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TRANSFORMATION OF UKRAINE'S FOREIGN TRADE UNDER GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES

The purpose of the study is to analyse the trends and structure of Ukraine's foreign trade under global economic and geopolitical challenges during 2014–2024. The method of statistical analysis of time series, a comparative method for Ukraine's foreign trade flows, and a systemic analysis of changes in world trade were applied.

The results of the study identified three stages of the transformation of Ukraine's foreign trade: the first (2014–2016) is characterized by a sharp reduction in foreign trade operations due to the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of hostilities in Donbas; the second (2017–2021) demonstrated a gradual recovery and growth in foreign trade volumes; the third (2022–2024) witnessed a rapid decline and the beginning of the recovery of exports in conditions of a full-scale war. Changes in the commodity structure of exports were identified as an increase in the share of plant products to 32.4% in 2024, a reduction in metallurgical products by almost threefold, an increase in the share of IT services and intellectual property items to 12%. A chronic deficit in the trade balance was revealed, and a radical reorientation of export flows from the markets of the Commonwealth of Independent States countries to the markets of the European Union was recorded in the geographical structure.

The research materials can be used to develop Ukraine's foreign trade strategy during the war and post-war recovery, to form a state policy to support exports, to determine priority areas for diversifying trade flows and developing export-oriented sectors of the economy.

The results of the study suggest a structural modification of Ukraine's export potential through the development of sectors with high added value, diversification of the geographical structure of foreign trade with an emphasis on the markets of Asia, the Middle East and Africa, reorientation of the metallurgical industry to the production of products with a higher degree of processing, as well as further support for the IT industry and the export of digital services as a strategic direction for ensuring a positive foreign trade balance of Ukraine.

Keywords: export, import, foreign trade balance, commodity structure, geographical structure, export diversification, geopolitical changes, logistical constraints, foreign trade of Ukraine.

JEL classification: F10, F17, F50, O50

Introduction and the research problem. The effectiveness of a modern national economy is determined not only by the results of its internal activities, but also by the degree of integration into the world economy. In the context of globalization, foreign trade relations are becoming a factor of economic growth, especially for countries with

transformational economies (Melitz & Redding, 2021). For Ukraine, which has undergone rapid geopolitical and economic changes over the past decade, the issue of effective foreign trade policy is becoming particularly relevant. Since 2014, the national economy has been experiencing successive transformational shocks, such as the annexation of

Crimea, the loss of control over the industrial areas of Donbas, and, since 2022, a full-scale war. These events have radically affected the structure, directions, and volumes of the country's foreign trade. At the same time, the economic system has demonstrated significant adaptability, which is manifested in the ability to reorient trade flows, develop new logistics routes, and partially compensate for lost export directions.

Despite positive trends in certain sectors of exports of goods and services, and given the existing problems, including the dominance of products with low added value in the export structure, a significant trade balance deficit, logistical restrictions, and regulatory barriers in major foreign markets, it is advisable to investigate structural shifts in Ukraine's foreign trade.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

Research on foreign trade has gained considerable attention within the academic community. To verify this trend, a cluster analysis was conducted using data from the Scopus scientometric database. The search applied the keywords “foreign AND trade” and identified 39,108 publications in which these terms appeared in titles, abstracts, or keywords (Scopus, n. d.). A steady increase in scholarly output has been evident since the 1990s, with the peak number of publications recorded in 2024, reaching 2,299. To

ensure a more focused assessment, the analysis was narrowed to the period between 2010 and 2025, and concentrated specifically on works within the fields of Economics, Econometrics, and Finance, which accounted for 12,214 relevant documents. The largest number of works was published in the USA – 3,173, China – 1,141 and Great Britain – 557, and Ukraine – 153 (Fig. 1) (Scopus, n. d.).

The figure 1 features six coloured clusters, where the bubble size denotes the frequency of term occurrences in the research, and their positioning indicates the relationships between various elements in the field of foreign trade, in particular:

1. The red cluster demonstrates the close relationship between foreign trade, capital inflows and macroeconomic indicators.
2. The green cluster focuses on foreign trade, the relationship between the structure of tariffs, the size of enterprises, state policies and the participation of transnational companies in trade.
3. The purple cluster reflects international and foreign trade, particularly in a sectoral context, including the analysis of costs, marketing and supply chains.
4. The yellow cluster considers the relationship between trade, investments in the future and sustainable development, environmental goals and the impact of trade on socio-economic sustainability.

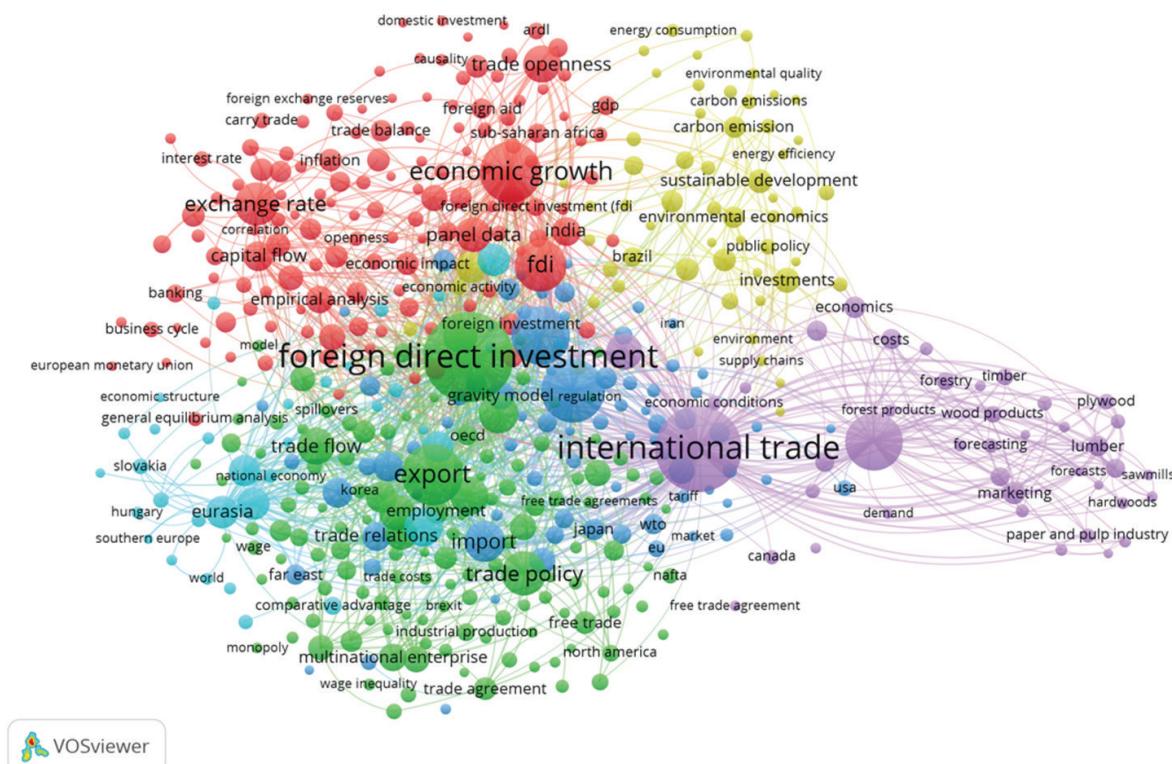


Fig. 1. Network of associations within scientific research focused on foreign trade
Source: created by the authors based on (Scopus, n. d.)

5. The blue cluster focuses on regional aspects of trade, trade unions and their impact on trade flows and policy.

6. The light blue cluster is dedicated to regional features of foreign trade, such as Eurasia, Central and Southern Europe.

In the context of studying Ukraine's foreign trade, the most interesting aspect is the green cluster, which covers aspects of trade policy, exports, imports, tariff regulation, participation in international trade agreements and the activities of transnational corporations. Accordingly, the issues of Ukraine's foreign trade relations are studied in the works of domestic and foreign scholars, particularly as the work of Melitz and Redding (2021) highlights the impact of international trade on the reallocation of resources and productivity growth. Darvas and Martins (2022) studied the consequences of Russian aggression on international trade, and found that energy prices rose more significantly in 2021 than in 2022, suggesting that the war was not the primary driver of the price increase. Additionally, the authors observed that while sanctions imposed on Russia did affect trade, they did not result in its total disruption. Havrylyuk (2024) analyses the dynamics and trends in the development of international trade in Ukraine, emphasizing the importance of diversifying trading partners and developing new markets. Shayda et al. (2022) analyse the dynamics of foreign trade relations between Ukraine and Germany, concluding that Germany continues to be one of Ukraine's key trading partners, despite the economic difficulties faced. Chunikhina et al. (2024) reveal the impact of global transformations on international trade through changes in alliances and trade policies. The authors emphasize the need to adapt to new conditions and develop innovative strategies to maintain competitiveness. Us and Havrylenko (2022) reflect the impact of the war on Ukraine's foreign trade, which led to a significant reduction in trade turnover, shifts in the geographical composition of trade, and a rise in the EU's share, while the share of countries from the Eurasian Economic Union has decreased.

Unsolved part of the problem. Despite significant scientific achievements on the issues of foreign trade in Ukraine, several aspects remain insufficiently researched, in particular the impact of a full-scale war on the commodity structure of foreign trade; mechanisms for adapting business to new logistical realities and regulatory conditions in major export markets, especially those of small and medium-sized enterprises that face disproportionately high barriers to entry into foreign markets; the

effectiveness of state export support programs and their impact on the diversification of the commodity structure of foreign trade; the prospects for integration into global value chains in the context of EU membership and economic reconstruction after the end of the war.

Research goal and questions. The aim of the article is a comprehensive analysis of structural changes in Ukraine's foreign trade and substantiation of strategies for transforming the commodity structure of exports for sustainable growth. The objectives of the study include the analysis of the trends of Ukraine's foreign trade relations, identification of trends in the commodity and geographical structure of foreign trade, the study of the country's adaptation to crisis conditions, assessment of the impact of geopolitical factors on trade, and development of recommendations for diversifying exports and reducing the commodity deficit of foreign trade.

Main findings. In 2024, global trade reached a record 33 trillion USD, up 3.7% from the previous year, driven by services trade, which grew by 9% and added 700 billion USD to the total, while goods trade grew by only 2% and remained below its 2022 peak (Fig. 2). Trade in services is outpacing the growth rate of trade in goods. Developed countries of the world (Japan, the USA) demonstrated better growth rates in 2024 compared to developing countries due to stable demand and improved business activity. In terms of sectors, high growth was shown by trade in information and communication technologies and office equipment (increased by 13% per quarter, each), clothing (+14% per quarter), while the automotive industry and trade in energy carriers (-7% per year) recorded a decline (UN Trade and Development, 2024).

Geopolitical changes are stimulating the active integration of new regions into world trade. Mexico and Vietnam are strengthening their positions in global supply chains, taking advantage of their geographical location and changing trade flows between major economic centres. At the same time, there is a structural transformation of international trade: the share of intangible assets, including intellectual property, is growing, which indicates a transition to a "knowledge economy" and the digitalization of global markets. Despite regional conflicts and geopolitical tensions, the global trading system is showing the ability to adapt quickly, companies are actively looking for alternative logistics solutions and new partners to minimize risks. Potential disruptions in maritime transportation and rising energy prices remain a threat to stability, which may have a knock-on

effect for many sectors of the global economy (World Trade Organization, 2024).

An analysis of the dynamics of Ukraine's foreign trade over the last decade allows us to identify three main stages of transformation related to geopolitical changes and their economic consequences (Fig. 3).

The first stage (2014–2016) was marked by a sharp decline in Ukraine's foreign trade in the context of the economic and geopolitical crisis. In 2014, exports fell by 15% compared to the previous year (to 53.9 billion USD), and imports decreased by almost a third (to 54.4 billion USD). The main reasons were the annexation of Crimea, military operations in Donbas, and the severance of trade relations with Russia, which was Ukraine's main foreign trade partner. In 2015–2016, the dynamics remained negative: exports and imports decreased in 2016 to 36.4 and 39.2 billion USD, respectively, which indicates a narrowing of the domestic market and a decline in purchasing power. A reorientation of trade flows to the EU and Asia also began.

The second stage (2017–2021) was characterized by a gradual recovery and growth in foreign trade volumes. From 2017 to 2021, there was a stable growth in exports and imports of 68.1 and 72.8 billion USD, respectively, which was the consequence of macroeconomic stabilization, strengthening trade relations with the European Union and an increase in world prices for Ukrainian export goods, grain, metals and oil. However, a negative trade balance remained, indicating structural imbalances and a high level of energy dependence.

The third stage (2022–2025) is associated with a full-scale war, which led to new economic shocks, the blockade of seaports, and the destruction of production potential. In 2022, exports of goods decreased by 35.3%, but already in 2024 there was a recovery in exports, which reached 41.7 billion USD, which is 15.2% more compared to 2023 (36.2 billion USD).

An important characteristic of Ukraine's foreign trade throughout the analysed period is the structural

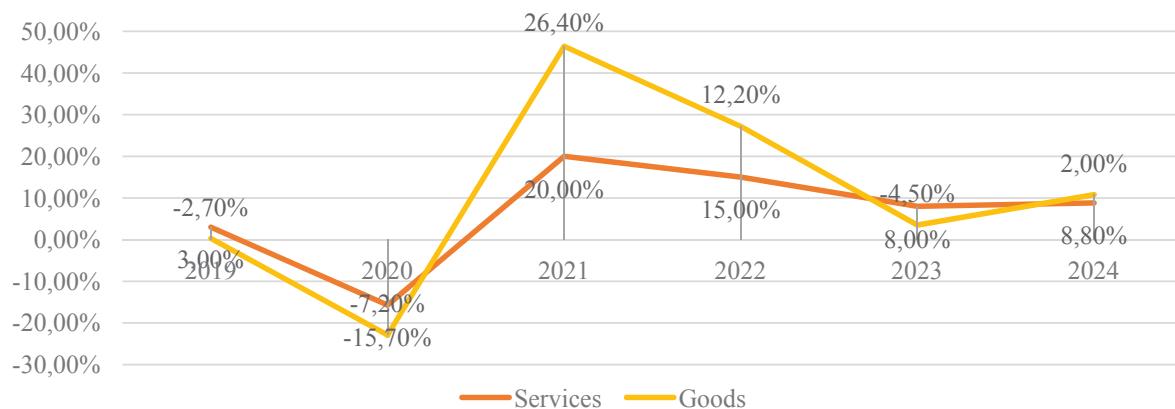


Fig. 2. Annual growth in the value of trade in goods and services, 2019–2024, %
Source: created by the authors based on (UN Trade and Development, 2025)

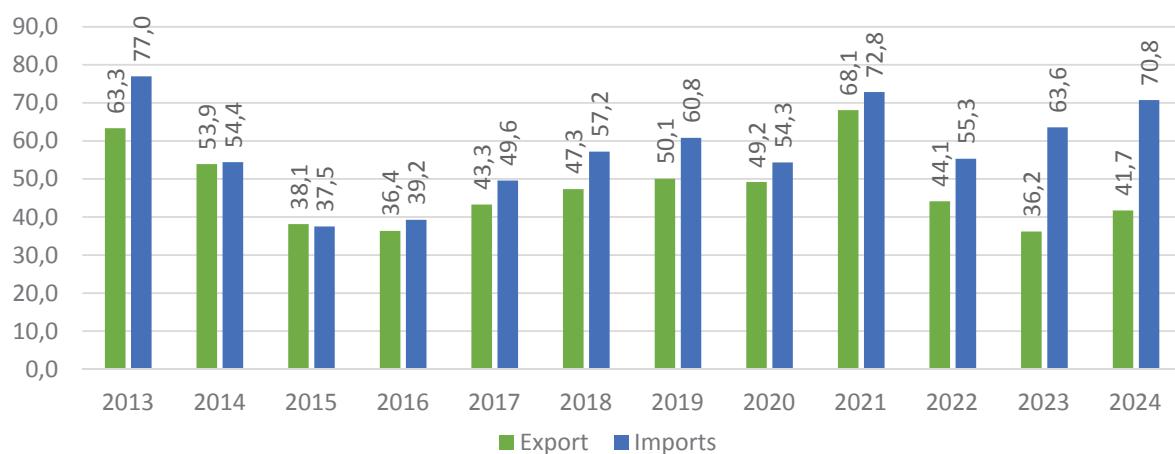


Fig. 3. Dynamics of exports and imports of Ukraine, 2013–2024, billion USD
Source: created by the authors based on (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2025)

imbalance between exports and imports, which leads to a chronic trade balance deficit. The situation became especially critical in 2022–2024, when the deficit reached 11.2 billion USD in 2022 (6.9% of Ukraine's GDP), 27.4 billion USD in 2023 (15.3% of Ukraine's GDP), and 29.1 billion USD in 2024. An examination of Ukraine's export commodity structure reveals notable shifts in the country's specialization in global markets over the past ten years (see Table).

A striking trend is the steady growth of the share of plant products in exports – from 16.2% in 2014 to almost 33% in 2024, which reflects a strengthening of the raw material focus on Ukraine's economy and increases its vulnerability to fluctuations in world prices for agricultural products. Simultaneously, there has been a decline in the proportion of metallurgical products (Base metals and articles thereof) from 28.3% in 2014 to 10.7% in 2024, which is primarily due to the loss of production capacity in the occupied territories, the destruction

of the Mariupol Azovstal and Ilyich Iron and Steel Works, as well as problems with export logistics.

A characteristic feature of recent years is the growth of arms imports, for example, during 2020–2024 Ukraine received 8.8% of the total volume of arms imports due to the full-scale invasion of Russia, which caused a sharp increase in the need for weapons for defence. The main suppliers of arms to Ukraine were the USA (45%), Germany (12%), and Poland (11%) (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2025). It is important to note that in the overall structure of Ukrainian exports, the IT sector ranks second after food products, and its share has a positive trend of growth from 2.3% in 2014 to 11.5% in 2024, which indicates the diversification of exports and the development of a sector with high added value (Sabadysyna, 2025).

Geopolitical shifts in the past ten years have had a profound impact on the geographical composition of Ukraine's foreign trade (Fig. 4).

Table. Dynamics of the goods structure of Ukraine's exports, 2014–2024, % of the total volume

Goods	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Plant-based products	16.2	20.9	22.3	21.3	20.9	25.8	24.2	22.8	30.5	32.4	32.4
Fats and oils	7.1	8.7	10.9	10.6	9.5	9.5	11.7	10.3	13.5	15.6	13.8
Base metals and articles thereof	28.3	24.8	22.9	23.4	24.6	20.5	18.4	23.5	13.6	10.8	10.7
Ready food products	5.7	6.5	6.7	6.5	6.4	6.4	6.8	5.6	5.7	9.0	9.0
Mineral products	11.3	8.1	7.5	9.1	9.2	9.7	10.8	12.4	9.8	6.7	8.2
Machinery and equipment	10.5	10.3	10.0	9.9	9.8	8.9	9.1	7.7	8.5	7.2	7.5
Chemical products	5.7	5.6	4.3	3.8	4.0	3.9	4.1	4.1	2.9	2.5	2.3
Other	15.2	15.1	15.4	15.4	15.6	15.3	14.9	13.6	15.5	15.8	16.1

Source: created by the authors based on (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2025)

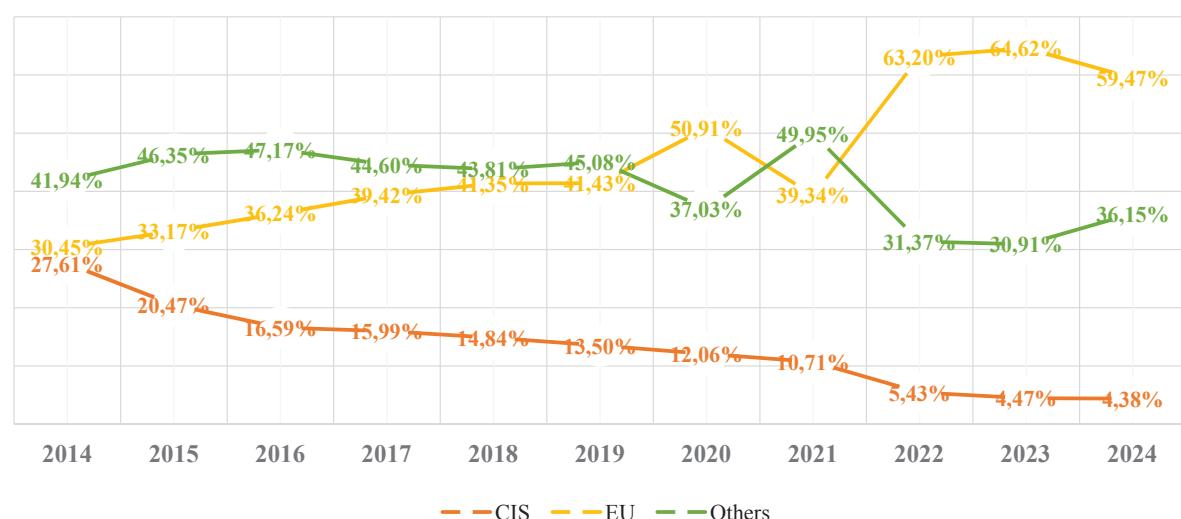


Fig. 4. Dynamics of the geographical structure of Ukraine's exports, 2014–2024, % of the total volume

Source: created by the authors based on (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2025; State Customs Service of Ukraine, n. d.)

The most significant change is the reorientation of export flows from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) markets to those of the EU markets. The share of CIS countries, including Russia, in the structure of Ukrainian exports decreased from 27.6% in 2014 to 4.3% in 2024, while the share of the EU increased from 30.5% to 59.5% over the same period (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2025; State Customs Service of Ukraine, n. d.). The growth of China's share in Ukrainian exports from 4.96% in 2014 to 5.74% in 2024 was accompanied by major exports, including iron ore raw materials, corn, oil cake, and sunflower oil (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2025).

Poland has become Ukraine's most important trading partner, increasing its share in exports to 11.28% in 2024 due to its geographical proximity and developed logistics, followed by Spain with a share of 6.86% and Germany with 6.81% (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2025).

Over the past decade, trade between Ukraine and the European Union has changed significantly after the signing of the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Area in 2014, which led to an increase in the EU's share in Ukraine's foreign trade after the loss of traditional markets in Russia. Ukraine's total exports to the EU are 24.9 billion USD, while imports are 35.7 billion USD, indicating a significant foreign trade deficit of Ukraine with the EU, which is 10.8 billion USD. Poland is Ukraine's primary trading partner within the European Union in terms of exports and imports, while Germany ranks second in terms of

imports and third in terms of exports, underscoring its importance in Ukraine's foreign trade.

Ukraine's exports are dominated by Central and Eastern European countries such as Poland, Germany and Spain, while imports are mainly from Western Europe, particularly Germany, Italy and France. The high imports from Poland may be due to re-exports. Overall, Ukraine's trade with the EU continues to grow, but the negative balance remains a challenge that requires an intensified export policy. The blockade of Ukraine's main seaports has forced the country to reorient its export flows to Danube ports, rail corridors and road transport through Europe, which has led to a significant increase in transportation costs. According to a study published in the journal *Choices*, logistics costs have increased by 55–125 USD per metric ton, which is approximately 30–50% of the cost of the goods (Bullock et al., 2023). This has prompted the transformation of logistics routes: Danube ports (Izmail, Reni and Ust-Danube) have increased their capacity by five times, and railway corridors with the EU and road transport, which are limited by high costs, are developing. Ukraine has also created its own maritime corridor to partially restore exports through Black Sea ports. Logistics restrictions affect exports differently: products with low added value (grain, ore) suffer the most, for which transport costs make up a significant share of the final price, while exports of services, in particular IT, are less dependent on physical logistics, which explains their growing share in the structure of the country's total exports.

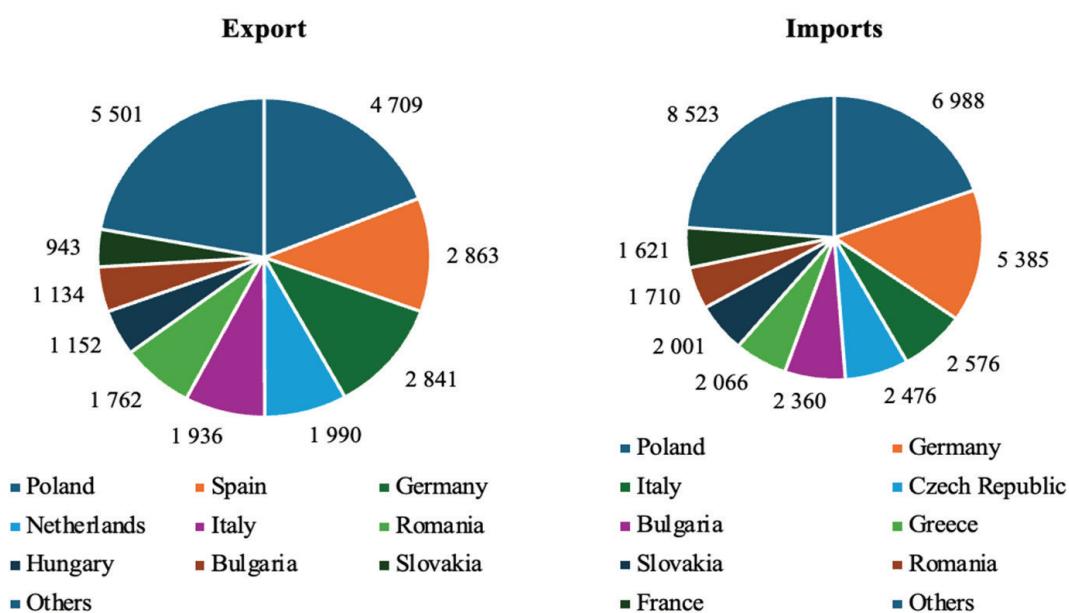


Fig. 5. Geographical distribution of foreign trade in goods with the EU, 2024, million USD
Source: created by the authors based on (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2025)

Analysis of the geographical and commodity structure of Ukraine's foreign trade indicates promising areas of export diversification that can reduce dependence on individual markets. For example, it is important to expand the presence of Ukrainian goods and services in the markets of Asia, the Middle East and Africa, where demand for agro-industrial products is growing, in particular ready-made food products and organic products. In the European direction, it is important to shift the emphasis from raw material exports to the supply of mechanical engineering products, electrical engineering, components for the automotive industry and innovative materials. The metallurgical industry has prospects for strengthening its positions in Turkey and the Middle East countries by exporting not only semi-finished products but also finished products with high added value. A separate strategic direction is the development of the IT industry and the export of digital services to the USA and the EU, where demand for software, cybersecurity and financial technologies is growing.

Conclusions and further research proposals.

According to the results of the study, structural changes in Ukraine's foreign trade in 2014–2025 indicate significant transformations caused by geopolitical crises and military aggression, which led to a decrease in trade volumes and a change in the commodity structure. It is worth noting the cardinal reorientation of the geographical structure of exports from the CIS markets (reduction from 27.6% to 4.3%) in favour of the EU (growth from 30.5% to 59.5%) and China (growth from 5% to 20.3%), which is a consequence of both the political confrontation with Russia and the implementation of the Association Agreement with the European Union. There have also been significant changes in the commodity structure of the export basket: the share of raw materials, primarily crop products, has increased (from 16.2% to 32.4%), while the share of metallurgical products has decreased (from 28.3% to 10.7%),

which indicates a regression in the export structure, in particular due to the blockade of Black Sea ports, which had a negative impact on national exports of goods with low added value. At the same time, the growth in the share of IT services and intellectual property objects is positive, which indicates the formation of new competitive advantages in the economy.

Ukraine's transition from a raw material economy to an export-oriented model with high added value requires a comprehensive approach in various areas. For example, the formation of targeted export financing and insurance programs will create a basis for the development of high-tech industries. Modernization of transport and logistics infrastructure, the development of modern logistics centers, in particular Western border crossings and ports, will reduce the logistics costs of exporters. Institutional support for innovative sectors through fiscal incentives and the development of technological clusters (technology parks, accelerators for innovative companies), as well as cooperation with international scientific institutions will contribute to the commercialization of innovations and the development of an innovative ecosystem within the country. The digitalization of customs procedures and the introduction of electronic document flow to increase the efficiency and transparency of trade operations will ensure a reduction in transaction costs when carrying out foreign economic operations. The conclusion of preferential trade agreements with countries of the Global South will expand export opportunities in underdeveloped markets in Africa and Southeast Asia. The implementation of these measures will create the prerequisites for a sustainable economic transformation of Ukraine. The suggested measures will not only help enhance the competitiveness of Ukrainian exports, but also to ensure the country's sustainable economic development in the face of global challenges and changes.

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ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ ЗОВНІШНЬОЇ ТОРГІВЛІ УКРАЇНИ В УМОВАХ ГЕОПОЛІТИЧНИХ ВИКЛИКІВ

Метою дослідження є аналіз динаміки та структури зовнішньої торгівлі України в умовах глобальних економічних і геополітичних викликів протягом 2014–2024 рр. Застосовано метод статистичного аналізу часових рядів, компаративний метод для зовнішньоторговельних потоків України та системний аналіз змін у світовій торгівлі.

За результатами дослідження виділено три етапи трансформації зовнішньої торгівлі України: перший (2014–2016 рр.) – різке скорочення зовнішньоторговельних операцій внаслідок анексії Криму та початку воєнних дій на Донбасі; другий (2017–2021 рр.) – поступове відновлення та зростання обсягів зовнішньої торгівлі; третій (2022–2024 рр.) – стрімке падіння та початок відновлення експорту в умовах повномасштабної війни. Встановлено зміни в товарній структурі експорту: зростання частки продукції рослинного походження до 32,4 % у 2024 р., скорочення металургійної продукції майже у 3 рази, збільшення частки IT-послуг та об'єктів інтелектуальної власності до 12 %. Виявлено хронічний дефіцит торговельного балансу, у географічній структурі зафіксовано кардинальну переорієнтацію експортних потоків з ринків країн СНД на ринки Європейського Союзу.

Матеріали дослідження можуть бути використані для розроблення зовнішньоторговельної стратегії України під час війни та в період післявоєнного відновлення, формування державної політики підтримки експорту, визначення пріоритетних напрямів диверсифікації торговельних потоків і розвитку експортоорієнтованих секторів економіки.

За результатами дослідження запропоновано структурну модифікацію експортного потенціалу України через розвиток секторів з високою вартістю, диверсифікацію географічної структури зовнішньої торгівлі з акцентом на ринки Азії, Близького Сходу та Африки, переорієнтацію металургійної галузі на виробництво продукції звищим ступенем обробки, а також подальшу підтримку IT-індустрії та експорту цифрових послуг як стратегічного напряму забезпечення позитивного зовнішньоторговельного балансу України.

Ключові слова: експорт, імпорт, зовнішньоторговельний баланс, товарна структура, географічна структура, диверсифікація експорту, геополітичні зміни, логістичні обмеження, зовнішня торгівля України.

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