



# Ukraine Country Report

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## Executive Summary:

Ukraine underwent a relatively peaceful transition to independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Due to Ukraine's geopolitical location between the West and Russia, Ukraine's leaders have tried to keep a balanced approach in interacting with its neighbors. Since Ukraine's independence, however, corruption and crime have persisted. The presidencies of Leonid Kuchma (1994-2004) and Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010) failed to notably improve the economy or put Ukraine on a fast track to European integration. During Viktor Yanukovych's presidency (2010-2014), the executive branch further consolidated power, corruption increased, and crackdowns on political opponents and independent media intensified. Ukrainian leaders' economic and political policies resulted in devaluation of the national currency and a fall in hard currency reserves, leading to an economic crisis.

Yanukovych's decision to suspend signing of an EU Association Agreement in November 2013 triggered mass protests. The protests resulted in the impeachment of Yanukovych, and a return to the 2004 constitution's parliamentary-presidential model. Petro Poroshenko won Ukraine's next presidential elections. In April 2016, after prolonged political turmoil, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk resigned, and a new government was appointed, led by ex-Rada Speaker Volodymyr Groysman.

After the 2014 Maidan protests, Russia deployed troops in Crimea on the pretext of protecting Russian-speaking nationals there. These actions were followed by a local referendum on accession to Russia, Crimea's de facto annexation, and further escalation of tensions between Russia and the West. Since spring of 2014, armed conflict and intense fighting in Ukraine's east has been frequent, as pro-Russian separatists, with covert Russian support, battle Ukrainian military forces. In 2015, a ceasefire agreement was reached in Minsk.

Jews have lived in Ukraine for many centuries. Ukrainian Jewish life experienced a remarkable revival during the late 1980s and after independence in 1991. While the number of anti-Semitic incidents in Ukraine has declined since 2008, activities of radical nationalist groups and political parties are of concern. Other concerns include the intentional exaggeration of the political crisis' impact on Ukraine's Jewish community, and provocations by pro-Russian groups and others.

## Statistics:

**Population:** 44,429,471  
(July 2015 est.)

**Size:** 603,550 sq. km.

**Capital:** Kyiv (Kiev)

**Major cities:** Kyiv, Lviv (Lvov), Kharkiv (Kharkov), Odesa (Odessa), Dnipro (Dnipropetrovsk, Dnepr)

**Jewish population:**

approximately 350,000

**2015 Aliyah** (emigration to Israel): 2,000

**Head of State:**

President Petro Poroshenko

**Head of Government:**

Volodymyr Groysman

**Foreign Minister:**

Pavlo Klimkin

**Ambassador to United States:**

Valeriy Chaly

**U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine:**

Marie L. Yovanovitch

**Freedom House Rating:**

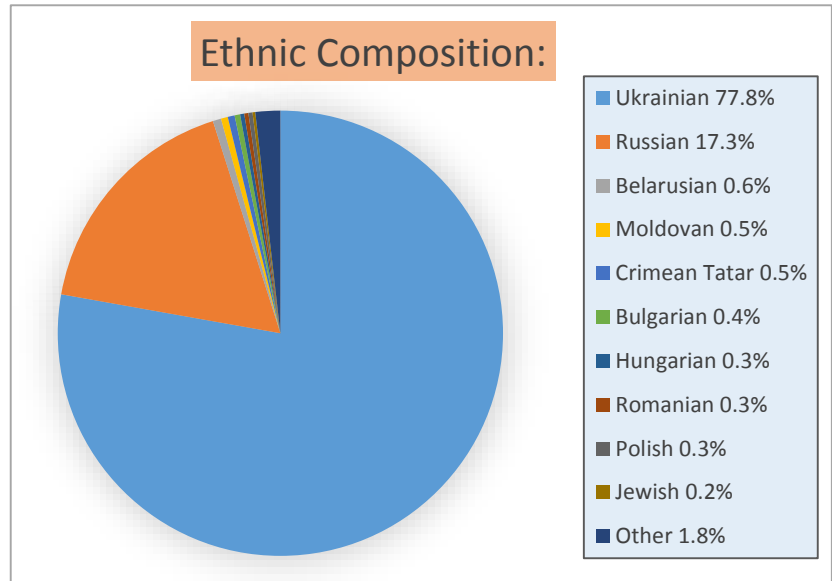
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## History:

Ukraine is Europe's second largest nation and the second largest Soviet successor state in population and economy. Ukraine borders Russia, Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, and the Black Sea.

Kyivan Rus, a powerful state centered in Kyiv, was founded in the 9th century, and was destroyed by the Mongols in the 13th century. Later, Ukraine was partitioned by its stronger neighbors, Poland, Lithuania, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, with Russia eventually annexing most of the Ukrainian territories.

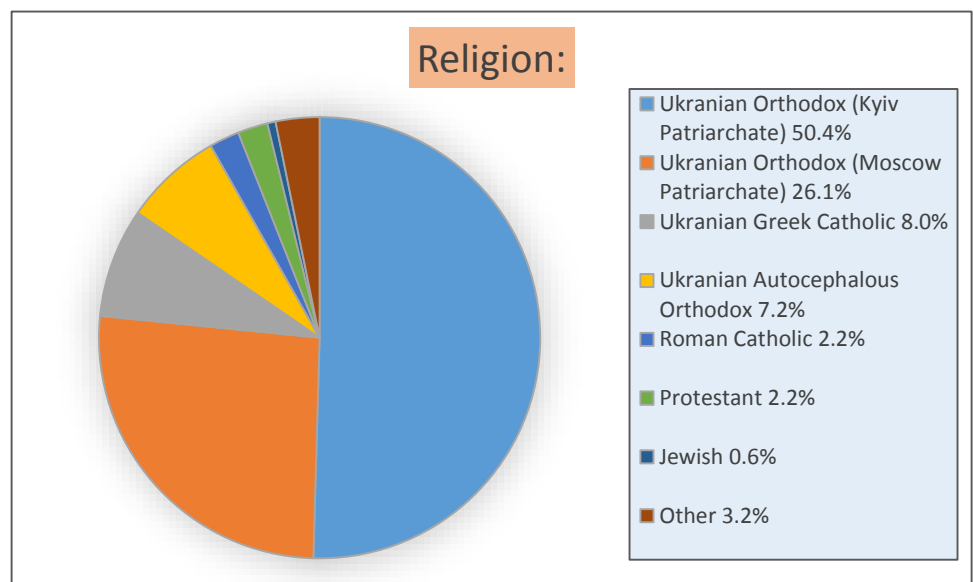
In 1918, Ukraine briefly gained independence, but Bolsheviks took over the newly independent country between 1918 and 1921. As a result of the Soviet-Polish War in 1921, Ukraine was divided among the USSR in the east and Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania in the west.



Under the Bolshevik regime, Ukrainian grain was repeatedly confiscated in the 1920s and 1930s, generating artificial famines that killed between 1.8 and 12 million Ukrainians. Thousands of members of the Ukrainian elite were shot or deported to Siberia during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. Under the terms of a secret protocol to the 1939 German-Soviet Non-Aggression (Molotov-Ribbentrop) Pact, the USSR retook western Ukraine from Hungary, Poland, and Romania in 1939.

During World War II, Ukraine lost millions to combat, Nazi atrocities, and wartime deprivation. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed during the Holocaust in Ukraine. A drought after the war, combined with collectivization drives, purges, and the Soviet struggle against Ukrainian nationalists, claimed nearly a million additional lives.

Repressions eased after Stalin's death in 1953, under



Ukrainian-born Nikita Khrushchev. He transferred Crimea from Russia to Ukraine in 1954 and also supported a return to greater ethnic Ukrainian representation in the Ukrainian Communist Party.

Throughout the post-war Soviet era, Ukraine remained subordinate to Russia. The division between “Russified” eastern Ukraine and more nationally-aware western Ukraine contributed to a fragile sense of national identity among Ukrainians.

Nevertheless, 90% of Ukrainian voters supported Ukraine’s independence in August 1991. In December 1991, Ukrainian communist party leader Leonid Kravchuk became the first president of newly-independent Ukraine.

### **Government:**

Ukraine is a mixed parliamentary-presidential constitutional republic with executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

The unicameral parliament (*Verkhovna Rada*, or Supreme Council) consists of 450 members elected to five-year terms. It has the power to initiate legislation, ratify international agreements, and approve the budget. The President appoints judges for lifetime tenure. The President is elected by popular vote every five years.

On February 21, 2014, Ukraine’s interim government voted to return to the country’s 2004 constitution, which limits presidential powers.

### **Political Situation:**

Ukraine’s transition to independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union was relatively peaceful. In 1991, an overwhelming majority of Ukrainian voters supported independence, electing Leonid Kravchuk to be the first president. During Kravchuk’s presidency Ukraine’s economy severely declined, and hyperinflation followed.

Dissatisfied with economic conditions, widespread corruption, and crime, Ukrainians supported Kravchuk’s opponent Leonid Kuchma in the 1996 presidential elections. During Kuchma’s administration, however, corruption and crime persisted. Fraud and government manipulation of the media, reported during the 1999 presidential elections, raised international concerns.

Viktor Yushchenko, a former chairman of the National Bank of Ukraine and a Prime Minister during the Kuchma administration, became the leader of the opposition. Yushchenko competed against Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich in the 2004 presidential elections. Yanukovich supported closer ties with Russia, and was openly backed by the Russian government, while Yushchenko promoted closer integration with Europe. Ukraine’s Central Electoral Committee declared Yanukovich the winner, but the elections were widely criticized for severe violations, including voter intimidation, media manipulation, and a near-fatal poisoning of Yushchenko. The decision sparked massive non-violent protests against Yanukovich, known as the Orange Revolution. A runoff election on December 26 resulted in Yushchenko’s election as President.

Despite high expectations, Yushchenko's government was unable to fulfill the promises of the Orange Revolution. Government division, failure to improve the economy, and an inability to put Ukraine on a fast track to join the EU left voters disappointed by Yushchenko's presidency.

In the 2010 presidential elections, former Prime Minister Yanukovich and Batkivshchyna ("Fatherland") party leader Yulia Tymoshenko finished first and second, respectively. The second round of elections gave Yanukovich a narrow victory.

Yanukovich's administration was widely criticized for consolidating executive branch power, allowing pervasive corruption, and persecuting political opponents and independent media.

The 2012 parliamentary elections were marred by electoral fraud, misuse of administrative resources, and voter bribery. In addition, a new "mixed" electoral system (50% of candidates elected by party and 50% by locality) provided opportunity for systemic electoral violations.

In 2014, Ukraine underwent a dramatic series of protests that led to the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich, and new presidential and parliamentary elections.

Russia refused to formally recognize Ukraine's new post-Yanukovich government, and deployed its troops in Crimea on the pretext of protecting Russian-speaking nationals in the peninsula. These actions were followed by a local referendum on accession to Russia, Crimea's *de facto* annexation, and further escalation of tensions between Russia and the West. In 2014, armed conflict and intense fighting took hold in Ukraine's east (Donbas), as pro-Russian separatists, with covert Russian support, battled Ukrainian military forces.

In September 2014, an initial ceasefire was signed, though fighting in the Donbas continued. In February 2015, the Ukrainian government and the pro-Russian separatists signed a second ceasefire in Minsk. Since then, the level of violence has declined, but ceasefire violations have persisted. Since the beginning of the conflict, over 9,000 people have been killed.

A danger of renewed conflict in Donbas remains. Russia's ultimate goal in the Donbas region is uncertain, and can be influenced by continued Western pressure on Russia and Russia's global strategy, including in Syria and the broader Middle East.

**Donbas (Donetsk and Luhansk regions)**

- **Occupied areas of Donbas account for 7% of Ukraine's territory**
- **10% of Ukraine's GDP (2013)**
- **30% of all Ukrainian exports (2014)**

Following months of political turmoil, a new government was appointed in April 2016 with ex-speaker of the parliament Volodymyr Groysman as a Prime Minister. He became the first Jewish Prime Minister of Ukraine.

## Economic Situation:

Ukraine is rich in natural resources and has a large industrial capacity. Despite this, Ukraine's economic growth in the 1990s declined, and its post-independence reform efforts have been complicated by high inflation, corruption, and organized crime.

After independence, Ukraine's economy contracted annually between 9.7% and 22.7%. By 1999, Ukraine's economic output had dropped to 40% of its 1991 level. Ukraine's extreme dependence on Russian energy supplies exacerbated this decline.

Resistance to privatization, from a significant part of the population and within the government, stalled reform efforts. A large number of state-owned enterprises were exempted from the privatization process.

Between 2001 and 2008, the Ukrainian economy picked up significantly. Foreign direct investment (FDI) has been positive since 1992, but it has mostly gone to retail trade and finance, while industry has been controlled by oligarchs.

Ukraine was hit hard by the 2008 global economic crisis. By 2009, unemployment had tripled and Ukraine's economy had shrunk by 15%.

From 2010-14, the economy was negatively affected by the policies of the Ukrainian government headed by Prime Minister Mykola Azarov. In 2012, the Ukrainian economy went into recession. Ukraine's GDP plunged from 3.7% in 2010 to -4.7% in 2013. In the beginning of 2014, Ukraine's national currency significantly lost value. Ukraine's hard currency reserves have since fallen to under \$18 billion. In addition, Ukraine has significant foreign debt.

On March 27, 2014 the IMF approved a plan to provide Ukraine with \$18 billion in assistance. The same day, the U.S. Congress approved \$1 billion in loan guarantees for Ukraine. By early June, the U.S. had announced funding for an additional \$184 million in direct U.S. assistance to Ukraine.

In 2015, Ukraine's economy continued to shrink. Prices rose, pensions were cut, taxes and energy tariffs increased, and salaries remained the same or shrunk. Ukraine was also on the brink of defaulting on its international loans. According to the National Bank of Ukraine, in 2015 government debt reached 71% of GDP.

Many analysts are optimistic about Ukraine's economic forecast for 2016. The new budget and tax code are important first steps in reducing excessive public spending and encouraging private enterprise. A debt restructuring deal has reduced Ukraine's foreign debt by 20%, and government spending cuts have reduced public deficit. The EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) Agreement entered into force in January, and is expected to increase trade and investment.

Additional reforms aimed at deregulation, reducing the size of the government, privatization of state enterprises, and encouraging investment remain a priority for 2016.

**Currency:** 26.3 Hryvnas = \$1

**GDP:** \$175.5 billion (2013 est.)

**GDP per capita:** \$7,500 (2015 est.)

**GDP Growth:** 0.4 % (2013 est.)

## **Social Issues:**

It is estimated that tens of thousands of women and girls from Ukraine are trafficked annually to Central and Western Europe and the Middle East. Limited resources, law enforcement corruption, and organized crime impede Ukraine's ability to eliminate or significantly reduce human trafficking.

Ukraine has one of the largest growing HIV/AIDS problems in Europe. HIV/AIDS knowledge, and access to adequate HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support services are low.

Ukraine is also tackling a growing problem of Asian and African illegal migrants, and many detention camps have been established to prevent migrants from reaching Ukraine's western border.

The return of Crimean Tatars from Soviet-era exile in Central Asia has raised pressing issues concerning property restitution and minority rights.

## **Foreign Policy:**

Former president Kravchuk's administration sought to maintain balance between Russia and the West in its foreign policy, fearing that a wholly pro-European course would trigger a Russian challenge to Ukrainian sovereignty.

During Kuchma's presidency, Ukraine's cooperation with NATO increased. In 1994, Ukraine joined the NATO Partnership for Peace; in 1996, Ukrainian soldiers deployed as part of NATO's peacekeeping troops to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the NATO-Ukraine Commission was established. In 1999, Kuchma's administration authorized the deployment of Ukrainian NATO troops to Kosovo; a NATO Liaison Office opened in Kyiv; and in 2002, Kuchma officially announced Ukraine's intent to eventually join NATO.

During Yushchenko's presidency, Ukraine's relations with Russia deteriorated. In 2006 and 2009, Russia cut off gas supplies to Ukraine, accusing it of siphoning gas exports to Europe. Europe's gas supply was affected by the stoppages. Russia was widely criticized for the moves, which many called politically motivated. The cutoffs emphasized Russian dependence on the Ukrainian transit route, and introduced European actors to the previously bilateral energy relationship between Ukraine and Russia.

Yushchenko restored accession to NATO as part of Ukraine's foreign policy agenda, but was unable to rally the domestic and international approval needed to sign a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP).

After Yanukovich was elected president, he removed Ukraine's membership in NATO from the foreign policy agenda, but maintained the existing framework of cooperation.

In 2010, Yanukovich and Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev signed the Kharkiv Accords, which extended the lease of the Sevastopol naval base in Crimea to the Russian Black Sea Fleet until 2042, in exchange for discounted prices for natural gas. At the same time, as President Yanukovich pursued free trade zone and

visa agreements with the EU, the imprisonment of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, which was widely seen as politically motivated, impeded the process of Ukraine's further integration into Europe.

In November 2013, President Yanukovich refused to sign an Association Agreement with the EU, and instead decided to pursue closer relations with Russia. Russia pledged \$15 billion in financial aid to Ukraine and to reduce natural gas prices.

After the ouster of Yanukovich and the formation of the interim government, Ukraine and the EU signed the political part of the EU Association Agreement.

The IMF has pledged \$17.5 billion in financial aid to Ukraine. The U.S., the EU and the World Bank have also pledged about \$2 billion each. However, experts say that the country remains severely underfunded.

### **Relations with the United States:**

On December 25, 1991, the United States officially recognized Ukraine's independence. As a result of negotiations with the U.S., Russia, and the U.K. in 1994, Ukraine agreed to renounce its nuclear weapons, which constituted the world's third largest nuclear arsenal, in return for aid and an agreement protecting its sovereignty.

The U.S. supported the results of the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine. President Yushchenko's visit to the U.S. in April 2005 signaled a major breakthrough in bilateral relations.

President Yushchenko declared Ukraine's graduation from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment a top priority. As part of the Trade Act of 1974, the amendment imposed U.S. trade restrictions on the Soviet Union in response to its denial of the right to emigrate. In March 2006, President Bush formally graduated Ukraine from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, aiding Ukraine's bid for membership in the World Trade Organization.

In September 2008, President Yushchenko visited the United States and met with President Bush to discuss U.S.-Ukraine relations. During his visit, Yushchenko awarded NCSEJ Executive Vice-Chairman and CEO Mark B. Levin the Order of Merit medal, which recognizes foreign citizens for significant personal contributions toward strengthening Ukraine's prestige and promoting historic and contemporary achievements.

In July 2009, Vice President Joe Biden and President Yushchenko established the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership Commission. Vice President Biden has expressed strong support for Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO.

During Yanukovich's presidency, the United States and Ukraine focused their cooperation on nuclear non-proliferation and energy issues, but human rights violations and stalled democratic reforms remained an area of concern for the Obama administration. In 2011 and 2012, U.S. officials criticized Yanukovich's administration for politically motivated persecutions, including the imprisonment of Tymoshenko. The U.S. criticized substantial violations in the 2012 parliamentary elections, calling them "a step backward for Ukrainian democracy."



In November 2013 and in January 2014, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland visited Ukraine to support the country's European aspirations, and to help resolve the political crisis. U.S. Secretary of State of John Kerry visited later, pledging U.S. financial and technical assistance for Ukraine's new government. In March 2014, the U.S. approved \$1 billion in loan guarantees for Ukraine. By early June, the U.S. had announced funding for efforts promoting economic and political reforms, security enhancement, anti-corruption efforts, and trade diversity, totaling an additional \$184 million in direct U.S. assistance to Ukraine.

In March 2016, President Poroshenko visited Washington for a nuclear summit and met with President Barack Obama and other U.S. leaders, discussing the development of a strategic partnership between Ukraine and the U.S., and Ukraine's progress on reforms.

In June 2016, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden announced that the White House plans to commit \$220 million in new assistance to Ukraine in support of economic, political, and energy reforms. This assistance package will continue U.S. support for Ukraine's efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law, reinforce the foundations for sustainable economic growth, and respond to humanitarian needs.

#### **Relations with Israel:**

Ukraine and Israel established bilateral relations in 1992. Israel opened an embassy in Kyiv in 1993; Ukraine opened its embassy in Tel Aviv in 1992. Israeli cultural centers are active in Kyiv and several other Ukrainian cities.

President Kravchuk paid Ukraine's first high-level state visit to Israel in January 1993, and President Kuchma visited in 1996. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Ukraine in March 1999 and laid a wreath at the Babi Yar Holocaust memorial. Prime Minister Shimon Peres visited in December 2001 to discuss bilateral relations and observe the ten-year anniversary of diplomatic relations. Israeli President Moshe Katsav visited Ukraine in October 2001, meeting with President Kuchma, and again in September 2006 to participate in ceremonies marking the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacre at Babi Yar.

In October 2001, a misdirected Ukrainian test missile hit a civilian jetliner over the Black Sea, killing 77 passengers, most of whom were Israeli citizens. The slow process of compensation and acceptance of responsibility strained bilateral relations until December 2003, when Ukraine ratified a compensation agreement involving the Ukrainian, Israeli, and Russian governments.

In 2005, Ukraine and Israel signed an economic agreement promoting trade cooperation. Ukraine sided with Israel during a United Nations Human Rights Council vote to condemn "grave Israeli violations of human rights in Lebanon" in August 2006, and to investigate Israel's conduct during the war.

Ukraine supported Israel on the issue of the 2009 United Nations Fact Finding Mission Report on the Gaza Conflict (the "Goldstone Report"). The Israeli government maintains that the number of casualties in the Gaza offensive cited in the Goldstone Report has been exaggerated. Ukraine, along with the United States, Italy, Holland, Hungary, and Slovakia, voted against the report.

In 2010, President Yanukovich and President Shimon Peres signed a bilateral free trade agreement. In February 2011, Ukraine and Israel canceled visa requirements for citizens traveling to each country. In March 2011, Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov visited Israel. Three months later, Israel and Ukraine signed a bilateral agreement establishing an Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation. In November 2011, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Kostyantyn Gryshchenko visited Israel.

In July 2012, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman made an official visit to Ukraine, where he met with President Yanukovich and his Ukrainian counterpart, and with Kyiv Jewish community leaders. In October 2014, Foreign Minister of Ukraine Pavlo Klimkin visited Israel.

Israel's honorary consul in western Ukraine, Oleg Vyshniakov, established an inter-ministerial committee for Ukrainian-Israeli trade and economic cooperation, as well as an economic business forum, which launched in November 2015 in Kyiv.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko paid a state visit to Israel in December 2015, where he met with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and addressed the Knesset.

### **Jewish Communal Life:**

Ukraine's Jewish community comprises approximately 350,000 people and more than 290 organizations in 100 cities. Kyiv's Jewish community, estimated at 100,000, is the largest, followed closely by Odessa (60,000-70,000), Dnipropetrovsk (60,000), Kharkiv (50,000), and Donetsk (18,000). Regionally, second in size only to Russia's community, Ukrainian Jewry has regained its vibrancy. However, leadership disputes remain a persistent issue dividing the community.

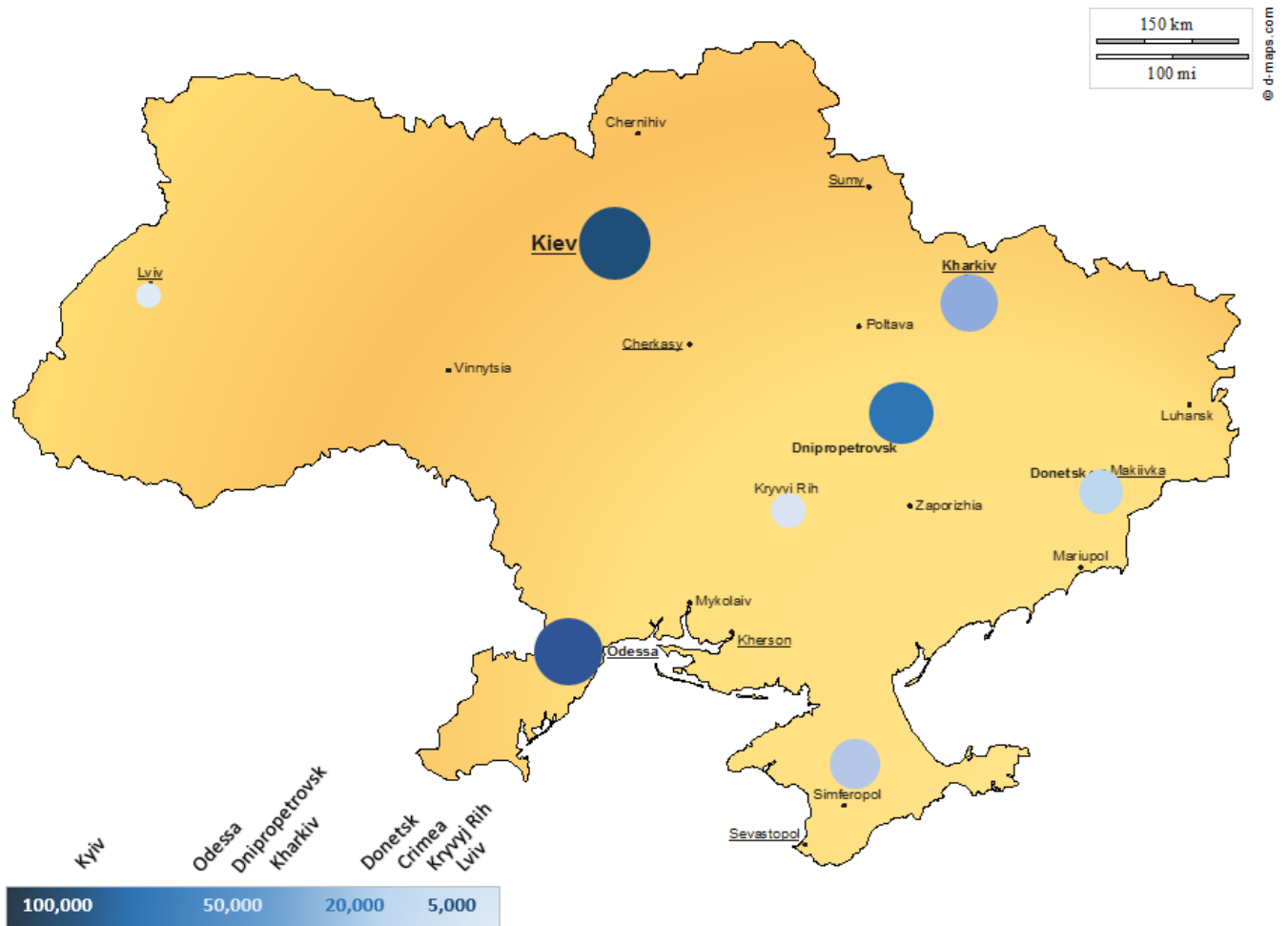
### **History:**

The first Jewish communities on the territory of modern Ukraine emerged in Greek and Roman-ruled city-states along the Black Sea coast and in Crimea. During the early Middle Ages, the Khazars (Turkic nomads from Central Asia) conquered and dominated much of modern Ukraine and southern Russia. Many converted to Judaism in the 8th century to better resist neighboring Christian and Muslim threats; their conversion accelerated Jewish settlement in the region, including in Kyiv. These early Jewish communities were destroyed during the Mongol invasions of the 13th century.

In subsequent centuries, Jews returned to Ukraine from Western and Central Europe, especially from Germany and Poland. Jews became successful traders as well as adjuncts to the Polish landowning aristocracy. However, this alliance generated strong hostility from the Ukrainian peasantry. Approximately 100,000 Jews were massacred during a 1648-49 popular revolt against the Polish aristocracy led by Cossack Bohdan Khmelnytsky, who is still regarded today as a Ukrainian national hero. Smaller-scale anti-Jewish and anti-Polish riots and massacres were orchestrated in the 18th century by the Haidamaks (bands of peasant serfs and Cossacks).

Despite periodic anti-Jewish pogroms, Ukraine's Jewish population grew to over two million by 1899. As a result of the tsarist policy of limiting Jewish residence to the Pale of Settlement, the vast majority of Jews lived in western Ukraine. Continued anti-Jewish violence and tsarist "Russification" programs led hundreds of

thousands of Jews to emigrate from Ukraine between 1880 and 1913, mostly to the United States. During Russia's 1918-21 Civil War, tens of thousands of Jews were killed by the various armies, militias, and insurgents. Ukrainian nationalist forces have been accused of responsibility for the most devastating pogroms. Ukrainian pogroms during this period led many Jews to join the Red Army and the Communist Party, which officially opposed anti-Semitism.



### *Jewish population of Ukraine*

The German invasion of June 1941 led to attacks on Jews by some Ukrainians, especially in western Ukraine, where many Ukrainians collaborated with Nazi forces. Some Ukrainian Jews, particularly in the east of the country, were evacuated by the Soviet government to Russia and Central Asia. The Nazis and their collaborators exterminated hundreds of thousands of the remaining Jews. Hundreds of Jewish mass graves dot the landscape of Ukraine, and the massacre of more than 33,000 Jews at Babi Yar on September 29-30, 1941, has come to epitomize the Holocaust in Ukraine.

Some Ukrainians hid Jews or helped them escape. As of May 2012, Israel has formally recognized 2,402 Ukrainians as “Righteous Among the Nations” for risking their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

Following Ukraine’s liberation by Soviet forces, many Jews were persecuted by the Soviet regime. Kyiv became a major center of underground Jewish culture and pro-aliyah (immigration to Israel) agitation during the 1970s and 1980s.

### **Community Revival:**

Ukrainian Jewish life experienced a remarkable revival during the late 1980s and after independence in 1991.

The Jewish community is represented by several umbrella organizations based in Kyiv. U.S.-born Hasidic Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich (a member of the Karlin-Stoliner movement) has served as Chief Rabbi of Ukraine and Kyiv since 1992, and is widely recognized as a leader of Ukraine’s post-Soviet Jewish renaissance. The Association of Jewish Communities and Organizations of Ukraine (VAAD), founded in 1991, unites more than 260 Jewish organizations that address communal, charitable, educational, cultural, and political issues and provide emigration assistance. The Jewish Council of Ukraine promotes Yiddish culture and Holocaust memorial activities. The Jewish Foundation for Ukraine was created in 1997 to fund communal and educational projects. The Union of Jewish Religious Communities of Ukraine unites more than 70 Jewish organizations, and the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress encompasses 120 organizations.

In 1998, the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine (JCU) umbrella organization was founded, uniting the VAAD, the Jewish Council of Ukraine, the Union of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine and the Kyiv Municipal Jewish Community.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC/“Joint”) funds welfare, cultural, and educational projects across Ukraine. To address the needs of elderly Jews, who comprise approximately 50% of the Jewish population in Ukraine, JDC and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany have built up a network of “Hesed” centers, which supply daily hot meals, medical assistance, and other social services.

An array of religious groups have emerged under the sponsorship of international religious organizations. In addition to the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations under Chabad-Lubavitch has built an extensive programmatic network. Chabad has a rich history in Ukraine and has been active in coordinating Jewish community efforts with the national and local governments.

Rabbi Alexander Dukhovny has served as Chief Progressive Rabbi of Kyiv and of the World Union for Progressive Judaism in Ukraine since 1999. The World Union operates congregations in over 20 cities of Ukraine, and runs leadership seminars and holiday and summer programs.

The Masorti (Conservative) movement runs a Sunday school and a youth group in Kyiv; it operates a day school in Chernovtsy and sponsors Sunday schools, youth activities, and summer camps in several other cities, predominantly in western and southwestern Ukraine.

In September 2005, Rabbi Moshe Reuven Azman was elected one of the Chief Rabbis of Ukraine by the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress and the United Jewish Community of Ukraine, the two secular Jewish organizations backed and headed by Ukrainian-Jewish media magnate Vadim Rabinovich. In 2008, billionaire Igor Kolomoisky replaced Rabinovich as the president of the United Jewish Communities of Ukraine.

The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI/“Sochnut”) sponsors a wide range of programs connected to Israel, aliyah, and Jewish life. JAFI funds summer camps and trips to Israel. The Orthodox Union has built a Torah community-learning center in Kharkiv.

Israeli and American organizations (including Hillel, Beitar, Kidma and Aish HaTorah) have initiated numerous student and youth programs. Local Jewish groups have established facilities in Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, Zhitomyr, and Korosten for homeless Jewish children, with support from World Jewish Relief and JDC. An orphanage is maintained under the auspices of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities of Karlin-Stolin. B’nai B’rith International is also represented in Ukraine. Project Keshet runs women’s leadership training programs throughout Ukraine, which build multi-ethnic coalitions to address domestic violence, trafficking, and women’s health concerns.

For several years, NCSEJ has helped pair Ukrainian Jewish communities with American Jewish communities through its Kehilla Projects and Operation Lifeline, which assist in providing educational, medical, and other social service programs. Models of these Kehilla partnerships include Baltimore-Odessa, Chicago-Kyiv, MetroWest (NJ)-Cherkasy, and Boston-Dnipropetrovsk; similar projects have been successful in other Ukrainian cities.

Educational programs and scholarly institutes have expanded significantly in the past decade. Ukrainian Jewish community organizations run 15 day schools and 11 kindergartens, 80 Sunday schools, eight yeshivas and an estimated 70 Hebrew *ulpanim*. The International Solomon University, with branches in Kyiv and Kharkiv, offers a program in Judaic studies.

Secular Jewish day schools operate in several Ukrainian cities under the supervision of World ORT, including the Technology Lyceum in Kyiv, the ORT Technology Centres in Odessa and in Dnipropetrovsk, and the ICT Studio in Kharkiv, in cooperation with JDC. ORT has also contributed computer equipment and curricula to several other schools and community centers.

The Center for Jewish Education in Ukraine (CJEU), under the sponsorship of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, trains Jewish teachers for day schools, conducts teacher-training workshops on the Holocaust, and organizes Sunday schools. The Beit Chana Jewish Women’s Pedagogical Institute in Dnipropetrovsk, established by the Boston Jewish community, trains teachers for work in Jewish schools and operates a special-needs center for children.

Several Jewish-related research centers operate in Ukraine. JDC supports the Tkuma Scientific-Educational Center, an institution for Holocaust studies. The Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, affiliated with the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, operates in Kyiv. The Academy of Sciences maintains an archive of Jewish manuscripts and books in its Vernadsky Library. The Institute for Jewish Studies, a research institute in Kyiv,

receives support from several local and international Jewish organizations for its projects, publications, and annual conferences. It also prepares a regular analysis of anti-Semitic trends.

In addition to scholarly Jewish publications, 10 Jewish newspapers are published in Kyiv, four of which have national circulations of 10-15,000. Nearly 20 smaller Jewish newspapers are published in other Ukrainian cities. Several professional Jewish theaters operate in Kyiv.

### **Community Concerns:**

Restitution of Jewish communal property confiscated during the Holocaust and the Soviet era is an issue of concern for the Ukrainian Jewish community. Although a small number of synagogues have been returned to the Ukrainian Jewish community, the pace has been slow; hundreds of synagogues and community buildings in Ukraine could potentially be restituted. Many isolated and poor communities seek to recover their buildings, which could once again house synagogues, schools, and community centers.

According to the Ukrainian Jewish community, approximately 40 synagogue buildings have been returned out of the nearly 2,000 surviving communal properties confiscated during the 20th century. Some communities have been able to regain property through Ukraine's court system. In a few cases, newer buildings have been provided to religious communities, in place of the original synagogues to which they lay claim.

Instances of restitution include the rededication of a monument in Crimea in 1999 to the 500 Jewish soldiers who died during the Crimean War; return of the Central (Brotsky) Synagogue in Kyiv to Chabad-Lubavitch in 1997, and its restoration; designation of the Babi Yar Holocaust site as a state-protected historical site in 2007; and transfer of Torah scrolls and holy texts from government archives to Jewish communities in 2009.

However, many restitution claims remain outstanding. According to a 1992 decree, only registered religious organizations are entitled to seek restitution of property confiscated by the Soviet regime, and only for those buildings and objects considered necessary for religious worship. The law requiring local authorities to return property to religious communities before 1998, however, was never fully implemented. Only 10% of Jewish properties have been returned to their original owners. Proposed amendments to the current law would expand the properties eligible for restitution to include religious schools and administrative buildings.

Like restitution, preservation of Jewish cemeteries is another issue of concern. While cemeteries should fall within the parameters of the government decree on restitution of religious property, in reality they have frequently been distributed to private owners, resulting in the desecration and destruction of burial sites and memorials. Even in those cases where conflicts over ownership of burial sites do not arise, Jewish communities frequently do not have the resources to restore old cemeteries.

Instances of disregard for Jewish sites have created tensions between the Jewish community and the government. For example, construction of a market in the 1990s on the site of an old Jewish cemetery in Lviv angered Jews in Ukraine and abroad. Following protests in the U.S. and Ukraine, President Kuchma imposed a moratorium on the privatization of burial sites. This halted further construction on the marketplace but did not mandate its dismantling.

Despite a court ruling and a letter from the Ministry of Culture halting the construction of an apartment building on the grounds of the Jewish cemetery in Volodymyr-Volynsky, construction has continued. In 2011 during a joint Polish-Ukrainian archaeological excavation in Volodymyr Volynsky, a World War II-era mass grave was uncovered. The Jewish communities of Ukraine and Poland have asked authorities to halt excavations until they can determine the victims' identity.

Crosses erected at several Jewish cemeteries and World War II killing sites have stirred interethnic and religious conflicts. In particular, disputes continue over the presence of a cross in the old Jewish cemetery near the massacre site of Babi Yar, and over the erection of crosses in the restored Jewish cemetery (reopened as a memorial park) in the Lviv oblast town of Staryi Sambir.

The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad has been active in addressing issues of restoration and preservation. In conjunction with the Commission, the U.S. and Ukrainian governments have signed an agreement to establish frameworks for the protection and preservation of cultural sites.

The humanitarian crisis in Eastern and Southern Ukraine has taken a heavy toll on Jewish communities. Included in the thousands that have left and continue to leave the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are many Jews. They urgently require assistance with relocation, housing, food, and meeting other basic needs.

Some, including many elderly Jews, have stayed behind and urgently need assistance. An estimated 15,000 Jews remain in the Donbas region. These Jewish communities rely almost fully on support from international and local charity organizations. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Jewish Agency for Israel, and other organizations have significantly increased their assistance to Ukraine's Jews.

Jewish communities outside of the war-torn regions continue their regular programs and activities, and are stepping up efforts to support Jewish refugees from the conflict areas. However, funding for programming has been reduced. Lack of jobs and the economic crisis have also negatively affected Jewish communities throughout Ukraine.

Aliyah from Ukraine has grown. Since the beginning of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, approximately 8,000 Ukrainian Jews have immigrated to Israel. With the stabilization of the armed conflict, the rate of Jewish emigration in 2016 may slow.

In September 2016, the Ukrainian government will mark the 75th anniversary of the Babi Yar tragedy with a commemorative events in Kyiv, and has announced plans to build a museum and research center at Babi Yar.

### **Anti-Semitism:**

Anti-Semitism is deeply rooted in the history of Ukraine. The massacres of 1648-49 resulted in deaths of 100,000 Jews. During the pogroms of 1881-82, thousands of Jews throughout Ukraine were massacred. The pogroms of 1919-1920 resulted in the deaths of more than 100,000 Jews, and during World War II, the Nazis and their Ukrainian collaborators exterminated hundreds of thousands of Jews.

Government-sponsored anti-Semitism prevailed in the post-war years and continued to thrive throughout the Soviet era. Only in the years following independence did Ukraine's government cease its openly anti-Jewish rhetoric and reach out to Jewish communities. Nevertheless, despite government efforts to improve relations in the post-independence years, anti-Semitic activity has reappeared in Ukrainian society.

Throughout the 1990s, anti-Semitic incidents in Ukraine included verbal and physical harassment of Jewish students, dissemination of anti-Semitic literature, vandalism, desecration of Jewish cemeteries, and arson attacks on synagogues. Anti-Semitism was often prevalent during election campaigns, particularly anti-Semitic graffiti and rhetoric fostered by ultra-nationalist extremists.

In some regions of Ukraine, economic and political instability has fueled xenophobia, extremism and the growth of right-wing radical parties. Expressions of intolerance in marginal publications may reflect and further incite these shifting societal attitudes.

Several relatively small but active nationalist parties and movements have emerged, particularly the Ukrainian National Assembly, Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Ukrainian Social National Party, Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, and others, which support the idea of "Ukraine for Ukrainians" and are hostile to foreigners. Some are openly anti-Semitic.

Throughout the 2000s, acts of anti-Semitic vandalism and violence were widespread across Ukraine, increasing by comparison to prior years. Manifestations of anti-Semitism included an assault on a group of Orthodox Jewish adults and youths in Simferopol in 2005, attacks on synagogues in Ivano-Frankovsk, Kyiv, and Zaporozhye in 2006 and 2007, several attacks on yeshiva students, desecrations of Jewish cemeteries in Berdychiv and Odessa in 2006 and 2007, and an attack on a Jewish orphanage in Zhitomir in 2006. Holocaust memorials were vandalized in Berdychiv, Aleksandria, Kalush and Lutsk. In 2008, Rabbi Dov-Ber Baitman, a teacher at the Jewish educational center Shiurey Torah in Dnipropetrovsk, was assaulted and severely beaten.

Ukraine's largest public university, the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management (MAUP), became increasingly anti-Semitic during the 2000s, often serving an outlet for extremist anti-Semitic propaganda. The well-known American white supremacist and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke is affiliated with the university and has lectured there.

Under the leadership of Georgy Tschokin, MAUP became a primary purveyor of anti-Semitic and xenophobic material in Ukraine, publishing two virulent anti-Semitic publications, *Personnel* and *Personnel Plus*. MAUP advocated dissolution of the State of Israel, majority rule by purely "ethnic Ukrainians", and barring Jews and other minorities from top governmental positions. Despite increasing government pressure, including condemnation by President Yushchenko, MAUP continued to publish strongly anti-Semitic materials and to invite stridently anti-Semitic speakers to Ukraine. The Euro-Asian Jewish Congress has estimated that MAUP accounted at one point for nearly 85% of all anti-Semitic materials published in Ukraine.

Since 2008, according to VAAD, MAUP has gradually curtailed its anti-Semitic campaign, which has resulted in a sharp decrease in the overall amount of anti-Semitic material distributed in Ukraine.



Ukraine's government has made attempts to combat anti-Semitic propaganda and attacks on Jews and Jewish property. In 2007, President Yushchenko publicly denounced Ukrainians who denied the Holocaust and ordered Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) to create a Special Operative Unit on Fighting Xenophobia.

In November 2007, the Foreign Ministry created the office of Special Ambassador on Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination, appointing Aleksandr Gorin to "combat anti-Semitism, prevent instigation of interethnic and inter-religious conflicts, and coordinate activities with other ministries and departments in this context."

In 2009, worshipers at a Simferopol synagogue were attacked, and Jewish facilities and memorials in Lutsk, Nikolaev, Voskresensk, and Kamenetsk-Podolsky were desecrated. In September 2009, local authorities approved plans to build hotels for the 2012 European Football Championship on top of the mass gravesite at Babi Yar. After an international uproar, the mayor of Kyiv vetoed the plan.

The 2010 presidential election campaign triggered a rise in anti-Semitic propaganda. The candidates Arseniy Yatsenyuk and Yulia Tymoshenko were publicly criticized on the grounds of their alleged Jewish roots. The Ukrainian Central Elections Committee allowed independent candidate Sergii Ratushnyak to run for president despite his anti-Semitic statements.

Despite a spike in anti-Semitic propaganda during the 2010 presidential elections, the rate of anti-Semitic activity in Ukraine has continued to decline. The Coordination Forum for Countering Anti-Semitism reported several anti-Semitic attacks in 2011, including the shattering of windows in the Jewish Community building in Bashvestka, destruction of the 'Guest Synagogue' tent in Uman, and threats to Jewish worshippers in Uman.

The electoral breakthrough of the xenophobic and anti-Semitic party Svoboda in the 2012 parliamentary elections has been another issue of concern. The party's leader Oleh Tyahnybok has on many occasions made anti-Semitic remarks and called for commemoration of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which fought alongside the Nazis against the Soviet Union in World War II. The party also opposes the annual pilgrimage of Breslov Hasidim to the grave of Rabbi Nahman in Uman, and members of Svoboda have been linked to several violent anti-Semitic attacks.

Since the beginning of the crisis in November 2013, several anti-Semitic incidents have taken place in Kyiv. Elsewhere, a synagogue in Zaporizhia has been firebombed, and a synagogue in Simferopol has been vandalized. In March 2014, two unidentified men attacked the director of the Ukrainian branch of Hatzalah emergency medical service, and a Jewish couple was assaulted near the Great Choral Synagogue in Kyiv. Local Jewish community leaders, however, suggest that these incidents were most likely provocations designed to incite unrest and discredit the new Ukrainian government.

Several Ukrainian Jewish leaders have voiced concern about the Russian government's attempt to perpetuate the myth that anti-Semitism is an integral part of the new Ukrainian government's agenda, and that a new fascism is threatening the Jewish community of Ukraine.

Instances of anti-Semitic vandalism in 2015 included an arson attempt on the Jewish Holocaust museum of Odessa in January, an attack on a Jewish neurosurgeon in Kharkiv in March, desecrations of the Babi Yar Holocaust memorial in April and June, desecrations in Kremenchuk, Odessa, Cherkasy, and Mykolaiv in March and April, and anti-Semitic graffiti on Holocaust monuments in Nikopol and Novomoskovsk in June.

In 2016, a Jewish cemetery in Kolomyia was desecrated, a synagogue in the central Ukrainian city of Cherkasy was defaced, and the Babi Yar memorial was vandalized twice.

In July 2016, Moscow Avenue in Kyiv was renamed after Stepan Bandera, and the city plans on naming another street for Roman Shukhevych. Both men were the leaders of the militant nationalist movement in 1940s-1950s, who are widely believed to be responsible for lethal violence against Jews and Poles. The Ukrainian Jewish Committee and the World Jewish Congress have expressed concerns and condemned the renaming.

There have been a number of accounts of anti-Semitic statements and remarks made publically by pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine. Pro-Russian separatist leaders Alexander Zakharchenko and Igor Plotnitsky, in anti-Semitic statements in February 2015, branded the Ukrainian government as 'pathetic Jews'. In June 2015, Plotnitsky said that Jews were responsible for the Maidan revolution. Overall, however, support for ultra-nationalist parties such as Svoboda and the Right Sector has declined, although traditional anti-Semitic beliefs remain deep-seated in some segments of Ukrainian society.