

Editorial Note: Ukraine's Reconstruction and the V4's Strategic Responsibility

The war in Ukraine has generated the greatest political, social, and economic challenge to Europe since the end of the Cold War. The devastation of infrastructure, industry, and communities is immense, yet the process of reconstruction has already begun. Unlike earlier episodes of post-conflict recovery, Ukraine's trajectory is inseparable from its aspirations for European Union membership, and therefore from the interests of its immediate neighbours. For the Visegrád Four (V4) countries — Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic — Ukraine's integration represents both an extraordinary challenge and a historic opportunity.

This special issue of the journal brings together a set of articles that engage with different facets of Ukraine's reconstruction and integration. Collectively, they demonstrate that the challenges Ukraine faces cannot be reduced to technical fixes or isolated reforms. They concern the very principles of statehood, development, and governance in a post-war context. At the same time, they reveal that Ukraine's path forward is intimately tied to the strategies, policies, and political choices of the V4 countries, which have themselves undergone profound transformation since the 1990s.

The first contribution, *Ukraine's Reconstruction Pathways: Agriculture, Migration, Education, and the Europeanisation of Post-War Recovery*, situates reconstruction within the combined frameworks of post-conflict recovery and Europeanisation. It demonstrates that agriculture — Ukraine's historic backbone — has been decimated by landmines, blocked export routes, and credit shortages, but also that its revival could position Ukraine as a "Green Food Hub of Europe." The article further argues that labour migration and youth empowerment are not secondary concerns but central to recovery, with diaspora engagement and investment in STEM education offering long-term leverage. Its central finding is that reconstruction will succeed only if sequenced properly: security first, integration second, and human capital as the long-term anchor. This sequencing, the article argues, also conditions the way the V4 states can and should engage with Ukraine's recovery — through demining expertise, regional trade corridors, and shared educational innovations.

A second article addresses *the systemic problem of corruption in Ukraine and its implications for reconstruction*. Corruption is both an old challenge and a new risk: the influx of billions in aid and investment will test the institutional capacity of Ukraine's governance. It can be argued that there is a discrepancy between institutional progress as required by the EU and the public perception of corruption; the importance of civil society engagement to fight corruption cannot be emphasised enough. Based on previous experiences, it can be stated that creating lots of institutions and making reforms is not enough to fight corruption in Ukraine.

Ukraine's reconstruction is not taking place in isolation, but is closely linked to the economic development of Central and Eastern Europe. Ukrainian reconstruction may represent a new path of development, particularly for the neighbouring V4 region. Therefore, the industrial policy of the V4 countries is likely to be closely linked to Ukrainian reconstruction. It is therefore essential to analyse the development of industrial policy in the V4 region, as this may influence the course of Ukrainian reconstruction. This regional context is presented by the contribution on 'The Return of Industrial Policy in the V4 Countries: Insights from the NIPO database'. The paper analyses the industrial policy of the V4 countries between 2017 and 2023 based on the NIPO database. It shows that, alongside the post-transition FDI-focused model, vertical, sector-specific interventions have emerged. However, these are heavily dependent on external sources and continue to favour foreign companies. Four different approaches are emerging: Slovakia is EU-embedded and focused on the automotive industry; Hungary relies on domestic resources but mainly supports Asian capital; Poland tends to rely on domestic companies; and the Czech Republic is EU-embedded, more diversified, and R&D-oriented. The resurgence of industrial policy in the V4 states, whether through state aid, foreign direct investment (FDI), or innovation support, provides a crucial parallel for Ukraine, which must rebuild its industrial base in a far more constrained environment. The article suggests that Ukraine's reconstruction will be shaped not only by its own choices, but also by the strategic industrial priorities of its neighbours.

The question of sustainability comes to the fore in the article on *Green Reconstruction*. This contribution situates Ukraine's rebuilding within the EU Green Deal and emphasises that reconstruction cannot be modelled on carbon-heavy growth strategies of the past. Instead, Ukraine has the potential to leapfrog into green energy, low-carbon agriculture, and climate-resilient infrastructure. The piece underscores that the V4 states, despite their ambivalent relationship with the EU's climate agenda, will play a decisive role in whether Ukraine's reconstruction reinforces or undermines the EU's green transition. This theme is particularly timely given the global debates on energy security and climate adaptation.

Finally, the article on the *Ukrainian Textile and Garment Industry* provides a sectoral case study that brings the human dimension of reconstruction into focus. It shows how small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly those employing women, have adapted during the war and how they could play a role in post-war recovery. The study highlights both the vulnerabilities of the sector and its resilience, offering insights into how Ukraine can diversify its economic base beyond

agriculture and heavy industry. It also suggests practical ways in which V4 investors, supply chains, and vocational training programs can support Ukrainian industries in finding sustainable niches in European and global markets.

Taken together, these contributions emphasise that Ukraine's reconstruction is not a narrow national project but a regional and European one. The V4 countries, given their geographic proximity, historic ties, and shared EU membership, have a particular stake in this process. Their experience of post-socialist transformation provides valuable lessons for Ukraine, yet it also reveals pitfalls that must be avoided: uneven regional development, persistent corruption, and the dangers of populist retrenchment. For the V4, supporting Ukraine's integration is not only a question of solidarity but also of self-interest: the future stability, prosperity, and security of Central Europe depend on whether Ukraine succeeds in its transformation.

This special issue does not provide definitive answers — no single volume could — but it does point toward principles that should guide scholarship and policy. Ukraine's reconstruction will require sequencing, sustainability, and inclusivity. It must prioritise both physical rebuilding and human capital, and it must be anchored in EU integration. For the V4, the task is to recognise that Ukraine's success is their success, and that their role is not peripheral but central to Europe's future.

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