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Ukraine's accession: How to deliver Europe's next enlargement

On 8 June 2026, a public discussion was held as part of the visit of European Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos in Kyiv. The event was jointly organised by the Ukraine2EU programme and the European Policy Institute in Kyiv (EPIK).

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On 8 June 2026, as part of the visit of **Marta Kos**, European Commissioner for Enlargement, a public discussion titled "Ukraine's Accession: How to Deliver Europe's Next Enlargement" took place in Kyiv.

Taras Kachka, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, together with **Oleksandr Korniyenko**, Deputy Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, and **Gerald Knaus**, EU enlargement expert and Visiting Policy Fellow at EPIK, joined the discussion moderated by Ambassador of the European Union to Ukraine **Katarína Mathernová.**

As the European Union prepares to open Cluster 1 on Fundamentals with Ukraine, Ukraine's European integration is entering a new phase – one defined not by aspirations, but by implementation and delivery.

OPENING REMARKS



I'm very happy that we are about to take the biggest step with the opening of Cluster 1 in mid-June. This achievement belongs to everybody. It belongs to the government, it belongs to Parliament, but above all, it belongs to local communities, civil society, and ultimately, the Ukrainian people. European integration is a project of the whole nation. And because it is a national project, the next stage of accession requires a national effort. Enlargement is not about setting dates, but about reforms. The coming months will be decisive, and Ukraine needs to deliver reforms consistently. It might not be easy, but one thing is clear: Ukraine belongs to Europe, and a united Ukraine will receive support.

Marta Kos, European Commissioner for Enlargement



> **Ukraine has repeatedly shown that it can surprise Europe through the resilience of its society, the determination of its institutions, and adaptability under extraordinary pressure. I am convinced Ukraine can surprise us once again: by delivering reforms, and by proving that accession is not only a strategic choice, but a practical route to prosperity, security and full membership in the European Union.**
>
> Matteo Mecacci, Director of European Policy Institute in Kyiv (EPIK)

PANEL DISCUSSION

Few – if any – countries have pursued EU membership under circumstances as extraordinary as Ukraine's. While defending itself against Russia's aggression, Ukraine has continued to advance reforms, strengthen institutions and move forward on its European path.

At the same time, Ukraine's accession is reshaping the conversation about enlargement itself, returning it to the centre of Europe's political agenda as a strategic investment in a stronger, more secure and resilient continent.

Against this backdrop, **the discussion focused on three questions:**

- What must be delivered in the months ahead to sustain momentum?
- What political and institutional choices will determine success?
- And how can Ukraine's accession help shape the future of Europe in the decade to come?

"The next six months will be critically important for the EU enlargement process. Our priority remains opening all negotiating clusters. Thanks to the frontloading approach, Ukraine has already completed a significant share of the preparatory work, so it is now important to finalise this stage and move to full-scale negotiations. At the same time, continued reforms remain equally important. The rule of law is the foundation of the EU accession process, as it lies at the heart of the European Union itself. Many reforms are already at an advanced stage of implementation, so it is now important to properly assess the progress achieved. This is precisely why tools such as the EU Enlargement Package and the Interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR) are so valuable – they will allow us to evaluate Ukraine's readiness for the next stages of the accession process."

Taras Kachka, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration



For the Verkhovna Rada, one of the key tasks in the coming months is adapting internal procedures to the unprecedented volume of legislation related to EU accession. At the same time, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the timeline for the accession process. Our society needs a coherent vision of the next steps and membership prospects, – as this will help sustain public support for reforms and confidence in the irreversibility of Ukraine's European course.

Oleksandr Korniyenko, First Deputy Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

The image of Ukraine in Europe has changed tremendously since 2022. Now Ukraine is contributing as much to European security as Europeans are contributing to Ukraine with their budget support also for the military spending in Ukraine. It's a mutual dependency that has changed dramatically.

Gerald Knaus, EU enlargement expert and Visiting Policy Fellow at EPIK

