



UDC 339.92(498):061.1

## SUCCESS OF ROMANIA AND CHALLENGES ON THE WAY OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

### УСПІХИ РУМУНІЇ ТА ВИКЛИКИ НА ШЛЯХУ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОЇ ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ

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**Abstract.** The article examines the main stages of Romania's accession to the European Union. The results of the analysis of the Romania's accession to the EU process prove that it was long and much more complicated compared to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which after the collapse of the socialist system also chose the European way of development, but this result was obtained thanks to the consistent efforts made by Romania during 1990-2007. It is substantiated that the geopolitical location and potential of the state, certain success of Romania in improving the economic situation in the country, democratization of society became key factors that determined the integration process. However, the country still has problems that need to be solved and challenges that need to be overcome. In particular, it is not easy for the country to solve the problem of fighting corruption. According to the Rule of Law Index, developed by the World Justice Project, which is a global study and rating that assesses the extent to which countries adhere to the principles of the rule of law, Romania remains one of the worst in the EU. The results of a survey of Romanian citizens regarding the level of satisfaction with the choice of the European vector of the country's development are analyzed, which indicates a predominantly positive civic position regarding the choice of the European development way, with a high level of citizens' support for the European integration processes. In general, the majority of the country's citizens have a positive attitude towards EU membership and see its advantages.

**Keywords:** the European Union, Central and Eastern Europe, Romania, European integration, the European Commission.

### Statement of the problem.

The processes of European integration, especially of the Central and Eastern European countries neighboring Ukraine, are a specific example for Ukraine, especially in the field of reforming political and economic systems based on the Maastricht criteria, mandatory for all states that are members of the European Union (EU). Countries that have undergone long stages of integration include our neighboring country Romania, which joined the EU in 2007 after 12 years of reforms, and EU membership in general became possible after the overthrow of the dictator N. Ceausescu's regime in 1990.

Years of EU membership have positively changed Romania, in particular the changes took place in establishment of democratic institutions and an improvement in



the economic situation in the country, but there remain problems that need to be solved and challenges that need to be overcome.

**Analysis of the latest research.** The economic development of the Central and Eastern Europe countries is studied by such domestic and foreign scientists as: O. Kornienko, V. Nikoliuk, O. Oliynyk, V. Shevchuk, G. Mourre, Jean Letitia Saldanha, A. Hobza, K. Mc Morrow. European integration processes in Romania are the subject of research by such Ukrainian and foreign scholars as V. Burdiak, M. Ciocea, V. Ganev, A. Zadoya, N. Nicolov, E. Marinescu, H.-W. Sinn and others. However, little attention has been paid to the success and problems on the way to European integration of individual countries in the region.

**The purpose of the publication** is to study the success of one of the Central and Eastern European countries – Romania on the way to European integration, as well as the challenges the country faces.

**Presentation of the main material.** Romania is located in the southeast of Central Europe, bordering five countries. The length of the border between Ukraine and Romania is 608 km, in the north and southeast [1]. The country's Black Sea location, as well as control over the largest natural transport artery in Europe – the Danube River, especially in its lower reaches and confluence with the Black Sea, make Romania's geopolitical position particularly advantageous [2].

Let us consider the stages of Romania's accession to the European Union (Table 1).

Romania's integration processes with the accession to the European Union did not stop, at different periods of time both political and socio-economic crises in the country influenced its further development. Despite problematical way of overcoming difficulties, Romania, which recently occupied significantly worse positions among other EU member states in many indicators, having the status of the poorest and most corrupt country of the Union upon joining the EU, has demonstrated growth. Over the past 10 years, its economy has increased by almost 58% [3].

**Table 1 – Chronology of events of Romania's accession to the EU**

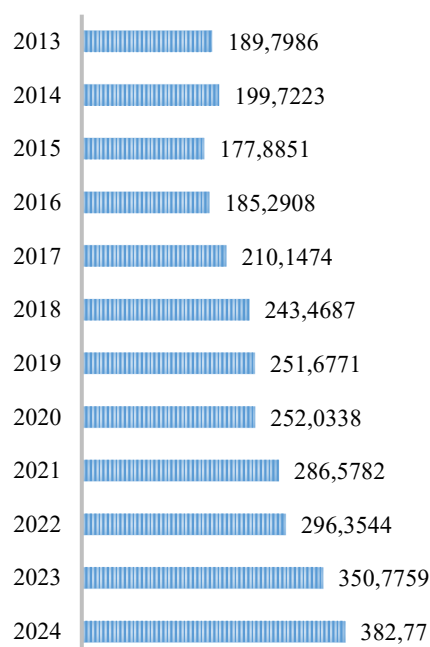
Date	Chronology of events
February 1st, 1993	Signing of the "Association Agreement" between Romania and the EU, which entered into force after its ratification by all EU member states, as well as by the Romanian Parliament
December, 1993	The European Commission was founded in Bucharest as a diplomatic mission, the main task of which was to support Romania's efforts to gain full membership in the EU
1994	The EU Council's pre-accession strategy definition. The strategy was based on three main elements: implementation of the European accession agreements; PHARE financial support program (assistance for economic reconstruction); structured dialogue, which would allow EU member states and candidate countries to discuss issues of common interest
June 22nd, 1995	Romania has applied for EU membership
July, 1997	At the meeting of the EU Council in Luxembourg, a decision was made to develop a strategic document called the "Accession Partnership", which covered all forms of assistance to the candidate country
1998	A strategic document, "Partnership for Accession", was signed for Romania, coordinating all work related to Romania's accession to the EU The European Commission has drawn up the first "Regular Report on Romania's progress towards accession"
February 15th, 2000	The negotiation process began, following the meeting of the EU Council within the framework of the Helsinki Summit (December 1999), regarding Romania's accession to the European Union, together with Malta, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia and Bulgaria
2002	Following the results of the European Commission's 2002 report on Romania's progress towards EU accession, the Romanian Government developed a new programme for the harmonisation of legislation, in accordance with the "Legislative Programme to Support the Process of Accession to the European Union, as part of the Priority Action Plan for European Integration". The National Programme for Romania's Accession to the EU was developed in order to implement the process of harmonising Romanian legislation with EU norms, which included a harmonisation work plan for the period 2002-2006
2002	Romania enters a new geopolitical dimension: receiving an invitation from the North Atlantic Alliance on November 21st at the NATO summit in Prague; the European Union setting 2007 as the date for Romania's integration into the EU; Romanian citizens gaining the right to travel freely in the Schengen area
March 20 th, 2006	The Romania-EU Association Council meeting was held in Brussels. Among the issues discussed was the EU's insistence on the need for Romania to make additional efforts to address problematic issues, namely: implementing the reforms initiated, fighting corruption, strengthening border control in the fight against organized crime and human trafficking, further consolidating the administrative capacity of Romanian state authorities and increasing the efficiency of interdepartmental coordination, avoiding the expansion of trade and budget deficits, improving the business climate, etc.
September 26 th, 2006	The European Commission has published a report on the state of preparations of Romania and Bulgaria for EU accession, which set January 1st, 2007 as the date of official accession

*Source: completed by the author*



Romania's gross domestic product (GDP) was \$382.77 billion in 2024, according to official World Bank data. The country's GDP share in the global economy is 0.36 percent.

The dynamics of Romania's GDP for 2013-2024 is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 – Romania's GDP dynamics for 2013-2024, USD Billion**

*Source: completed by the author on the bases [4; 5]*

Romania's full-year GDP growth rate has declined to 0.90 percent in 2024 from 2.40 percent in 2023. Full-year GDP growth averaged 3.33 percent from 2012 to 2023, reaching a historical high of 7.10 percent in 2017 and a record low of -3.70 percent in 2020.

Romania's GDP grew by 0.30 percent in the first quarter of 2025 compared to the same quarter of the previous year. Romania's GDP growth rate is expected to be 0.80 percent by the end of the current quarter, according to global macroeconomic models and expectations of analysts at Trading Economics. In the long term, Romania's GDP growth rate is expected at the level 2.40 percent in 2026 and 2.00 percent in 2027 [5].

Compared to the EU average indicators (26%), industry (including construction) occupies a larger share of the Romanian economy – 28% [3]. The basis of industry is electronics, car manufacturing and textiles. Romania has about 800 enterprises that



manufacture electronics and computer equipment. About 500 thousand cars are completed in Romania annually.

The only Dacia car brand, now owned by the French Renault, produces about 300 thousand cars in Romania every year. 4% of all cars sold in Europe are of this brand, and in Bulgaria and Moldova it is the most popular. Almost 200 thousand cars are produced by the Romanian Ford plant every year.

Agriculture plays a minor role in the Romanian economy, generating about 4% of the national product, although almost one of five Romanians is involved in the sector. The largest part of the country's economy is the service sector [3]. In general, all sectors of the economy are developing in the country: services, production of goods, exports, and, accordingly, the well-being of citizens is increasing [6].

GDP per capita in Romania was \$12,493.43 in 2024. On average, this indicator was \$7,388.68 from 1990 to 2024, reaching a historical high of \$12,493.43 in 2024 and a record low of \$4,059.10 in 1992 [5]. It is expected to reach \$12,573.00 by the end of 2025, and in the long term, according to Trading Economics analysts, Romania's GDP per capita is expected at the level \$12,837.00 in 2026 and \$13,170.00 in 2027 [5].

During its membership in the EU, Romania has contributed over 20 billion euros to the common treasury, and received 50 billion more. And, since Romania is still one of the poor countries of the Union, these infusions continue. EU funds were directed to the development of infrastructure, modernization of water supply and water treatment systems, reconstruction of many historical monuments, etc. Accession to the EU has simplified the access of the country's citizens to the labor market of other European countries, which ensures a stable flow of money to the country in the form of money transfers. Since joining the EU, migrant workers have transferred 41 billion euros to Romania [3]. Despite this, the country's accession to the EU required reforms, including environmental protection, ensuring the rule of law and fighting corruption, rural development, reducing traffic speeds, etc.

The country faces challenges in fighting corruption. According to the Rule of Law Index developed by the World Justice Project, a global study and ranking that assesses how well countries adhere to the rule of law, Romania remains one of the worst



performers in the EU. In 2024, it ranked 41st out of 142 countries in the ranking [7], down one place from 2023's 40th position [8], indicating challenges in upholding the rule of law. In comparison, Poland ranks 33rd, Slovenia 27th, and the Slovak Republic 34th [7]. For example, Ukraine ranks 88th [7].

In the 2024 Alert Mechanism Report, the European Commission selected 6 countries (Romania, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden) to assess whether they were experiencing macroeconomic imbalances [9]. Romania continues to face vulnerabilities related to public finances and external balance accounts. Some progress was made in reducing the current account deficit in 2023, mainly due to more restrictive monetary policy and weaker private consumption.

According to the European Commission analysis, Romania's macroeconomic vulnerability has increased as a result of the pandemic in a context of exceptionally resilient growth. The general government deficit remained high at 6.3% of GDP in 2022, only slightly decreasing from 7.2% in 2021 following a rapid increase in government spending. So far, Romania has not faced difficulties in meeting its financing needs, with its foreign exchange reserves covering almost 5 months of imports and over 100% of short-term external debt at the end of 2023 [9]. In March 2025, the highest annual inflation rate in the European Union was recorded in Romania – 5.1%. This is another problem that needs to be addressed [10].

The results of a survey of Romanian citizens regarding the level of satisfaction with the choice of the European vector of the country's development are interesting. The survey was conducted in December 2024.

The distribution of respondents' answers to key questions is presented in Figures 2–6.

On the question "How much do you trust each of the following countries/organization?" 66.8 per cent of respondents supported the European Union [11; 12] (fig. 2).

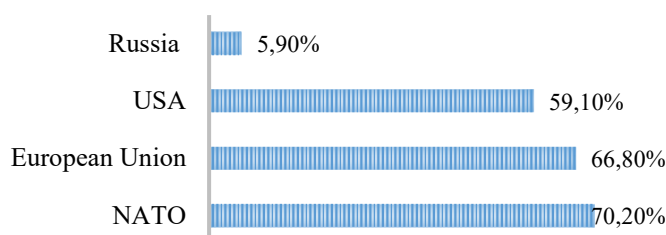
On the question "Do you personally think Romania should leave the European Union?" 88.1 per cent of respondents said "No" [11; 12] (fig. 3).

On the question "In your opinion, is it in Romania's national interest to remain in



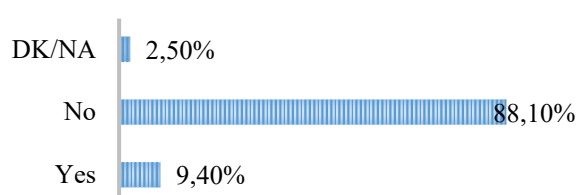


the European Union?" 88.4 per cent of respondents said "Yes" and only 8.5 per cent said "No" [11; 12] (fig. 4).



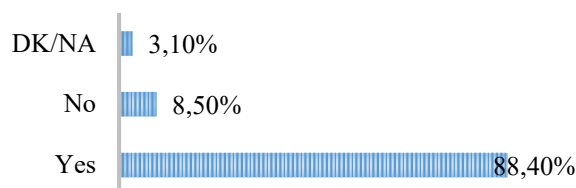
**Figure 2 – Trust in countries/organizations in Romania**

*Source: completed by the author on the bases [11; 12]*



**Figure 3 – Romania's exit from the European Union**

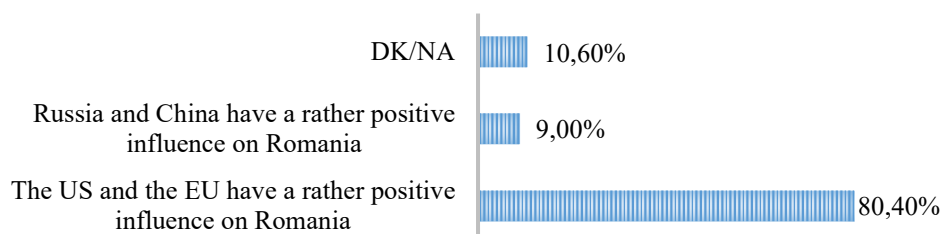
*Source: completed by the author on the bases [11; 12]*



**Figure 4 – Romania's national interest in the EU context**

*Source: completed by the author on the bases [11; 12]*

On the question concerning external influence on Romania, most respondents told about positive influence from the EU [11; 12] (fig. 5).

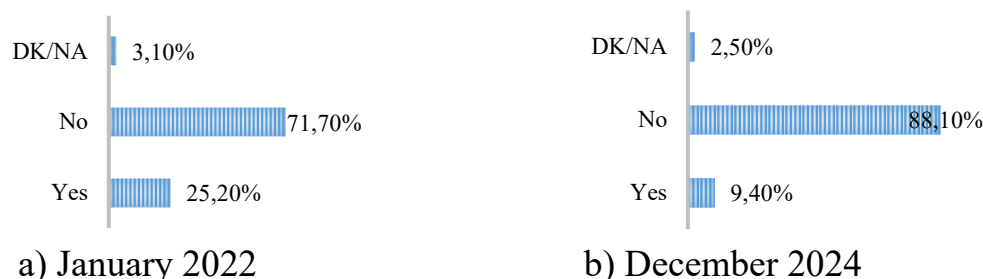


**Figure 5 – Positive influence on Romania: US and EU vs. Russia and China**

*Source: completed by the author on the bases [11; 12]*



And if compare the answers on the question "Do you personally think Romania should leave the EU?" in December 2024 and in January 2022 it should be noted that the number of respondents who answered "No" in December 2024 increased to 88.1% from 71.7% in January 2022 [11; 12] (fig. 6).



**Figure 6 – Romania's exit from the European Union (Ro-Exit)**

*Source: completed by the author on the bases [11; 12]*

Thus, as polls show, there is unquestionable support among the population for the European vector of the country's development and its membership in the European Union.

### Conclusions.

Having analyzed the process of Romania's accession to the European Union, it should be noted that it was long and much more complicated compared to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which after the collapse of the socialist system also chose the European vector of development, but this result was obtained thanks to the consistent efforts made by Romania during 1990-2007. The geopolitical location and potential of the state, certain successes of Romania in improving the economy and democratizing society became key factors that led to the country's accession to the EU.

In 2025, the economic situation in Romania is characterized by certain positive trends, but there are also challenges, in particular inflation. The IT services market is growing, the country is attractive for foreign investment. At the same time, inflation remains high and public debt is growing. Certain problems with the rule of law also remain.

Romania's civic position on the European way of development is largely positive, with a high level of support for European integration. The majority of the country's citizens are positive about EU membership and see its benefits.

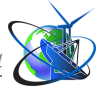




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**Анотація.** У статті розглянуто основні етапи набуття членства Румунії в Європейському Союзі. Результати аналізу процесу вступу Румунії до ЄС доводять, що він був тривалим і набагато складнішим порівняно з іншими країнами Центральної та Східної Європи, які після розпаду соціалістичної системи також обрали європейський шлях, але цей



результат було отримано завдяки послідовним зусиллям, здійснених Румунією впродовж 1990-2007 рр. Обґрунтовано, що геополітичне розташування і потенціал держави, певні успіхи Румунії в удосконаленні економіки, покращенні економічної ситуації в країні, демократизації суспільства стали ключовими факторами, що зумовили процес інтеграції. Проте в країні залишаються проблеми, які потрібно вирішити і виклики, які слід подолати. Зокрема, непросто даються країні вирішення питань боротьби з корупцією. Згідно з Rule of Law Index, розробленим World Justice Project, що є глобальним дослідженням і рейтингом, який оцінює наскільки країни дотримуються принципів верховенства закону, Румунія залишається однією з найгірших в ЄС. Проаналізовано результати опитування громадян Румунії стосовно рівня задоволення вибором європейського вектору розвитку країни, що свідчить на користь переважно позитивної громадянської позиції щодо вибору шляху європейського розвитку, з високим рівнем підтримки громадян процесів євроінтеграції. В цілому, більшість громадян країни позитивно ставляться до членства в ЄС і вбачають у цьому переваги.

**Ключові слова:** Європейський Союз, Центральна та Східна Європа, Румунія, європейська інтеграція, Європейська комісія.

Стаття відправлена: 17.08.2025 р.

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