



# 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 Yanukovich'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.*

*Yanukovich's decision to suspend signing of an EU Association Agreement in November 2013 triggered mass protests and a relatively peaceful overthrowing of the government in February 2014. Parliament impeached Yanukovich, and Ukraine returned 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 parliament Speaker Volodymyr Groysman.*

*After the 2014 Maidan protests, Russia deployed troops in Crimea on the pretext of protecting Russian-speaking nationals. 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 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, though fighting continues.*

*Jews have lived in Ukraine for centuries. Ukrainian Jewish life experienced a remarkable revival during the late 1980s and after independence in 1991. Jews in Ukraine live freely without restriction. Anti-Semitic incidents in Ukraine have fallen since 2008. Some anti-Semitic incidents may be provocations by pro-Russian groups, seeking to discredit Ukraine in the international arena. Activities of nationalist groups and political parties seeking to glorify World War II-era Holocaust collaborators are of concern.*

## Statistics:

**Population:** 43,846,000 (March 2019 est.)

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

**Capital:** Kyiv (Kiev)

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

**Jewish population:**

Approximately 300,000

**Head of State:** President Petro Poroshenko

**Head of Government:**

Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman

**Foreign Minister:** Pavlo Klimkin

**Ambassador to United States:**

Valeriy Chaly

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

Marie L. Yovanovitch

**Freedom House Rating:**

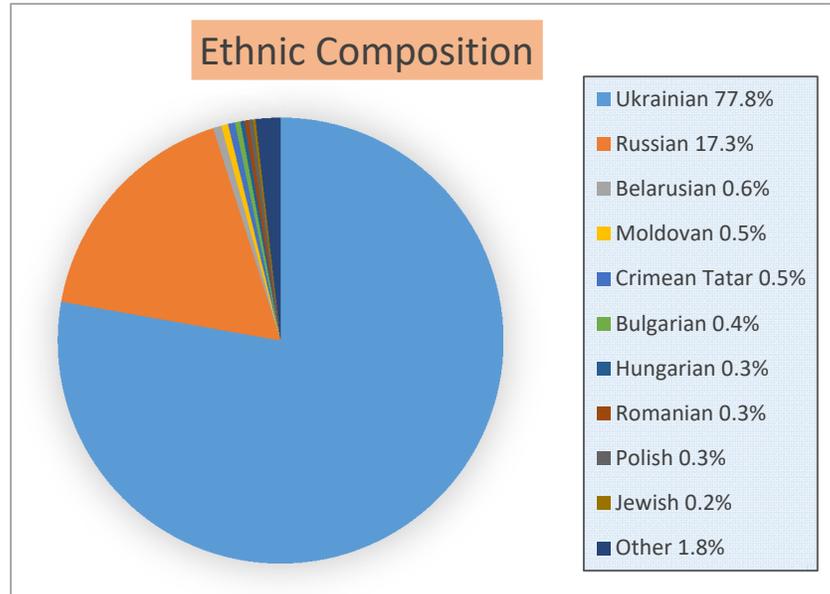
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## History:

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.

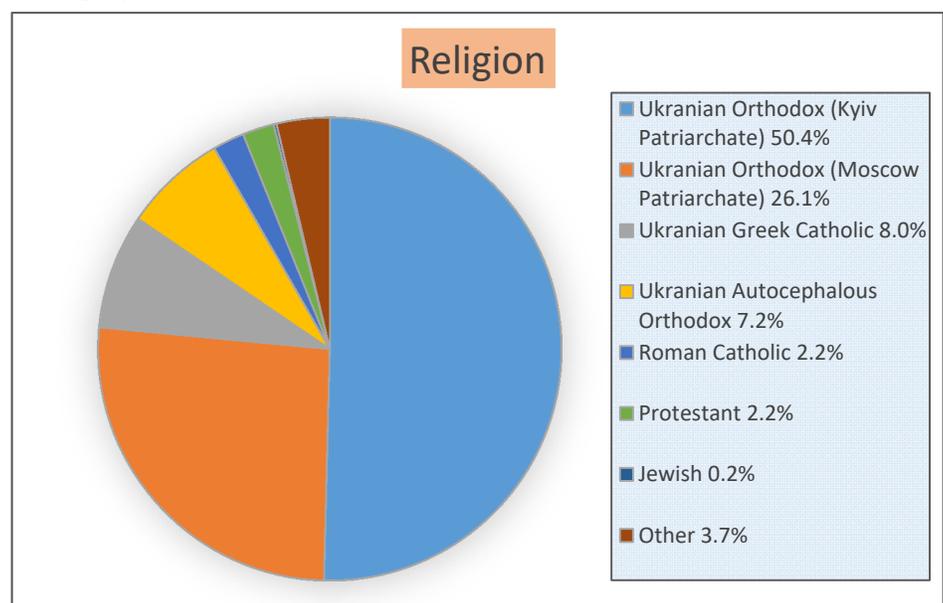
In 1918, Ukraine briefly gained independence, but the Bolsheviks took over the newly independent country between 1918 and 1921 during the Russian Civil War. As a result of the Soviet-Polish War in 1921, Ukraine was divided between the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania.



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, known as the Holodomor. 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 24, 1991. In December 1991, Ukrainian communist party leader Leonid Kravchuk became the first president of newly-independent Ukraine.

### **Government:**

Ukraine is a semi-presidential republic with executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

The unicameral parliament (*Verkhovna Rada*, or Supreme Council) consists of 450 members elected to five-year terms. (Because of the Russian annexation of Crimea and the partial occupation of two eastern provinces, 27 of the 450 seats remain unfilled.) It has the power to initiate legislation, ratify international agreements, and approve the state budget. The next election is scheduled for October 2019.

The Supreme Court of Ukraine or SCU consists of 95 judges organized into civil, criminal, commercial, and administrative chambers, and a military panel; a separate Constitutional Court comprises 18 justices. Supreme Court judges are proposed by an independent body of judicial officials and other appointees, and appointed by presidential decree, and may serve until mandatory retirement at age 65. Constitutional Court justices are appointed (six each by the president, SCU, and Verkhovna Rada) for nine-year nonrenewable terms.

The President is the chief of state, and the Prime Minister is head of government. The Prime Minister nominates a Cabinet of Ministers, to be approved by the Verkhovna Rada. The president directly is elected by absolute majority popular vote for at most two five-year terms. The prime minister, nominated by the president, is confirmed by the Rada.

Ukraine held its most recent presidential election in March 2019. Of thirty-nine candidates, the three frontrunners were incumbent President Petro Poroshenko, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, and actor/comedian-turned-politician Volodymyr Zelensky. Following the first round, Zelensky secured a plurality of the votes followed by Poroshenko. The two will face each other in a runoff on April 21.

### **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 as the first president. During his presidency, Ukraine’s economy severely contracted, 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 committee's decision sparked massive non-violent protests against Yanukovich, known as the Orange Revolution. A December 2004 runoff election resulted in Yushchenko's election as President.

Despite high expectations, Yushchenko's government could not 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 with Yushchenko's presidency. Yushchenko's government also suffered from the regionalization of Ukrainian politics. Although he had strong support in the Western regions, less Russified regions of the country, those in the East continued to support Yanukovich and his party's pro-Russian policies.

In the 2010 presidential elections, former Prime Minister Yanukovich and Batkivshchyna ("Fatherland") party leader Yulia Tymoshenko finished first and second, respectively. Yanukovich won a narrow victory in the second round of elections. His subsequent administration was widely criticized for consolidating executive power, pervasive corruption, and persecuting political opponents and independent media. The 2012 parliamentary elections were marred by misuse of administrative resources and voter bribery. A new "mixed" electoral system (50% of candidates elected by party, 50% by locality) led to systemic electoral violations.

In 2013 and 2014, Ukrainians took to the streets in a dramatic series of protests, known as "Euromaidan", which led to President Yanukovich's ouster, and new presidential and parliamentary elections. Russia refused to formally recognize Ukraine's new post-Yanukovich government, and deployed 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 began in Ukraine's eastern territories of Donetsk and Luhansk ("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, Ukraine's government and pro-Russian separatists signed a second ceasefire in Minsk. Since then, the level of violence has declined, but ceasefire violations persist. According to the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, mortar, rocket, and artillery attacks between April 2014 and May 2016 killed over 9,000 people and injured more than 21,000 – including civilians and combatants. Impunity for conflict-related torture and arbitrary, unacknowledged detention persisted on both sides, including targeting of journalists. In 2019, the UN Monitoring Mission on Human Rights estimated that between April 2014 and the end of 2018, 13,000 people had died as a result of the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

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

Authorities have made some progress toward accountability for abuses during the 2014 Maidan protests by government forces against protesters. In June 2016, authorities charged four members of the Berkut riot police battalion with killing three protesters and injuring 35.

In May 2015, President Poroshenko appointed former President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili Governor of the Odesa region, for which Saakashvili had to renounce his Georgian citizenship. In November 2016, however, Saakashvili resigned from his post, decrying the high level of corruption in the country, and accusing Ukraine's government and President of high level corruption and kleptocracy. In December 2017, he was arrested and later deported to Poland.

In Crimea, Russian authorities have persecuted pro-Ukraine activists and the Crimean Tatar community for their peaceful opposition to Russia's occupation of the peninsula. Ukrainian authorities took several positive steps to facilitate civilians' crossing to and from Ukrainian-held territory, but lack of infrastructure at crossing points, especially from the nongovernment-controlled side, exposure to landmines and shelling, and long waits in extreme temperatures continued to cause civilians hardship.

In November 2018, tension between Ukraine and Russia once again increased after the Russian military seized three Ukrainian naval vessels in the Kerch Strait, which divides the Black Sea from the Sea of Azov. After firing upon the three ships, Russian forces captured the twenty-four crewmen and have held them since. Efforts to diplomatically resolve this situation have thus far failed.

### **Economic Situation:**

Russia's occupation of Crimea in March 2014 and ongoing aggression in eastern Ukraine have hurt economic growth. With the loss of a major portion of Ukraine's heavy industry in Donbas and ongoing violence, Ukraine's economy contracted by 6.6% in 2014 and by 9.8% in 2015. The Ukrainian economy returned to low growth in 2016 and 2017, reaching 2.3% and 2.0%, respectively, as key reforms took hold. It also redirected trade activity towards the EU

following the implementation of a bilateral Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement in January 2016, displacing Russia as Ukraine's largest trading partner. A prohibition on commercial trade with separatist-controlled territories in early 2017 has not impacted Ukraine's key industrial sectors as much as expected, largely because of favorable external conditions. Amid positive economic developments, Ukraine returned to international debt markets in September 2017, issuing a \$3 billion sovereign bond.

**Occupied region: Donbas (Donetsk, Luhansk regions), which comprises:**

- 7% of Ukraine's territory
- 10% of Ukraine's GDP (2013)
- 30% of all Ukrainian exports (2014)

The international community has taken efforts to stabilize the Ukrainian economy, including a March 2014 IMF assistance package of \$17.5 billion, of which Ukraine has received four disbursements, most recently in April 2017, bringing the total disbursed to approximately \$8.4 billion. Ukraine has made significant progress on reforms designed to make the country prosperous, democratic, and transparent. But more improvements are needed, including fighting corruption, developing capital markets, and improving the business environment to attract foreign investment, and privatizing state-owned enterprises.

## **Civil Liberties and Social Issues:**

The constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and expression, and libel is not a criminal offense. The media landscape features considerable pluralism and open criticism of the government. However, business magnates with varying political interests own and influence many outlets, using them as tools to advance their agendas. President Poroshenko owns the television network Fifth Channel and has rebuffed press freedom groups' demands that he honor his earlier promise to sell it.

In 2014, the Interior Ministry banned the broadcast of over a dozen Russian channels, arguing that the country's information space had to be protected from Moscow's "propaganda of war and violence." Authorities continued to censor some Russian news sources and ban individual Russian journalists from entering the country in 2017. In May 2017, Ukraine sanctioned the popular Russian social networking sites Odnoklassniki and VK, Russian state news agency RIA Novosti, and the search engine Yandex, among others.

Journalists continue to face the threat of violence and intimidation. The independent Institute of Mass Information registered 274 media freedom violations during 2017, roughly the same number of incidents as in 2016. The most common violations included impeding journalists' activities, intimidation, and assaults. The media environment in occupied parts of eastern Ukraine is marked by severe violations of free expression, including censorship by the de facto authorities.

The constitution and a 1991 law define religious rights in Ukraine, and these are generally respected. However, the conflict has increased friction between rival branches of the Orthodox Church, and smaller religious groups continue to report some discrimination. In the occupied eastern regions, separatist forces have reportedly persecuted Protestant and other non-Russian Orthodox denominations, forcing them to flee or operate underground churches.

Civil society has flourished since 2014, as civic groups with various social, political, cultural, and economic agendas have emerged or become reinvigorated. Many groups are able to influence decision-making at various levels of government. However, in March 2017, President Poroshenko signed a law that increased monitoring of NGOs focused on corruption by requiring their leaders, staff, and contractors to submit asset declarations.

## **Foreign Policy:**

### **European Union**

In May 2017, the European Union approved visa-free travel for Ukrainian citizens. Under the regulation, Ukrainian citizens holding a biometric passport can travel to an EU country for up to 90 days out of any 180-day period for business, tourism or family purposes.

According to a June 2018 poll by the non-governmental research group "RATING," 51% of Ukraine's citizens supported their country's integration into the EU.

In February 2019, President Poroshenko signed a new constitutional amendment that committed the country to becoming a member of NATO and the European Union. The legislation requires Ukraine to submit a request for EU membership and receive a NATO membership action plan no later than 2023. European Council President Donald Tusk attended the signing ceremony at the Rada.

## **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 UK 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.

During Yanukovich's presidency from 2010-2014, 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 opposition leader Yulia 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, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland visited Ukraine to support the country's European aspirations, and to help resolve the political crisis. Secretary of State John Kerry visited later, pledging U.S. financial and technical assistance for Ukraine's new government. In March 2014, following the Euromaidan revolution, the U.S. approved \$1 billion in loan guarantees for Ukraine. By early June, the U.S. had announced funding to promote 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 Petro Poroshenko visited Washington for a nuclear summit and met with President Barack Obama and other U.S. leaders. In June 2016, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden announced a commitment of \$220 million in new assistance to support economic, political, and energy reforms.

On January 16, 2017, in one of his last official acts, Vice President Joe Biden met Ukraine's president and called on the Trump administration to retain Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia.

In May 2017 Vice President Mike Pence met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin in Washington. Pence issued a statement that stressed U.S. support for Ukraine's "territorial integrity" while urging Kyiv to "peacefully resolve the conflict" with Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

In June 2017, President Donald Trump met with President Poroshenko amid intensifying questions over whether his administration would step in to protect partners in the face of Russian aggression. The White House meeting began shortly after the Trump administration sanctioned two Russian officials and three dozen other individuals and companies over Russian activities in Ukraine. In January 2018, the United States imposed new economic sanctions on a further 21 people and nine companies.

In February 2018, in the framework of the Munich Security Conference, President Poroshenko met with Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis. Poroshenko expressed gratitude for the United States' firm support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The two sides also discussed the need to deploy a United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Donbas.

In July 2018, the U.S. State Department released the *Crimea Declaration*, which reaffirmed the United States' refusal to recognize Russia's annexation of the peninsula. The Declaration, furthermore, pledged the United States to maintain this policy until Ukraine's territorial integrity is restored.

In March 2019, the United States, EU, and Canada took coordinated action to impose sanctions on individuals who orchestrated the November 2018 attack on Ukrainian naval vessels near the Kerch Strait. Additionally, the U.S. sanctioned six Russian defense firms, two individuals involved in the November sham "elections" in eastern Ukraine; and two Russian energy and construction companies operating in Crimea.

Before the U.S.-hosted NATO summit in Washington in April 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called on NATO member states to support Ukraine. In March 26 testimony to the House Foreign Relations Committee, Pompeo also outlined his hope for additional measures against Russia.

## **Israel**

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

In 2005, Ukraine and Israel signed an economic agreement promoting trade cooperation. Ukraine sided with Israel during a UN Human Rights Council vote to condemn "Israeli human rights violations in Lebanon" in August 2006, and to investigate Israel's conduct during the war. Ukraine supported Israel on the issue of the 2009 UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (the "Goldstone Report"), voting 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 June

2011, Israel and Ukraine signed a bilateral agreement establishing an Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation. Israel's and Ukraine's foreign ministers have made frequent bilateral visits.

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.

In December 2016, Ukraine voted for a UN resolution condemning Israeli settlements. Shortly after that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu cancelled the planned visit of Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman to Israel due to Ukraine's vote. In a statement defending the vote, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry described the resolution as "balanced," and said its "yes" vote should not affect ties.

In May 2017 Prime Minister Netanyahu met with Prime Minister Groysman in Jerusalem. Netanyahu described the premier's visit and the mending of ties between Jerusalem and Kyiv as a "moment of courageous friendship."

In January 2019, Israel and Ukraine signed a free trade agreement after more than fifteen years of negotiation. With this agreement, trade between the two countries is expected to increase to over \$1 billion in the next five years.

### **Jewish Communal Life:**

Ukraine's Jewish community comprises approximately 300,000 people and more than 290 organizations in 100 towns and cities. Kyiv's Jewish community, estimated at 100,000, is the largest, followed closely by Odesa (60,000-70,000), Dnipro (60,000), Kharkiv (50,000), and Donetsk (18,000). Regionally second in size only to Russia's community, Ukrainian Jewry is renewing its vibrancy.

### **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, led by Cossack Bohdan Khmelnytsky, who is still regarded today as a Ukrainian national hero, against the Polish aristocracy. 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 various armies, militias, and insurgents. Ukrainian nationalist forces during this period have been accused of responsibility for the most devastating pogroms, and their activities led many Jews to join the Red Army and the Communist Party, which officially opposed anti-Semitism.

## **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. 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.

U.S.-born Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich (a member of the Karlin-Stoliner movement) has served as Chief Rabbi of Ukraine and Kyiv since 1992, and is a widely-recognized leader of Ukraine’s post-Soviet Jewish renaissance. 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 Ihor 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 Dnipro, Odesa, Zhytomyr, 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. 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 in pairing 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-Odesa, Chicago-Kyiv, MetroWest (NJ)-Cherkasy, and Boston-Dnipro; similar projects were successful in other Ukrainian cities.



Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and other senior government and community leaders place candles at the Babi Yar Memorial on September 29, 2016. (Shahar Azran)

In September 2016, the Ukrainian government marked the 75th anniversary of the Holocaust-era massacres at the Babi Yar ravine with a three day series of commemorative events in Kyiv. Event participants included President Poroshenko, Prime Minister Groysman, Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko, and Jewish organization representatives from across the globe, including a delegation of over 20 NCSEJ leaders.

During the commemorative events, the government announced plans to build a museum and research center at Babi Yar. In August 2017, The Culture Ministry of Ukraine, the National Historical Memorial Reserve, and the International Memorial Foundation “Babi

Yar” signed a memorandum on the joint establishment of the Babi Yar State Museum. The state has allocated funds for restoring a building for the future museum.

Other 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 Dnipro, 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 Dnipro, 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, ten Jewish newspapers are published in Kyiv, four of which have national circulations of 10-15,000. Nearly twenty smaller Jewish newspapers are published in other Ukrainian cities. Several professional Jewish theaters operate in Kyiv.

The Ukrainian city of Uman annually hosts tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims from around the world for celebration of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

### **Community Concerns and Anti-Semitism:**

#### *Restitution*

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 the local Jewish community 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.

As of early 2019, Ukraine has no official law for the restitution of confiscated communal or private property. Authorities have made efforts, however, to work with the Jewish community and State Committee on Archives to register and return all Torahs in the country to former owners or synagogues.

### *Cemetery Preservation*

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.

An issue that remains to be addressed is inadequate security of Ukraine's Jewish sites. Anti-Semitic vandalism has prompted the need for the government to address insufficient protection by increasing security and vigorously prosecuting hate crimes.

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. On September, 4, 2016, the first phase of the Space of Synagogues project in the western city of Lviv was opened for the general public. It includes conservation of the remains of the Golden Rose synagogue, marking the foundations of the Jewish House of Learning (Beth Hamidrash) and the Perpetuation memorial installation.

Crosses erected at several Jewish cemeteries and World War II killing sites have stirred interethnic and religious quarrels. In particular, disputes continue over the presence of a cross in the old Jewish cemetery near 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. In March 2017, NCSEJ raised concerns over the placement of a cross in a historic Jewish cemetery in Kolomyia by the members of the Right Sector, Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists.

The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad has been active in addressing issues of restoration and preservation. The Commission and Ukrainian government signed an agreement in 1994 to establish frameworks for the protection and preservation of cultural sites.

In 2018 and 2019, however, local Jewish communities have reported numerous cemetery desecrations throughout the country. These include anti-Semitic graffiti and physical damage to memorials.

In 2018, there were also cases of grave diggers vandalizing Jewish cemeteries in the hope of finding valuables. In March 2019, grave robbers desecrated a mass grave of Holocaust victims in Raflivka.

### *Donbas Conflict*

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 3,000 Jews remain in the city of Donetsk itself, while around 12,000 have immigrated since the start of the conflict. 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, many with the help of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. With the stabilization of the armed conflict, the rate of Jewish emigration in 2016 reached approximately 5,700. In 2017 and 2018, 4,300 and 4,000 Ukrainian Jews made aliyah, respectively.

### *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, but in the years following independence, Ukraine's government ceased its anti-Jewish rhetoric and reached out to Jewish communities. Today, there is no official state-sponsored anti-Semitism.

Despite government efforts to fight anti-Semitism 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.

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 occurred across Ukraine. 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 Zhytomyr 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.

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.

Jewish community leaders have expressed concerns over the honoring of figures such as Olena Teliha, a Ukrainian nationalist writer and one of the leaders of OUN. In July 2016, Moscow Avenue in Kyiv was renamed after Stepan Bandera, the leader of the militant nationalist movement in the 1930-1940s, who were widely believed to be responsible for lethal violence against Jews and Poles. In May 2017, the Kyiv city council passed legislation to rename one of the city’s main streets after Roman Shukhevych, a Ukrainian nationalist and Nazi officer who commanded a radical militia also complicit in the murder of Jews during World War II.

In a widely-publicized post on his official Facebook page and on Twitter in May 2018, President Poroshenko wrote: “I strongly condemn any manifestations of intolerance and anti-Semitism. I consider as unacceptable any attempts to bring these shameful things in Ukraine, as it happened recently during the actions in Lviv and Odesa. Ukrainian authorities will resolutely respond to any attempts to sow hostility in our society. The reaction of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies to such unlawful actions will be immediate. Ukraine is not a place for discrimination and intolerance on any ground, since respect for life and dignity of every person is the highest value for the Ukrainian state,” Poroshenko stated.

#### **Selected Anti-Semitic Incidents in 2017:**

- On January 1, over a thousand Ukrainians participated in a torchlight march in Kyiv, organized by the “Svoboda” political party, for the 108th birthday of Stepan Bandera. Bandera headed the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists during World War II. A column of the marchers began chanting “Juden Out.” One of

the banners included both a symbol used by Nazis and the Waffen SS, and the slogan “We will destroy the second Khazar Khanate,” referencing an anti-Semitic myth that Jews secretly control the country.

- In January, Nazi symbols were spray-painted on a monument to Holocaust victims near mass graves. The letter X was painted on the Star of David on the monument near the western city of Ternopil. A swastika was drawn on the Hebrew-language section of the monument and the SS symbol on the part in English.
- On April 25, a theater in Kyiv displayed a sign for an upcoming performance of play titled *A Holocaust Cabaret*. The sign was put up a day earlier, while Israel was marking Holocaust Remembrance Day, and drew criticism from Chief Rabbi of Ukraine Moshe Azman, who posted pictures of the theater on his Facebook page.
- In a series of highly public anti-Semitic statements by prominent figures in Ukraine, a retired Ukrainian general affiliated with the country’s intelligence services called for the destruction of his country’s Jewish community. In a post since deleted from Facebook, Vasily Vovk – a general who holds a senior reserve rank with the Security Service of Ukraine, the local successor to the KGB – wrote that Jews “aren’t Ukrainians and I will destroy you along with [Ukrainian oligarch and Jewish lawmaker Vadim] Rabinovich. I’m telling you one more time - go to hell, zhidi [kikes], the Ukrainian people have had it to here with you....Ukraine must be governed by Ukrainians.”
- Two swastikas were painted on the front door of a synagogue in western Ukraine and, in a separate incident, the headstone of a prominent rabbi’s grave was smashed. The incident involving the swastikas was discovered in May in Chernivtsi, 250 miles southwest of Kyiv. Community leaders reported the incident to police and removed the offensive symbols. In the town of Storozhynets, 12 miles southwest of Chernivtsi, the headstone was smashed at the resting place of Rabbi Yechiel Hager, a grandson of Menachem Mendel Hager, the 19th-century founder of the Vizhnitz Hasidic dynasty. There are no suspects in either case.
- In July, unidentified individuals hurled a firebomb at a synagogue in Lviv and, in a separate incident, wrote anti-Semitic slogans on another Jewish community building in the western Ukrainian city. The perpetrators may have aimed the firebomb at a window of the synagogue on Mikhovsky Street but missed it, hitting the building facade, according to the director of the Chesed-Arieh Jewish group Ada Dianova. The firebomb fell to the foot of the building and burned there, resulting in no damage to the interior. The anti-Semitic slogans painted on a former building of the community on Sholem Aleichem Street included the words “Down with Jewish power” and “Jews, remember July 1,” an apparent reference to a 1941 pogrom in Lviv.
- In July, a local resident prevented three vandals from defacing the memorial building in the “Space of Synagogue” with paint on Staroevreyska Street in the center of Lviv.
- In July, vandals in northwestern Ukraine sprayed Nazi symbols and other antisemitic graffiti that targeted the World Zionist Organization. Local residents visiting a monument for victims of the Holocaust discovered the graffiti near the site, located in the village of P’yatydni in Volyn Oblast. In 1942, the Nazis killed 20,000 Jews near the village. A local Jewish activist affiliated with the WZO reported the incident. “WZO = ☆ ✠” was found painted on the ground in front of the steps leading to the monument. Vladimir Muzichenko, who visited the site to commemorate the victims, also reported anti-Semitic graffiti at several other locations in the area and instances of grave-robbing. Other graffiti found at a bus stop included scrawlings of the WZO initials, the word “Judenreich” (sic), the names of Ukrainian parliamentary parties and the Star of David.

### **Selected Anti-Semitic Incidents in 2018:**

- In January, an unidentified person wearing a ski mask hurled a smoke grenade into a Lviv bookstore during a lecture about the Holocaust organized by the Jewish youth organization Hillel. Witnesses described the perpetrator as a teenager, though they did not see his face. The incident ended without injury.
- In February, a monument for Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust was vandalized by unidentified individuals who painted on it a swastika and an SS symbol. The incident occurred in the city of Ternopil, located about 80 miles east of the city of Lviv in Western Ukraine. The day before the incident, on February 2, the editor-in-chief of a local newspaper in Chortkiv, 40 miles south of Ternopil, published an article claiming Jews have excessive power in Ukraine and that only 800,000 Jews died in the Holocaust.
- In April, hundreds of people in Lviv attended a nationalist march featuring Nazi symbols that commemorated a Waffen SS unit with many local volunteers. The march honored the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS, or the 1st Galician. The march was held on the 75th anniversary of the 1st Galician's establishment under Nazi auspices. In addition to the Waffen SS symbols, dozens of participants at the march carried posters featuring the 1st Galician's symbol. The event followed a string of vandalism attacks in April targeting Jewish sites.
- In July, Ukraine's top military prosecutor Anatoliy Matios stated that Jews desired Ukrainians to shed blood and associated Jews with Bolshevism. Matios failed to apologize and instead claimed that his comments were "a test."
- On October 14, 10,000 Ukrainian nationalists marched through Kiev to commemorate the formation of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. During the Second World War, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army fought with Nazi Germany and participated in the murder of tens of thousands of Jews and Poles.
- On October 28, the regional leader of the far-right Svoboda Party shared an image of a Cossack beating a Jew with a flail, along with a poem celebrating the attack as a "threshing."
- On October 31, Chief Rabbi of Ukraine Moshe Azman announced that secret recording and surveillance devices were discovered in Kiev's main synagogue. The Jewish community accused the government's National Anti-Corruption Bureau of placing the apparatus in the synagogue.
- In December, Lviv's regional council declared 2019 the "Year of Stepan Bandera." During the Second World War, Bandera led the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, which allied itself with Nazi Germany. Bandera advocated anti-Semitic policies and the removal of Jews from Ukraine's territory.

### **Selected Anti-Semitic Incidents in 2019:**

- On February 11, following a far-right protest in Kyiv, members of the police force and Interior Minister, as well as National Police Chief Serhiy Knyazev started a social media campaign in which they identified themselves as #IamaBanderites. The hashtag appeared in response to a riot-police officer using a derogatory form of the name while he attacked a far-right demonstrator. Kyiv's police chief apologized for the officers' use of the slur and also noted that he too was a #Banderite.
- On February 18, a staircase with a built-in video display in a Kyiv shopping mall on Bandera Avenue was briefly hacked to display the image of a large swastika. Authorities claimed the digital vandalism was a Russian provocation, and the image was immediately taken down. A torchlight parade by Ukrainian nationalists through central Kyiv occurred the same day that the image in the mall was found.