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EUROPEAN VALUES AND EFFECTIVE BUSINESS INTERACTION

Abstract. This paper intends to understand the organisational values in different countries across Europe, using the Hofstede 6-D model, and apply them to realise the best strategies for effective interactions between Ukrainians and the rest of Europe, regarding the European Union commitment to accept Ukraine as a member in the future. This research compares the national values and determines clusters of countries, which have similar values regarding organisational action and structure, and searches for any correlation between clusters' values and the countries' positions in the rank of European Chamber for businesses. Regarding the results, the paper establishes which countries are culturally more similar to Ukraine, and also which values are predominant in the most successful countries. Finally, the paper points to a trending set of ideas and organisational values that Ukrainian businesses and organisations must pay attention to within the cultural framework of their future European Union partners.

Keywords: Ukraine; European integration; European values; organisational culture; Hofstede.

Introduction. June 17th 2022 the European Commission recommended that Ukraine should be given the perspective to become a member of the European Union. The statement included the note that Ukraine should be granted candidate status "on the understanding that steps are taken in a number of areas" [1]. This has become another significant milestone along the long and hard way of the Ukrainian nation to rejoin its European family. Ukrainians proved their commitment to European values first, during Euromaidan protests during 2013/14 [2] and then during an unprovoked and unjustified russian aggression. Since 1 September 2017 Ukraine has been granted the Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) that can be considered as a gesture of support and trust from the EU.

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Joining the European Union, one of the slogans of which is "united in diversity" [3], requires from Ukrainians strong cross-cultural competences. With 27 member countries and dozens of authentic cultures within national ones, the European Union is truly diverse. It is very important to find common language with potential business partners considering their cultural backgrounds. To deal effectively with diversity companies need to have a strategic approach to cross-cultural business communication [4].

Successful business interaction with colleagues, clients, partners or investors representing different cultures requires developed cultural intelligence [5]. Among the key concepts providing theoretical backgrounds for cross-cultural interaction, we should mention the Hofstede 6-D model, Lewis model and project GLOBE. While Lewis [6] classifies national cultures as linear-active, multi-active and reactive ones considering people's values, habits and norms of behaviour, Hofstede [7] and GLOBE [8] approaches include description of different cultural dimensions.

The Hofstede 6-D model is still probably the most popular one, and it is widely used by scholars and practitioners. It includes six key cultural dimensions that help to understand and distinguish national cultures. These dimensions are the following: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence [7]. Regular research followed by the appearance of the quantitative scores for numerous national cultures make the Hofstede model a very convenient tool for companies planning to expand their businesses to foreign markets. Exploring new cultures using the data from the Hofstede centre [9] helps to adjust one's communication style to the style of his or her new business partners from abroad.

Values shape how people think about the world they live in and vice-versa. Following the phenomenological concept of life-world [10], people gain understanding of the world according to and resulting from their lived experiences and shared information. Culture is the result of collective accumulated and solidified knowledge, and an intersubjective intertwined construction of historical layers and present living experiences [11].

In an anthropological sense, culture can be understood as a matrix of values that offers agency to the individual rather than a structural shell that harbour human beings within a society [12]. Likewise, inside organisations, there is a specific cultural environment that configures some values and normative aspects of the daily working life. The shared codes of behaviour and beliefs towards work, business and organisation are an important part of the organisational culture.

Because organisations are inserted in societies framed by regional and national cultures, organisational culture almost always reflects the values from the broader culture surrounding the organisations, albeit the global environment and the worldly network that brings people and their ideas closer together.

In nowadays global environment and economics, companies are seeking to develop their business on an international level. However, the situation and circumstances for developing and doing business can differ from culture to culture, from country to country. The world is quickly becoming a single global economy or

"global village," caused in large part by the rapid advances in technology, specifically information technology [13] and culture has a direct bearing on the business success and development. Thus, business need to develop their practice in a way to be more adjusted to these cultural differences. Especially in times of economic crisis, nations constantly seek new ways and ideas to facilitate their economic rejuvenation.

There is now, however, a consensus that culture has an influence on business that may be significant, stating that culture represents an important determinant of business and firm performance [14]. Being the business world tied into a global marketplace, open to every people and nation, the cross-cultural dimensions and cultural dynamics became inevitable dimensions to look upon, when researching or partaking in global economics and business. Any lack of understanding about these dynamics of culture can ultimately lead to negative business outcomes [13] or analytical misunderstandings, the latter considering academic research like the one presented on this paper.

In this study we focus on the perspectives of deeper integration of Ukraine and Ukrainian companies into the European Union business and cultural environment. Our goal is to explore the usage of the Hofstede model while preparing for cross-cultural business interaction with partners from the EU.

Methods. Effective cross-cultural business communication with European partners requires from Ukrainian businessmen some adjustment of their cultural patterns. In our study we focus on different clusters of the European Union countries based on their cultural peculiarities and on their economic achievements. There are numerous well-recognised global competitiveness indexes like World Economic Forum (WEF) index, the Institute of Management development index (IMD), Doing business index (DBI) etc [15]. While using the Hofstede 6-D model for shaping up cultural clusters we have selected the EuCham index to identify most economically successful national models.

The European Chamber ranks European countries considering their business environment. Ranking main indicator called the EuCham score is calculated using two parameters: the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business score (EoDB) and Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI). The EuCham score of each country is reflected on a scale from 0 to 100, with 0 representing the lowest performance and 100 representing the best. The EuCham score is the average of both indicators (EoDB and CPI scores with 50 % weight each). Countries with high scores are more favourable for doing business in, and those with the low scores are least favourable for it [16].

Cluster analysis helps get a deeper insight into the data by grouping similar objects together in a group or cluster [17]. K-means clustering is one of the oldest and most widely used clustering algorithms and is a "prototype-based, simple partitional clustering algorithm that attempts to find K non-overlapping clusters" [17]. In the clustering process, first, the user specifies a number of clusters. The process then starts by randomly initializing K centroids. According to Wu [17] every point in the data is assigned to the closest centroid and the initial clusters are made. A centroid is typically the mean of the cluster members. The centroid is then updated depending on the members of that cluster and this process is repeated until no point changes cluster.

A K-means algorithm was used for clustering the data on the six dimensions of the Hofstede scale. The script was written in Python 3 and using the SciKit-learn library was used. SciKit-learn is a Python module containing a wide range of machine learning algorithms (including K-means clustering) [18].

The data was first standardized with a Standard scaler by calculating the z score (Eq. 1).

$$z = (x - \mu) / s \tag{1}$$

where is the mean of the training sample and is the standard deviation.

The scaled feature scores were then used in a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) that was used to reduce the reduce number of interrelated variables while retaining as much as possible of the variation [19]. This is done by transforming the variables into a set of new variables, named Principal Components which are uncorrelated and ordered in descending order of variation explained so that the first few retain most of the variation of all the original data [19].
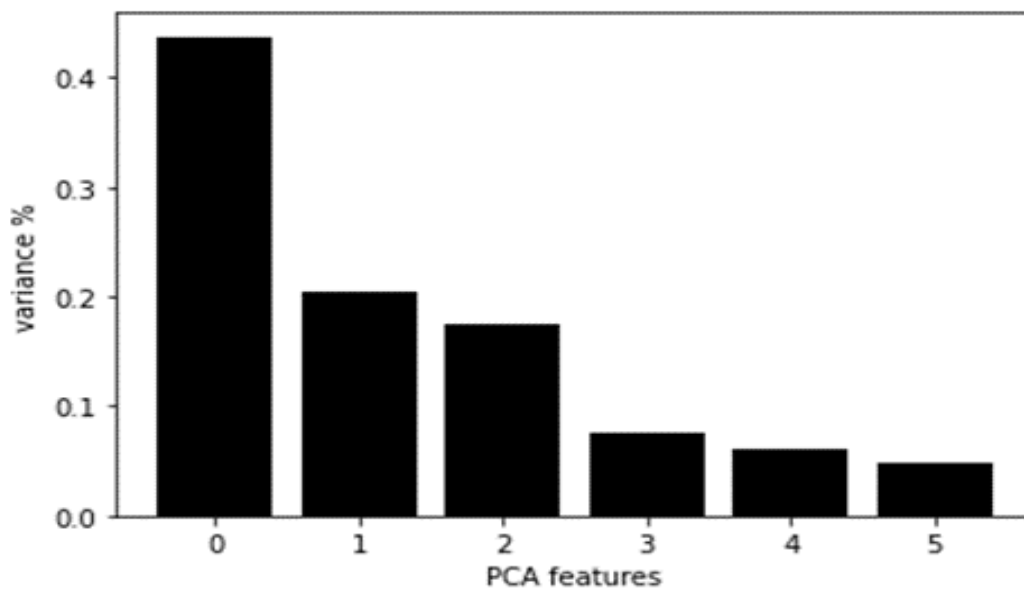

Figure 1. Resulting features of the PCA analysis

Source: by authors.

The total explained variance by the first three components is 81.5 %. After the first three components the explained variance drops off (Fig 1.).

The resulting components were used in the K-Means clustering. The K-means clustering algorithm requires the number of clusters as a parameter. To determine the

optimal number of clusters, two methods were used: the elbow and the silhouette method.

The elbow method implies running the algorithm multiple times, with different numbers of clusters and plotting the cost function (sum of squares due to error – SSE in this case) for different values of k [20]. As the number of cluster increases, the distortion will decrease and the instances will be closer to their centroids [20]. The value of k where the improvement declines the most is named the elbow and where the optimal number of clusters is considered [20]. Using this method an optimal of 4 or 5 clusters (Fig. 2) was considered.
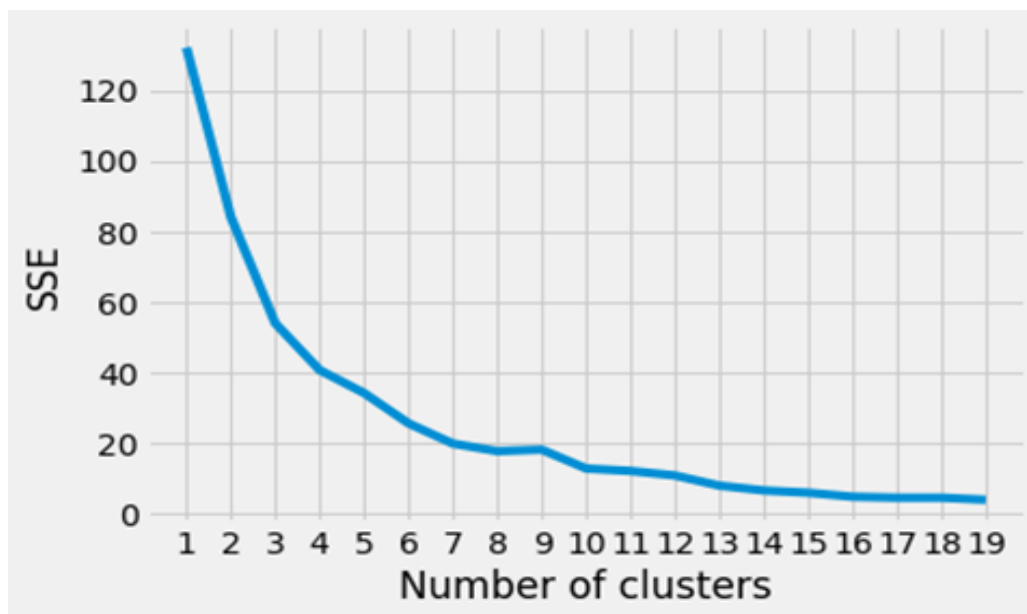

Figure 2. The elbow method for identifying the ideal number of clusters

Source: by authors

The silhouette method analyzes the silhouette coefficients for each number of clusters. The silhouette coefficients are a measure of amount of clustering structure discovered by the algorithm and they are dimensionless and at most equal to 1 [21]. The best score (highest value) is indicative of the ideal number of clusters [22]. This method indicated the optimal is 4 clusters (Fig. 3).

By combining the results of the two methods, the ideal number of clusters that was chosen is 4.

The K-means algorithm was run with 4 clusters. The algorithm was run 10 times with different centroid seeds for a maximum of 300 iterations for each run. The obtained inertia was 40.72.

Results. The resulting clusters were plotted using Plotly in a 3D scatter plot (Fig 4).
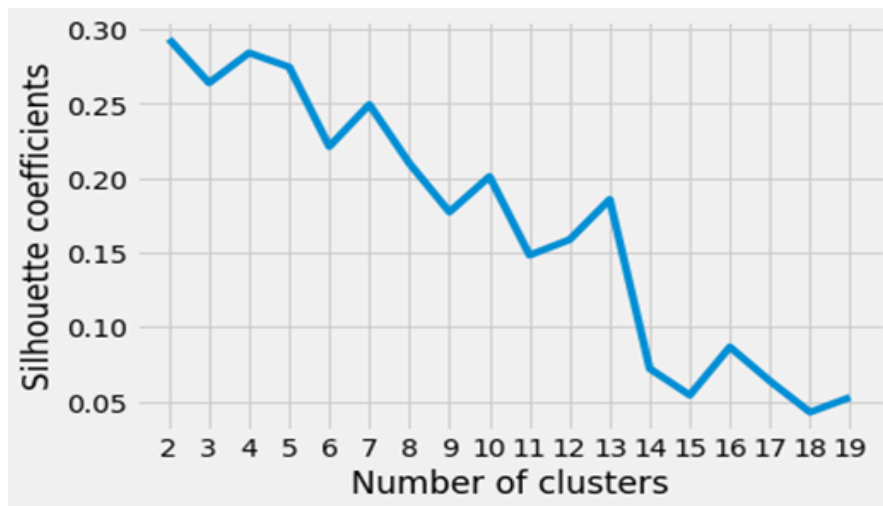
Figure 3. The silhouette method for identifying the ideal number of clusters
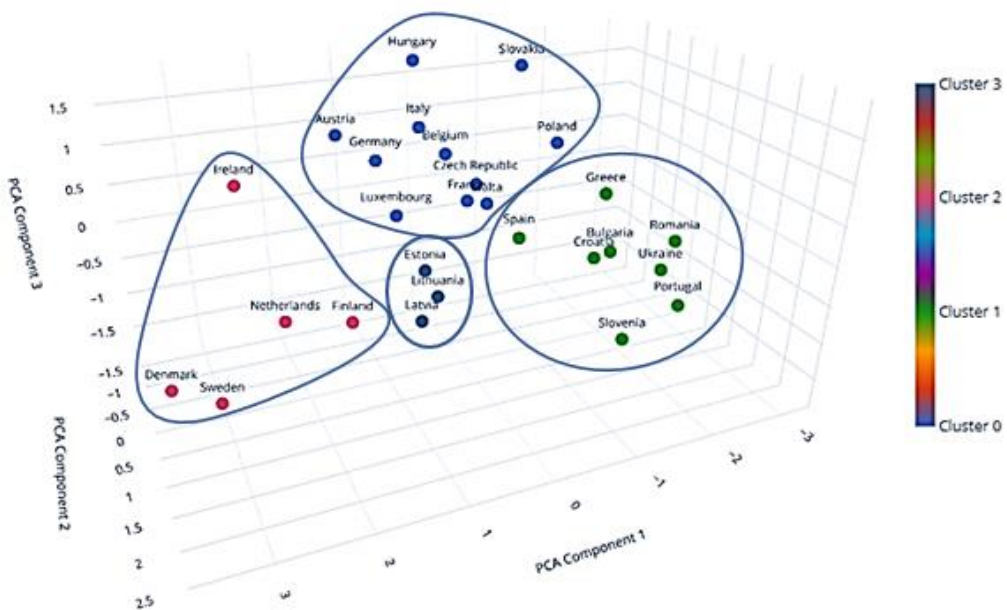
Source: by authors

Figure 4. Resulting clusters after K-means clustering

Source: by authors

The four clusters are easily distinguishable as being: 1) Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden; 2) Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Poland, Czech Republic, Italy, Slovakia, Malta, Hungary; 3) Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania; 4) Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Slovenia, Spain, Portugal.

Ukraine's cultural characteristics correspond to the cultural cluster of Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Slovenia, Spain and Portugal. Being relatively close geographically to Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia and Greece, Ukraine has had more interactions with these countries and cultures throughout history. At the same time, Portugal and Spain, representing most Western part of Europe, belong to Mediterranean cultures as well as Greece [23] and their contacts with Ukraine used to be comparatively infrequent.

Table 1

**COUNTRIES THAT ARE MEMBERS
OF THE SAME CLUSTER IN DESCENDING SCORE ORDER**

Country	Cluster	Score	Powerdistance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long term orientation	Indulgence	Rank
Germany	0	79.85	35	67	66	65	83	40	7
Austria	0	77.85	11	55	79	70	60	63	10
Belgium	0	75	65	75	54	94	82	57	15
Luxembourg	0	74.8	40	60	50	70	64	56	13
France	0	72.9	68	71	43	86	63	48	14
Poland	0	67.2	68	60	64	93	38	29	20
Czech Republic	0	66.15	57	58	57	74	70	29	23
Italy	0	62.95	50	76	70	75	61	30	26
Slovakia	0	62.8	100	52	100	51	77	28	25
Malta	0	60.05	56	59	47	96	47	66	28
Hungary	0	58.7	46	80	88	82	58	31	32
Spain	1	69.95	57	51	42	86	48	44	21
Portugal	1	69.25	63	27	31	99	28	33	17
Slovenia	1	68.25	71	27	19	88	49	48	22
Croatia	1	60.3	73	33	40	80	58	33	29
Romania	1	58.65	90	30	42	90	52	20	30
Greece	1	58.2	60	35	57	100	45	50	36
Bulgaria	1	57.5	70	30	40	85	69	16	35

End of Table 1

Country	Cluster	Score	Powerdistance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long term orientation	Indulgence	Rank
Ukraine	1	**50.1**	92	25	27	95	86	14	46
Denmark	2	**86.15**	18	74	16	23	35	70	1
Sweden	2	**83.5**	31	71	5	29	53	78	3
Finland	2	**83.1**	33	63	26	59	38	57	4
Netherlands	2	**79.05**	38	80	14	53	67	68	8
Ireland	2	**76.8**	28	70	68	35	24	65	12
Estonia	3	**77.3**	40	60	30	60	82	16	11
Lithuania	3	**70.8**	42	60	19	65	82	16	18
Latvia	3	**68.15**	44	70	9	63	69	13	19

Source: by authors using data from European Chamber, Hofstede-insights.

While Ukrainian culture has some significant similarities with the cultures of the analysed cluster, there are several important differences. Ukraine has the highest score of the Power Distance dimension among the countries mentioned above. It means that Ukrainians, in general, tend to be more hierarchical that can become an obstacle during business contacts with partners representing more egalitarian cultures. Even in the same cluster we can notice Portugal, Spain and Greece with significantly lower PDI scores.

Table 1

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS SCORES OF THE CLUSTER 4 COUNTRIES

Country	Cultural dimension scores					
	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO	IVR
Bulgaria	70	30	40	85	69	16
Croatia	73	33	40	80	58	33
Greece	60	35	57	100	45	50
Slovenia	71	27	19	88	49	48
Spain	63	27	31	99	28	33
Portugal	57	51	42	86	48	44
Ukraine	**92**	**25**	**27**	**95**	**86**	**14**

Source: Hofstede-insights.

Ukraine is one of the most feminine countries in the Cluster 4 with only Slovenia having lower MAS score. Thus, Ukrainian businessmen should be ready for a more confident, "tough" style of negotiations from their partners representing more masculine societies, e.g., Greece. Ukrainian national culture also tends to be more long-term oriented and restrained. While long-term orientation cultures are more pragmatic in a business context, being restrained means that Ukrainians rely on social norms and standards of behaviour more than their partners from more indulgent cultures.

Comparing Ukraine with the European countries having rather similar cultural characteristics it should be noted that all of them have significantly better positions in the European Chamber ranking. As the EuCham score calculations include using the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business score (EoDB) and Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) it is clear that Ukraine so far is struggling to reach the scores of its EU neighbours. Considering cultural similarities, one of the reasons of such gap is the fact that Spain (joined the EU in 1986), Portugal (1986), Greece (1981), Croatia (2013), Slovenia (2004) and Bulgaria (2007) are the members of EU – an institution stimulating many positive changes in legislation, economy and social sphere. This is why countries mentioned above had a chance to implement numerous good practices earlier than Ukraine with the help of the EU.

Among top-10 European Union countries in the European Chamber ranking list some cultural similarities have been noticed. Though, all of the mentioned countries have absolutely unique cultures, it should be said that several cultural dimensions have rather similar meanings. Nine out of ten most successful countries have rather low PDI score. Only Belgium has PDI higher that 50 (65) while the rest of the countries have the score below 50 which means that their societies are rather egalitarian. Austria, Denmark and Ireland have the lowest PDI scores in this group.

Table 2

TOP-10 EU COUNTRIES IN THE EUROPEAN CHAMBER RANKING

EuCham Rank	Country	EuCham Score	Cultural dimension score					
			PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO	IVR
1	Denmark	86	18	74	16	23	35	70
2	Sweden	84	31	71	5	29	53	78
4	Finland	83	33	63	26	59	38	57
7	Germany	80	35	67	66	65	83	40
8	Netherlands	79	38	80	14	53	67	68
10	Austria	78	11	55	79	70	60	63
11	Estonia	77	40	60	30	60	82	16
12	Ireland	77	28	70	68	35	24	65
13	Belgium	75	65	75	54	94	82	57
14	Luxembourg	75	40	60	50	70	64	56

Sources: European Chamber, Hofstede-insights.

All countries have individualistic societies with Austria having the lowest individualism score (55) and Netherlands – the highest (80). At the same time some of the national cultures are masculine and some are feminine. While Austria, Germany and Ireland are some of the classic masculine societies, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Netherlands represent traditional feminine cultures. Such differences illustrate that it is possible to be economically successful with disregard to this dimension score.

Similar situation is with uncertainty avoidance. While the societies in Finland and Sweden treat situations of uncertainty as something normal, people in Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg prefer to see clear perspectives of their future and in business context in particular. All ten countries have different approaches to long-term orientation. While the societies in Germany, Estonia and Belgium are more pragmatic, Ireland, Denmark and Sweden tend to be more short-term oriented.

Eight out of ten cultures are rather indulgent. Only Germany (IVR=40) and Estonia (IVR=16) have more restrain cultures. The low score in Estonia differs this country significantly from its Nordic neighbours like Sweden (78) and Finland (57). There are obvious historical reasons for such differences, but in general it should be noted that the majority of economically successful European countries have indulgent cultures.

Thus, we can notice that some of the Hofstede dimensions, such as Masculinity, Uncertainty avoidance and Long-term orientation, appeared to be not significantly important regarding economic success of the European Union countries. At the same time, the majority of the top-10 EU countries have high Individualism score, low Power Distance score and high Indulgence score.

Ukrainian culture is on the opposite side having high power distance, low individualism and low indulgence scores. However, Hofstede model provides very general picture [24] and modern globally oriented Ukrainian companies and professionals might have significantly different personal scores which makes them more alike to their European partners.

Conclusions. Effective business interactions in a globalised world require strong cross-cultural competences from all parties. While it might be easier to interact with partners with similar cultural background, the diverse business landscape offers different challenges. General understanding of other cultures, such as using the Hofstede 6-D model, serves as a good basis, but preparation for business negotiations requires deeper research.

Striving to join the EU, Ukraine needs to be ready for more frequent interactions on different levels with representatives of numerous European cultures. As it was highlighted in our study there are several cultural clusters in the European Union regarding the Hofstede cultural dimensions. Ukrainian businessmen might feel more comfortable dealing with partners from Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Slovenia, Spain and Portugal due to numerous cultural similarities. On the other hand, some significant differences exist between all of the mentioned above countries.

Contacts with representatives of other cultural clusters require understanding of their culture and some adjustments of the communication style from the Ukrainian side. Being more hierarchical, Ukrainians should be more flexible dealing with partners representing countries with low Power distance score (e.g., Denmark or

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Austria). Collectivistic Ukrainians have to adjust their behaviours and communication style to more individualistic ones of their partners from the Netherlands, France or Lithuania. It is important to be open to innovative and risky projects from the businessmen representing societies with low Uncertainty avoidance scores like Denmark, Sweden or Ireland. Being a feminine nation, Ukrainians need to learn to negotiate effectively with partners from more masculine cultures such as German or Polish. As a long-term oriented, pragmatic people, Ukrainians should be prepared to feel comfortable dealing with more short-term oriented nations like Portugal or Finland. And, of course, it is important to be more relaxed, less restrained at nego-tiations with partners from much more indulgent cultures like Sweden or Denmark.

Due to the russian aggression and a full-scale invasion to Ukraine the nation found itself in circumstances when fundamental cultural values might change much faster than under normal conditions. At the same time, it should be mentioned that new generations of Ukrainians are already very open to cross-cultural interactions [25] and their integration into European social and business environment might be very smooth. Another factor that is enlightening the European integration of Ukraine is an unprecedent support from all European Union nations to Ukrainians at the tragic moment of their history with the majority Europeans are welcoming the idea of Ukraine joining the EU [26].

European integration is a long and complicated process of harmonization of political, social, economic, legal and even cultural practices with the European norms and standards and Ukraine has done a lot of steps already [27]. Ukrainian companies are more western or global oriented now especially after the deep and comprehensive free trade area (DCFTA) between Ukraine and the European Union came into force on the 1st of January 2016 [28]. Thus, strong cross-cultural communication strategy has become essential for successful interaction with partners from the European Union. In the future studies it would be reasonable to develop specific strategies for different clusters, countries and regions of the EU. Moreover, effective cross-cultural business interaction requires exploring not only national or regional culture, but also organisational and even personal characteristics of partners.

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ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКІ ЦІННОСТІ ТА ЕФЕКТИВНА БІЗНЕС-ВЗАЄМОДІЯ

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Анотація. Стаття має на меті виявити організаційні цінності в різних країнах Європи, використовуючи 6-D модель Хофстеде, і застосувати їх для реалізації найкращих стратегій ефективної взаємодії між українцями та рештою Європи, зважаючи на зобов'язання Європейського Союзу надати Україні членство у майбутньому. У цьому дослідженні порівнюються національні цінності та визначаються кластери країн, які мають подібні цінності щодо організаційної діяльності та структури, а також виявляється кореляція між цінностями кластерів та позиціями країн у рейтингу Європейської палати бізнесу. Стосовно результатів, у роботі встановлено, які країни культурно більше схожі на Україну, а також які цінності переважають у найуспішніших країнах. Нарешті, вказується на набір актуальних ідей та організаційних цінностей, на які повинні звернути увагу українські підприємства та організації в межах культурних рамок їхніх майбутніх партнерів з Європейського Союзу..

Ключові слова: Україна; євроінтеграція; європейські цінності; організаційна культура; Хофстеде.