

Victoria LOMAKA, Yevhen NOVIKOV, Ivan YAKOVIYK, Olesia TRAGNIUK, Maksym SYCH

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The Role of the European Union in the Development of Legal Culture in Ukraine: Legal Awareness, Sovereignty Perception, and Civic Transformation

O papel da União Europeia no desenvolvimento da cultura jurídica na Ucrânia: consciência jurídica, percepção da soberania e transformação cívica

Victoria LOMAKA¹
Yevhen NOVIKOV²
Ivan YAKOVIYK³
Olesia TRAGNIUK⁴
Maksym SYCH⁵

ABSTRACT: The article deals with the role of the European Union (EU) in shaping the legal culture of Ukraine, focusing on aspects of legal awareness, sovereignty perception, and building of civic identity in the context of current geopolitical and institutional transformations. The study is based on socio-legal approaches, relying on the theories of legal socialization and political consciousness. The research employed a mixed approach, combining quantitative (structured sociological surveys) and qualitative (focus group interviews) methods. This made it possible to analyse how EU norms affect the level of legal awareness among different demographic groups, as well as assess the impact of supranational integration processes on the perception of state sovereignty and the legitimacy of the rule of law. The results of the study indicate the generational and regional differences in public perceptions. In particular, younger, urban, and highly educated populations demonstrate greater compliance with EU legal standards and greater sensitivity to discourses related to human rights. The obtained data give grounds to state that the EU is not only a geopolitical ally, but also a normative force that promotes civic transformations and legal modernization. The article contributes to the academic discussion on legal Europeanization by demonstrating how transnational legal norms are internalized at the level of public consciousness in Eastern Europe. Further research may focus on comparative studies, in particular in other countries of the Eastern Partnership in order to identify similarities and differences in the dynamics of legal integration.

KEYWORDS: Political Consciousness; Legal Awareness; Sovereignty Perception; European Union; NATO; Legal Culture; Human Rights; Civic Identity.

RESUMO: O artigo explora o papel da União Europeia na formação da cultura jurídica da Ucrânia, focando aspetos de consciência jurídica, percepção de soberania e construção de

¹ PhD in Law, European Union Law Department, Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, Kharkiv, Ukraine, e-mail: vyktory.ia@gmail.com.

² PhD in Law, European Union Law Department, Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, Kharkiv, Ukraine, e-mail: evgen.nov90@gmail.com.

³ Doctor Sciences (Law), Professor, Sector of comparative law, Research Institute of State Building and Local Self-Government, National Academy of Legal Sciences of Ukraine, Kharkiv, Ukraine, e-mail: yakovuk.ivan@ukr.net.

⁴ PhD in Law, Professor, Research Institute of State Building and Local Self-Government, National Academy of Legal Sciences of Ukraine, Kharkiv, Ukraine, e-mail: olsa.tragnuk@ukr.net.

⁵ PhD in Law, Research Institute of State Building and Local Self-Government, National Academy of Legal Sciences of Ukraine, Kharkiv, Ukraine, e-mail: max.sych@ukr.net.

identidade cívica no contexto das atuais transformações geopolíticas e institucionais. A investigação baseia-se em abordagens sociojurídicas, apoiando-se nas teorias da socialização jurídica e da consciência política. Metodologicamente, foi utilizada uma abordagem mista, combinando métodos quantitativos (inquéritos sociológicos estruturados) e qualitativos (entrevistas de grupo de foco). Isto permitiu analisar como as normas da União Europeia afectam o nível de consciência jurídica entre os diferentes grupos demográficos, bem como avaliar o impacto dos processos de integração supranacional na percepção da soberania do Estado e na legitimidade do Estado de direito. Os resultados do estudo indicam a presença de diferenças geracionais e regionais nas percepções públicas. Em particular, as populações mais jovens, urbanas e com um elevado nível de escolaridade demonstram uma maior conformidade com as normas jurídicas da UE e uma maior sensibilidade aos discursos relacionados com os direitos humanos. Os dados obtidos permitem afirmar que a União Europeia funciona não só como um aliado geopolítico, mas também como uma força normativa promotora de transformações cívicas e de modernização jurídica. O artigo contribui para a discussão académica sobre a europeização jurídica ao demonstrar como as normas jurídicas transnacionais são interiorizadas ao nível da consciência pública na Europa de Leste. No futuro, é aconselhável realizar estudos comparativos, em particular noutros países da região da Parceria Oriental, a fim de identificar semelhanças e diferenças na dinâmica da integração jurídica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Consciência Política; Consciência Jurídica; Percepção de Soberania; União Europeia; OTAN; Cultura Jurídica; Direitos Humanos, Identidade Cívica.

1. Introduction

The influence of the European Union (EU) on Ukrainian legal culture has grown amid the country's evolving democratic institutions and geopolitical orientation. Ukraine's trajectory toward EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership emphasizes the role of supranational norms in shaping domestic legal consciousness and renegotiating political identity⁶. This research draws on the theoretical underpinnings of legal socialization, Europeanization, and sovereignty studies⁷. In this context, there are three central inseparable concepts: legal awareness — the knowledge and application of legal norms by the population in social life; political consciousness — awareness of civic responsibilities, governmental institutions, and the legitimacy of authority; and sovereignty perception — the perception by citizens of national sovereignty in the EU's regulatory and institutional settings⁸.

This article presumes that the EU's legal norms and system of values — more precisely its emphasis on human rights, rule of law, and democratic governance — act as both spur and measuring stick for the internal reform processes in Ukraine. These

⁶ EUROPEAN SPACE LAW (EUSL) [online]. EU Space Law (EUSL) | Updates. 2025. Available from: <https://www.european-space-law.com/>

⁷ LINDEBOOM, Justin and WESSEL, Ramses A. Introduction: The autonomy of EU law, legal theory and European integration. *European Papers*, 2023, vol. 8, n° 3, pp. 1247-1254. ISSN 2499-8249. <https://doi.org/10.15166/2499-8249/716>

⁸ EUAM UKRAINE. How the EU helps Ukraine reform police and justice [online]. 31 May 2024. Available from: <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/news/opinion/how-the-eu-helps-ukraine-reform-police-and-justice/>

norms have the potential to influence public attitudes to the principles of law and contribute to a rebuilding of civic identity in Ukraine⁹. In contrast to existing studies that predominantly addressed elite negotiations or institutional adherence to EU demands¹⁰, this study focuses on the societal level: how the broader citizenry understands, internalizes, and responds to EU-induced legal changes.

There is an urgent need to study the formation and evolution of such public views on Ukraine's interaction with EU institutions. Public acceptance of EU norms is crucial for measuring the effectiveness of legal harmonization and the duration of democratic transition in Ukraine. This perspective also reveals regional and generational variances in legal consciousness — outcomes that hold the most significance for framing inclusive legal education and governance reforms ¹¹.

Despite the growing number of academic studies on Ukraine's European integration process, there are still significant gaps in the existing literature. In particular, the issue of interpretation of concepts of sovereignty and legal responsibility in the context of European integration by different social groups interpret is poorly studied. How these perceptions vary depending on the respondents' demographic characteristics or under the influence of the EU's legal culture is even less studied.

This study aims to fill these gaps. It is based on empirical analysis and examines the relationship between legal awareness, political awareness, and the sovereignty perception. Particular attention is paid to how these factors are shaped and transformed by the EU legal and regulatory framework.

The aim of this research is to evaluate the EU's role in fostering legal modernization in Ukraine by exploring how citizens internalize supranational legal values. The study also seeks to explore how different social groups manage the tension between national sovereignty and legal harmonization. The aim was achieved through the fulfilment of the following research objectives:

1. Examine the historical dynamics of Ukrainian attitudes towards sovereignty and the rule of law in the context of the country's integration into the EU and NATO;

⁹ EU Law – European Integration Portal [online]. EU Law. 2025. Available from: <https://eu-ua.kmu.gov.ua/en/law/>

¹⁰ EIPA. Home page European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) [online]. November 2024. Available from: <https://www.eipa.eu/>

¹¹ MARTONYI, János. Law and identity in the European integration. *Hungarian Journal of Legal Studies*, 2021, vol. 60, n° 3, pp. 227-235. ISSN 2560-1067. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2052.2019.00014>

2. Take into account the influence of international partners — both friends and enemies — on the legal awareness of Ukrainians;
3. Examine the impact of human rights rhetoric and legal approximation on national legal culture and public trust in institutions.

2. Literature review

The intersection of supranational governance and domestic legal transformations is increasingly analysed through the prism of legal socialization, the formation of political identity, and the level of civic trust. In this context, the EU appears not only as an economic and political entity, but also as a normative force that actively influences the development of legal culture in post-Soviet countries, in particular in Ukraine. An important component of this process is legal awareness — the citizens' ability to understand and apply current legal norms. This determines the perception and assimilation of European legal standards at the individual and collective levels. An equally important factor is political consciousness, which encompasses the awareness of the principles of democratic governance, legal accountability, and institutional legitimacy. The concept of the perception of sovereignty adds additional complexity to this dynamic. It combines an emotional commitment to national autonomy with a pragmatic acceptance of supranational legal jurisdiction, reflecting the contradictory nature of the interaction between national and European legal spaces.

Scholars such as Bukhun¹² emphasize the EU's role in shaping civic engagement among Ukrainian youth through educational and civic programmes, suggesting that exposure to EU norms enhances democratic participation and alters perceptions of sovereignty. Zhang¹³ explores the phenomenon of “asymmetrical integration” in Central and Eastern Europe, where states selectively internalize EU legal obligations to safeguard elements of national autonomy. His findings illustrate the dual challenge of adaptation and preservation that transitional societies face during EU alignment

¹² BUKHUN, Andriy. Formation of the civil position of Ukrainian youth in the context of European integration processes. *Vitoki Pedagogičnoї Majsternosti*, 2021, vol^o 27, pp. 31-35. ISSN 2616-6623. <https://doi.org/10.33989/2075-146x.2021.27.247003>

¹³ ZHANG, Longtai. Advancing European integration in Central and Eastern Europe: A comprehensive examination of reconciliation and collaborative progress in the Western Balkans. *Studies in Social Science & Humanities*, February 2024, vol. 3, n^o 2, pp. 54-65. ISSN 2709-7862. <https://doi.org/10.56397/sssh.2024.02.09>

processes. Mangione¹⁴, Salihu and Murati¹⁵ and Ahmedi and Stojchevska¹⁶ underscore the significance of constitutional reform, legal harmonization, and human rights protections as mechanisms driving the transformation of legal culture. Their comparative research, though focusing on Italy, the Western Balkans, and other developing states, offers valuable insights for Ukraine, particularly regarding how legal modernization can foster greater public trust in institutions.

On the other hand, Foster¹⁷ and Čakal and Mesihović¹⁸ caution against the rigidity of EU legal frameworks. They argue that bureaucratic legalism can hinder effective domestic implementation, especially in contexts where institutional capacity is limited. These critiques are pertinent to Ukraine, where legal harmonization efforts must contend with structural challenges, inconsistent enforcement, and legacy legal cultures. The dual nature of EU integration is further elaborated by Van Den Brink et al.¹⁹ who distinguish between positive integration (harmonization and cooperation) and negative integration (regulatory compliance and constraint). This distinction is useful for understanding the ambivalent perceptions of EU influence in Ukraine, where some view it as enhancing sovereignty through democratic governance, while others see it as a threat to national autonomy. The contribution presented in the collection edited by Žalimienė and Wojciechowski²⁰, *Constitutional Consciousness* is of particular value. In this edition, several chapters deal with the analysis of how European human rights standards and constitutional reform processes influence the transformation of public understandings of sovereignty and legitimacy. The studies included in the collection

¹⁴ MANGIONE, Gariella. The European dimension to the constitution of the Republic of Italy *Comparative Law Review*, 2022, vol. 28, pp. 411-434. ISSN 2391-7644. <https://doi.org/10.12775/clr.2022.014>

¹⁵ SALIHU, Vjollca and MURATI Besnik. Harmonization of the legislation of foreign investments of the developing countries with that of the European. *Journal of Governance and Regulation*, 2023, vol. 12, n° 1 (special issue), pp. 348-358. ISSN 2306-6784. <https://doi.org/10.22495/jgrv12i1siart13>

¹⁶ AHMEDİ, Blerta and STOJCHEVSKA, Stefani. The challenges of European Union integration: The parallel between human rights and corruption perceptions. *Juridical Tribune – Review of Comparative and International Law*, 2024, vol. 14, n° 1, pp. 130-146. ISSN 3008-637X. <https://doi.org/10.62768/tbj/2024/14/1/08>

¹⁷ FOSTER, Chase. Legalism without adversarialism?: Bureaucratic legalism and the politics of regulatory implementation in the European Union. *Regulation & Governance*, March, vol. 18, n° 1, pp. 53-72. ISSN 1748-5991. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12524>

¹⁸ ČAKAL, Anesa and MESIHOVIĆ, Lejla Ramić. Bosnia and Herzegovina in the European Union integration process: Systemic limitations to progress in the rule of law. *MAP Social Sciences*, February 2024, vol. 4, n° 1, pp. 137-148. ISSN 2744-2454. <https://doi.org/10.53880/2744-2454.2024.4.137>

¹⁹ VAN DEN BRINK, Martijn, DAWSON, Mark and ZGLINSKI, Jan. Revisiting the asymmetry thesis: Negative and positive integration in the EU. *Journal of European Public Policy*, December 2023, vol. 32, n° 1, pp. 209-234. ISSN 1466-4429. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2296940>

²⁰ ŽALIMIENĖ, Skirgailė and WOJCIECHOWSKI, Bartosz (eds.). *Constitutional Consciousness*. vol. 31. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2023. ISBN 9783631905227. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b21009>

emphasize the need to harmonize institutional changes with public expectations. This is especially relevant for states that are in the process of overcoming the consequences of an authoritarian past. While Martonyi²¹ and Asatryan²² address this in the context of legal identity, further empirical research is needed to understand how EU norms reshape legal culture on a societal level in Ukraine.

Despite the growing number of literature, there are still significant gaps in this area of research. In particular, there is a limited number of studies that directly analyse how Ukrainian citizens conceptualise legal norms implemented within the European legal framework. Even less attention has been paid to examining how these perceptions vary across regional characteristics, age groups or education levels. The relationship between public legal awareness and corruption perceptions, particularly in the context of human rights, has also been poorly studied. Furthermore, while a significant number of studies has analysed the transposition of European legislation and reforms initiated by political elites, empirical evidence on how these changes are interpreted and accepted at the societal level remains limited.

This study seeks to bridge these gaps by offering an empirically grounded analysis of how EU legal and institutional standards influence legal awareness and civic identity in Ukraine. It contributes to a broader understanding of legal Europeanization by focusing on the micro-level processes through which legal norms shape, and are shaped by, citizens' attitudes toward law, sovereignty, and supranational governance.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This study employed a sequential mixed methodological design structured in four stages. It combines quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the impact of the EU on the level of legal awareness and the sovereignty perception in Ukraine. The methodological model was based on interdisciplinary theories of legal socialization, political cognition, and institutional trust. These theoretical approaches became the

²¹ MARTONYI, János. Law and identity in the European integration. *Hungarian Journal of Legal Studies*, 2021, vol. 60, n° 3, pp. 227-235. ISSN 2560-1067. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2052.2019.00014>

²² ASATRYAN, Armen Levonovich. The analysis of Anglo-Saxon and Romano-Germanic legal systems in the light of comparative jurisprudence. *Armenian Army: Defense-Academic Journal, National Defense Research University, Ministry of Defense, Republic of Armenia*, 2023, vol. 1, n° 115, pp. 91-104. ISSN 1829-0108. <https://doi.org/10.61760/18290108-aaa23.1-91>

basis for the development of research instruments, the definition of the sampling strategy, and the construction of analytical procedures (see Figure 1).

The research included the following stages:

1. Preparatory Stage – formulating research questions and hypotheses concerning the relationship between legal awareness, political consciousness, and sovereignty perception under EU influence.

2. Data Collection – structured surveys and moderated focus groups to gather primary data from a representative cross-section of the Ukrainian population.

3. Data Analysis – quantitative analysis was conducted using statistical software (SPSS), while qualitative data were thematically coded using NVivo. The coding process involved both inductive (emerging themes from the data) and deductive (based on predefined categories) strategies to ensure analytical rigor and thematic saturation.

4. Interpretation and Reporting – triangulated findings were synthesized to identify correlations and construct grounded conclusions, reinforced with visual and comparative tools.

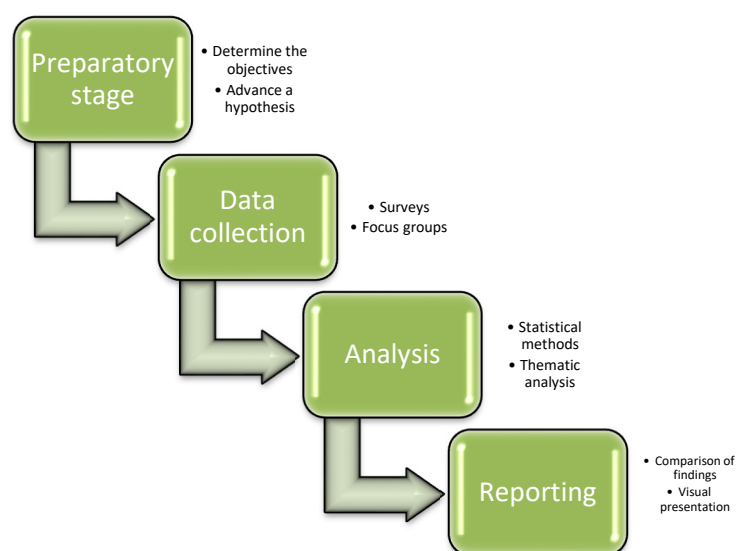


Figure 1 – Research stages
Source: Developed by author based on MiniTAB²³.

3.2. Sampling Strategy

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure the generalizability and demographic diversity of the findings. A total of 1,000 respondents

²³ MINITAB. We are Minitab [online]. 2025. Available from: <https://www.minitab.com/en-us/>

aged 18 and older were surveyed, covering the five main regions of Ukraine: East, West, Centre, South, and North. Sampling quotas were structured to reflect national demographic proportions:

- Age groups: 18–30 (30%), 31–50 (40%), 51+ (30%)
- Gender parity: 50% male, 50% female
- Education level: Higher education (40%), secondary education (35%), professional/vocational training (25%)

- Geographic distribution: Urban and rural representation in all regions

The design achieved a 95% confidence level with a $\pm 3\%$ margin of error.

3.3. Research Methods and Instruments

The main analytical constructs — legal awareness, political consciousness, and sovereignty perceptions — were applied using the following methodological tools:

- Structured survey. A standardized questionnaire (see Appendix A) was used to collect empirical data on citizens' attitudes toward legal norms, EU and NATO membership, human rights, and sovereignty, including both closed and open-ended questions. The instrument was pilot-tested and reliability assessed.

- Focus group studies. Five focus group sessions were organized, each consisting of 6–10 participants, selected on the basis of age, gender, educational, and regional diversity. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. Discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and thematically coded. Both inductive and deductive approaches were used for the analysis to identify new narratives and test the relevance of theoretical constructs.

- Statistical analysis. The collected data were processed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics methods, construction of correlation matrices, and multivariate regression modelling were used to identify relationships between demographic variables and the level of legal awareness.

- Comparative analysis. The results obtained in Ukraine were correlated with existing data on EU and NATO countries. This made it possible to contextualize the legal culture of Ukraine within the framework of broader regional Europeanization processes.

Instruments Used:

- Structured questionnaire (Appendix A)

- Audio recording devices for qualitative data collection
- SPSS (v.26) for statistical processing
- NVivo (v.14) for qualitative thematic analysis

This methodological configuration enabled a robust and multi-layered assessment of how the EU's legal norms are received, interpreted, and internalized by different sectors of Ukrainian society.

4. Results

4.1. Sovereignty Perception and Regional Variation

The survey results show that 87% of respondents consider national sovereignty to be a core value. This belief is particularly strong in the western (90%) and northern (88%) regions, indicating the influence of geographical proximity to the EU on a more categorical sovereignty perception.

The focus group data confirmed this finding. Sovereignty is associated not only with territorial integrity, but also with legal autonomy and the ability to resist foreign influence, in particular from Russia. These responses reflect a shift away from traditional, state-centric approaches to understanding sovereignty in favour of more institutional and normative interpretations that are consistent with European legal and political models (Figure 2).

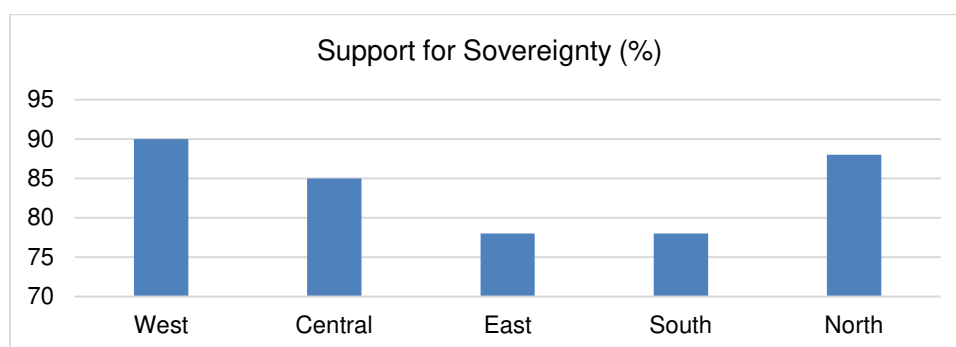


Figure 2 – Regional support for sovereignty and independence

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from the Ilko Kucheriv «Democratic Initiatives» Foundation²⁴, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology²⁵.

²⁴ ILKO KUCHERIV «DEMOCRATIC INITIATIVES» FOUNDATION. Independence day of Ukraine: way to victory, identity, and perception of the state's value amid the war [online]. 27 August 2023. Available from: <https://dif.org.ua/en/article/independence-day-of-ukraine-way-to-victory-identity-and-perception-of-the-states-value-amid-the-war>

²⁵ KYIV INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY. Dynamics of the attitude of Ukrainians to independence and the Independence Day Holiday (2013–2023) [online]. 23 August 2024. Available from: <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1427&page=1>

4.2. Support for EU and NATO Membership Across Age Groups

The majority of respondents support Ukraine's integration with both the EU (76%) and NATO (68%). Analysis of the age distribution reveals significant variations between generations. The highest level of support is recorded among younger participants (18–30 years old): 85% support EU accession, and 75% support NATO. This likely indicates a convergence with Euro-Atlantic values and expectations for legal modernization. Support is much more restrained among respondents aged 51+: only 52% support EU membership, and 40% support NATO accession. This generational gap can be explained by different governance experiences, levels of trust in Western institutions, and historical and political memory.

Table 1 – Support for EU and NATO Integration by Age Groups

Age group	Support for the EU (%)	Support for NATO (%)
18–30	85%	75%
31–50	78%	70%
51+	52%	40%

Source: Developed by the author based on European Commission²⁶, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology²⁷.

4.3. Perception of Allies and Adversaries

The perception of geopolitical partners reveals high trust in the EU (82%) and deep distrust of Russia (84%), confirming that international affiliations are interpreted through a sovereignty-conscious lens. Regional breakdowns indicate that western Ukrainians are more likely to identify EU countries as strategic allies. Focus group analysis underscores the symbolic and normative capital attributed to EU membership, particularly the Union's role in promoting democratic values, legal reform, and institutional accountability.

It is interesting that while the United States (US) is considered a partner by a majority, support levels are lower in the south and east (60–65%). This suggests regional distinctions in threat perception and trust in Western military frameworks. Although mentioned only briefly in survey data, these attitudes toward the US reflect broader views on transatlantic security and require further inquiry in further studies

²⁶ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. EC Library Guides: EC library guide to information on the European integration history: EU databases [online]. 2025. Available from: https://ec-europa-eu.libguides.com/EU_history/history-of-eu-law/eu

²⁷ KYIV INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY. Attitudes towards Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO, attitudes towards direct talks with Vladimir Putin and the perception of the military threat from Russia: The results of a telephone survey conducted on December 13–16, 2021 [online]. 24 December 2021. Available from: <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1083>

(Figure 3).

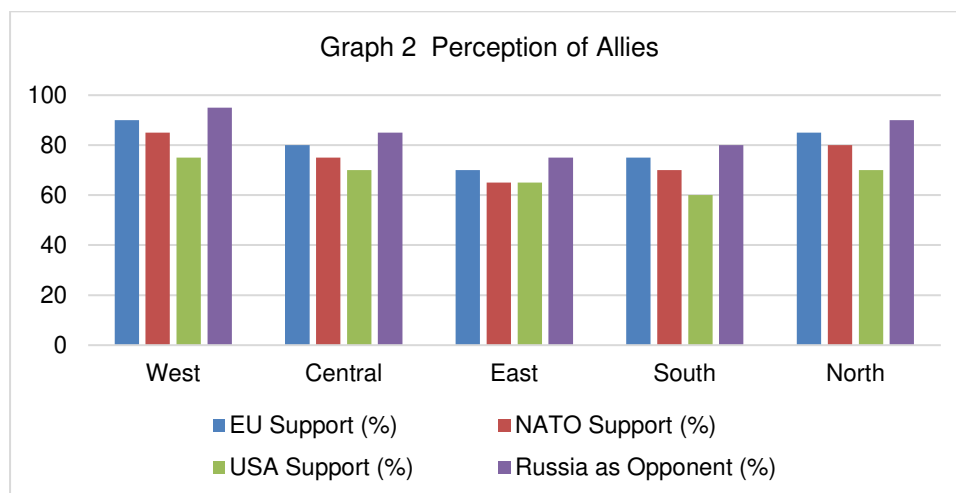


Figure 3 – Perception of allies and adversaries by region

Source: developed by the author based on Rating Group²⁸, Ilko Kucheriv «Democratic Initiatives» Foundation²⁹.

4.4. Human Rights Awareness and Educational Background

Legal awareness of human rights shows a positive correlation with the level of education. Among respondents with higher education, 75% consider human rights to be a key issue for legal reform. This is significantly higher than the 60% among those with professional qualifications and 50% among those with only secondary education.

The focus group results confirmed this trend. Participants with higher education had better knowledge of EU human rights standards. They were more likely to associate these standards with legal responsibility and social justice. On the other hand, respondents from rural areas, although less familiar with the formal legal framework, showed a growing recognition of legal discourse as an important part of Ukraine's EU accession aspirations (Table 2).

Table 2 – Prioritization of human rights by educational level

Level of education	Consider human rights important (%)
Higher education	75%
Secondary education	50%
Professional education	60%

Source: developed by the author based on What Ukrainians Know and Think About Human

²⁸ RATING GROUP. Ukrainians' perception of other countries' friendliness towards Ukraine (June 1–2, 2023) [online]. June 2023. Available from: https://ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/ukrainians_perception_of_other_countries_friendliness_towards_ukraine_june_1-2_2023.html

²⁹ ILKO KUCHERIV «DEMOCRATIC INITIATIVES» FOUNDATION. How the war changed the way Ukrainians think about friends, enemies, and the country's strategic goals [online]. 30 May 2022. Available from: <https://dif.org.ua/en/article/how-the-war-changed-the-way-ukrainians-think-about-friends-enemies-and-the-countrys-strategic-goals>

Rights?³⁰, Promoting Social Human Rights as a Key Factor of Sustainable Democracy in Ukraine³¹.

4.5. Legal Awareness by Age Groups

The study found that legal awareness is the highest among young Ukrainians. In particular, 71% of respondents reported familiarity with the legal principles related to Ukraine's membership in the EU. The highest level of awareness is observed among people aged 18–30, where this figure reaches 80%. At the same time, awareness decreases in the age group 31–50, where it is 75%, and even more so among those aged 51+ (60%).

The respondents identified digital media consumption, educational experience, and civic education as the main sources of legal knowledge. Approximately 62% of survey participants indicated digital platforms such as news aggregators, social networks and legal information sites as the main resources that contribute to their understanding of EU norms and the concept of sovereignty.

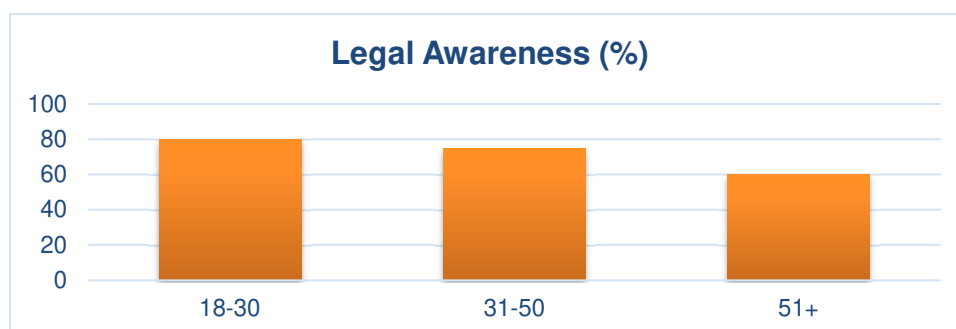


Figure 4 – Legal awareness by age group

Source: based on the data from Project HELP (Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals) for Ukraine Including During Wartime³², System of Free Legal Aid in Ukraine Demonstrates High Level of Resilience in War Conditions — UNDP Report³³, How Ukraine Can Strengthen the EU's Strategic Autonomy in the Areas of Security, Human Capital, and Economy – Results of EuroSummit of CSOs³⁴.

³⁰ UNDP. What Ukrainians know and think about human rights? [online]. August 2017. Available from: <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/what-ukrainians-know-and-think-about-human-rights>

³¹ COUNCIL OF EUROPE OFFICE IN UKRAINE. Promoting social human rights as a key factor of sustainable democracy in Ukraine [online]. 2023. Available from: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/socialrights>

³² COUNCIL OF EUROPE OFFICE IN UKRAINE. Project 'HELP' (human rights education for legal professionals) for Ukraine including during wartime, Phase II [online]. 2024. Available from: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/project-help-human-rights-education-for-legal-professionals-for-ukraine-including-during-wartime>

³³ UNDP. System of free legal aid in Ukraine demonstrates high level of resilience in war conditions — UNDP report [online]. May 2023. Available from: <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/press-releases/system-free-legal-aid-ukraine-demonstrates-high-level-resilience-war-conditions-undp-report>

³⁴ EEAS. How Ukraine can strengthen the EU's strategic autonomy in the areas of security, human capital, and economy – results of EuroSummit of CSOs [online]. 10 May 2024. Available from:

5. Discussion

This study analyses how the EU influences the formation of legal consciousness, political consciousness, and notions of sovereignty in Ukraine. Particular attention is paid to how supranational legal norms are internationalized by various social groups. The obtained results demonstrate that the EU is not only a geopolitical partner, but also a normative force that influences the transformation of the national legal culture. Ukrainian legal consciousness is increasingly being shaped by European legal standards, primarily in the areas of human rights, the rule of law, and democratic governance. This indicates a broader process of legal Europeanization in the country. The main conclusion of the study is a clearly expressed intergenerational gap in attitudes towards Ukraine's integration with the EU and NATO. Young people aged 18 to 30 demonstrate a higher level of legal awareness, being more actively involved in civic activities, and demonstrate significantly stronger support for the Euro-Atlantic course.

This trend is consistent with the position of Bukhun³⁵, according to which civic education oriented towards European values promotes democratic participation of citizens and forms a new vision of national identity through the prism of legal modernization. The results of sociological surveys and focus groups confirm that representatives of the younger generations view sovereignty not as a purely territorial concept, but as the ability of a state to take an active and meaningful part in international legal mechanisms.

In contrast, the older generation (51+) shows a lower level of legal awareness and demonstrates greater ambivalence towards the supranational integration processes. For many representatives of this age group, the concept of sovereignty is closely linked to the experience of past conflicts and the established historical ideas about statehood. The results are consistent with the findings of researchers in Constitutional Consciousness (Žalimienė and Wojciechowski's³⁶), who emphasize that the process of harmonizing national legislation with EU law can cause anxiety in post-

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/how-ukraine-can-strengthen-eu%E2%80%99s-strategic-autonomy-areas-security-human-capital-and-economy-%E2%80%93_en?s=232

³⁵ BUKHUN, Andriy. Formation of the civil position of Ukrainian youth in the context of European integration processes. *Vitoki Pedagogičnoї Majsternosti*, 2021, vol^o 27, pp. 31-35. ISSN 2616-6623. <https://doi.org/10.33989/2075-146x.2021.27.247003>

³⁶ ŽALIMIENĖ, Skirgailė and WOJCIECHOWSKI, Bartosz (eds.). *Constitutional Consciousness*. vol. 31. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2023. ISBN 9783631905227. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b21009>

totalitarian states with unstable legal institutions. This anxiety is exacerbated by the fear of losing national autonomy and cultural identity.

The concept of sovereignty in Ukrainian society is clearly undergoing evolutionary changes. The results of focus group studies indicate a gradual transition from understanding sovereignty as legal isolation to its interpretation as authorized participation in the international rule-based legal order. This transformation is consistent with Zhang's³⁷ model of "asymmetric integration", according to which national autonomy is not denied, but is reinterpreted through selective adaptation to EU norms. This position is especially clearly observed among respondents from western and urban regions. They demonstrate a willingness to coexist with supranational governance mechanisms, provided that national institutions retain a key role in implementing legal reforms.

Regarding human rights awareness, empirical data indicate that a higher level of education contributes to a deeper awareness of human rights as a key element of legal culture and a factor of democratic stability. Ahmedi and Stojchevska³⁸ emphasize that effective human rights protection is associated with decreased corruption perception and increased trust in state institutions.

The results of this study confirm this dependence: human rights discourse functions as a means of legal socialization and strengthening institutional legitimacy. Such interdependence becomes particularly relevant in the context of institutional pressure caused by the war in Ukraine, as well as in the context of ongoing legal reform.

Despite general support for European integration, there is still some scepticism towards Western military institutions, particularly NATO and, to a lesser extent, the US. While trust in the European Union is generally high, regional differences – especially in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine – indicate a mixed perception of strategic alliances. This perception is shaped not so much by legal or cultural factors as by historical, economic, and media narratives. This situation emphasizes the need

³⁷ ZHANG, Longtai. Advancing European integration in Central and Eastern Europe: A comprehensive examination of reconciliation and collaborative progress in the Western Balkans. *Studies in Social Science & Humanities*, February 2024, vol. 3, n° 2, pp. 54-65. ISSN 2709-7862. <https://doi.org/10.56397/sssh.2024.02.09>

³⁸ AHMEDI, Blerta and STOJCHEVSKA, Stefani. The challenges of European Union integration: The parallel between human rights and corruption perceptions. *Juridical Tribune – Review of Comparative and International Law*, 2024, vol. 14, n° 1, pp. 130-146. ISSN 3008-637X. <https://doi.org/10.62768/tbj/2024/14/1/08>

to view European integration not only through the prism of security or economics, but also as a process of legal and civic transformation. The obtained results are partly inconsistent with Chakal & Mezigovich³⁹ and Foster's⁴⁰ criticisms of the EU legal model as excessively bureaucratic and hierarchical. Despite the institutional difficulties, the study demonstrates that citizens – especially young people and educated social groups – perceive the EU as a source of legal modernization and expansion of civil rights. Therefore, even if the process of legal harmonization is complex from a procedural perspective, it finds a positive response among the Ukrainian population. European norms are associated with the protection of human rights, judicial justice, and accountability of state institutions.

Thus, the influence of the EU on Ukraine is not reduced to the formal implementation of legislation. It also encompasses the cognitive and cultural aspects of legal awareness. Citizens are not passive recipients of EU norms. On the contrary, they actively interpret, discuss and assimilate these norms in the context of generational experience, education, and regional peculiarities. This indicates that legal transformation in the context of transitional democracy is not only an institutional but also a social process.

5.1. Limitations

Although this study provides important insights into the relationship between the influence of the EU and the development of legal awareness in Ukraine, there are still several limitations. First, the use of the core concepts — legal awareness, political consciousness, and sovereignty perception — was based on self-reported data. Although survey and focus group instruments were developed to ensure consistency, the interpretation of these constructs may have varied depending on the respondents' region, age, education level, and prior civic experience. The subjective nature of the responses may introduce some conceptual variability, which affects the internal validity of some of the findings.

Second, the study takes place in a specific temporal context characterized by

³⁹ ČAKAL, Anesa and MESIHOVIĆ, Lejla Ramić. Bosnia and Herzegovina in the European Union integration process: Systemic limitations to progress in the rule of law. *MAP Social Sciences*, February 2024, vol. 4, n° 1, pp. 137-148. ISSN 2744-2454. <https://doi.org/10.53880/2744-2454.2024.4.137>

⁴⁰ FOSTER, Chase. Legalism without adversarialism?: Bureaucratic legalism and the politics of regulatory implementation in the European Union. *Regulation & Governance*, March, vol. 18, n° 1, pp. 53-72. ISSN 1748-5991. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12524>

ongoing geopolitical instability, including continued Russian aggression. This may influence public attitudes toward the European Union, NATO, and national sovereignty, which may reflect short-term anxieties rather than stable or enduring beliefs. Such contextual variability limits the generalizability of the findings to post-conflict or long-term scenarios.

Third, while the study finds significant correlations, for example, between education level and awareness of human rights, it does not account for intervening variables. Such factors as access to legal education, trust in national institutions, the influence of digital media, and regional differences in civic infrastructure may have a significant impact on these results, but they were not considered in our study.

Fourth, while the qualitative component of the study provides valuable thematic insights, its geographical limitations are significant. Focus groups were conducted only in selected regions, which may not provide a full range of perspectives, particularly among marginalized or hard-to-reach populations. Expanding the geographical coverage of the qualitative data would have made it possible to better identify regional differences in legal culture and civic identity. Finally, a comparative analysis with other post-Soviet countries was proposed but not implemented. Although comparative law analysis is an important direction for further research, current analysis remains limited to national frameworks.

Despite these limitations, methodological triangulation, which combines structured interviews, focus groups, and cross-sectional analysis, creates a reliable basis for understanding the complex processes of internalization of European Union norms in the legal consciousness of Ukraine.

5.2. Recommendations

The obtained results and the identified limitations give grounds to provide the following recommendations to policymakers, educators, civil society representatives, and researchers:

1. Expand legal education and civic literacy programmes. In view of the close link between education levels and legal awareness, targeted civic education initiatives should be developed, in particular for the elderly and rural populations. These programmes should focus on the practical implications of EU legal norms, such as the protection of human rights, the rule of law and democratic accountability. Interactive tools, including digital platforms, television content and regional seminars, can

significantly increase the effectiveness and reach of these initiatives.

2. Revision of the concept of sovereignty in the context of European integration. Public discourse needs to shift from binary narratives that describe EU membership as a threat to sovereignty to a broader understanding of sovereignty as legal autonomy within supranational structures. Government institutions, academia, and the media should promote a shift in perceptions of this concept, which could reduce fears among older generations and promote a broader public consensus on integration.

3. Institutionalize human rights education. Formal education systems, from primary school to university, should include modules that highlight European human rights and legal protection standards. Professional training programmes for civil servants, educators, and law enforcement officers should provide training on the relevance of the EU legal framework for national reforms. This will contribute to the formation of a legal consciousness that will be perceived as a civic norm.

4. Support for interdisciplinary research. The shifts in public opinion amid the current geopolitical instability make it important to conduct longitudinal research. Further research should integrate methods from media studies, psychology, and digital sociology to examine how narratives about the EU, sovereignty, and legal identity are shaped and disseminated through public discourse.

5. Expanding regional and demographic representation in qualitative research. Further empirical research should ensure the participation of underrepresented and marginalized groups, such as internally displaced persons, ethnic minorities, and residents of war-torn territories. This will provide a deeper understanding of how regional histories and socio-economic conditions influence the sense of justice and support for European integration.

6. Enhancing public trust through transparent legal reforms. Legal reforms aimed at harmonization with the EU should be accompanied by transparent implementation mechanisms and public accountability. Civil society organizations and international partners should support government initiatives that ensure transparency and demonstrate concrete benefits of harmonization with EU legal standards, in particular in areas such as combating corruption, ensuring the independence of the judiciary, and access to justice.

6. Conclusions

The study demonstrated a significant and multidimensional influence of the EU

on the formation of legal culture and civic identity in Ukraine. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods made it possible to confirm that the level of legal awareness among the Ukrainian population is increasing. This is especially noticeable among young people, urban residents, and representatives of highly educated groups. The respondents pay particular attention to such aspects as state sovereignty, human rights, and institutional accountability.

The results of the study demonstrate that support for European integration in Ukraine has not only a political or strategic basis. It is largely determined by normative expectations regarding legal modernization, guaranteeing human rights, and strengthening democratic governance. The legal norms promoted by the EU are increasingly perceived not as external standards, but as effective tools for strengthening civil rights and institutional capacity. This indicates a process of internationalization of European supranational values, which goes beyond the formal harmonization of legislation. In particular, the concept of sovereignty is being reinterpreted in the national context. It is increasingly less associated with territorial control only and is increasingly interpreted as the ability to participate in supranational legal mechanisms and benefit from them. This approach is especially characteristic of the younger generation. This indicates a growing understanding that legal integration with supranational structures and the preservation of national autonomy can coexist and mutually reinforce each other.

At the same time, the study reveals persistent intergenerational and regional disparities. Older people and residents of rural areas are more likely to express concerns about the possible loss of national identity and sovereignty. This emphasizes the need for inclusive legal education, transparency of reforms and effective public engagement strategies. It is particularly important to clearly explain the compatibility of European integration with national interests. This study contributes to the broadening of the academic debate on legal Europeanization. It provides empirical evidence on how EU legal norms are perceived, interpreted, and integrated at the societal level in transitional democracies. In this context, legal awareness is not only a consequence of democratic transformation, but also a key driver.

Further research should be conducted in a comparative perspective, in particular by analysing similar processes in the Eastern Partnership or in other post-Soviet countries. Such an approach will provide a deeper understanding of the regional scale of the EU's legal influence and the variability of interaction models between

supranational regulation and domestic legal development. As a result, the interaction of the EU with Ukraine goes beyond purely political cooperation. It is part of a broader social transformation. Legal awareness acquires fundamental importance in this process, determining how Ukrainian citizens perceive law, realize their own rights, and identify themselves in the European legal and civic space.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire on Legal Awareness and European Integration

Instructions: Please answer the given questions with maximum honesty. Your answers will be kept confidential. They will be used for research purposes only.

Section 1: Demography

1. Age:
 - 18–24
 - 25–34
 - 35–44
 - 45–54
 - 55 and over
2. Gender:
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other/Don't want to answer
3. Education level:
 - No formal education
 - Primary education
 - Secondary education
 - Professional education
 - Bachelor degree
 - Master's degree or higher
4. Region of residence:
 - Eastern Ukraine
 - Western Ukraine
 - Northern Ukraine
 - Southern Ukraine
 - Central Ukraine
 - Kyiv

Section 2: Attitudes towards sovereignty and independence

5. How important is national sovereignty to you? (1 = not important, 5 = very important)
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
6. To what extent, in your opinion, should Ukraine preserve its independence from external influence? (1 = Not at all, 5 = Completely)
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5

Section 3: Attitudes towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration

7. What is your attitude towards Ukraine's potential membership in the European Union (EU)? (1 = very negative, 5 = very positive)
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
8. How do you feel about Ukraine's potential membership in NATO? (1 = very negative, 5 = very positive)
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4

- 5
- 9. What do you see as the advantages of Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO? (Choose all that apply)
 - Economic growth
 - Security improvements
 - Strengthened protection of human rights
 - Greater political stability
 - Cultural exchange
 - Other (specify): _____.

Section 4: Perception of allies and adversaries

- 10. In your opinion, which countries are considered allies of Ukraine? (Choose all that apply)
 - EU member countries
 - USA
 - Canada
 - Great Britain
 - Other (specify): _____.
- 11. How do you assess the support of Ukraine from Western countries? (1 = very negative, 5 = very positive)
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5

Section 5: Human rights and legal culture

- 12. How well do you know your legal rights as a citizen of Ukraine? (1 = I don't know at all, 5 = I know well)
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
- 13. How satisfied are you with the current situation with human rights in Ukraine? (1 = Very dissatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
- 14. What improvements, in your opinion, are necessary for the protection of human rights in Ukraine? (Choose all that apply)
 - Strengthening the legislative framework
 - Raising public awareness and education
 - More reliable law enforcement agencies
 - More government responsibility
 - Other (specify): _____.

Section 6: Additional comments

- 15. Please provide additional comments or considerations regarding the impact of European integration on the legal consciousness of Ukraine:

Focus group discussion procedure

Aim

Study the attitude of the participants to sovereignty, European integration, human rights, as well as the perception of Ukraine's allies and opponents to get an idea of the legal awareness of Ukrainian society.

Participant selection

- Participants: a total of 6-10 participants per focus group, selected to represent different demographic groups (age, gender, education, region).

- Recruitment: Participants will be recruited through community centres, social media platforms and local organisations, ensuring a balanced representation of views.

Moderation

- Facilitator: Each session will be led by a trained facilitator with experience in group discussions and knowledge of the issue under research.
- Training: facilitators will receive training on managing discussions, ensuring participation of all participants and maintaining neutrality.

Duration and settings

- Duration: Each focus group will last approximately 90 minutes.
- Settings: Discussions will take place in a comfortable, quiet place conducive to open conversation, such as community centres or meeting rooms.

Equipment

- Recording devices: Audio recording devices will be used to record discussions for later transcription and analysis.
- Consent forms: Participants sign consent forms to ensure that they understand the purpose of the study and agree to be recorded.

Discussion structure

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Congratulate the participants and thank them for their participation.
- Introduce the presenter and briefly explain the purpose of the discussion.
- Review the discussion rules (e.g., respect different opinions, speak to one person at a time, confidentiality).
- Obtain verbal consent to record the session.

2. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Ask participants to introduce themselves (name, age, occupation) and share one thing they hope to gain from the discussion.

3. Main topics of discussion (60 minutes)

- **Attitude towards sovereignty and independence (15 minutes)**
- How do you understand the sovereignty of Ukraine?
- Why is sovereignty important to you?
- In your opinion, in what ways should Ukraine preserve its independence?
- **European and Euro-Atlantic integration (15 minutes)**
- What do you think about Ukraine's potential membership in the EU?
- How do you assess the role of NATO in Ukraine?
- What advantages or difficulties do you associate with integration into these organizations?
- **Perception of allies and opponents (15 minutes)**
- Who do you consider allies of Ukraine and why?
- How do you assess the support of Ukraine from Western countries?
- **Human rights and legal culture (15 min.)**
- How well do you know your legal rights as a citizen of Ukraine?
- What improvements do you think are necessary to protect human rights in Ukraine?
- How satisfied are you with the current state of human rights?

4. Conclusion (10 minutes)

- Summarize the main points discussed and ask participants if there are any final thoughts they would like to share.
- Thank participants for their contributions and provide information on how they can receive updates on the results of the study.

Post-discussion

- Transcription: The recording of the discussion will be transcribed verbatim within a week after the session for analysis.
- Data analysis: The facilitator and research team will analyse the transcriptions to identify key themes and ideas related to the research objectives.

Ethical considerations

- Ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants in all reports and publications.
- Allow participants to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.
- Provide resources or guidance for participants who may want to discuss sensitive topics raised during the discussion.

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Universidade Portucalense Cooperativa de Ensino Superior, CRL

Rua Dr. António Bernardino de Almeida, 541 - 4200-072 Porto

Email: upt@upt.pt