



# Ukraine

**Assessment:** Fair

**Trend:** ↔

**Capital:** Kiev

**Type of Government:** Republic

**Chief of State:** President Leonid D. Kuchma  
(since 19 July 1994)

**Minister of Foreign Affairs:** Anatoliy Zlenko

**Population:** 48,760,474

**Human Development Index Ranking 2002:** 80

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ukraine has a **fair** record of support for democracy abroad. As it struggles to overcome its own democratic shortcomings, Ukraine has made modest progress in promoting international democracy, primarily by adopting international conventions and treaties, and by participating in operations and missions of the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). At the same time, Ukraine has responded poorly to overthrows of democratically-elected governments, has generally been reluctant to condemn the manipulation of electoral processes, and compiled a track record of cozy relationships with entrenched dictatorships.

The country's disappointing record with respect to support for democracy abroad is a function of a complex and evolving domestic environment, including severe economic decline, lack of civic democratic traditions, weak rule of law, and widespread corruption. A review of the past decade indicates that when economic interests are pitted against democratic principles, Ukrainian governments have most often stressed economic and other strategic considerations. Participation in UN peacekeeping missions, however laudable, was motivated more by a desire to integrate into Western structures rather than any commitment to democracy building abroad. Democracy promotion has not been an explicit goal of Ukrainian foreign policy.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

One of the largest nations in Europe, Ukraine is a relative newcomer to international politics. It became an independent nation following a referendum in December 1991. As in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, Ukraine's pro-independence movement consisted of a loose coalition of nationalists (People's Movement or *Rukh*), students, and labor unions (its own version of *Solidarity*). Together, these groups advocated national revival, democracy, and, following the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, de-nuclearization of the state. Unfortunately, Ukraine lacked strong democratic traditions, clear support from the West for its independence, and governing experience.

The new Ukrainian government faced a number of additional pressures, including the traditional split in Ukraine's population between the Russophile east and Russophobe west, Russian and Romanian calls for redrawing national borders, and intense U.S. pressure to give up nuclear weapons based on its soil. In response to these pressures, the novice Ukrainian government made internal cohesion, territorial integrity, and stability its top priorities.<sup>1</sup> It performed quite well on all these fronts, and drew praise from the European Union for its commitment to domestic and regional stability, for negotiating border agreements with all neighboring nations, and for becoming the first country in the world to voluntarily relinquish possession of all nuclear arms, in this case Moscow-controlled weapons in Ukraine following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Ukraine's solid international performance was not, however, matched by equally successful internal development. From 1991 to 1999 Ukraine's GDP fell by almost three-quarters as social problems deepened and multiplied. The privatization of state-owned assets was slow and, instead of creating a strong middle class, gave rise to a powerful group of industrial oligarchs. There was little progress on establishing the rule of law



or undertaking judicial reform, and rampant corruption earned Ukraine the sad distinction of being named one of the world's most corrupt countries by Transparency International.

Democratic political reform also lagged. After an initial "thaw," Ukrainian governments gradually tightened their grip on the media, and by 2000 the Kuchma Administration had made curbs on free expression a feature of everyday life. Many Ukrainians came to believe that Kuchma was linked to the gruesome murder of prominent, anti-corruption crusading journalist Georgiy Gongadze. OSCE observer missions monitoring Ukraine's 1998 parliamentary and 1999 presidential elections reported widespread irregularities accompanied by intimidation of candidates and abuse of public office. The European Union and influential groups such as Amnesty International criticized Ukraine's weak human rights record, and called attention to allegations of torture and ill treatment of persons in police custody.

Ukraine's vigorous efforts to integrate into trans-European political and security structures was sometimes impeded by struggles between the executive branch and parliament ("Verkhovna Rada") for dominance in setting foreign policy. Successive presidents pursued closer cooperation with NATO (through Partnership for Peace), eventual membership in the EU,<sup>2</sup> and "pragmatic" (i.e. economically beneficial) relations with neighboring countries. But eagerness to join the West did not translate into a foreign policy that made promotion of democracy and human rights a priority.

### **RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS**

Ukraine's reaction to the October 1999 overthrow of the democratically-elected government of Pakistani President Nawaz Sharif by General Pervez Musharraf was relatively mild. Two days after the coup, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry issued a statement expressing the hope that events would develop in "a peaceful, democratic manner" and would not "undermine regional stability."<sup>3</sup> The Ministry did not categorically condemn the coup or call for downgrading political, economic, or cultural ties. Instead it emphasized that the "experience of cooperation in different fields acquired by the two countries will allow for further development of traditionally friendly relations between Ukraine and Pakistan."<sup>4</sup> In the absence of internationally-imposed sanctions, Ukraine saw no reason for

destabilizing its relations with Pakistan. This reaction can be explained in part by Ukraine's financial interests. In 1996, Ukraine's state-run Malyshev industrial plant in Kharkiv won a contract from Pakistan to produce more than 300 modern battle tanks at a total cost of some \$650 million. This was Ukraine's largest defense contract since independence, and promised to keep afloat both the Malyshev plant and associated enterprises.

### **RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

Ukraine's indifferent response to the manipulation of electoral processes abroad has reflected its own weak record on internal democracy. This is particularly evident in the cases of Kazakhstan and Belarus. Ukrainian monitors participated in observer missions for presidential elections in Kazakhstan that were described by OSCE as failing to meet international standards. However, the Government of Ukraine did not subscribe to the mission's conclusions. Instead, President Kuchma sent a telegram to his Kazakhstani counterpart, Nursultan Nazarbayev, congratulating him on his victory and lauding his contribution to the country's development, including democratization.<sup>5</sup>

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institution and Human Rights (ODIHR) similarly faulted the October 2000 parliamentary elections in Belarus for being neither free nor fair. Ukrainian officials all but dismissed the finding, stating that Belarus' new deputies had the ability to carry out their traditional legislative function<sup>6</sup> and that the parliament's "legitimate authority should be acknowledged by both those who won and those who lost."<sup>7</sup> This response reversed more progressive sentiments expressed by the Foreign Ministry a year earlier, following clashes between democratic opposition and police in Minsk. Foreign Ministry officials were then quoted as saying, "Ukraine believes that under any circumstances the internal political problems should be solved by way of political dialogue, according to international obligations in the area of human rights and basic freedoms, in particular freedom of speech and freedom of assembly."<sup>8</sup>

By 2001, Ukraine's already poor record in not opposing electoral manipulation had deteriorated further. An OSCE/ODIHR team monitoring the September presidential elections in Belarus issued a report that bluntly criticized the inadequacies of the electoral process, weak legislative framework, censorship of the independent print media,



intimidation of political activists and a campaign environment seriously disadvantageous for opposition candidates. Yet, Ukraine's observers with the OSCE team openly disagreed with the mission's report. Indeed, Natalya Vitrenko, head of the Ukrainian monitors and the leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, called a press conference in which she said that President Lukashenko was "worthy of his electoral triumph," and that European institutions needed "protection from charlatans who pursue a policy of pressure, in particular against the former Soviet republics."<sup>9</sup> Her statements were echoed by President Kuchma, who described Lukashenko's victory as "convincing" and one that "cannot be dismissed," albeit adding that Ukraine would "take into account" the conclusions of the international community regarding the elections.<sup>10</sup> Both the U.S. and the OSCE called the vote a "sham" and refused to recognize the election results.<sup>11</sup>

### **PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY**

Ukraine's overall record of promoting international democracy is appreciably better than its actions in the electoral sphere. Ukraine is a member of numerous international organizations, and on occasion has taken an active role in promoting democratic practices beyond its borders. In 1998, Ukraine hosted an international conference commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and supported the creation of the International Criminal Court. It has also ratified or become a party to several major international human rights treaties<sup>12</sup> and abolished the death penalty.

Since independence, Ukraine also has been very active in UN peacekeeping missions aimed at creating and maintaining democracy, peace, and stability in various parts of the world. More than 8,000 Ukrainian military and civilian personnel served under the UN flag in Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, East Timor, Guatemala, Macedonia, Mozambique and Tajikistan. By 2001, Ukraine had become Europe's largest contributor to UN peacekeeping operations.

Ukraine has been a strong backer of the UN more generally. Despite its grave economic difficulties, Ukraine met its substantial assessed obligations. The country was elected to be a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2000-2001. In addition, as a member of OSCE, Ukrainian officials have participated in election monitoring and other missions to Georgia, Yugoslavia, Croatia,

Nagorno-Karabakh as well as Belarus and Kazakhstan.

The Ukrainian government has taken a positive stance in response to democracy-eroding developments in what it calls the "far abroad." In a series of communiqués and statements, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned violence in Sierra-Leone (1999, 2000), military skirmishes between India and Pakistan (1999), and the actions of extremist groups in East Timor (1999).<sup>13</sup>

Ukraine has also been the beneficiary of considerable assistance from the U.S. (fourth largest worldwide) and the EU. Some of this assistance is explicitly earmarked for programs intended to spur democratic reform in spheres such as rule of law, judicial independence, media freedom, and civil society building.

### **POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS**

Ukraine's policy toward entrenched dictatorships, such as those in Belarus and in the countries of Central Asia, has fluctuated between indifference and vocal support. Ukraine's relationship with the authoritarian regime of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko has been largely pragmatic, based in part on geographic proximity and close economic ties. Although Kuchma congratulated Lukashenko on his controversial September 2001 victory, there is relatively little political cooperation between Minsk and Kyiv. Belarus' strong support for integration under Russian leadership of the former Soviet Republics conflicts with Ukraine's stated foreign policy interests.

Ukraine's policy toward Uzbekistan has been similarly driven by geo-strategic interests that leave little room for democracy-promoting considerations. Ukrainian governments have attempted to position the country as a regional leader rivaling Russia. Kyiv was one of the founders of GUUAM, a loose alliance composed of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, which emerged in 1996 and to which Uzbekistan was a party in 1999-2002.<sup>14</sup> The official goals of GUUAM have been to: establish a Europe-South Caucasus-Central Asia trade corridor and pipeline transit route; support its members against challenges to regional security and stability; and promote close relations with NATO. The unspoken aim of the alliance is to prevent Russia from exploiting Caspian Sea oil. As a de facto leader of the alliance, Ukraine has been careful not to criticize Uzbekistan's



abysmal democracy and human rights record. It has, instead, called the country “a reliable friend and a strategic partner,” one with whom it has a “vital” relationship that must grow “stronger with every passing year.”<sup>15</sup>

Similar pragmatic considerations also significantly influenced Ukraine’s relationship with then-leader of the Former Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic. Concerns about regional stability and security, as well as strong economic interests, led Ukraine to try to prevent Western military action. The Ukrainian government expressed mild criticism

of the Milosevic regime, urging it to respect principles of international law and not to engage in ethnic cleansing or other violence against civilians. Kyiv opposed NATO’s use of force, calling for a peaceful settlement of the crisis. When in 1999 the Hague International Tribunal indicted Milosevic for war crimes, Ukraine viewed the measure as a possible impediment to ongoing diplomatic efforts. The government reiterated this sentiment when the Tribunal extradited Milosevic in 2001, stating that such a move could destabilize the entire region.

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<sup>1</sup> A statement by Borys Tarasyuk, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine from April 1998 through September 2000 and a key foreign policy-maker reads: “Under the conditions of radical changes which took place on the world arena in the period from late 80-ies to early 90-ies the people of the newborn Ukrainian state chose their own way of development, primarily aimed at creation of a democratic, legal and socially-oriented state where the rights and freedoms of man are honored and the force of law prevails. Ensuring state independence, territorial integrity and immunity of state frontiers became a priority means of internal revival and development of the Ukrainian state, protection of national political and economic interests on the world arena. On the basis of these priority tasks, the foreign policy of independent Ukraine and its key foreign political priorities are determined”. “Ukraine 2000: Ways of International Cooperation” CD-ROM, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine/UN Development Program (UKR/97/005).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary of the Press Service of the MFA of Ukraine*, October 14, 1999, <http://www.mfa.gov.ua/information/card.shtml?mfa/1999/10/1403.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “ITAR-TASS Asian News-in-Brief for Tuesday, January 12,” *ITAR-TASS News Agency*, January 12, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> “Ukraine official sees hope for legitimate Belarus parliament,” *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, October 31, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> “Plushch diplomatic on Belarus elections,” *UNIAN*, October 17, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> *Statement of the Press Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine*, October 18, 1999, <http://www.mfa.gov.ua/information/card.shtml?mfa/1999/10/1801.html>.

<sup>9</sup> “Ukrainian observers disagree with OSCE team over Belarussian elections,” *Interfax News Agency*, September 11, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> “Ukrainian president calls Lukashenko’s presidential victory ‘convincing’”, *Agence France Presse*, September 11, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> The International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1973), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1973), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981), the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987), the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1991), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991), the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (2000), and two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2000).

<sup>13</sup> All statements and communiqués of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine can be found on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, following the link <http://www.mfa.gov.ua/information/?mfa>.

<sup>14</sup> Uzbekistan has suspended its membership in GUUAM starting June 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Leonid Kuchma, Statement, October 21, 2000, quoted in the on-line news release *Uzbek TV Screens Programme on Ukrainian Head’s Visit to Uzbekistan*, October 21, 2000, [http://www.uzland.uz/2000/10\\_21](http://www.uzland.uz/2000/10_21).