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BOOK REVIEW: FROM PERIPHERY TO PARTNERSHIP: UKRAINE'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract: The publication *From Periphery to Partnership: Ukraine's Socio-Economic Transformation*, edited by Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, Sławomir Kamosiński, Konrad Walerski and published in 2026, examines Ukraine's social, economic, and political transformation under wartime conditions. The book argues that Ukraine is moving from a position of dependence toward a partnership with Europe based on cooperation and integration. Russian aggression has accelerated modernisation processes, although they remain uneven and shaped by war, geopolitical pressures, and infrastructural destruction.

The authors present Ukraine as an increasingly important European actor, particularly in security and EU integration. The volume also highlights the role of migration, reforms, and every day wartime experiences. Overall, Ukraine is portrayed not only as a country in crisis but as a dynamic space of change, where war simultaneously drives modernisation and deeper European integration.

Keywords: Ukraine's transformation; wartime modernisation; forced migration; European integration; historical memory

The publication *From Periphery to Partnership: Ukraine's Socio-Economic Transformation*, edited by Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, Sławomir Kamosiński and Konrad Walerski (2026), constitutes volume 17 in the *Interdisciplinary Polish and Ukrainian Studies* series. The book is the outcome of the conference "Between Hope and Reality: Modernization and Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe," held on May 22–23, 2025, at the Viadrina Center for Polish and Ukrainian Studies (VCPU).

The articles included in the volume present interdisciplinary research spanning history, economics, political science, sociology, and cultural studies. The central focus of the analyses is the process of political and social transformation in Ukraine, examined in the context of the dynamic changes following the so-called Revolution of Dignity (Euromaidan).

The main premise of the publication is the editors' conviction that the development of contemporary Ukraine is shaped by complex factors of change that should not be described solely in terms of categories applied to countries such as Poland or Germany, such as "gentle transformation" or "shock therapy" (Jajeśniak-Quast, Kamosiński and Walerski, 2026: 11). Ukraine's transformation cannot be analysed as a simple, linear process of transition toward liberal democracy (Michalski and Kuczabski, 2014). These determining factors include, above all, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, initiated in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and subsequently escalating into a full-scale war after February 24, 2022.

The volume can be viewed as a natural continuation of the reflection initiated in *Ukrainian Society During Wartime: Grassroots Resilience as a Mechanism for Social Transformation* (Veira-Ramos, Ivashchenko-Stadnik and Liubyva, 2026). While the earlier publication focused primarily on societal resilience and the role of grassroots civic engagement in wartime, *From Periphery to Partnership* shifts the emphasis towards the implications of these processes for state modernisation, migration, and European integration. In this respect, the book broadens the existing debate on Ukraine's transformation by demonstrating that the consequences of war extend beyond the social sphere and encompass profound economic and institutional changes.

Since 2014, the processes of transformation and modernisation have taken place under conditions of military threat, which renders them simultaneously accelerated, directional, and uneven. After 2014, a pro-Western trajectory of Ukraine's development also crystallised across the social, political, and economic spheres. The uniqueness of this transformation further lies in the experience of mass migration, internal displacement, occupation, humanitarian crisis, cultural emancipation, and the redefinition of historical memory.

The transformations unfolding under conditions of crisis have provided a basis for several authors to investigate processes of change and adaptive practices in wartime settings. The titular concept of "peripherality" refers to a system of dependency in which Ukraine functioned as an object of policies, practices, and external evaluation, whereas "partnership"

denotes the active co-creation of the European order through integration, knowledge transfer, and social and institutional cooperation. The war has shifted Ukraine from the position of a buffer zone and periphery to the very centre of European debates on security and solidarity, European values, and wartime technologies and practices.

The first part of the volume—*Introduction to Comparative Studies of Ukraine and Poland*—includes the article *International Economic and Multidisciplinary Research on Ukraine and Poland in the Twenty-First Century: Comparative Content Analysis*, which constitutes an example of meta-research aimed at analysing the directions of scholarly development concerning Ukraine and Poland in the first quarter of the twenty-first century.

A key strength of this study lies in its application of quantitative content analysis to a large dataset (approximately 4,000 publications from 2001 to 2024), enabling the identification of long-term trends in academic discourse. At the same time, the adopted methodological approach and analytical assumptions entail several significant limitations that warrant critical reflection.

The article relies on the RePEc database (repec.org), which is primarily oriented toward economics and economic research; this may influence the final assessment of transformation processes and call into question the interdisciplinary scope declared in the introduction. RePEc is one of the world's largest free and open-access databases (including articles, books, and working papers) in the field of economics. Although this method allows for large-scale comparative analysis, it also leads to simplifications that reduce complex scholarly arguments to keywords.

At the same time, it should be emphasised that the results presented in the article possess considerable diagnostic value. The authors convincingly demonstrate clear differences in the structure of research on Poland and Ukraine. Despite the methodological and interpretative risks, the article constitutes a valuable study of research trends; however, its conclusions should be interpreted with caution.

Part 2, *Adaptation and the Outcomes of Forced Refugees from Ukraine*, addresses the highly important and timely issue of the forced migration of Ukrainian citizens following February 24, 2022, focusing on adaptive processes and their socio-economic consequences (Pogarska et al., 2023). The authors situate their work within the rapidly developing field of research on wartime migration, offering an analysis that encompasses both host countries and the potential implications for the post-war reconstruction of the country of origin. The section consists of three articles.

Among its major strengths are the timeliness of the topic and the social relevance of the analyses, which make this part not only cognitively valuable but also significant for public policy. The authors portray migrants as active participants in socio-economic life, moving away from their traditional representation as passive recipients of support. Such an approach aligns with contemporary research perspectives emphasizing the role of human capital and transnational networks. Noteworthy is also the comparative perspective on adaptation processes in Poland and Germany, which allows identification of different integration models—a more market-oriented one in Poland and a more institutional one in Germany. The authors also take into account a range of social factors and the multidimensional nature of the problem, including the situation of women with children, language barriers, and educational challenges.

At the same time, the text is not without significant limitations. The most important of these is the absence of a coherent and clearly defined theoretical framework, as well as the lack of references to classical theories of migration or integration. This constrains the potential for generalisation and makes it more difficult to situate the analysis within a broader academic discourse. The three contributions remain separate analyses, which is a common shortcoming of conference-based publications. Another issue is the uneven depth of analysis: the individual case studies differ in their level of detail, complicating the development of a fully coherent comparison. Moreover, the predominance of a descriptive approach means that the text tends to identify phenomena rather than explain their underlying mechanisms.

The third article in this section addresses war crimes committed by Russia against Ukrainian children. The analysis of crimes involving violations of children's rights is based on specific examples of deportation as well as physical and psychological violence, examined from the perspective of international security.

In conclusion, this part of the publication constitutes a valuable and up-to-date study of forced migration, making an important contribution to research on socio-economic transformation under wartime conditions. Its primary function is diagnostic, providing a foundation for further, more in-depth analyses.

Part 3, *Challenges of the Systemic Transformations in Wartime Ukraine*, focuses on the institutional and structural dimensions of Ukraine's transformation under conditions of war and European integration. Across three articles, the authors analyse the interrelations between armed conflict,

state reforms, and modernisation processes. War is presented as a factor of dual character: on the one hand, it destabilises the functioning of the state and the economy; on the other, it accelerates reforms and mobilises both society and institutions.

An important component of the analysis concerns institutional reforms in public administration, the legal system, and economic governance, which are uneven and, in many cases, fragmentary. Integration with the European Union constitutes a key normative framework for transformation, setting the direction for legislative and institutional change. The economy operates under conditions of crisis adaptation, combining recession and infrastructural losses with adjustment processes and the development of selected sectors. Since 2014, Ukraine has implemented approximately 50 reforms that have significantly reshaped its political and economic systems toward alignment with European Union norms. The growing role of civil society is also emphasised, as it compensates for institutional shortcomings and actively co-creates the transformation process. Consequently, Ukraine's transformation remains strongly dependent on external factors, including relations with the EU and international support.

One of the main strengths of this section lies in its ability to capture the complexity of Ukraine's transformation. Similar processes have been discussed by A. Wilson (2023). The authors effectively present transformation as a nonlinear, multilevel process deeply conditioned by the wartime and geopolitical context. Particularly noteworthy is the integration of institutional, economic, and social perspectives, which together provide a comprehensive view of transformation as a systemic process.

At the same time, the analysis is not without limitations. Most notably, there is a lack of precise empirical data, leading some conclusions to remain rather general. Another issue is the insufficient operationalisation of key concepts such as transformation and modernisation, which makes their analytical application more difficult.

Part 4, *The Experience of Migration as a Source of Post-War Economic and Social Modernisation*, comprises two articles and offers a multidimensional analysis of the role of migration in Ukraine's transformation under wartime conditions and in the perspective of post-war reconstruction. The authors of this section: Olga Nosova (2026) and Carolin Leutloff-Grandits (2026) propose a reinterpretation of migration that goes beyond its traditional understanding as merely a consequence of conflict. In their approach, migration emerges as a potentially productive socio-economic process that can become a key driver of state and societal modernisation.

The central premise of this section is that migration flows generated by war are not solely a crisis phenomenon but may constitute an important source of economic, social, and cultural capital. In this sense, migration is embedded in broader transformation processes, encompassing structural changes in the economy, the labour market, institutions, and international relations ('Socio-economic impacts...', 2024). The authors emphasise that migration experiences – both at the individual and collective levels – lead to the development of new skills, social networks, and forms of transnational cooperation that may be utilised in Ukraine's reconstruction and European integration.

In Olga Nosova's article, migration is analysed primarily from an economic and demographic perspective. The author highlights the ambivalent nature of this phenomenon, presenting both its positive and negative consequences. Among the key benefits are remittances, which constitute a significant share of Ukraine's GDP, as well as increased household incomes and the transfer of human capital in the form of skills acquired abroad by migrants. Migrants also contribute to the development of host economies – for instance, in Poland, their presence has been associated with GDP growth and increased consumer demand.

At the same time, Nosova (2026) underscores serious risks associated with migration, such as brain drain, the outflow of young, skilled workers, and the exacerbation of demographic challenges in the country of origin. She also points to a decline in the number of enterprises and employment in Ukraine, which may weaken the country's long-term economic potential. Migration also has social consequences, including weakened family ties, difficulties with adaptation, and psychological stress, particularly among women and children. The author argues that a key challenge for the Ukrainian state is to create conditions conducive to return migration and to leverage migrants' potential within the country. This includes ensuring security, stable economic conditions, and employment opportunities corresponding to migrants' qualifications. It also requires investment in education, training, and skills development, as well as the implementation of a coherent, long-term migration policy that integrates economic and social objectives.

Carolyn Leutloff-Grandits (2026), in turn, broadens the analysis by incorporating an anthropological and comparative perspective, drawing on Kosovo as an example of a post-conflict state. She focuses on migrants as entrepreneurs who play a crucial role in economic reconstruction. In her account, migrants are not merely beneficiaries of humanitarian aid but ac-

tive economic actors who, through investment, knowledge transfer, and the creation of transnational networks, contribute to the development of their country of origin. Particular importance is attached to the social and emotional ties linking migrants to their homeland, as these bonds motivate them to invest and engage in reconstruction processes. Leutloff-Grandits also highlights generational differences: the first generation of migrants tends to concentrate on rebuilding basic infrastructure and satisfying fundamental economic needs, whereas subsequent generations introduce innovation, develop service and technology sectors, and integrate local markets into the global economy. In this way, migrants become a “bridge” between their country of origin and international markets, particularly in the context of European Union integration.

Part 4 stands out for its strong interdisciplinary approach, combining economic analysis with social and cultural reflection. This perspective enables the capture of the complexity of modernisation processes and underscores the importance of non-economic factors such as identity, social ties, and lived experience.

In conclusion, Part 4 constitutes an important contribution to research on contemporary migration processes and the transformation of conflict-affected states. Its greatest value lies in its shift of perspective: migration is no longer viewed solely as a humanitarian problem but is instead analysed as a potential instrument of development and modernisation.

Part 5, *Memory and Cultural Practices in Times of War*, provides an important conclusion to the volume by shifting attention from economic and institutional processes to the cultural, symbolic, and mnemonic dimensions of Ukraine’s transformation. In contrast to the preceding sections, which focus primarily on economic, migration, and political mechanisms, this part presents modernisation as a process also rooted in historical narratives and everyday social practices.

The central premise of this section is that Ukraine’s transformation cannot be analysed solely through economic indicators or institutional reforms. The authors demonstrate that cultural and symbolic changes—such as the reinterpretation of history and the transformation of everyday practices—are equally crucial for understanding modernisation processes. War functions here as an accelerating factor that not only destroys existing structures but also compels their redefinition at the level of meanings, values, and narratives.

Felix Schmidtke’s article (2026) focuses on the analysis of Ukrainian interpretations of their own past, particularly of the Soviet period (1956–

1985). The author examines the tension between conformist and oppositional narratives that coexisted during the USSR and are now subject to renewed reinterpretation. In his view, historical memory is not a static resource but a dynamic field of negotiation in which different visions of national identity compete. In the context of war, this process intensifies: the experience of Russian aggression leads to a clear rejection of imperial narratives and to the strengthening of a national narrative emphasising Ukraine's distinctiveness and sovereignty. Schmidtke argues that the reinterpretation of the past serves not only a cognitive function but also political and social ones. In this sense, memory becomes a tool of modernisation, enabling the redefinition of Ukraine's place in Europe and the construction of a new state identity.

The second article – by Ilya Sogolov and Tatiana Cherepnina (2026) – offers a seemingly micro-social analysis of cycling culture in Kharkiv before and after 2022. However, this specific perspective proves highly valuable for understanding broader transformation processes. The authors demonstrate that everyday practices, such as cycling, can serve both as indicators and instruments of urban modernisation. Under wartime conditions, transport infrastructure is disrupted or destroyed, leading to adaptive changes in mobility patterns. In this context, the bicycle emerges as a symbol of both resilience and social flexibility. The analysis of cycling culture shows that modernisation is not solely a top-down, planned process but often takes on a bottom-up and spontaneous character.

Part 5 is distinguished by a strong interdisciplinary approach that combines historiography, memory studies, the sociology of culture, and the analysis of everyday urban practices. This enables the authors to demonstrate that Ukraine's transformation is a multi-level process encompassing not only institutions and the economy, but also the symbolic and social spheres. A shared theme of both articles is that war acts as a catalyst for change, compelling society to redefine its past and present.

Another strength of this section lies in its capacity to capture long-term processes. The analysis of historical memory shows that contemporary transformations are rooted in past experiences and that their interpretation requires consideration of historical context. A limitation of this section, however, is the lack of thematic and methodological coherence. Although both contributions are insightful, they appear relatively distant from one another in terms of subject matter.

In conclusion, *From Periphery to Partnership* is a publication of significant scholarly value, presenting Ukraine's transformation as a complex, multidimensional process shaped profoundly by wartime conditions. The articles include abstracts in Polish, German, English, and Ukrainian. The greatest strength of the volume lies in its interdisciplinary character and its effort to capture multiple levels of analysis—from institutions and the economy to culture and social experience. At the same time, the volume exhibits the typical limitations of conference-based publications, including a lack of full theoretical coherence, uneven quality among individual contributions, and the predominance of descriptive over explanatory approaches.

Despite these shortcomings, the publication constitutes an important contribution to research on contemporary Ukraine and on transformation processes under conditions of conflict. It demonstrates that modernisation is not a simple process of adaptation to Western models, but rather a complex, multi-layered phenomenon in which political, economic, social, and cultural factors all play crucial roles. In this sense, the volume not only diagnoses the current state of transformations but also opens new avenues for research and indicates directions for further reflection on Ukraine's future in Europe.

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