

**THE EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE
PROCESS OF LATVIA'S INTEGRATION INTO THE EU: LESSONS FOR
UKRAINE**

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The article deal with the analysis of the experience of external and internal political communication in Latvia in the process of the country's integration into the EU and the study of the possibilities of using this experience in Ukraine. The starting point of this analysis is the statement that the common values of the EU: human rights, above all the right to life, human dignity, freedom, equality, democracy, and the rule of law constitute the axiological core of this political communication. The Europeanization of the state establishment and the public sphere is the goal of political communication in the process of EU integration. The study focuses on three main participants of political communication: political actors, citizens, and the media. The author analyzes the activities of these actors at the three stages of Latvia's integration into the EU. In conclusion the article, the author proves that considering the similarity of geopolitical conditions, ethno-demographic differentiation, and foreign policy orientations in Latvia and Ukraine, the experience of Latvian political communication in the process of integration into the EU can be used in Ukraine. Based on an assessment of Latvia's achievements and miscalculations along this way, he offers a number of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of Ukrainian European integration communication.

Keywords: *European integration, political communication, EU values, Europeanization, Latvian experience, war in Ukraine, Russian invasion.*

**ЕВОЛЮЦІЯ ПОЛІТИЧНОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ У ПРОЦЕСІ
ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ ЛАТВІЇ ДО ЄС: УРОКИ ДЛЯ УКРАЇНИ**

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Стаття присвячена аналізу досвіду зовнішньо- та внутрішньополітичної комунікації Латвії в процесі інтеграції країни до ЄС та дослідженню можливостей використання цього досвіду в Україні. The starting point of this analysis is the statement that the common values of the EU: human rights, above all the right to life, human dignity, freedom, equality, democracy, and the rule of law constitute the axiological core of this political communication. Європеїзація державного істеблішменту та публічної сфери є метою політичної комунікації в процесі євроінтеграції. Дослідження фокусується на трьох основних учасниках політичної комунікації: політичних акторах, громадянах та ЗМІ. Автор аналізує діяльність цих акторів на трьох етапах інтеграції Латвії в ЄС. Він доводить, що зважаючи на схожість геополітичних умов, етнодемографічної диференціації та зовнішньополітичних орієнтирів Латвії та України, досвід латвійської політичної комунікації в процесі інтеграції до ЄС може бути використаний в Україні. На основі оцінки досягнень і прорахунків Латвії на цьому шляху він пропонує низку рекомендацій щодо підвищення ефективності євроінтеграційної комунікації України.

Ключові слова: європейська інтеграція, політична комунікація, цінності ЄС, європеїзація, латвійський досвід, війна в Україні, російське вторгнення.

Introduction. On June 23, 2022, the European Council at the summit in Brussels decided to grant Ukraine the status of a candidate country for membership of the European Union. President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi emphasized that at this day European Council adopted one of the most important decisions for Ukraine in all 30 years of independence of our state and this is the biggest step towards strengthening Europe that could be taken right now, in our time and in such difficult conditions, when the Russian war is testing our ability to preserve freedom and unity [25].

But a difficult path of integration into the EU opens after this step. It includes economic, legal and political directions. In order to go this way faster and more efficiently, it is necessary to study the experience of the countries that are ahead. This will allow to adopt their best achievements and not repeat their mistakes in Ukrainian practice. Considering the political direction of European integration, it should be noted that integration in this direction is impossible without the development of effective domestic and external political communication. It has to be based on EU-founded values. Therefore, the analysis of the experience of political communication transformation in the process of integration into the EU is an urgent research task. At the same time, for more effective use of this experience, the characteristics of the research object should be as similar as possible to Ukrainian realities. Among the EU member states, Latvia meets these requirements to the greatest extent. That's why the study of Latvia's political communication evolution from Soviet to European values is especially useful.

The research aims to analyze the experience of Latvia's political communication transformation in the process of integration into the EU and, based on this analysis, to propose guidelines for the development of effective political communication in the process of Ukraine's European integration.

Methods. To achieve this goal, the following research methods were applied:

- content analysis was used to study the content of official documents, statements and speeches of public figures and scientific publications;
- cross-temporal comparative analysis was used to highlight the peculiarities of Latvian political communication in different periods of the country's integration into the EU;
- cross-state comparative analysis was used to determine the common and different characteristics of political communication conditions in Latvia and Ukraine;

- the analysis of statistical data was used to reveal the state and dynamics of changes in society's attitude to issues related to European integration.

Background. The background of this research consists of two components: the theory of political communication and the history of Latvia – EU relations.

Value Communication as a Means of Integration

The theory of political communication argues that any social and political integration can't be achieved without creating effective communication mechanisms and processes of communication. Political communication connects various elements of the political system into a single organism. The exchange of intellectual and spiritual achievements is the main content of the culture of society, which develops and transforms thanks to this. Jean-Marie Cottre argued that communication for political life is as important as blood circulation for the human body [6, p. 25]. Political communication is also the main means of public management and reflection of external influences. Karl Deutsch called political communication "the nervous system of governance" [7, p. 58]. These statements fully apply both to the fields of domestic and international relations. The theoretical background of research based on Wilbur Schramm's concept of communication, and on the Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems as communication systems. The author argues that the more common values political actors share, the stronger the bond between them and, as a result, the more effective political communication.

The values around which political communication in the EU is built are defined in the constituent acts of the Union. The Lisbon Treaty of 2007 states: "The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between women and men prevail" [24]. These values are an integral part of European

way of life, so their implementation is a mandatory condition for integration into the EU. In this context, it is worth paying attention to the statement of the President of the Republic of Latvia Egils Levits: “Human dignity, human rights, and freedoms, democracy, rule of law, and solidarity are European values that have naturally shaped and molded Latvia as a nation state” [11, p. 3]. Therefore, the analysis of the implementation of these values in Latvian political practice such as referendum, elections, and other political campaigns should show the meaningful effects of political communication in the process of integration into the EU. The goal of political communication in the process of EU integration is the Europeanization of the state establishment and public sphere. Europeanization could be characterized as structural changes with diverse impacts on different state institutions and participants in political processes: their functions, ideas, interests, and values [20, p. 11].

Periodization of the Evolution of Latvia – EU Relations

In the context of this research, it is important to focus on the inference of Egils Levits about the evolution of Latvia – EU relations. He identifies three periods in the development of these relations. The first period began with the restoration of independence in 1990-1991 and ended when Latvia joined the European Union in 2004. It was the transition period for the state and the society, which transformed nearly every area of life in Latvia and taught Latvian people the importance of adjusting to new circumstances as quickly as possible. Latvia needed these roughly 15 years to restructure its economy, political and legal system, and realign its values with Western, specifically European, democratic standards. The second period of European integration, which Levits defines, came after Latvia became an EU member state. This period, which began after 2004 and lasts until today, can be described as a period of Latvia’s European maturation. The political system of Latvia had to transpose European Union laws, standards, and political logic. The

President of Latvia believes that in the third decade of the 21st century and 15 years since joining the European Union Latvians are ready to enter the next phase of their European integration. That means Latvians are no longer on the receiving end only – they are not merely transposing and implementing European standards, thinking paradigms, or values. Therefore, Latvia’s political communication with the EU at this stage should be based on the fact that “actions, way of thinking and values of Latvians are European by default” [11, p. 4].

In accordance with the periodization of the development of relations between Latvia and the European Union, which was proposed by President Levits, the author distinguishes three stages in the evolution of political communication in the process of Latvia’s integration into the EU.

Results

The First Stage: the Choice is Made

The evolution of political communication in the process of Latvia’s integration into the EU has its start point on August 21, 1991, when Latvia adopted the Constitutional Law on full Independence thus *de facto* re-establishing sovereignty. International recognition followed soon. At the Helsinki Summit in December 1999, the European Council decided to begin accession negotiations with Latvia. The decision was based on the European Commission’s Progress Reports on Latvia. On 16 April 2002, was signed the Treaty of Accession to the European Union on behalf of Latvia. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2022). But the crucial point of political communication at this stage was the preparation and holding of a referendum on Latvia’s membership in the European Union. The analysis of the participation of state institutions, non-governmental organisations and the media in the preparation for this main event of the first period of Latvia’s integration with the EU provides an opportunity to reveal the peculiarities of political

communication at this stage. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia provides comprehensive information about this process [17].

In accordance with the decision of the Parliament of Latvia (Saeima), the referendum on Latvia's membership of the European Union will take place on September 20, 2003. On 8 May, the Saeima approved amendments to the Latvian Constitution and to the Law on Initiating Referenda and Other Legislation, thereby establishing the legal foundation for the referendum. The question voted on in the referendum was: Do you support the membership of Latvia in the European Union?

Official responsibility for managing the pre-referendum public information campaign belongs to the Government Task Force Latvija Eiropā (Latvia in Europe), established on 16 January 2003 by a decision of the Cabinet of Ministers. The work of the Task Force includes coordinating collaboration among state institutions during the campaign and involving community, municipal, cultural and educational organisations in public information events on the European Union. In March, the Prime Minister approved the pre-referendum information strategy "Latvia in Europe – A Strategy for the People's Campaign. Vote for the future of Latvia", which stated that the aim of the campaign was to provide the people of Latvia with objective and comprehensive information on the European Union, as well as deepen understanding of and promote discussion on the advantages and risks for Latvia associated with accession. The strategy aims to reduce the proportion of undecided voters by having the campaign specifically address their concerns, as well as ensure a maximum turnout on referendum day by emphasizing that voting is the personal responsibility of each citizen. To achieve its objectives, the People's Campaign has enlisted the participation of politicians, government and independent experts, public opinion formers and non-governmental organisations. In the lead up to the referendum, the Task Force launched a campaign advertisement with the slogan "Nepaliec malā!"

(Don't Stay on the Sidelines!) on TV and radio and in the print media on 12 August, with farmers, workers and pensioners as the three main target audiences.

The Saeima EU Information Centre was established in 1997 under the auspices of the Saeima European Affairs Committee. The Centre aims to inform parliamentarians, the media and the general public about the latest developments in the EU. With the approach of the referendum, the Centre launched a special Internet website (<http://www.eiroidfo.lv>), from which all interested persons could obtain information on various aspects of the EU accession process. The website contains the weekly information bulletin "Euronews", fact sheets, and the most important EU-related documents, including the Accession Treaty.

The President of Latvia Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, although not directly involved in the pre-referendum campaign, has lately made use of almost every public appearance to urge her compatriots to make an informed choice and to vote in favour of EU membership for Latvia on referendum day.

Ministries of Republic of Latvia have organised events as part of the People's Campaign, as well as initiating their own separate campaigns on aspects of public life falling within their jurisdiction. About a month before the referendum, ministries started to release information to the press on the potential benefits of EU membership for Latvia, focusing primarily on the various EU funds that could become available for the promotion of rural development, employment and infrastructure projects.

The European Integration Bureau is a state agency established in 1994 to manage and co-ordinate Latvia's integration into the European Union. The Bureau operates under the direct authority of the Prime Minister. In the lead-up to the referendum, the Bureau has provided coordination and assistance to the Government Task Force Latvija Europā and organised seminars and lectures at the request of various government institutions and NGOs.

The European Union Information Centre of the European Commission Delegation in Latvia launched the Eurohouse project to provide up-to-date information on the European Union and Latvia's integration into it.

NGOs have been actively involved in the information campaign, organising various activities to inform members of the professional and interest groups that they represent. The European Movement – Latvia, founded on 20 May 1997, is a non-governmental organisation whose main objective is to assist with Latvia's accession to the European Union and strengthen the unity of a democratic Europe. Its main target audiences were business people, other NGOs and the elderly. An information centre for NGOs has been established as part of the campaign. The Society Integration Foundation has allocated a total of LVL 143 000 for 37 projects, to be implemented by non-governmental organisations, municipalities, and educational and cultural institutions for promoting public awareness and discussion on EU membership. On 9 September, the Latvian Students' Association organised a student referendum on Latvia's membership of the European Union. Of the total of 10 653 students who cast their vote, 58.3% voted in favour of membership and 41.7% against. Famous and authoritative Latvian personalities also joined the political communication campaign in favour of joining the EU.

Latvia was considered one of the most skeptical countries to join the European Union, but polls conducted in the year of the referendum consistently showed a majority in favour of joining the EU, although this preference consistently hovered just above half, raising concerns about the outcome of the referendum.

Tabl. 1. Public opinion surveys on support for Latvia's accession to the EU

[17]

Mons 2003	Jan.	Mar.	May	Jul.	Aug.	Sep. (1st week)	Sep. (2nd week)
%	64	59	64	62	53	55	56,5

Supporters of joining the EU included the coalition government and the business community. They argued that this would give access to EU markets and development aid. They also stressed that membership would provide protection from pressure from Russia. In the last few weeks the 'Yes' campaign launched an advertising campaign with the slogan "Don't stay aside!" [10]. The groups of survey participants most often expressing support for Latvia's accession to the EU, and of whom more than half said they would vote 'Yes' in the referendum were: ethnic Latvians; young people aged between 18 and 24; persons living in households with a monthly income per household member exceeding LVL 101; persons with higher education; school and university students; the self-employed; top and medium-level executives; housewives.

By contrast, the main groups opposed to accession were: non-citizens of Latvia and members of non-Latvian ethnic groups; persons of comparatively low or average income (from households with a monthly income per household member of less than LVL 50; persons with a basic or unfinished secondary education; the middle-aged and seniors (aged between 40 and 74 years) workers; pensioners; the unemployed. Generally opposition was higher among Riga and Latgale, southeastern regions of Latvia with a large ethnic Russian population. The 'No' campaign argued that: Latvia should not surrender the sovereignty they had recently gained from the Soviet Union; should responsibility for key decisions be transferred to institutions outside Latvia in which other countries (for example, France and Germany) hold the greatest influence; the loss of a degree of democracy, arguing that European Commission bureaucrats have the most significant power in the EU; an increase in prices and the tax burden, leading to a decline in welfare in Latvia. They also suggested that Latvia would suffer economically as the poorest of the candidate countries.

However, being aware of the risks associated with Latvia's geo-political situation and historical heritage, on 20 September 2003, the people of Latvia expressed their support for Latvia's EU membership in a referendum 71.5% of the electorate participated in the referendum, 67% of whom voted in favour of Latvia's accession to the EU, 32.26% – against. The results saw the highest turnout of any of the Eastern European countries holding referendums in 2003. The 'Yes' vote was ahead in 30 of the 34 electoral districts with the highest 'Yes' vote among Latvians abroad with over 90% supporting membership. The highest 'No' vote was in the poorer east of Latvia, especially where there were significant numbers of ethnic Russians.

Thus, the wide-ranging political communication, the purpose of which was to increase trust for the government's decision to join the EU and the desire for cooperation within the Union based on common values, turned out to be effective in general. On 30 October 2003, the Saeima ratified the Treaty of Accession to the EU while respecting the opinion expressed by residents. And on 1 May 2004 Latvia joined the European Union (EU), thus closing almost ten-year long process of accession. Those the first stage of internal political communication in the process of Latvia's integration into the EU finished victoriously. But at this stage, the vertical direction of external political communication between the EU and Latvia is clearly manifested: Brussels officials behave like teachers, and Latvian government officials readily play the role of diligent students.

The Second Stage: the Teenager Adapts

In the second stage of Latvia's integration into the EU country has been fully involved in the EU's work, political communication, and decision-making process. Daunis Auers asserts that Latvia's relationship with the EU then fundamentally changed after May 2004 as it went from being a "third country" with bilateral relations with the EU to being one of a growing number of full-fledged member

states that was no longer purely reactive to EU demands but expected to take initiative and promote its own national interests [3, p. 17].

As part of the EU's institutional framework at this period of integration Latvia has been moving towards the external policy objective of being at the 'core' of the EU. From January 1 to June 30 Latvia was presiding over the Council of the European Union. During the presidency, the representatives of Latvia organised 1726 meetings on various EU policy and legislative issues, by focusing on the priorities of the presidency: a competitive, digital and involved Europe. 1483 meetings were held in Brussels, while 197 official presidency events, including the Eastern Partnership Summit and 10 informal ministerial meetings, took place in Latvia. A total of 25 300 participants from 105 countries participated in the events held in Latvia [22]. Thus, Latvia demonstrated its powerful potential for organising political communication inside the EU.

As for the value content of internal political communication, certain progress on the way to a developed democracy that meets EU criteria should be noted. Ieva Berzina accents that Latvia, like other Baltic states, in this regard are a specific case due to their remarkable progress in the development of democracy. According to the Freedom House survey, they are the only free countries in the former Soviet Union [8] and strong ties with the West, marked by their membership in the EU and [4, p. 197].

Political communication studies have long argued that elections are an indicator of democracy. On the other hand, their course reveals the peculiarities and character of political communication in each state. From the point of view of assessing the state of political communication at the second period of Latvia's integration into the EU, the analysis of the elections to the European Parliament in 2019 is indicative.

The 25-26 May 2019 European Parliament elections were the fourth in the Baltic states since accession to the European Union fifteen years ago. According to Daunis Auers, European Parliament elections are broadly understood as “second order elections” in national electoral cycles [2, pp. 3, 1]. He provides data from the Eurobarometer survey that identified the key concerns of Latvian citizens in advance of the election in 2019, which reflect their value priorities. Among the themes that should be discussed as a matter of priority, they gave preference to the economy and growth (68%), combating youth unemployment (46%), and social protection of EU citizens (42%). While the issue of promoting human rights and democracy is considered a priority for 28%, the question “The way the EU should be working in the future” – is for 22% only [14, p. 9]. Evidently, the awareness of European democratic values did not reach dominance in the Latvian public sphere.

And this is reflected in the population’s assessment of the results of Latvia’s membership in the EU. Attitudes to the European Union in Latvia, in other Baltic states, and in EU27 on average, are revealed through the answers to the following questions:

- “Generally speaking, do you think that (our country’s) membership of the EU is a good thing?” The percentage of those who agree was in Latvia – 54%, in Lithuania – 71%, in Estonia – 74%, in EU27 – 61%.

- “Taking everything into account, would you say that (our country) has on balance benefitted from being a member of the EU?” The part of those who agreed was in Latvia – 72%, in Lithuania – 90%, in Estonia – 88%, in EU27 – 68%.

- “My voice counts in the EU”. Agreed with this statement was in Latvia – 27%, in Lithuania – 32%, in Estonia – 22%, in EU27 – 51%.

- “Our country’s voice counts in the EU”. The part of those who agreed was in Latvia – 50%, in Lithuania – 57%, in Estonia – 58%, in EU27 – 63% [2, p. 4].

From the point of view of evaluating the effectiveness of political communication, the low level of approval of Latvia's EU membership by citizens, as well as the extremely low degree of confidence that Latvia's voice in the EU can be heard, is striking. Auers notes that Eurosceptic parties have regularly competed in European Parliament elections in Latvia but have fared very poorly [2, pp. 4, 11]. Therefore, Eurosceptics do not set the agenda for Latvian political communication. Unlike countries such as Germany, France, Poland and Hungary, Euro-opportunists are not in the camp of right-wing nationalists, but in the Russian-speaking environment.

In order to analyze the nature of political communication in Latvia, it will be useful to refer to expert interviews with political communication practitioners, published by Ieva Berzina:

The views of respondents on local characteristics of the Latvian political environment are rather critical. They are based on three interrelated factors: low quality of political journalism; weak political parties; and limited understanding of political processes in society in general. The quality and openness of political discussions in the political parties, parliament, and media also are viewed as lower if compared to the Western standards, in the opinion of the respondents [4, p. 214].

So, the specified shortcomings reduce the effectiveness of political communication in providing the "entry" functions of the political system – delivering demands and support. Under such conditions, the integration processes slow down, and the metastases of authoritarianism from the Russian cancerous tumor penetrate into the body of deliberative democracy of the European model.

The analysis of political communication at the second stage of Latvian integration revealed the presence of two contradictory trends. On the one hand,

Latvian politicians and citizens are becoming more and more actively involved in pan-European political affairs, including the elections to the European Parliament, and are deeply immersed in them. But, on the other hand, European democratic values have not yet become axiological priorities for the Latvian public sphere. And the unsatisfactory evaluations of the level of participation and influence on the general European policy indicate the presence of blood clots in the way of circulation of information between European officials, the Latvian government, and the population of Latvia. In the second period, the vertical orientation of political communication from Brussels to Riga, which was characteristic of the first period, is preserved. However, the Latvian authorities already feel that the stage of teenage adaptation in the European family is already coming to an end. As a result, independent national power strengthened not only in public opinion but also in all branches of government, which led to the transition at the third stage of Latvia's European integration.

The Third Stage: the Student Becomes a Teacher

To understand the peculiarities of the nature of political communication at the new third stage, it is important to pay attention to the President Levits' words:

The first two phases of European integration were asymmetric: Latvia had to take over European experiences, standards, thinking paradigms and values, whereas now we, the Latvians, conceive ourselves as true Europeans. We are very much open to best practices of other European nations, as much as they are open to best practices coming from Latvia... All European Union member states, including Latvia, are equally responsible for the future of Europe. Europe needs Latvia and its contribution to the future development of common European project [11, p. 4].

Resolute Latvian support for Ukraine in the war against full-scale Russian invasion has become such the best practices coming from Latvia.

In the context of the presented study, it is important to emphasize that at this stage the war in Ukraine became at the top of Latvian political communication agenda, not only in foreign policy but also in domestic policy. On 5 March 2022, ten days after the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine, President of Latvia Egils Levits took part in a support rally 'We stand with Ukraine! Together against Putin!' in Riga. In his address to those gathered, President Levits urged Latvians to remain united and continue to support Ukraine. President Levits' message: "Latvians fighting for support to Ukraine. Latvians of all ethnic backgrounds, irrespective of their home language, stand with Ukraine today" [12].

Therefore, according to President Levits, supporting Ukraine in resisting Russian aggression should solve the long-standing interrelated problems of sending Russian propaganda and consolidating all ethnic groups of the population of Latvia.

Latvia intensified political dialogue with Ukraine at all levels and branches of state power. On 12 April 2022, just half a month after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, President of Latvia Egils Levits, together with his Baltic and Polish colleagues visited the capital of Ukraine – Kyiv. They then discussed with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy ways to further assist Ukraine's civilian and military forces, as well as the progress of war crimes investigations as evidence of numerous atrocities committed by the invading army has been recorded. President Egils Levits emphasized: "Latvia would urge that the process of candidate status be reviewed by the European Union as soon as possible, so that Ukrainian society sees that its efforts to defend European values have not been in vain" [13].

On 9 May 2022 President of Latvia Egils Levits met with Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Ukraine Ms. Olena Kondratiuk. The main topics of discussion

were Russia's war in Ukraine, Ukraine's road to securing the status of a candidate country to the European Union (EU) and Latvia's support for Ukraine [14].

On 25 August 2022, delegations from the foreign affairs committees of the parliaments of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland visited Ukraine to jointly show their support for Ukraine and to gain a deeper understanding of the current situation of the war there. "This visit is a demonstration of support for the Ukrainian people who have made enormous sacrifices and continue to do so to preserve their independence, territorial integrity, and democracy. Our goal is to help Ukraine in any way we can to win the war and in dealing with its consequences", – declared the Chairs of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the four countries [18].

The war in Ukraine exposed the problem of commitment to the true values of human dignity, freedoms, and human rights, first of all, the right to life, democracy, and the rule of law over the world, and in the EU at first. It should be emphasized that in Latvian political communication these values have gained priority over economic interests. Awareness of the need for active protection of core public values allowed the Latvian authorities to put long-term internal problems on the agenda of political communication. In an interview on Latvian Radio on Ukraine's Independence Day, August 24, President of Latvia Egils Levits said:

Russia's war in Ukraine over the six months has completely changed the world, especially in Europe. The world has changed completely over the last half-year – the west has recovered from the original shock, converged, and become united. The task of Latvia, NATO, Europe, and Western countries is to continue helping Ukraine to resist Russian attacks by providing military support and continuing economic and political pressure on Russia. Latvians have become more patriotic and more aware of the price of freedom. The war in Ukraine has created a

“higher sensitivity” for Latvia against Russia’s presence in Latvia. For example, we now take Russian monuments more painfully [15].

The example given by the President is quite indicative in the context of analyzing the content of political communication in this period. The demolition of the giant Soviet ‘Victory Monument’ in Uzvaras Park, Rīga, has drawn a great deal of both domestic and international attention and discussion. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its barbaric actions there have undoubtedly been the main cause of a groundswell of opinion in favour of demolishing the monument, with many people arguing that there is little or no difference between the Russian Federation’s war crimes in Ukraine and the Red Army’s actions in Latvia, so leaving a monument to those actions in place is offensive. But the SKDS research showed that among Latvian residents who speak Russian in their families, a part of condemning Russia’s actions in Ukraine is only 40%, and the majority of them (60%) do not support the demolition of the Victory Park monument. Among Latvian speakers, opposition to Russia’s war in Ukraine is much clearer, and so is the belief that it’s time for the Soviet memorial to come down [21]. The demolition of the Soviet Victory monument was tackled successfully on August 25, 2022. Latvian Television and LSM offered a live stream of the process, which proved extremely popular.

The given facts testify not only to the existing value differentiation in Latvian society, which hinders integrative political communication, but also expose the desire of the authorities in their political messages to pass off the desired as the reality, which is no less threatening for effective political communication because it distorts the “feedback loop” and undermines trust in governance. A survey conducted by the agency SKDS in March 2021 showed that only 16% of Latvians are satisfied with the work of the government, and 80% are not satisfied (in addition, 39% are completely dissatisfied) [21]. The data of sociological surveys testify to the low effectiveness of political communication between the Latvian authorities and

society regarding the prospects of the country's development at this new stage of European integration. In March 2021, 22% of respondents believed that the situation in the country is developing in the right direction, but 60% – that it is developing incorrectly [21]. So, in addition to value and level differences in Latvian political communication, legal, institutional and functional problems remain at this stage too, despite the presence of certain positive developments.

Regarding the effectiveness of valuable political communication at the third stage, it should be noted. that against the background of successful foreign policy communication, which contributes to the increase of Latvia's international authority, domestic political communication suffers from a lack of trust in the government on the part of citizens. However, the fact that Latvia together with Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia fundamentally upholds the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law, even to the detriment of its economic interests, which sets it apart from some other EU member states, shows that the true value Europeanization of the Republic of Latvia has taken place.

Discussion

The discussion revolves around the questions of how and to what extent Latvia's experience can be used to improve political communication in Ukraine in the process of its integration into the European Union. To answer these questions, it is necessary to check the analogies of the conditions in which political communication, that ensures integration into the EU, takes place. The peculiarities of political communication in Ukraine are determined by its geopolitical position between Russia and the EU, as well as by the sub-ethnic language and regional differentiation of the Western and South-Eastern region population. The war in Ukraine, which has continued since 2014 and escalated into a full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, shows that ethno-political differentiation is being used by Russia as a pretext for aggression under the guise of "denazification".

Latvia was chosen as a case because it belongs to the West through its European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation membership, but at the same time, Russia impacts on it relatively highly in terms of historical ties, the presence of the Russian media, the spread of the Russian language, and other factors [5]. The strategic choice between the West and Russia is an issue that is perpetually at the forefront in Latvian politics. This may seem odd from the standpoint that Latvia is a full-fledged member of the EU and NATO, but Latvia's link with the West is unquestionable just by taking a superficial look. The ethnic division between Latvians and non-Latvians (Russianspeaking population) has been a main reference point in the Latvian political spectrum [4, p. 28] from the renewal of Latvia's independence in 1991 until now. Latvia is stuck in the middle between the political communication trends in Western democracies and authoritarian Russia. This is being mentioned as a fundamental problem that makes it difficult to apply in Latvia not only Western political campaigning techniques but also political theories worked out in the context of Western democracies. But it is far from being purely a Latvian internal issue [1, p. 214]. Thus, the characteristics of Latvia's and Ukraine's conditions of political communication are similar in their foreign policy orientations and internal political differentiations in many respects.

Within the framework of the modern discourse on democracy, a difficult dilemma arises: how the government, fulfilling the will of the majority, should take into account the wishes of the minority. The description of the situation of value dissonance made by Inese Šūpule is relevant both for Latvia and Ukraine:

Many current challenges require political action that goes beyond the national level and requires broad public legitimacy. If the values that underpin the policy-making process do not match the values and attitudes that prevail in society, the rules are not followed, or people express their dissatisfaction in protest. Policymakers and the media

need to be careful about confronting different identity groups, as this exacerbates conflicts and makes decision-making more difficult. In the policy-making process, one way to avoid conflict and confrontation between two groups is to find another, unifying identity or unifying value that underpins the political message [23, p. 46].

She notes that in Latvia one of the unifying values of society is family and family relationships as a value. Similar axiological priority imprinted in the Ukrainian ethos. But focusing purely on family values leads to localization rather than integration. A similar problem arises not only at the level of individual citizens and households, but also before political institutions. Auers concludes that Latvian political institution to have been *nationalized* rather than *europeanized* over the last decade and a half [3, p 21]. Paradoxical attempts to join Europe under nationalist slogans are also observed in Ukraine. Setting EU priorities 2019-2024, experts prove that renew Europe is at the forefront of defending common European values of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights. Values, more than anything, are at the very heart of EU citizenship and the DNA of European identity. The protection and promotion of citizens' rights and freedoms remains at the core of EU political agenda – now more than ever before. Notably, democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights are not just ideals, they are essential for the functioning of the European Union as a whole [19]. So, not local, but universal European values should be the basis of political communication that will ensure successful integration into the EU. It is they who are able to create and expand those areas of intersection of the framework of value correlation of communicators, which generate trust and create conditions for social and political cooperation.

Membership of the EU has clearly had a profound impact on Latvia's external political communication. Government ministers and civil servants shuffle between Brussels and Riga as well as other European capitals and prime ministers

increasingly interact with their counterparts in other EU member states and their diaries fill-up with bilateral, regional and European Council summits of political leaders. The Saeima has established a major new committee – the European Affairs Committee – to help deal with the incessant flow of legislative acts, often extremely technical in nature, as well as approving national negotiating positions. Political parties compete in European Parliament elections and ever more intensively interact with ideologically similar European parties. Interest groups and non-governmental organisations have discovered a whole new world of international partnerships, funding opportunities and European-level arena's for interest representation. Arguably only the office of the state president has seen a decline in the salience of European issues since accession in 2004 [3, p. 21]. But the development of effective prospective political communication is hindered by the fact that “Latvia does not have a single document that identifies its medium- or long-term national interests in the EU, rather, there are a number of documents that lay out short-term interests” [3, p. 17].

Considering that Europeanization as an axiological basis of European integration has not only a foreign policy component, but also, as Latvia's experience shows, a more important internal component, the coordination of political communication in the process of European integration in Ukraine should be carried out by the President through the National Security and Defense Council, taking into account the realities political practices established in Ukraine.

Thus, implementing the achievements of Latvian friends and avoiding the mistakes they made will contribute to increasing the effectiveness of Ukrainian foreign and domestic political communication in the process of integration into the European Union.

Conclusion

The study shows that European integration does not end after joining the EU, but transforms from the organizational to a deeper value phase. Latvian experience of political communication was accumulated at the three stages of integration into the EU. During this time, the country went from choosing the path to European integration through the adaptation of all spheres of life, including political, to cooperation within the framework of membership in the Union and entered a new period when Latvia not only communicates on an equal footing with representatives of the EU institutions but also shows itself as a leader in the promotion and protection of European values, which was clearly manifested in Ukraine. At the same time, as the results of the study show, in the process of establishing effective external and, especially, internal political communication, Latvian state institutions, and civil organisations made a number of mistakes that negatively affected the Europeanization of Latvian society. According to their geopolitical position, ethno-demographic and mental characteristics, and foreign policy orientations, Latvia and Ukraine are very similar, so the Latvian experience of political communication can be quickly adapted for use in Ukraine.

So, lessons for Ukraine, which should be learned from the Latvian experience of political communication in the process of EU integration are as follows:

1. Attempts to replace Europeanization with nationalization are dangerous because they lead to stratification in society. The basis of political communication, which aims at the Europeanization of society, should be values that are common to the EU, namely human rights, primarily the right to life, human dignity, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and tolerance.

2. Political communication requires coordinated efforts of all government institutions and non-governmental organisations. To do this, redevelop and adopt an appropriate programme.

3. There should be no gap between official assessments and public opinion regarding EU membership. To prevent this, it is necessary to include not only official bodies in the process of valuable political communication, but also the public sphere as a whole and ensure access to communication channels for every citizen, including using the tools of participatory and deliberative electronic democracy.

4. It is necessary to change the vertical political communication from Brussels to Kyiv in the style of "teacher-student" to equal horizontal communication. For this, it is necessary to use the opportunities that have opened up for Ukraine in the process of its close cooperation with Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Estonia during the resistance to Russian aggression, and to enter the EU as part of a group of states - the new value leaders of the Union.

5. Suppression of freedom of speech and journalistic activity, including on the Internet, negatively affects the effectiveness of political communication and strengthens authoritarian tendencies, which, on the one hand, contradict the values of the EU, and, on the other hand, increase the possibilities of information aggression on the part of the Russian Federation. In order to prevent the narrowing of the communication field, it is necessary to combine prohibitive measures in relation to Russian propaganda channels with the expansion of access to communication channels of the EU as a whole and individual member states, in particular to Latvian Russian-language channels.

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