for 2021-2027) – provide for the participation of Ukrainian entities under the same conditions as those applicable to the member states. Both agreements will enable Ukrainian researchers and creators to benefit from EU subsidies and develop cooperation with EU partners. The provisions on supporting Kyiv in extending the transit of Russian gas after 2024, when the agreement with Gazprom expires, and on increasing the EU's involvement in increasing Ukraine's security resilience (no specific decisions have been made on these issues) should also be assessed positively. In addition, the provision of a second tranche of macro-financial assistance of €600 million to Ukraine was confirmed.
- The summit took place in the context of Kyiv's efforts to renegotiate the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreement (which is part of the Association

Agreement). Furthermore, the Ukrainian government has increasingly been emphasising the need for the country to be offered the prospect of EU membership. The first case might be called a partial success since it has been announced that, by the end of this year, the possibility of signing a so-called visa-free industrial regime, i.e. the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA), will be assessed). However, in the second case, the statements of the EU leaders did not meet Ukrainian demands – they were limited to declaring “support for Ukraine's European choice”. This fact will determine the increasing criticism of the West and disillusionment with cooperation with the EU among the Ukrainian political elite. This may delay the process of systemic reforms, as Kyiv will not perceive that their political and economic costs will be sufficiently compensated by the benefits of extending cooperation with the EU.

- The clear signals of bitterness about the lack of membership prospects – the Ukrainian government is aware that it is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future – should be seen as political rhetoric aimed at the Ukrainian public. It is meant to serve as a demonstration of the international activity of Ukraine's diplomacy and of President Zelensky himself, and to emphasise that the blame for the lack of progress on the road to European integration lies with the EU. Ukraine's communication strategy is to remain silent on the issues of Brussels' dissatisfaction with the pace of reforms, especially those concerning the judiciary, the security service and the fight against corruption.