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# **Building Ukraine Back Better: The Role of Czechia and the EU**

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## Summary

- There is a consensus among Ukrainian stakeholders that the post-war reconstruction must be both a platform for modernising the country along the lines of building back better, and a tool for European integration. There is therefore a focus on such areas as green transition and reforms that will ultimately bring Ukraine closer to the EU.
  
- In connection with post-war reconstruction there are huge expectations in Ukraine that can lead to disillusion if the progress is not steady. Because of this Ukraine must be given a tangible European future perspective under the condition that it will solve its own domestic issues in parallel.
  
- The current discussion on the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine has so far proved to be rather fragmented among different formats, actors as well as in terms of their expectations from the process. The main dividing lines have emerged not only around the question of leadership and coordination among the main partners, but also around financial contributions and thematic priorities that need to be better reconciled in the future.
  
- While the process of planning and coordination of long-term recovery among the leading institutions and states has started, it is above all the immediate fast reconstruction, macro-financial stabilisation as well as humanitarian and emergency support (e.g. including most prominently infrastructure and energy) that have been put in place thus far.
  
- So far, the position and efforts of the EU institutions and member states have delivered only mixed results, especially when compared with the leadership at the level of G7 and particularly the United States, which the EU only recently started to compensate for with contributions from individual EU members, particularly from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).
  
- Among them, Czechia has been one of the leading voices, appointing a governmental special envoy for reconstruction of Ukraine in mid-January 2023, whose role is coordination with Ukraine, the G7, individual Czech governmental institutions and agencies as well as the business community and civil society. At the same time, Czechia has played an important role also at the business level, when its companies, united within the Business Club Ukraine organised by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, showed not only willingness to return to Ukraine, but also concrete and practical help in investing in the country's future.
  
- However, to play a more active and leading role, the EU as such needs to step up its activities and its coordination role as well as stressing its own policy priorities towards Ukraine, including enlargement. They need to be communicated widely in the world, including the future process of integration within the EU and the sustainable angle following the “building back better” philosophy.



- Countries from the CEE, including Czechia, Poland or the Baltic states, should actively engage in the debate about the post-war reconstruction and – based on their relatively recent experience with enlargement and close relations with Ukraine - maximise Western efforts to also promote the question of standards and compatibility with the EU's acquis necessary for internal reforms.
  
- Discussions on the Ukraine recovery should not be limited to the governmental level only. Regions and local municipalities as well as local business and civil society should be encouraged to actively seek partners within Ukraine to share experience and provide specific help where there is demand for it.



## Introduction

The post-war reconstruction of Ukraine and the process of building back after the end of the Russian aggression has been widely debated but is still only gradually developing in terms of concrete plans. The ongoing nature of the Russian large-scale military operation in Ukraine, which has cost an enormous number of lives, damaged critical infrastructure and led to the destruction of whole cities, urban centres and parts of Ukraine's territory, does not allow it to start in full yet.

From Ukraine's point of view, the process represents hope for a better future after the war and a significant morale boost when the war ends. Ukrainians see it as an opportunity for reforming and rebuilding the country on its way into the European Union, and possibly also NATO, both of which now have the support of the overwhelming majority of the citizens.<sup>12</sup> For the West, Ukraine's post-war reconstruction is another way to counter Russian aggression and show not only solidarity with Ukraine, but also secure its own interests in making Europe a more secure, stable and prosperous place after the end of hostilities on Ukraine's territory. For the CEE, including most notably Poland, the Baltic states and Czechia, but also Slovakia, Romania and others,<sup>3</sup> the Russian invasion is an existential threat, and, at the same time, an enormous opportunity to secure its eastern neighbourhood and make use of its strategic location for the support and financial investment that will necessarily go through the closest neighbours of Ukraine.

This policy brief is aimed at presenting the current state of play as of April 2023 from Ukraine's, the EU's and the Czech and wider CEE perspectives. It outlines challenges and opportunities for the future and draws connections between the profound needs on the ground and what the West, and especially the EU, has so far offered in terms of reconstruction support elaborating on several basic premises and theses and offering some guidance for mutual cooperation between Ukraine and the West in the future.

## Ukraine's needs

From Ukraine's point of view, it is necessary to understand that the needs of various regions differ widely. There are cities and villages that have been literally wiped out, regions where it was mainly critical infrastructure that was targeted and places around the country that are basically intact. Because of this, some places need urgent fast recovery regardless of whether the war is still ongoing, while a more long-term approach with strategic planning is more suitable for others.

Because of these differing needs it is suitable to look for partners at a local level and form active partnerships between regions and municipalities with similar experience. One of the key issues on liberated territories is landmines and other types of unexploded munitions, which make Ukraine one of the most contaminated countries in the world.<sup>4</sup> All issues though, must be addressed separately and will require a lot of effort over months and years, in some instances possibly decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Razumkov Centre, "Hromadska dumka pro viinu, peremohu ta harantii bezpeky (liutyi-berezen 2023r.)", 31. 3. 2023, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/gromadska-dumka-pro-viinu-peremogu-ta-garantii-bezpeky-liutyi-berezen-2023r>.

<sup>2</sup> Razumkov Centre, Zovnishnopolitychni oriiantatsii hromadian Ukrainy, otsinka zovnishnoi polityky vlady, stavlennia do inozemnykh derzhav ta politykiv (liutyi-berezen 2023r.), 4. 4. 2023, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/zovnishnopolitychni-oriiantatsii-gromadian-ukrainy-otsinka-zovnishnoi-polityky-vlady-stavlennia-do-inozemnykh-derzhav-ta-politykiv-liutyi-berezen-2023r>.

<sup>3</sup> "Ukrainian Support Tracker - Kiel Institute for the World Economy," <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Ukraine among world's most mine-contaminated countries - media," Ukrinform, January 29, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3661541-ukraine-among-worlds-most-minecontaminated-countries-media.html>.



Ukrainians are aware of this and from the beginning, their plans differentiate between short-term and long-term objectives.

The general discussion on post-war reconstruction within Ukraine itself started already in spring 2022. At the end of April, president Volodymyr Zelensky issued a decree on the creation of a National Council for the Recovery of Ukraine from the War,<sup>5</sup> which serves as an advisory body for the president. Initial results of its work were presented at a conference in Lugano on July 4–5 when Ukrainians presented a comprehensive plan of recovery.<sup>6</sup> Although representatives of civil society participated in working groups that were preparing the plan, the process turned out to be strongly centralised within the Office of the President, which took final decisions regardless of recommendations from the civil society.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the State Agency for Restoration and Infrastructure Development, under the leadership of Mustafa Nayyem, was set up in January 2023 as a structure which directly implements government policy and operates in tandem with the Ministry for Restoration and the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development and Infrastructure chaired by Oleksandr Kubrakov.<sup>8</sup>

Despite some adjustments of original plans, there is general agreement on some of the main principles of the process of reconstruction both from within the Office of the President, government, business and civil society. First of all, Ukraine sees the post-war reconstruction as an opportunity to modernise itself and get rid of long-term problems such as high energy consumption or the general lack of modernisation of its economy, among others. It is therefore not about rebuilding what was destroyed, but about “(re)building back better”.<sup>9</sup> An important part of this process should be the green transition, including switching to renewable energy sources in order to achieve sustainable development, resulting also in less dependency on Russian energy supplies. In this particular area, there are, though, complaints from the civil society that officials in Kyiv do not put enough emphasis on this component,<sup>10</sup> which will be crucial considering both global trends and EU policies. Ukraine’s ambitious programme, however, requires funding, upon which there is no final agreement, despite the gradually emerging consensus both in the international community led by the West and among Ukrainian actors, that it should be provided by various international actors and with the use of frozen Russian assets in the West.

There is also a general consensus that the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine should be done within the framework of EU integration. It must therefore be inherently connected to an adoption of the EU’s *acquis* and standards. The reform process should also create a favourable business environment for future investors, including robust checks and balances on the side of the state. The main focus must therefore be on areas such as the fight against corruption or reform of the judiciary

<sup>5</sup> “Ukaz Prezidenta Ukrainy №266/2022 Pytannia Natsionalnoi rady z vidnovlennia Ukrainy vid naslidkiv viiny,” <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/2662022-42225>.

<sup>6</sup> National Recovery Council. Ukraine’s National Recovery Plan. July 2022, [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/621f88db25fbf24758792dd8/62c166751fcf41105380a733\\_NRC%20Ukraine%27s%20Recovery%20Plan%20blueprint\\_ENG.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/621f88db25fbf24758792dd8/62c166751fcf41105380a733_NRC%20Ukraine%27s%20Recovery%20Plan%20blueprint_ENG.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Ira Krytska, Serhii Shevchuk, “2500 ekspertiv dva misiatsi pyshut plan dlia pisliavoiennoi Ukrainy. Yak vlashtovana ta chym zaimaietsia stvorena Zelenskym Natsrada vidnovlennia,” *Forbes Ukraine*, June 17, 2023, <https://forbes.ua/inside/2500-ekspertiv-dva-misyatsi-pishut-plan-dlya-pislyavoennoi-ukraini-yak-vlashtovana-ta-chim-zaymaetsya-stvorena-zelenskim-natsrada-vidnovlennya-17062022-6666>.

<sup>8</sup> “Mustafa Naiiem ocholyt Ahentstvo vidnovlennia ta rozvytku infrastruktury,” *Ukrinform*, January 27, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-economy/3660676-mustafa-najem-ocolit-agentstvo-vidnovlennia-ta-rozvytku-infrastrukturi.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Iryna Stavchuk, “Ukraine: building back better and greener,” *Euractiv*, February 24, 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/opinion/ukraine-building-back-better-and-greener/>.

<sup>10</sup> Tamara Malkova, “Povoienne vidnovlennia Ukrainy maie buty zelenym,” *Ukrinform*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3666839-povoienne-vidnovlennia-ukraini-mae-butiy-zelenim.html>.



and in general, the empowerment of civil society as watchdogs of Ukraine's governmental activities. The latest corruption scandals, exposed in January 2023,<sup>11</sup> showed on one hand that this is still one of the crucial challenges for Ukraine, but on the other, that there is a political will to deal with the issue, as a wave of dismissals, including high-level officials from several governmental bodies, followed. It is extremely important especially in light of the many attempts there have been to concentrate power since the declaration of Ukraine's independence in 1991, instead of sharing it in accordance with democratic principles. We can observe this trend towards strong centralisation in the creation of plans for the post-war reconstruction, coordination with the donor community or communication with the public. An important first step in overcoming this problem was made before the Russian invasion, when the successful decentralisation reform was finalised in 2020. Naturally, this can potentially open up new spaces for conflict within Ukraine, but it is essential for its further democratic development.

The recovery has already begun despite ongoing active war operations on the territory of Ukraine since it is not possible simply to wait until after the end of the hostilities. There are many liberated regions and other places affected by the war that are safe enough and where recovery can proceed already today. Also the process of aligning the Ukrainian legislature with the EU's *acquis* can occur immediately and be reflected in all newly adopted pieces of legislation. However, despite all comprehensive plans and efforts to reach an agreement on funding, the full-scale recovery of all regions of Ukraine cannot start before the war fully ends.

Initial Ukrainian plans in this regard were rather optimistic when they set the "post-war recovery" phase for the years 2023–2025. An element not to be underestimated is the huge expectations of the Ukrainian population that can be compared to the situation in 2014 after the Revolution of Dignity. Back then, Ukrainians believed in swift reforms and rapid economic growth, which did not occur despite many positive changes.

It is necessary on the one hand to temper those expectations of swift results and the chance that they could lead to strong disillusion, while on the other to provide Ukraine with a realistic perspective of European integration that can provide for improvements in the standard of living and the economy, under the condition that Ukrainians themselves can solve their domestic issues and follow the reform commitments spelled out by the EU institutions in June 2022 and beyond<sup>12</sup>. A crucial role in this process will be played by the civil society which has already started engaging with reform efforts and repeating the experience from after 2014 when together with the international community they contributed to a substantial transformation of the country thanks to the so-called sandwich effect.<sup>13</sup> One concrete example has been the RISE Coalition advocating for making the recovery transparent and open to keep the trust of the domestic and international public and minimise the interference of malign actors in the process.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jakub Ber, "Ukraine: a wave of dismissals against a background of corruption," *Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich*, January 31, 2023, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-01-31/ukraine-a-wave-dismissals-against-a-background-corruption>.

<sup>12</sup> European Council, "Joint statement following the 24th EU-Ukraine Summit," February 3, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/02/03/joint-statement-following-the-24th-eu-ukraine-summit/>.

<sup>13</sup> Kateryna Zarembo, "Civic Activism Against Geopolitics: The Case of Ukraine," in *Global Civil Society in a Geopolitical Age: How Civic Activism Is Being Reshaped by Great Power Competition*, ed. Richard Youngs (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022) <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/11/30/civic-activism-against-geopolitics-case-of-ukraine-pub-88485>.

<sup>14</sup> "Our Principles for Ukraine's Reconstruction and Modernization - Rise Ukraine," <https://www.rise.org.ua/#principles>.



## EU debate on the reconstruction of Ukraine

The discussion on the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine in Brussels and the other EU capitals has been taking place already a year, and more intensively at least since the July 2022 Lugano Conference, but has so far only produced mixed results along the lines of Ukraine-West cooperation. This is caused particularly by the weak leadership and the slow institutional reaction of the EU, which is only now taking more concrete steps towards creating a robust coordination platform that would actually be in position to engage with countries at the G7 level.

While the EU has spoken at length about the need to start planning the process, in order to be prepared for the post-war situation, its concrete actions have been mostly limited to a lower-level fast recovery process, which was especially the case during the period of autumn and winter 2022 during the so-called winterisation.<sup>15</sup> The fast recovery included not only a key focus on energy and restoration of critical infrastructure in order to help Ukraine to overcome the winter months and help it adapt to the harsh cold months, but also the prioritisation of humanitarian aid and emergency support for the everyday reality of Ukrainian citizens, which the international community has been trying to mitigate as much as possible.<sup>16</sup>

Another major part of the ongoing discussion, also illustrating weak points from the EU's side, has been the financial and resource component of the discussion and dialogue with Ukraine, which only towards the end of last year saw an unblocking of the 18 billion EUR of macro financial assistance to Ukraine for the year 2023.<sup>17</sup> However, it has been lacking any longer term or more robust financial and investment mechanism for making the help more sustainable in the future. In this context, the behaviour of the Hungarian leadership has also caused reputational damage to the EU, as it dragged its feet until the very end of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU in December last year. This is especially disturbing in light of the enormous damage inside of Ukraine as counted by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), including most prominently the World Bank and IMF, running into hundreds of billions of euros.<sup>18</sup>

Closely connected to that, the EU has, despite intense efforts, so far been unable to strike any kind of a deal either on the frozen Russian assets belonging to the Central Bank, or on the property of Russian oligarchs and other sanctioned individuals and companies that could serve as a major source of investment into the future of post-war Ukraine.<sup>19</sup> Only recently has the political will been found to actively start looking for a solution on how to deal with the frozen assets in favour of Ukraine. Thus, only individual EU members, such as Estonia or Latvia,<sup>20</sup> have shown leadership and practical progress in this area, so far bypassing the common European decision-making process. Nevertheless, the political and legal reality is

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<sup>15</sup> Ukraine Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment. Washington, DC: the World Bank, the Government of Ukraine, the European Union, the United Nations, 2023, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099184503212328877/pdf/P180174od1177f03coab180057556615497.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3TpamPLLtdl73qltoP109zcoldmXZKEUO6E594-pvIsbXYaknIHdtAxlg>.

<sup>16</sup> "The Multi-Donor Resources for Institutions and Infrastructure (MRII) for Ukraine Facility - The World Bank," <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ukraine/brief/mrii>.

<sup>17</sup> "Commission proposes stable and predictable support package for Ukraine for 2023 up to €18 billion - European Commission," [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_6699](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_6699).

<sup>18</sup> "Updated Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Assessment - The World Bank," <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/03/23/updated-ukraine-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-assessment>.

<sup>19</sup> "EU unable to simply seize frozen assets of Russia's central bank, report says," NV, April 13, 2023, <https://english.nv.ua/business/eu-unable-to-simply-seize-frozen-assets-of-russia-s-central-bank-report-says-news-50317719.html>.

<sup>20</sup> "How Estonia Sets an Example for the West in Seizing Russian Assets," European Pravda, January 30, 2023, <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/news/2023/01/30/7155144/>.





slowly but surely moving and the rhetoric of the European Commission's (EC) President Ursula von der Leyen as well as the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU is promising in the sense of efforts to find a solution for this urgent need by the end of the EC's mandate in 2024,<sup>21</sup> and might possibly result in the delivery of a concrete proposal by the Commission which would then look for support from the EU members.

A separate issue has been the debate on involving private investment from the EU (and beyond) as well as providing insurance for these investments, which has so far delivered only mixed results on the EU level. Once again, only individual countries, including most notably Germany and Poland, have developed their own schemes following the logic of public interest and somehow playing down the due diligence principle of protection of public funds at risk, which are necessarily still in place. Czechia has so far been rather among the outliers in the process only slowly discussing the deeply political issue. Nevertheless, the global discussion on this topic has become more prominent and both the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU as well as the UK G7 Presidency will devote attention to it in June this year.

Beyond that, the EU has, after months of cautious international coordination including changes in its institutional architecture, finally moved in launching the international coordination mechanism platform.<sup>22</sup> For this purpose it transformed the previously operating Support Group for Ukraine into the new Ukraine Service under Directorate E of the DG NEAR responsible for Ukraine, which focuses on the post-war reconstruction and efforts to maximise the EU's involvement in the process. This process should also include contracting and seconding personnel from EU members as well as the G7 countries, which are crucial partners in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. However, the process has so far been rather slow and fragmented and the Secretariat of the platform is still only in the making without clear tasks, division of labour or having seconded a sufficient number of staff.

One major area of potential concern has been the natural attempts of the EU to connect Ukraine's process of post-war reconstruction and building back better with enlargement and the adoption of the EU's *acquis*, in order to integrate Ukraine closer into EU structures and processes. While integration is gradually happening on a lower level more spontaneously, including in areas of trade, energy or people-to-people ties, there is still a profound need for the EU to articulate its demands and vision on how to match both areas together. The currently discussed Enlargement Package for Ukraine within the European Commission would be the right way forward in this regard.

Outlining the strategic objectives from the EU's side might, however, be complicated by over-ambitious and politically driven statements from the Ukrainian leadership. Speaking about potential accession to the EU in 2026 creates unrealistic expectations in Ukrainian society as well as pressuring EU members and backing some of them into a corner, considering the rather lukewarm domestic reality and perceptions of future enlargement in some of the older EU members. Another issue that arises is the capacity of Ukraine itself to cope with challenges not only on the battlefield, while the war is still ongoing, but also when focusing on internal reforms and ensuring the accountability and transparency of the post-war reconstruction process.

It is absolutely necessary to match this with reform of the judiciary, empowerment of the civil society as well as creating a functioning system of checks

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<sup>21</sup> "Intensive efforts to enable frozen Russian assets to reach Ukraine - Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union," <https://swedish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/intensive-efforts-to-enable-frozen-russian-assets-to-reach-ukraine/>.

<sup>22</sup> "Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform ramps up efforts to help Ukraine address priority recovery needs in 2023 - European Commission," [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_2102](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_2102).



and balances when it comes to financial flows, in order to keep the trust of the international community high. This is also why the EU, when designating Ukraine candidacy status, outlined seven outstanding areas, which serve as pre-conditions for the opening of accession talks and include the most important expectations from the EU side.<sup>23</sup>

While marrying the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine with the future enlargement of the EU came naturally for many, including Ukraine, this has not been the ultimate priority for the international community and all G7 countries. There are a number of question marks around the EU's future approach towards Ukraine. The amount of time and energy needed to even open accession talks, on which the EU-27 needs to agree unanimously, will be substantial. This applies, indeed, even when opening individual clusters of chapters and proceeding with the practical steps towards the final entry of Ukraine into the EU, which might take many years, especially if Western support turns out not to be continuous.

Finally, the lack of strategic unity among the EU members when it comes to the future integration of Ukraine as well as Moldova and the Western Balkan countries, might to some extent hinder the willingness of the global community to follow the EU's lead. One group of member states is emphasising the strategic nature of the process and the profound need to move forward and open accession talks in the foreseeable future, possibly before the end of 2023, while the other camp is putting emphasis on the required internal reforms process inside Ukraine, but also within the EU. This will, however, necessarily require a long process of strategic discussions on the future of Europe, for which Ukraine might again pay a price in terms of delay. Thus, the only viable option seems to be progressing simultaneously on the two fronts for which an enormous level of leadership inside the EU as well as from Ukraine will be required.

## Czech discussion

Since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, Czechia has been one of the most vocal supporters of Ukraine. Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala went together with representatives of Poland and Slovenia to the besieged Kyiv already in March 2022 and Czechia was among the first countries to deliver heavy weapons, including tanks, self-propelled artillery and helicopters.<sup>24</sup> The first weeks of the Russian invasion of Ukraine were also accompanied by the massive success of the donation platform for the Ukrainian army that was created by the Embassy of Ukraine in Prague together with the Ministry of Defence and closely coordinated with the business community. Those steps were crucial in spreading a positive perception of Czechia, which was in the past perceived as a "pro-Russian" country by Ukrainians.<sup>25</sup> Support has been further promoted by the latest visit of the president Petr Pavel together with his Slovak counterpart Zuzana Čaputová in late April 2023.

It was only logical that Czechia expressed its initial interest in the support towards Ukraine and its post-war recovery for moral reasons, because aggressive Russian behaviour is a major security threat to its own survival. Only secondarily, the choice represented a pragmatic decision offering numerous opportunities for Czech companies in the future. In the first phase during 2022, there was - however -

<sup>23</sup> Sergiy Sydorenko, "Seven Steps for Ukraine's EU Future. How Does Kyiv Implement Brussels' Checklist?," *European Pravda*, February 1, 2023, <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/articles/2023/02/1/7155269/>.

<sup>24</sup> Ministerstvo obrany České republiky, "Ministryně obrany informovala o detailech odtajněné vojenské pomoci Ukrajině", 23. února 2023, <https://mocr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/ministryne-obrany-informovala-o-detailech-odtajnene-vojenske-pomoci-ukrajine-242316/>.

<sup>25</sup> Yurii Panchenko, "Chekhiia postala proty prorosiiskoho revanshu: shcho pokazav pershyi tur vyboriv prezydenta," *Yevropeyska Pravda*, 16. ledna 2023, <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2023/01/16/7154203/>.



a certain level of misunderstanding and lack of communication between the Czech government and Ukrainian authorities responsible for the preparation of recovery plans. Czechia was from the beginning interested in the role of main coordinator of the recovery of Dnipropetrovsk oblast as a region with similar structure of economy and where Czech diplomatic efforts were relocated from Donetsk after 2014. Ukrainians, on the other hand, supported the territorial focus of the reconstruction efforts much less than in their initial plans and gradually moved away from the regional principle while prioritising the thematically-driven focus. A certain potential for misunderstanding might affect the bilateral conversations as was, for example, the case during the visit of a delegation from Dnipro, which did not receive substantial support from the Embassy of Ukraine in Prague.

So far, the most important initiatives on the Czech side were the creation of Business Club Ukraine,<sup>26</sup> launched by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, and the appointment of a governmental special envoy, Tomáš Kopečný, in mid-January 2023<sup>27</sup> when the need to fill gaps on the coordination side, especially for the high-level discussion with the G7, arose. Also, a flexible bilateral programme of humanitarian, stabilisation, reconstruction and economic assistance with funding of 500 million CZK (23 million USD) a year until 2025 was launched.<sup>28</sup> Business Club Ukraine proved to be an important and effective platform for dialogue not only in coordination of preparations for post-war reconstruction focused mostly, but not solely, on Dnipropetrovsk oblast, but also as a tool for immediate help (fast recovery) by Czech business. Cooperation with Ukraine and other international actors only deepened with the appointment of the special envoy for reconstruction of Ukraine, whose aim is also to look for additional financial opportunities to support the Czech bilateral involvement. This opens a path for discussions on financial opportunities as well as particular projects that can be implemented in Ukraine and were, among other things, discussed during the visit of deputy minister of foreign affairs Jaroslav Kurfürst in Dnipro at the beginning of February 2023 with local stakeholders and business representatives.<sup>29</sup>

For the foreseeable future, it is necessary to keep up the unique momentum that has begun by the swift and resolute reaction of the Czech government to the Russian invasion, both in terms of supporting Ukraine as well as punishing Putin's Russia for the ongoing aggression. If the process of the reconstruction of Ukraine and its European integration successfully progresses, it will create enormous opportunities for the Czech economy and businesses interested in future investments in Ukraine. Industrial and predominantly urbanised Dnipropetrovsk oblast is a perfect example of a region that will offer numerous possibilities for modernisation, green transition and future growth, especially if Czechia continues with its original regional focus, combined with more thematically-driven priorities that are also embedded in its future actions and financial planning.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "Business klub Ukrajina," <https://www.businessklubukrajina.cz/>.

<sup>27</sup> Vláda České republiky, "Vládní zmocněnec pro rekonstrukci Ukrajiny," 11. ledna 2023, [https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/zmocnenci\\_vlady/vladni-zmocnec-pro-rekonstrukci-ukrajiny-202266/](https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/zmocnenci_vlady/vladni-zmocnec-pro-rekonstrukci-ukrajiny-202266/).

<sup>28</sup> Vláda České republiky, "Joint Statement on the outcomes of the Intergovernmental consultations between Ukraine and the Czech Republic," [https://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/Joint\\_Statement\\_UA-CZ.pdf](https://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/Joint_Statement_UA-CZ.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Jaroslav Kurfürst (@JKurfuerst), "Dnipro je důležitým centrem poskytujícím Ukrajině pevné zázemí pro boje proti agresorovi," Twitter, February 8, 2023, <https://twitter.com/JKurfuerst/status/1623412381517852672>.

<sup>30</sup> Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky, "Program humanitární, stabilizační, rekonstrukční a hospodářské asistence Ukrajině v letech 2023-2025," [https://www.mzv.cz/file/4808055/Program\\_Ukrajina.pdf](https://www.mzv.cz/file/4808055/Program_Ukrajina.pdf).



## Conclusions

While it is clear that both Ukraine and the West are standing only at the beginning of the vast efforts behind the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, it is necessary to note that one part of the process has already started and is actively being promoted by both Ukrainian authorities and the international community.

Although the first phase of the fast recovery is already taking place, a number of other interconnected challenges are still ahead of us. The issues of funding, coordination, the place of the EU as well as individual member states or insuring the private investment into Ukraine, which are now being debated, require more attention and resources.

In the run-up to the new high-level coordination platform meeting in London, the paper has identified some missing links and gaps between Ukraine and the West, including the principle of territorial reconstruction (still actively) advocated for by Czechia, or the governance mechanism of the reconstruction that is even in Ukraine itself still being debated, or the absence of good knowledge and understanding of the enlargement process at the level of Ukrainian society as well as of the ruling elites. Another prominent issue has been the clash between a centralised and a decentralised approach to reconstruction, which has emerged out of the political reality and the need to swiftly and efficiently negotiate with the international community but needs to be balanced to maximise both localisation and efficiency in the process.


Considering just some of these challenges, it is clear that without proper strategic planning, international coordination as well as an eye on the future sustainability of this endeavour and its co-ownership between Ukraine and the international community, it will be hard to succeed.

Therefore, there is a profound need for leadership within the process which needs to be taken not only by the key players within the international community, including the G7 and IFIs as well as the EU and its member states, but including notably those from the CEE, which not only have know-how of the enlargement process useful for Ukraine, but also a key territorial position and access to the country. This, matched with the close political relationships cultivated by Poland, Czechia or the Baltic states and others, means an enormous opportunity for the development of the whole region that should not be missed. Only in this way, is it possible to come out of the crisis stronger, which is a common goal for both Ukraine, its neighbours as well as the civilised world as such.




## Association for International Affairs (AMO)

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AMO is a member of “Rebuild Ukraine Green Platform”, an informal coalition of Ukrainian and EU CSOs in support of Ukraine’s sustainable recovery.