Introduction

Ukraine (Ukrainian Ukraina), country in eastern Europe, and the second largest country in Europe after Russia. Ukraine is bordered on the west by Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary; on the southwest by Romania and Moldova; on the south by the Black Sea and Sea of Azov; on the east and northeast by Russia; and on the north by Belarus. The Crimean Autonomous Republic—encompassing the Crimean Peninsula, or Crimea, in the south—is included in Ukraine's borders. The capital and largest city is Kyiv (Kiev).

Much of Ukraine is a fertile plain suited for agriculture. Ukraine is rich in natural resources, and has a developed economy with significant agricultural and industrial sectors. The country has a democratic form of government headed by a president.

From the 9th century AD northern Ukraine was part of Kievan Rus, the first significant East Slavic state, which succumbed to the Mongol invasions of the 13th century. Ukraine was for centuries thereafter under the rule of a succession of foreign powers, including Poland and the Russian Empire. In 1918 a Bolshevik (Communist) government was established in Ukraine, and in 1922 the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) was one of the four founding republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Ukraine's declaration of independence, approved by a popular vote on December 1, 1991, was a major factor in the USSR's collapse later that month.

Land and Resources

The area of Ukraine area is 603,700 sq km (233,090 sq mi). Most of Ukraine is a broad, flat plain. The highest point is Mount Hoverla at 2061 m (6762 ft), located in the Carpathian Mountains in the west. Ukraine has a temperate continental climate, with a subtropical Mediterranean climate on the Crimean Peninsula in the south. Precipitation generally decreases from north to south; it is greatest in the Carpathians. Ukraine has

extremely fertile soils in the central and southern portions. Wildlife includes deer, beaver, marten, vulture, and the steppe eagle.

People and Religion

The population of Ukraine was estimated in 2003 at 48,055,439, giving the country a population density of 80 persons per sq km (206 per sq mi). The most notable recent demographic trend has been a decline in population—with an estimated loss of nearly 1.2 million between 1990 and 1997—due to death rates exceeding birth rates. Leading factors in the country's low fertility and high mortality rates are environmental pollution, poor diet, widespread smoking and alcoholism, and deteriorating medical care. Some 68 percent of the population lives in cities and towns. The largest cities in Ukraine are Kyiv, the country's capital and economic, cultural, and educational center; Kharkiv, noted for its engineering expertise, machinery plants, and educational institutions; Dnipropetrovs'k, a center of metallurgical and aerospace industries; and Donets'k, known for mining and metallurgy. Odesa (Odessa), on the Black Sea coast, is the country's largest seaport.

Ethnic Ukrainians make up 73 percent of the population of Ukraine. Russians are the largest minority group at 22 percent. Jews (considered both an ethnic and a religious group in Ukraine) and Belarusians each account for about 1 percent of the total. Other numerically significant groups are Bulgarians, Poles, Hungarians, and Romanians. Since the end of World War II in 1945, the proportion of Russians nearly doubled, while the Jewish population declined by about half as a result of emigration. Ethnic clashes are rare, although some tension exists in Crimea between Crimean Tatars and ethnic Russians. The Crimean Tatars, who were forcibly deported to Central Asia in 1944, are being allowed to resettle in Crimea. Of the 250,000 who have returned, about 100,000 still have inadequate housing and 70,000 have not yet received Ukrainian citizenship.

--> Language
The official language of the country is Ukrainian, which forms with Russian and Belarusian the eastern branch of the Slavic language subfamily of Indo-European languages. Russian also is widely used, especially in the cities.

--> Education
Literacy is almost universal in Ukraine, and education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 15. Ukraine's institutions of higher learning include ten universities and a large number of specialized academies. The most prestigious is the University of Kyiv (founded in 1834), located in the capital. L'viv State University (1784), located in L'viv, is the country's oldest university. In recent years private schools and universities have appeared, most notably the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (1992), located in Kyiv.

--> Way of Life
Ukraine's society was traditionally agrarian and village-based. With Soviet rule came rapid modernization and urbanization. By the 1960s, most inhabitants lived in cities. Important regional differences developed in Ukraine; today the west tends to be more

agrarian, traditionalist, religious, and Ukrainian-speaking, while the east is industrialized, urbanized, and more often Russian-speaking. The highly regimented lifestyle of the Soviet period is slowly being supplanted by a consumer society. However, the transition to a market-based economy is difficult, and most people have been engaged in a desperate struggle to make ends meet.

A series of exploitative regimes kept living standards low during the Soviet period, although the government provided employment and other provisions such as housing. Apartments built during the Soviet period are small and cramped, and most of the buildings are now dilapidated. An average family has only about one-seventh the living space of an average family in the United States. People in Ukraine spend more than half of their income on food, and many families depend on garden plots to meet their food needs. Due to economic constraints, families are small and getting smaller. Divorce rates are high. Despite formal equality, women are especially hard-pressed. Although they form the majority of the labor force, even in sectors demanding physical labor such as farming, few women have positions of influence in politics, business, or government. Vacations, once lengthy, have become less frequent for most people. New developments since the end of Soviet rule are freedom of expression and the growth of private property, especially in the form of dwellings.

The Ukrainian diet depends heavily on rye bread, potatoes, and borsch (beet soup). Pork and pork products, especially sausage and salo (a type of smoked bacon), are favored meats. Alcohol consumption, especially of the potent horilka, a wheat-based whiskey, is high, and smoking is widespread. Consumer goods are now more available than in the Soviet period, but few people can afford them. City residents usually have appliances such as refrigerators, telephones, and televisions; these amenities are much less common in the villages. Soccer is the most popular spectator sport in Ukraine. The main leisure activity is watching television. Cultural activities such as concerts, opera, and ballet are becoming less accessible for most people because of the cost.

--> Religion

During most of the Soviet period, the state imposed severe restrictions on religious activity, banned many churches, and persecuted religious leaders. Many believers, forced underground, continued to adhere to their faiths, however. Religious activity remained relatively strong in Ukraine, and it has greatly expanded since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. A majority of the population adheres to Eastern Orthodoxy through the Ukrainian Orthodox Church or the Ukrainian Autocephalous (independent) Orthodox Church. Until 1990 all of the country’s Orthodox churches were part of the Ukrainian exarchate, which was subsidiary to the patriarchate (jurisdiction of the patriarch, or head) of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1992 the Ukrainian Orthodox Church split into two rival denominations when the Kyivan patriarchate was formed, separating itself from the Moscow patriarchate. The autocephalous church, which was banned by the Soviet government in 1930, regained legal status in 1990. About 10 percent of the population, based almost exclusively in western Ukraine, belongs to the Ukrainian Catholic (Uniate) Church, a church of the Byzantine rite (see Eastern Rite Churches); banned in 1946, this

church was officially revived in 1991. Other denominations include Roman Catholics of the Latin rite, Jews, Muslims, and Baptists.

Economy

Ukraine was the second-ranking Soviet republic in industrial and agricultural production, after Russia. Long known as the “breadbasket of Europe,” Ukraine traditionally had a highly developed agricultural sector because of its vast, fertile lands. It generated more than one-fourth of the total agricultural output of the Soviet Union. Industrial development was a high priority of the Soviet government. In the 1930s Ukraine experienced a rapid and extensive industrial upsurge, mainly in the mineral-rich Donets’k and Kryvyy Rih regions. Because of Soviet development, which emphasized heavy industry, Ukraine possesses one of the most industrialized economies of Europe. However, its industries are highly inefficient and in pressing need of modernization.

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought a dramatic rise in energy costs and a reduction in demand for Ukraine’s products, causing a catastrophic decline in production. The problems were compounded by high rates of inflation and sluggish reforms to increase private ownership of enterprise. In 1995 and 1996, however, inflation was significantly reduced and reforms toward a system based on free enterprise were accelerated. In addition, the United States as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international organizations provided large grants and loans.

The value of Ukraine’s gross domestic product (GDP) in 2001 was $37.6 billion. Agriculture, which includes forestry and fishing, accounted for 17 percent; industry, which includes mining, manufacturing, and construction, accounted for 39 percent; and trade and other services accounted for 44 percent.

Government

Although Ukraine is a unitary state, its constitution allows for a considerable degree of decentralization. The country is divided into 24 oblasts (regions) and one autonomous republic, Crimea. The cities of Kyiv and Sevastopol’ have special status; their governments, which operate independently of oblast authority, are responsible only to the central government in Kyiv. Local councils and executive bodies, elected every four years, are responsible for their jurisdiction’s taxes, budgets, schools, roads, utilities, and public health. The Crimean Autonomous Republic enjoys far-ranging autonomy within Ukraine, including its own constitution, legislature, and Cabinet of Ministers. The latter controls Crimea’s government and economy, but is restricted from implementing policies that would contradict the constitution of Ukraine.

Executive authority in Ukraine lies in a president who is elected by direct, popular vote. The president appoints the prime minister and the cabinet with the approval of the legislature. The 450-member Supreme Council is Ukraine's legislative authority.

History

Ukraine has been the site of much conflict over the centuries. In the late 9th century Kiev was captured by Varangians and made the capital of the state known as Kievan Rus. In the 13th century the area was invaded by Tatar-Mongols. Galicia, in western Ukraine, was annexed by Poland in the 14th century. At the same time, Lithuania conquered Kiev, but both then fell under Polish rule. In 1667 eastern Ukraine was ceded to Russia, and in 1793 the remainder of Ukraine—except Galicia—became part of the Russian Empire. Galicia remained part of the Austrian Empire, which it had joined in 1772. During World War I (1914-1918), following Russia's Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Ukraine proclaimed independence. The Bolsheviks, however, assumed control in 1920, and in 1922 Ukraine joined the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Between 1922 and 1939 the USSR suppressed Ukrainian nationalists, who hoped for the independence of a Greater Ukraine, including Polish Galicia and Czechoslovakian Ruthenia. Forced collectivization of farms caused famine in the 1930s, and more than 7 million people died in Ukraine. In 1939 Galicia was incorporated into Ukraine, and during World War II (1939-1945) Germany invaded, dividing the country into Russian Ukraine and West Ukraine. The USSR regained control in 1944, and in 1954 added Crimea to Ukraine.

In 1991 the USSR collapsed, and Ukraine became an independent republic. Crimea, dominated by ethnic Russians, tried unsuccessfully to secede. In 1994 Crimea voted to reactivate its constitution, which had been suspended in 1992, but Ukrainian President Leonid Danylovych Kuchma dissolved the local parliament. Secessionist groups were also defeated in local elections. In 1994 Kuchma was elected president. He accelerated the conversion from a state-owned to a free-market economy and signed an agreement with the Ukrainian parliament giving the president broader political power.

Internal Power Struggles & Shifting Governments

Ukraine was the last of the former Soviet republics to adopt a new constitution. The delay was caused by a struggle in the legislature between reformers, who wanted to introduce a new, democratic system of government, and conservatives, who wanted to preserve the structures of the former Soviet state. In 1996 the reformers finally triumphed when the legislature adopted a new constitution that stipulated a parliamentary democracy. Ukraine adopted the new constitution on June 28, 1996. This achievement was buttressed by the smooth introduction, in August, of a new unit of currency, the hryvnia. Meanwhile, Kuchma succeeded in persuading most of the political leaders in Crimea to accept the idea of autonomy within Ukraine.

Nevertheless, political problems abounded. In May 1996 Kuchma replaced his prime minister, Evhen Marchuk, with Pavlo Lazarenko, a rich, influential businessman from Dnipropetrovs’k, a region from where the new president himself and many top

government officials came. In July an attempt was made to assassinate the new prime minister. Many viewed it as a reflection of the power struggles between powerful clans of politicians and businessmen from Dnipropetrovs'k and those from Donets'k. Such regional loyalties and conflicts, accompanied by extensive corruption, began to play an increasing role in the politics of Ukraine.

In 1997 President Kuchma dismissed Prime Minister Lazarenko, who had drawn widespread criticism for the slow pace of economic reform, and appointed Valery Pustovoitenko to succeed him. In the 1998 legislative elections, the Communists won the largest percentage of the vote; however, they still held less than 25 percent of the seats in a parliament dominated by independents. In September 1998, less than a month after Russia's economic collapse, Ukraine's currency, the hryvnia, fell significantly in value, and the country's economy continued to slump through 1999. The government put limits on the money supply so that Ukraine could receive loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union (EU).

In November 1999 Kuchma was elected to a second term as president. He appointed Viktor Yushchenko, the longtime chairman of the National Bank of Ukraine, as the new prime minister in December. Yushchenko became immensely popular with the public for his economic reforms and anticorruption efforts; however, the left-leaning legislature ousted his government with a vote of no-confidence in April 2001. Kuchma named a more conservative politician, Anatoli Kinakh, to replace Yushchenko. In the 2002 legislative elections, the Communist Party lost its dominance of the legislature, with more seats going to Yushchenko's new reformist bloc, Our Ukraine, than any other party or bloc. However, the United Ukraine bloc, which supported Kuchma, gained the support of enough independents to form the largest parliamentary faction. Kuchma named the United Ukraine nominee, Viktor Yanukovych, as prime minister.

--> 2004 Presidential Elections

Yushchenko emerged as the leading opposition candidate in the 2004 presidential race, running against Prime Minister Yanukovych. Kuchma, who chose not to run for reelection, endorsed Yanukovych. Throughout the election campaign Russian president Vladimir Putin publicly endorsed Yanukovych, who favored stronger ties with Russia and found his base of support in eastern Ukraine. Yushchenko advocated stronger ties with the West and drew his support mostly from western Ukraine.

The election in late October gave a small lead of 0.5 percent to Yushchenko, triggering a second-round ballot in November. Yanukovych was officially declared the winner of the runoff election, but Yushchenko rejected the result amid claims of widespread vote-rigging. Tens of thousands of his supporters staged daily protests in Kiev's Independence Square, blockading government buildings and demanding a new runoff election. Their protests became known as the Orange Revolution, for the prominent display of Yushchenko's campaign color in flags, banners, and clothing.

In early December the Supreme Court ruled that the November election had been fraudulent and annulled the results, paving the way for a new runoff election on December 26. Yushchenko won the election with 52 percent of the vote. Yanukovych, who took 44 percent of the vote, resigned as prime minister at the end of December. He appealed the result with the Supreme Court, but it upheld Yushchenko's election victory in January 2005.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian parliament reopened an inquiry into Yushchenko's claims he had been poisoned by his opponents during the election campaign. In the last three months of the campaign, a worsening skin condition had disfigured Yushchenko's previously photogenic face, in addition to other symptoms. Medical tests conducted in Vienna, Austria, in mid-December showed that Yushchenko's blood contained an extremely high level of dioxin, a highly toxic chemical byproduct, and further analysis determined the poison was TCDD, the most toxic type of dioxin.