



Module 4

Eastern Europe

This module is designed to introduce you to the work of OSCE field missions in eastern Europe. The module focuses on the work of the OSCE in:

- Belarus (OSCE Office in Minsk closed in 2011)
- Ukraine
- Moldova

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CHAPTER 1

Belarus

Belarus is a sovereign state in Eastern Europe that was formerly part of the Soviet Union. This chapter contains the following sections that describe Belarus:

- Key information
- Historical background
- Domestic politics
- Foreign relations



Key information

Geography

Item	Description
Area	81,000 square miles
Natural resources	Potatoes, grains, flax, and sugar beet are grown. There are no significant natural resources apart from wood and peat, the main local source of fuel.

People

Item	Description
Population	9.643 million (2012 est.)
Ethnic groups	Belarusians 84%, Russians 8%, Poles 3%, Ukrainians 2%, others 3%. People in the southern area of Belarus with a mixed Belarusian-Ukrainian identity and dialect are called Poleshchuks.
Religions	Eastern Orthodox 80%, other (including Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim) 20% (1997 est.)
Languages	The Belarusian language belongs to the eastern branch of the Slavic group of the Indo-European family of languages. It is written in an adapted form of the Cyrillic script that is used for Russian. Although the official state language is Belarusian, the language in most common use is Russian.

Government

Item	Description
Capital	Minsk
Type	Presidential republic
System of government	In formal terms, Belarus has evolved from a parliamentary into a presidential republic. In practice, the political system is a presidential dictatorship with a structural democratic veneer.
Head of state	Alexander Lukashenko (1994-present)
Currency	Belarusian Ruble



Historical background

This section describes the historical background of Belarus:

- Before Russian rule
- Under Russian and Soviet rule
- From Perestroika to independence



Before Russian rule

From 1386 to 1569, Belarus was part of the [Grand Duchy of Lithuania](#), a large multi-ethnic state that stretched from the Baltics to what is now western Ukraine. Its official language was Belarusian. Despite its name, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is regarded as a precursor of present-day Belarus. Belarus' flag and emblem are based on those of the Grand Duchy.

Belarus absorbed into the Kingdom of Poland

In 1569, the Grand Duchy was absorbed into the Kingdom of Poland. As a result, Belarus came under strong Polish influence. In the 17th century, Poland fought for control of Belarus against an expanding Russia. In 1795 Poland was divided between Russia, Prussia, and Austria; and Belarus was incorporated into the Russian Empire.

Belarusian republic

Intellectuals in Belarus started to think of themselves as belonging to a Belarusian nation in the mid-nineteenth century. However, the Russian government suppressed expression of Belarusian identity, and the nationalist movement remained weak.

In March 1918, an independent [Belarusian People's Republic](#) was proclaimed, made possible by the chaos that followed the Russian Revolution. In 1920-21, Poland and now Soviet Russia again fought over Belarusian territory. The newborn Belarusian republic was crushed, and the treaty that ended the Polish-Soviet war divided Belarus in two. Western Belarus came under Polish rule, while eastern Belarus became the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (Belarusian SSR), one of the USSR's union republics.



Under Russian and Soviet rule

In the 1920s, the Soviet government encouraged the development of Belarusian culture in the part of the country under its control, while the Polish government tried to suppress all expression of Belarusian identity in the part under its rule. This helps explain the strength of pro-Russian and pro-Soviet attitudes in Belarus.

War devastated Belarus

In 1939, the [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact](#) led to Nazi Germany's occupation of Poland (except for western Belarus) and the Soviet annexation of western Belarus, which was incorporated into the Belarusian SSR.

In 1941, the Nazis overran Belarus as they invaded the Soviet Union. The war devastated Belarus, leaving its cities in ruins and its population reduced by one quarter.



Post-war Minsk, 1944 (National Library of Belarus)

Steady Russification

After the war, the cities of Belarus were rebuilt and its economy restored. By the 1970s, a new industrial base was taking shape, including textiles, motor vehicles, chemicals, and electrical equipment. Belarus' industry was completely integrated into the USSR economy and dependent on Russia and other Union Republics for fuel and other supplies. The republic underwent steady Russification, so that by 1980 over a quarter of Belarusians no longer used Belarusian as their primary language.

From Perestroika to independence

In 1986, Gorbachev's moves to liberalize the Soviet system opened the floodgates of public protest in Belarus. Demonstrators demanded higher status for the Belarusian language and protested against the policies that caused the disaster at the [Chernobyl nuclear power station](#) in April 1986. Chernobyl is on the Ukrainian side of the Belarus-Ukraine border, but radioactivity affected Belarus the most because of the direction of the wind following the accident.

Belarusian Popular Front

In 1988 the [Belarusian Popular Front](#) (BPF) was established, and became the main organization behind the protest movement. In the March 1990 elections, many BPF candidates won seats in the Supreme Soviet of the Belarusian SSR and entered into a power-sharing arrangement with representatives of the old establishment.

In July 1990, the Supreme Soviet adopted a Declaration of State Sovereignty that proclaimed the Belarusian SSR a neutral state and a nuclear-free zone. Belarusian was declared the state language.

Belarusian independence

After the collapse in August 1991 of the hard-line coup in Moscow, Belarus declared full independence. The Belarusian SSR was renamed the [Republic of Belarus](#). The scientist [Stanislav Shushkevich](#), who was close to the BPF, was appointed chairman of the Supreme Soviet, which made him head of state (there being no presidency in Belarus at that time). In December 1991, Shushkevich met with President Yeltsin of Russia and President Kravchuk of Ukraine at a hunting lodge near Minsk to formalize the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Domestic politics

This section describes the following domestic issues in Belarus:

- Elections
- Economics
- Ethnic relations



Foreign relations

This section describes Belarus' relations with:

- Russia
- CIS
- Eurasian Economic Community
- The West
- EU
- OSCE



Russia

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, geography, economics and the preferences of its leadership contributed to the continuation of Belarus' close relationship with Russia.

Security

Under Lukashenko, Belarus entered into a close security alliance with Russia. It is integrated into Russia's military system. Russia has troops on the Belarus-Poland border and long-term leases on air defense and other strategic facilities in Belarus, including the early warning radar at Baranovichi in the southwest.

Economics and politics

Belarus under Lukashenko sought economic and political integration with Russia. Its industry is deeply dependent on Russia for fuel and other supplies, and also—being non-competitive in Western markets—for export outlets. A role is also played by nostalgia for the Soviet Union and the idea of Slavic brotherhood: Lukashenko has advocated a Slavic Union of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

Russia's interest in further integration with Belarus is doubtful.

Russia-Belarus Union Treaty

During 1996-2000, Moscow and Minsk signed treaties providing for greater political, economic and social integration. Joint governmental, parliamentary, and judicial institutions were to be set up, and there was to be further policy coordination in customs, taxation, defense, and other fields.

When Putin became Russian president, the movement toward union clearly stalled. Putin expressed irritation at Lukashenko's demands and opposed confederal arrangements that gave Belarus veto powers. He proposed instead direct incorporation of Belarus' six provinces into the Russian Federation—an idea that Lukashenko found unacceptable.

Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest between the two governments are increasingly significant. The economic systems of Russia and Belarus are no longer compatible. Russia chafes at the economic burden of supporting Belarus, as shown in disputes over the supply of subsidized Russian gas to Belarus.

Belarus has deferred plans to privatize certain enterprises in order to halt further Russian penetration of its economy (Russian corporations such as the gas and oil giants Gazprom and Lukoil had been acquiring Belarusian enterprises).

Currency

There was a plan for Belarus to adopt the Russian ruble as its currency at the beginning of 2005, but Lukashenko postponed transitional measures and called the plan premature. He expressed concern that currency unification would undermine Belarus' sovereignty. The Belarusian side demanded that Russia and Belarus jointly control circulation of the ruble and that Russia pay Belarus \$2.1 billion as compensation for the costs of adopting the ruble. Neither demand was acceptable to Russia.



Energy

Belarus faced another Russian gas cutoff at the beginning of 2007, but agreed at the last moment to a five-year contract with Gazprom providing for a doubling of its subsidized price of gas, coupled with the Russian gas monopoly's purchase of 50% of the Beltransgaz Belarusian state-controlled gas pipeline network. Gas prices were to gradually increase until they matched world market prices by 2011. Belarus' 2007 imposition of a tariff on crude oil flowing from Russia and passing through its territory to Western Europe resulted in a short-lived Russian cut-off of oil. Belarus quickly backed down and repealed the tariff.

Other issues have added to their mutual irritation: Russia's banning of Belarus dairy products in 2009, Belarus' refusal to follow Russia's lead in recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and a Russian media campaign against Lukashenko in mid-2010,

Another "gas war" set Russia and Belarus against each other in 2010. The acrimonious standoff was finally resolved when Belarus took a loan from Azerbaijan and paid off a \$192 million debt for gas imported from Russia and Moscow paid off \$228 million for gas transit fees.

Belarus planned to replace increasingly costly Russian-supplied energy by constructing a nuclear power plant at Astravets starting in 2010. Russia would be the source of both funding and provision of the power plant. Planning for the station has stalled, against amid disagreement between Moscow and Minsk over the amount of Russian funding. Another challenge to this project is the potential saturation of the area with similar planned nuclear power plants, including one in Kaliningrad in Russia.

Another supply dispute broke out in June 2011, as Russia's state-controlled power trading corporation was threatening to stop electricity supplies to Belarus due to unpaid bills.

Economic crisis

The Belarus National Bank devalued the Belarus currency in June 2011 in response to mounting economic problems, including a current accounts deficit, high demands for foreign currency and mass buying of consumer goods and food essentials. Belarus had to turn to the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union's Emergency Fund for a \$3 billion loan. In return, though, Belarus had to sell over 7.5 billion dollars of state assets. Much of these were likely to be bought up by Russian firms, making Belarus even more dependent on Moscow. Meanwhile, the Belarus government is also seeking alternatives through a request for loans from the International Monetary Fund.

CIS

Belarus is also a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as are all the other post-Soviet states except the Baltic states. The CIS has functioned mainly as a consultative forum and an optional framework for cooperation in various fields.



Eurasian Economic Community

Belarus is also a member of the Eurasian Economic Community that was created in 2000. The other members are Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and (since 2005) Uzbekistan.

Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan agreed in 2007 to create a customs union, open to other states. But the agreement has not advanced, nor have other states joined.

The Eurasian Economic Community summit in 2009 agreed to create a joint anti-economic crisis fund. Belarus has received two significant credits from this fund. In addition, Belarus is also requesting a loan to use toward paying its bills for Russian oil and gas.

The Customs Union between the three states was finally established in 2010, and will likely be most advantageous to Russia in economic terms. Kazakhstan may hope that the union will facilitate its penetration of Europe's energy markets through Russia and Belarus, although it could just as easily find itself becoming a raw materials supplier to Russia within the union. Belarus may have acceded to the union to ease its political differences with Russia, but this will probably not suffice to paper over the many issues that have damaged their relationship.



The West

Human rights violations played a major role in the deterioration of Belarus' relations with the West. In 2006, the U.S. issued a [report](#) entitled "The Last Dictatorship in Europe," also accusing Lukashenko's government of sales of arms and weapons-related technologies to countries of concern, including state sponsors of terrorism.

After the 2006 post-election crackdown on demonstrators and the opposition, the EU and the U.S. applied targeted travel restrictions and financial sanctions against Lukashenko and other regime leaders. The travel ban was widened in 2007 to include directors and deputy directors of state-owned enterprises.

Later in 2007 the U.S. imposed sanctions on the state oil company, [Belneftekhim](#), which Washington charged was personally controlled by Lukashenko. The Treasury Department froze the company's U.S. assets and barred Americans from doing business with it. The U.S. subsequently allowed a broad interpretation of a list of firms linked to Belneftekhim. The U.S. and the EU continued to call for the release of political prisoners, including [Alaksandar Kazulin](#).

In 2008 Belarus withdrew its ambassador from Washington, and the U.S. ambassador in Minsk was asked to leave the country. In addition, the U.S. embassy was asked to reduce its staff by the Belarus government, and later asked to cut its staff down to five diplomats.

In 2008 the U.S. suspended its ban on U.S. companies dealing with two Belarusian firms, [Lakokraska](#) and [Polotsk-Steklovolokno](#), although continuing the ban on the state oil and chemical company Belneftekhim. The move followed the release of several opposition activists by the government, including Alaksandar Kazulin.

A short-term positive development in the relationship was Belarus' agreement to give up its stock of weapons-grade uranium, announced in a joint statement by Secretary of State Clinton and Belarus Foreign Minister Martynov issued after a meeting on the margins of the OSCE Summit in Astana in 2010. Two shipments of uranium had already left Belarus during October and November, according to the statement, with the remainder to be eliminated by 2012. The statement was also noteworthy because it included Belarus' acceptance of language that enhanced respect for democracy and human rights in Belarus was central to improvement of the bilateral relationship.

Alienation from the West

The Lukashenko regime's repression of former presidential candidates and protestors led to a sharp backlash from the West in 2011. The harsh sentences led to EU and U.S. travel bans on Belarus leaders. U.S. President Obama termed the situation in Belarus "unacceptable," while Polish prime Minister Tusk agreed that the Lukashenka regime "had no future in Europe."

Cooperation with U.S. and NATO on Afghanistan

Despite sanctions, Belarus has continued to participate in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), through which non-lethal supplies are shipped overland to American and NATO forces in Afghanistan. The volume of goods that transited the Belarus route of NDN reportedly doubled during 2012. Belarus will be playing a similar role in the reverse transit when the U.S. and NATO forces exit from Afghanistan in 2014.



EU

The 2009 visit of Javier Solana, the EU's High Representative for a Common Foreign and Security Policy, pointed to a short-term end to Belarus' isolation and a warming of relations with the EU. Solana met with government officials and opposition figures. The leader of the opposition "For Freedom" movement, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, publicly termed the visit a great chance for the country and called for the continuation of the dialogue. Previously, senior representatives of the Council of Europe had visited Minsk.

By 2009 an EU-Belarus political dialogue had been established, a human rights dialogue had been launched, technical cooperation had increased, and Belarus was actively participating in the EU's [Eastern Partnership Program](#) .

EU Sanctions after 2010 Elections

By early 2011, however, the EU (together with the U.S.) had added new sanctions on Belarus in response to the violent crackdown on protests following the December 2010 president election. The EU foreign affairs council banned Lukashenko and 150 other officials from traveling to the EU, and extended a list of those hit by an EU assets freeze.

2011 Eastern Partnership Summit Flap

The EU opted not to invite Lukashenko to attend the 2011 Eastern Partnership Summit as part of its sanctions on Belarus. In response, Belarus' foreign minister refused to attend and the Belarus delegation eventually departed claiming "discrimination" (because it was not allowed to attend events meant for heads of state/government). Perhaps more likely, Belarus authorities were miffed that senior EU leaders were demonstratively meeting with opposition figures and criticizing government behavior. Belarus reportedly did not respond positively to a nine billion Euro EU proposal of assistance in return for democratization.

Withdrawal of EU Ambassadors

EU ambassadors were withdrawn from Belarus in 2012, after Minsk pulled its envoys from EU countries and asked that EU ambassadors depart

OSCE

An OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group was established in Belarus in 1997, primarily to assist in promoting democratic institutions. Increasingly, the relationship between the OSCE and the Lukashenko regime deteriorated. By the end of 2002, after the regime refused to grant or extend visas to OSCE staff to show its irritation with the mission's operations, the mission no longer had any international staff.

Subsequently, the OSCE and Belarus negotiated an agreement to establish a new OSCE Office in Minsk with a new mandate as of January 1, 2003. The [OSCE Office in Minsk's](#) revised and final mandate was to assist the Belarusian government in promoting institution building, consolidating the rule of law and in developing relations with civil society; and assisting with its economic and environmental activities.



OSCE Office in Minsk (OSCE)



Head of the OSCE Office in Minsk, Amb. Benedikt Haller (2nd r), Economic and Environmental Programme Manager Francois-Vadim de Hartingh (r) and Core-Agri Programme Co-ordinator S. Tarasiuk (l) visit a farm in Belarus' Chernobyl-affected area, 3 June 2010. (OSCE)

Mission closed

Belarus refused to join consensus on extension of the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk, and the mandate expired at the end of 2010. The mission was formally closed in March 2011.

OSCE Moscow Mechanism on Human Rights Invoked

In 2011, 14 OSCE participating states invoked the Moscow Mechanism on the human rights situation in Belarus. This mechanism allowed an investigation to be launched without consensus and independently of the OSCE Chairmanship, institutions and decision making bodies if one state, supported by at least nine others, believed that "a serious threat to the fulfillment of the provisions of the human dimension had arisen in another participating state." The Mechanism also required that the Rapporteur's report be sent to the Permanent Council. The report can be found at <http://www.osce.org/node/78705>.



CHAPTER 2

Ukraine

Ukraine is a sovereign state in Eastern Europe that was formerly part of the Soviet Union. This chapter contains the following sections:

- Key information
- Historical background
- Domestic politics
- Foreign relations
- Culture



Key information

This section describes key information on Ukraine, including:

- Geography
- People
- Government
- Heads of state

Geography

Item	Description
Area	235,000 square miles
Natural resources	Ukraine, especially eastern Ukraine, is rich in coal, iron ore and other metals, salts and other minerals. There are unexploited reserves of oil and natural gas. Ukraine's soil is highly fertile; 30% of the world's "black soil" is located there. Two-thirds of Ukraine's territory is agricultural.

People

Item	Description
Population	44.854 Million (2012 est.)
Ethnic groups	Ukrainian 77%, Russian 17.3%, Other 5%. Many people, especially in eastern Ukraine, are of mixed Russian and Ukrainian origin. The balance between Ukrainians and Russians varies widely from one part of Ukraine to another.
Religions	Ukrainian Orthodox - Kyiv Patriarchate 50.4%, Ukrainian Orthodox - Moscow Patriarchate 26.1%, Ukrainian Greek Catholic 8%, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox 7.2%, Roman Catholic 2.2%, Protestant 2.2%, Jewish 0.6% Other 3.2% (2006 est.)
Languages	Ukrainian belongs to the East Slavic group of the Indo-European family of languages and is written in a variant of the Cyrillic script. The state language of Ukraine is Ukrainian, but many people speak Russian or are bilingual in Russian and Ukrainian. Many people speak a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian known as Surzhyk.

Government



Item	Description
Capital	Kyiv
System of government	Ukraine is a republic of mixed presidential-parliamentary type, including a multi-party system.
Head of state	Viktor Fedorovych Yanukovich
Currency	the Hryvna

Heads of state

Date	Name
12/1991 - 7/1994	Leonid Makarovich Kravchuk
7/1994 - 1/2005	Leonid Danylovych Kuchma
1/2005 - 2/2010	Viktor Andriyovich Yushchenko
2/2010 - Present	Viktor Fedorovych Yanukovich



Regions of Ukraine

Ukraine is usually thought of as consisting of five regions:

- Eastern Ukraine
- Southern Ukraine
- Crimea
- Central Ukraine
- Western Ukraine

Eastern Ukraine

Eastern Ukraine is the center of the country's heavy industry (metallurgy, petrochemicals, and engineering). In the southeast there is an old coal-mining area called the Donbass. The main city of the Donbass is [Donetsk](#). To the northeast lies [Kharkiv](#), which was Ukraine's capital in the early Soviet period.

Eastern Ukraine is ethnically mixed (60% Ukrainian, 40% Russian) but mainly Russian-speaking. It has close links with neighboring areas of southern Russia.

Southern Ukraine

Southern Ukraine, along the Black Sea coast, is less heavily industrialized. There are a number of ports with shipbuilding, the most famous being the cosmopolitan city of Odessa.

The ethnic composition of Southern Ukraine is similar to that of Eastern Ukraine. It is also mainly Russian-speaking.

Crimea

Attached by a narrow isthmus to Southern Ukraine is the beautiful peninsula of Crimea, which has the status of an autonomous republic within Ukraine (capital [Simferopol](#)). Here are famous seaside resorts such as [Yalta](#). The Russian Federation's Black Sea Fleet is also located here, with its main base at Sevastopol. About two-thirds of the population of Crimea is Russian. Besides Russians and Ukrainians, there are the Crimean Tatars, who are indigenous to Crimea.

Central Ukraine

Central Ukraine comprises the country's rural heartland and the area around the capital. The population is mainly Ukrainian. Both the Ukrainian and the Russian languages are widely spoken.

Western Ukraine

Western Ukraine is mainly rural, and overwhelmingly Ukrainian and Ukrainian-speaking. There is a Polish as well as a Russian minority. Western Ukraine, and especially the province of Galicia, with its main city of [Lviv](#), is the stronghold of Ukrainian nationalism.

Western Ukraine includes the province of Transcarpathia. This province is not as "Ukrainian" as



the rest of Western Ukraine. Many people there feel that they belong to a separate Slavic group called Rusyns or [Ruthenes](#), although officially they are regarded simply as Ukrainians. There is also a sizable Hungarian minority in the province.

The Dnieper

Ukraine's greatest river, the Dnieper, starts in the marshlands of eastern Belarus, flows south through Kyiv, then southeast to Dnipropetrovsk, and finally southwest into the Black Sea.

Ukraine east of the Dnieper is called "Left Bank Ukraine". Ukraine west of the Dnieper is called "Right Bank Ukraine" (that is, left or right as you face south, toward the Black Sea).



Historical background

This section describes the historical background of Ukraine:

- Before Russian rule
- Under Russian and Soviet rule
- From Perestroika to independence



Before Russian rule

The Ukrainians, like the Russians and Belarusians, are descendant of the East Slavic tribes. The first great state associated with these East Slavic tribes was the Kyiv-based principality of Rus, which lasted from the late 9th century to 1240, when the Mongols captured Kyiv. Both Russian and Ukrainian nationalists now claim [Kyivan Rus](#) as the oldest part of their national heritage, although there were no such people as “Russians” or “Ukrainians” at that time.

The word “Ukraine”

The word “Ukraine” came into use to denote the area roughly corresponding to present-day Ukraine in the late 16th century, when this area fell under the rule of the [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](#). Ukraine had the literal meaning of borderland, for that was how Russians, Poles, and Turks all perceived the area.

1648 - 1775

In 1648 Cossacks led by [Bogdan Khmelnytsky](#) set off a peasant uprising, which was accompanied by massacres of Poles and Jews. In 1649 Khmelnytsky entered Kyiv and proclaimed a new state. This state, the [Hetmanate](#), may be regarded as the first independent Ukrainian state.

But a series of Cossack defeats by the Polish army forced Khmelnytsky to turn to Moscow for protection. In [1654 the Treaty of Pereyaslav](#) united Ukraine with Russia. The Ukrainians interpreted the treaty as guaranteeing autonomy for Ukraine within the Russian Empire, but the Czars did not share this interpretation. Ukraine’s autonomy was whittled away and finally abolished in 1775, when serfdom was imposed on Ukraine.



Under Russian and Soviet rule

The Czarist government refused to recognize the Ukrainians as a nation distinct from the Russians, or Ukrainian as a language distinct from Russian. Russians were called Great Russians, Ukrainians - Little Russians, and Belarusians - White Russians.

Mid-19th century

The mid-19th century witnessed a revival of Ukrainian culture and ethnic consciousness. The key figure in this revival was [Taras Shevchenko](#), who came to be regarded as Ukraine's national poet. The Czarist government responded in 1863 by banning the publication of books in the Ukrainian language. Shevchenko was exiled to Kazakhstan, where he was forbidden to write or draw.

At the same time, there was no discrimination against Ukrainians who did not insist on a separate identity. This continued to be true throughout the Soviet period.

Ukrainian Republic

In November 1917, following the Russian Revolution, an [independent Ukrainian People's Republic](#) was proclaimed in Kyiv. Although this Republic was to be a lasting source of inspiration to Ukrainian nationalists, it survived for only three months. A rival Soviet Ukrainian government was formed in Kharkiv, and in February 1918 the Red Army captured Kyiv. But then, in accordance with the terms of the [Treaty of Brest-Litovsk](#) between Soviet Russia and Germany, Ukraine came under German occupation. A German puppet regime was established. The defeat of Germany by the Western allies in 1918 led to the Soviet recapture of Kyiv in February 1919 and the creation of the [Ukrainian SSR](#).

Ukrainian SSR

During the 1920s the Soviet regime allowed Ukraine a measure of autonomy under the control of Ukrainian communists, who promoted the Ukrainian language and culture. In the 1930s Stalin reversed this policy. Many Ukrainian communists perished in the purges, and millions of peasants starved in the [man-made famine of 1933](#), the result of forced collectivization and excessive grain requisitions. Ukrainians refer to this man-made famine as the Holodomor.

Western Ukraine.

[Western Ukraine](#) escaped Russian and Soviet rule until 1939. Up to 1914 it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while between the wars most of it belonged to Poland (except for Transcarpathia, which belonged to Czechoslovakia, and another small area that belonged to Romania). This is why, even today, West Ukrainians are oriented more toward Central Europe than toward Russia.

In 1939, when Poland was dismembered following the [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact](#), its west Ukrainian territories were absorbed by the Soviet Union. The USSR annexed the rest of western Ukraine in 1940 (from Romania) and 1946 (from Czechoslovakia). It took the Soviet authorities several years to suppress guerrilla resistance mounted in the newly Sovietized territories by nationalists.



World War II and after

Ukraine was devastated during the Second World War, with deaths in the millions. In the postwar period Ukraine underwent extensive industrialization. After Stalin's death, greater scope was again allowed to Ukrainian culture, but the policy of Russification resumed in the 1970s.



Kiev in ruins during World War II. (Ukrainian SSR)

From Perestroika to independence

Gorbachev's perestroika at first had little effect on Ukraine. Mass demonstrations against Soviet rule began only in 1988. In September 1989, the opposition moderate nationalists ("national democrats") of Rukh held their first congress. In the same month, the hard-line Communist Party boss was removed. [Leonid Kravchuk](#), who was willing to make concessions to the Ukrainian nationalists and forge an alliance with Rukh, replaced him as party leader. It was at this time that Ukrainian was declared the sole official language.



Leonid Kravchuk (Permission by Jan van Steenbergen)

Full independence

After the collapse of the attempted hard-line coup in Moscow in August 1991, Ukraine moved to claim full independence, confirmed by [referendum on December 1, 1991](#), with 90% voting in favor. On the same day, Kravchuk was elected the first president of independent Ukraine. He played the decisive role in the decision, made later that month by the heads of state of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, to abolish the Soviet Union. Everyone accepted that "there can be no union without Ukraine"—and Ukraine did not want a union.

Nationalized military forces

In contrast to the Baltic states, which sought to expel Soviet military forces, and Belarus, which accepted their continued presence under Russian control, Ukraine “nationalized”— or took control of—almost all [military forces](#) that were on its territory when the Soviet Union was abolished. However, nuclear weapons were given up under Russian and Western pressure. Officers were given the choice of swearing an oath of loyalty to Ukraine or leaving the country.



Domestic politics

The initially overwhelming public support for independence obscured a deep division in attitudes. Only in western Ukraine was independence valued for its own sake, as an ideal for which it was worth making sacrifices.

In Russian-speaking [eastern Ukraine](#) and Crimea, most of those who voted for independence did so under the illusion that it would quickly bring prosperity. When it turned out that independence was instead bringing them further impoverishment, they became increasingly hostile to the Ukrainian nationalists and the government in Kyiv. Their hostility was exacerbated by exaggerated fears that they would be forced to stop using Russian and use only Ukrainian.

Ukrainian remains the sole state language and Russian-speaking regions have not been put under strong pressure to switch to Ukrainian. In December 2012, the ruling eastern Ukraine-based Party of Regions pushed through a law reaffirming Ukrainian as the official language, but allowing local and regional governments to give official status to Russian and other languages spoken by at least 10 percent of their residents.



Elections

In 1994 [Leonid Kuchma](#) was elected president. Ukraine's democracy thereby passed the test of the peaceful transfer of power. Kuchma, an industrial manager from eastern Ukraine, was widely expected to tilt the balance away from nationalist western Ukraine. Indeed, he himself spoke very poor Ukrainian when he took office. But he introduced only marginal changes—and took lessons to improve his Ukrainian.

While the east-west regional division remains important in Ukrainian politics, another factor is the rivalry between [Donetsk](#) and [Dnipropetrovsk](#), the two big industrial centers of eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian politics is very complicated, with no fewer than 122 registered political parties.



Leonid Kuchma (by permission of Agência Brasil)

“Our Ukraine” Bloc wins most seats in 2002

The [“Our Ukraine”](#) bloc, including two of the three Rukh parties, took 160 seats. The [“For a United Ukraine”](#) bloc, consisting of five parties that supported President Kuchma, came in second with 101 seats. The [Communist Party](#) came in third with 66 seats.

The OSCE noted progress in comparison with the [1998 elections](#), although it also pointed to extreme bias in the state media and other abuses of authority. Other observers reported instances of vote-rigging, physical intimidation, and violence.

Coalition government formed

In November 2002, parliament endorsed the formation of a new coalition government with Donetsk region governor [Viktor Yanukovych](#) as prime minister. While the government included representatives of several factions, the Donetsk clan was the dominant force.



Viktor Yanukovych (premier.gov.ru)

2004 presidential election

In the October election to determine Kuchma's successor, Yanukovych received 40.03% of the vote, while "Our Ukraine" leader (and former prime minister) [Viktor Yushchenko](#) received 39.16%. However, since no candidate received more than 50% of the vote, a second round was required and held in November. The first round of voting had not met OSCE, COE and other European

standards for democratic elections, according to an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM).

The results of the November round were disputed. The Ukrainian Central Election Commission said Yanukovych won 49.2%, with Yushchenko receiving 46.69% of the vote. The opposition claimed fraud. The IEOM stated that the elections had not met international standards.

In December 2004, Yushchenko won the repeat election sanctioned by the Constitutional Court. He captured 52% of the vote, compared to 44% for Yanukovych. The Electoral Commission verified the result in January 2005. Following the announcement of the electoral results, a massive campaign of pro-Yushchenko protests and civil disobedience spread throughout the country, especially in the western regions and in Kyiv, named the “[Orange Revolution](#).” Orange was originally adopted by the Yushchenko camp as its election campaign color, but came to represent the entire sequence of protest events after the disputed election. When the Ukrainian Constitutional Court decided (like the IEOM) that the election outcome was fraudulent, the government-supported candidate, Yanukovych, decided that there was no alternative but to accept another second round of voting.



Victor Yushchenko (Flickr/European People's Party)

Yushchenko's first year

The new president initially faced serious challenges, including a possible hostile parliament. He also had to win the support of former rivals and build bridges with ethnic Russians and Russified Ukrainians living mostly in the east and south, including Crimea, in order to govern effectively. His choice of [Yulia Tymoshenko](#), widely considered populist and anti-Russian, as prime minister did not ease his task.

Internationally, the new government received widespread support from the West. The OSCE CiO, Foreign Minister Rupel of Slovenia, welcomed Yushchenko's election and attended his inauguration.

In its first year, the new Ukrainian government faced political infighting, reports of continued corruption, a ballooning deficit, and reduced economic growth. Facing heavy criticism, Yushchenko fired Tymoshenko and dismissed the cabinet in September 2005 and nominated

Dnipropetrovsk Governor [Yuri Yekhanurov](#) as prime minister. The Yekhanurov government was ousted by Parliament in January 2006 over the issue of the price Ukraine would pay Russia for natural gas, and served in a caretaker status until the March 2006 parliamentary elections.



Yulia Tymoshenko (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

March 2006 parliamentary elections

Yanukovich's Party of Regions won 31.37% of the vote, with the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc unexpectedly coming in second with 22.44% of the vote, and President Yushchenko's Our Ukraine Bloc a disappointing 14.44%. The Socialist Party won 5.86% and the Communist Party won 3.63%, with none of the other 45 parties contesting the election passing the 3% hurdle to enter Parliament.

The International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) concluded that the elections were conducted basically in line with OSCE and international standards. This election further consolidated the December 2004 breakthrough for the conduct of democratic elections in Ukraine, according to the IEOM.



Yushchenko, 2005 (OSCE/BOBO)

“Orange Revolution” partners form government

After objections from pro-Russian parties, the Socialist Party defected from the coalition to join Our Ukraine, leading to several more months of negotiations. Finally, in August Yushchenko and Yanukovich’s parties formed a coalition in which Yanukovich took over as prime minister, and the Tymoshenko Bloc went into the opposition. After months of negotiations, the Tymoshenko Bloc, Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine, and the Socialist Party, the partners in the “Orange Revolution,” formed a coalition, despite personal animosity and policy differences. To seal the agreement, Tymoshenko was made prime minister and Our Ukraine was allowed to name the speaker of the legislature.

Yushchenko and Yanukovich continued to clash over issues such as relations with Europe, the appointment of ministers, and the lead role and powers of the president and prime minister. Yushchenko eventually opted to dissolve parliament in April 2007 and set new elections.

Yanukovich and his parliamentary majority rejected the decree. The conflict over who had executive power rose to a new high. Yushchenko fired the Prosecutor-General, while Yanukovich’s Minister of Interior ally sent special police to push out the security guards the president had sent to guard the Prosecutor-General’s office. Yushchenko’s threat to bring in loyal troops pushed the confrontation to a compromise. By early June, parliament had passed legislation that was signed by the president to hold new parliamentary elections on September 30.

2007 parliamentary elections

Although the [Party of Regions](#) won the most seats (175) in the September elections, an alliance of the two parties associated with the “Orange Revolution,” Yulia Tymoshenko’s ([BYuT](#)) Bloc with 156 seats, and [Our Ukraine-Peoples Self-Defense](#) (NUNS) Bloc with 72 seats won a majority and were able to form a government. The Party of Regions was pushed into the opposition. [The Communist Party of Ukraine](#) won 27 seats and the [Ltyvyn Bloc](#) with 20 seats were the only other parties of the 20 contesting the election that made the 3% required minimum. Over 63% of registered voters participated in the election.

The International Election Observation Monitoring Mission (including OSCE's ODIHR) reported that the elections were conducted mostly in line with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and other international standards for democratic elections. Areas of concern were amendments to the Election Law (procedures for compiling voter lists, provisions on home voting, and provisions for removing voters who crossed state border and did not return before 26 September), the inadequate quality of voter lists, and possible loss of the right to vote by voters who crossed state borders after 1 August.

Tymoshenko returns as prime minister

Tymoshenko narrowly won election in parliament as prime minister by a majority plus one vote on December 2007. All the opposition parliamentarians—Party of Regions, Communist Party of Ukraine and Lytvyn Bloc—voted solidly against her. She won the support of all the NUNS parliamentarians only thanks to pressure by Yushchenko.

Tymoshenko-Yushchenko rivalry

Nonetheless, the Tymoshenko-Yushchenko relationship increasingly frayed. Tymoshenko's BYuT blockaded parliament in May 2008 to protest what it termed the "sabotage" of government policies. BYuT's blockade prevented the president from giving his annual address, which had not happened since Ukraine's independence from the USSR.

In addition, Tymoshenko's BYuT appeared ready to join the opposition Party of Regions in supporting constitutional amendments to strengthen the power of parliament. This appeared to end Yushchenko's longstanding hopes to rebuild presidential powers reduced by the parliament's 2004-06 constitutional reforms.

Going into 2009, there was hardly an issue on which Tymoshenko and Yushchenko did not disagree, and criticize each other in the media. Their conflict, added to the international economic crisis, made it increasingly difficult for Ukraine to implement the necessary governmental response. Only pressure from the International Monetary Fund, which insisted on a joint letter of intent to follow a coordinated policy in return for increased funding, convinced the two to agree to resolve some key policy differences.

2010 presidential election

Eighteen candidates contested the first round of the [presidential election](#) in January. The front runners were Yanukovich with 35.32 % of the vote, followed by Tymoshenko with 25.05%, Sergei Tigipko with 13%, Arseniy Yatsenyuk with 7%, and President Yushchenko with just above 5%.

The International Election Observation Mission reported that the first round of the election was of high quality, showed significant improvement over previous elections, and met most OSCE and Council of Europe commitments.

Since no candidate won more than 50% of the vote, Yanukovich and Tymoshenko faced each other in a February 2010 run-off.

Yanukovich won the second round with 48.95% to Tymoshenko's 45.47% of the vote. The International Election Observation Mission reported that the February election met most OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections and consolidated progress achieved since 2004. The report noted that the process was transparent and offered



voters a genuine choice between candidates representing diverse political views. However, it added that the unsubstantiated allegations of large-scale electoral fraud negatively affected the election atmosphere and voter confidence in the process.

The results for the presidential election underlined the country's continuing deep divisions: the western and central regions voted for Tymoshenko, while the eastern and southern regions voted for Yanukovich.

The Downfall of Yulia Tymoshenko

Tymoshenko claimed the vote was rigged and petitioned the Higher Administrative Court in Kiev to scrutinize documents from the election districts in the Crimea, but the Court rejected her petition. Tymoshenko withdrew her petition to the Supreme Court of Ukraine, because she believed there were no legal provisions on which she could base an appeal.

By mid-March, Tymoshenko was ousted as prime minister by a parliamentary vote of no-confidence and a pro-Yanukovich cabinet was approved headed by Mykola Azarov.

In May 2011 Tymoshenko was arrested and charged with abuse of office for having signed a gas import contract with Russia that included overly high gas prices. In October 2011 Tymoshenko was found guilty of the charges against her and sentenced to seven years imprisonment.

The U.S. and EU criticized the Ukrainian government's handling of the case. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Ashton stated the verdict showed justice in Ukraine was being applied selectively in politically-motivated prosecutions and would have implications for the country's future EU integration. Russia also criticized the trial's lack of impartiality and anti-Russian undertones. Belarusian President Lukashenko repeatedly called on the Ukrainian government to release Tymoshenko and offered her asylum in Belarus. In January 2012 the Czech Republic granted asylum to Tymoshenko's husband, Oleksandr Tymoshenko. Their daughter remains in the Ukraine and actively supports her mother.

Ten additional criminal charges ranging from tax evasion, to theft of state funds, to murder were brought against Tymoshenko. In April 2012 Tymoshenko refused, due to poor health, to attend her trial to face renewed charges on tax invasion and the 2001 theft of state funds in from United Energy Systems Ukraine. Soon after, she was forcibly taken to hospital where she began a 20-day hunger strike to protest eroding democracy in the Ukraine and her prison conditions. Her doctors found her ill and were not permitted to conduct the necessary tests to determine the cause of her illness.

Despite her imprisonment, [Tymoshenko](#) continues her activism in Ukrainian politics. She is supported by a number of Western leaders, and when permitted meets with foreign government officials, her political party, coalition partners, and international organizations. The Ukrainian government recently denied her a meeting with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Vice President, Wallburga Habsburg Douglas, who was conducting a fact-finding mission ahead of the October 2012 parliamentary elections in Ukraine.

Tymoshenko has been treated for stress-related illness, and her condition has worsened since she went on hunger strike to protest the outcome of the elections.

(In February 2013, a Kyiv court launched proceedings against Tymoshenko for allegedly funding the 1996 murder of Ukrainian oligarch Yevhen Scherban.)





Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko speaks during her trial, with Judge, Rodion Kireyev, left, reading the indictment at the Pecherskiy District Court in Kiev, Ukraine, October 11, 2011. (Voice of America)

2012 parliamentary elections

Due to changes in the electoral law, the 2012 parliamentary election used a mixed voting system (50% under party lists and 50% under simple-majority constituencies) with a 5% election threshold. Participation by blocs of political parties was not permitted. A total of 445 deputies were elected of the 450 seats in parliament. The Central Electoral Commission was ordered by the Supreme Court to conduct repeat elections in five single-mandate constituencies. The All Ukrainian Party "Svoboda," Party of Regions and Independents gained the largest number of seats, followed by the Communist party.

OSCE characterized the elections as lacking a level playing field, caused primarily by the abuse of administrative resources, lack of transparency of campaign and party financing, and lack of balanced media coverage. Voting and counting were assessed mostly positively. Tabulation was assessed negatively as it lacked transparency.

Challenges to Ukraine's democracy

Despite its abundance of parties, Ukraine's democracy has faced serious challenges:

- Dysfunctional government due to conflicts between presidents and prime ministers.
- Presidents and parliaments have not worked together effectively.
- Corruption has been rampant. In 2004, a U.S. court convicted former Prime Minister [Pavlo Lazarenko](#) of money laundering, wire fraud, and 24 other charges. Lazarenko embezzled \$114 million while in office.
- Scores of opposition politicians and journalists have disappeared or died under suspicious circumstances. There were widespread protests over the fate of journalist [Georgy Gongadze](#), who disappeared in 2000. (Former President Kuchma was arrested in 2011 and charged with involvement in the murder. In January 2013, a former police general was convicted of the strangling and beheading of Gongadze and sentenced to life in prison.)
- Involvement of organized crime in Ukrainian politics.
- Regional divisions between east and west.



Protesters hold a placard with the portrait of Ukrainian President Kuchma, dressed in prison overalls and with the inscription "Pakhan" (criminal boss) on his chest, Kyiv, Ukraine. Opposition supporters called for Kuchma's resignation or early elections. 12 October 2002 (©AP/Wide World Photo/Efrem Lukatsky)

Energy and Economic Development

Ukraine's energy dependence on Russia has a direct impact on its economic development. The country currently imports Russian gas at \$415 per 1,000 cubic meters.

Past bilateral negotiations determined the import price, which fell far below European prices. Over time the Ukraine fell behind in payments and even diverted gas intended for Europe for industrial consumption. In 2005, Gazprom informed the Ukrainian government that it was raising gas prices to match prices on the world market. The Ukrainian government responded by asking for additional payment in transit fees. (Two thirds of Gazprom's profit comes from gas sold to Europe that transits the Ukraine.) The two countries were unable to agree on a price, which resulted in Gazprom cutting its supplies to Europe mid-winter. Nevertheless due to contractual obligations and fear of being sued by European countries, Gazprom soon returned the supply to its normal delivery level.

A similar dispute over gas prices erupted again in 2009 and was resolved when Tymoshenko and Putin negotiated a 10-year agreement on gas prices. Tymoshenko was later accused of abuse of office and sentenced to 7 years imprisonment due to this agreement.

Ukraine also has its own domestic natural gas reserves, which are approximately 1 trillion cubic meters, and are managed by the UkrGasProduction company. The company has the capacity to extract 15 billion cubic meters, which is worth \$5.5 billion at current 2012 European gas prices. UkrGasProduction supplies heating to households at a subsidized rate of \$90 per 1,000 cubic meters, which is four times lower than the Russian import price.

There has been no attempt by the Ukrainian government to end domestic subsidies and raise the fees for residential consumers. This is despite the fact that other unpopular social welfare reform policies have been implemented in the last five years. It is suspected that some of this domestic gas is being bought by corrupt government officials who then profit from its export to Europe at world market prices or its sale to internal industrial consumers.

In order to achieve true energy security, the Ukrainian government must reform the energy sector. This means charging citizens unsubsidized tariffs for energy consumption (with an exception for the truly vulnerable) and installing meters and a proper municipal billing system. The increased revenue from fees for domestic energy consumption could be reinvested with the aim of increasing domestic extraction capacity or diversifying supply by investing in renewable energy and promoting an energy efficiency policy.



Crimea

Crimea has a special history. Until the late 18th century it belonged to a Turkic people, the [Crimean Tatars](#), whose khans were allied with Ottoman Turkey. The [Khanate](#) was conquered by Russia in 1776, and annexed to the Russian Empire by Empress Catherine II in 1783. Many Russian colonists settled in Crimea, while many Crimean Tatars emigrated.

1921-1954

In 1921 the Soviet leadership made Crimea an autonomous republic (ASSR) within Russia (the RSFSR). However, the cultural autonomy of the Crimean Tatars was suppressed under Stalin.

In 1944 the whole Crimean Tatar people was deported to Central Asia on suspicion of disloyalty. Many died on the way. In 1945 Crimea was made an ordinary province of Russia.

Then in 1954, after Stalin's death, Khrushchev transferred Crimea from Russia to Ukraine, on the grounds that its economy was more closely connected to Ukraine.

Crimean Tatars return to homeland

For many years the Crimean Tatars campaigned for the right to return to their homeland. But it was only in the late 1980s, under Gorbachev, that they were finally allowed to return. Others had long since occupied the land and houses where they used to live, so they established makeshift settlements. The [return of Crimean Tatars](#) caused alarm among the Slavic (Russian and Ukrainian) population of Crimea, who feared that they would be dispossessed.

Disputes over land on the southern coast of the peninsula sparked violent ethnic clashes in 2004.

Besides the land question, there are other contentious issues, such as the political representation of the Crimean Tatars and the status of their language.

Other confrontations have been triggered by police attempts to remove Crimean Tatar settlements and by criminals killing Crimean Tatar traders for refusing to pay protection money.

Tensions between Simferopol and Kyiv

The other aspect of the Crimean problem concerns relations between the regional authorities in Crimea's capital Simferopol and the central government in Kyiv.

In the early 1990s Crimea had a special autonomous status within Ukraine. Crimea is the only region of Ukraine where Russians form a large majority—about two-thirds of the population. Many Russians think that the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine by Khrushchev in 1954 was unjustified, and would like to see Crimea either again part of Russia or a separate republic with close ties to both Russia and Ukraine. Neither of these options is acceptable to the majority of Ukrainians.

Tension between Simferopol and Kyiv reached its height following the 1994 election of secessionist [Yuri Meshkov](#) as Crimea's president. However, Meshkov did not take decisive steps to secede from Ukraine. This was partly the result of conflict between Meshkov and other local pro-Russian politicians, but the crucial factor was probably the unwillingness of the Russian government to back Meshkov.

Ukrainian parliament reasserts Kyiv's control



In 1995, the Ukrainian parliament reasserted Kyiv's control over Crimea, annulling the constitution that Crimea had adopted in 1992 and abolishing the Crimean presidency. By overreaching themselves, the Crimean authorities lost most of the prerogatives that they previously enjoyed.

In 1995-96, the Ukrainian and Crimean governments and parliaments succeeded in negotiating a mutually acceptable solution. A new constitution adopted by the Crimean parliament in November 1995 was amended to bring it into accordance with the Ukrainian constitution, and in June 1996 the Ukrainian parliament reaffirmed Crimea's status as an autonomous republic within Ukraine.

Role of OSCE

The OSCE, which hosted a conference on Crimea in Locarno (Switzerland) in June 1995, played an important mediating and advisory role in resolving the dispute. Conflict prevention with regard to Crimea was the main mandate of the OSCE Mission to Ukraine, which monitored the situation in the country from 1994 to 1999. In 1999, with the improvement of inter-ethnic relations, the OSCE and Ukraine agreed to close the OSCE Mission to Ukraine and established "the OSCE [Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine](#)" to develop programs in support of democratization.

Recent projects include:

- A review of legislation to bring it into line with international human rights standards
- Support to the office of the Ombudsman
- Assistance to the judiciary
- Media freedom
- Military reform

Example

The OSCE Secretariat is implementing the largest OSCE donor-funded project to date in removing toxic rocket fuel components called melange from Ukraine. The most recent train with 380 tons of melange was shipped from Ukraine to Russia for disposal in December 2012. The project was funded by the U.S., Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Spain and Sweden. The removal of the last of the 16,000 tons of melange is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2013.



L-r: Lubomir Kopaj, OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, Yuriy Kluchkovskyy, member of the Ukrainian parliament and Oleksandr Chupakhin, member of Central Election Commission of Ukraine at a conference in Kyiv, November 29, 2010. (OSCE/Oksana Polyuga)



Ukrainian armed forces personnel helped remove the last melange from the Kalynivka storage site in the Vinnytsya region of Ukraine in January 2010. (OSCE/Leonid Kalashnyk)

Crimean Tatars status remains unresolved

Reintegration of the Crimean Tatars in Crimea remains problematic. The new constitutional arrangements adopted in 1995 were a step backward in this respect, as Crimean Tatars lost the representation that they were previously guaranteed in the Crimean parliament.

After the Orange Revolution, a power-sharing agreement marked one step forward in interethnic relations in Crimea, providing Crimean Tatars with two local ministerial posts as well as the position of deputy prime minister. The agreement also provided for the establishment of

native-language media.

[The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People](#) works to restore the national and political rights of the Crimean Tatar people. Representatives from the Mejlis met with the [OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities](#) and asked his office to research and prepare recommendations on the restoration of the rights of the Crimean Tatar people. The research results will be presented at the 2013 International Forum on Restoration of Rights of the Crimean Tatar people to their Homeland.



Crimean Tatars are praying in the center of Simferopol during a meeting devoted to the 59th anniversary of deportation of the Crimean Tatars from Crimea. 18 May 2003. (©AP/Wide World Photo SSR. EPA Photo EPA/ Sergey Svetlitskiy/sd)

Foreign relations

This section deals with Ukraine's shifting relationships with:

- Russia
- the West, including the EU and NATO



Russia

Soviet Black Sea Fleet

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia and Ukraine argued over possession of the [Soviet Black Sea Fleet](#), which is based in Crimea. In 1997, after several years of negotiation, agreement was reached on how to divide the fleet. Ukraine ended up with only a small proportion of the ships, but kept the shore facilities (though agreeing to lease some of them back to Russia).

Tensions between Ukraine and Russia rose in the 2008 after Yushchenko stated that Ukraine would not extend Russia's lease of Black Sea fleet facilities after 2017, and urged the start of preparations for its departure.

Russian use of Black Sea fleet ships during its war with Georgia in August 2008 presented another problem for Ukraine, which sided with Georgia during the conflict. Yushchenko subsequently signed a directive requiring Russia to notify Ukrainian authorities of all movements by Black Sea fleet naval vessels and aircraft. Russia asserted that this contradicted their 1997 agreement.



Russian Navy Flagship anti-submarine ship "Kerch" fires a live rocket during the Ukraine-Russia joint naval exercises not far from Sevastopol, Crimea. 31 October 1997 (©AP/Wide World Photo/Vladimir Strumkovsky)

Russia gets long-term lease in Crimea

Newly-elected Ukrainian President Yanukovich agreed in 2010 to extend Russia's lease of naval facilities in Crimea from 2017 for another 25 years with an additional five-year renewal option, in exchange for a multi-year discounted contract for Russian gas. The Ukrainian opposition sharply criticized the deal. Former PM Tymoshenko asserted that the Constitution forbid the continuation of foreign bases after 2017.

Energy

Ukraine and Russia have engaged in recurring disputes over payments for Russian gas, often resulting in cut-offs of gas shipments to Ukraine.

Inconclusive Yanukovich 2012 Visit to Moscow

Ukraine President Yanukovich visit to Moscow in October 2012 did not result in agreements on outstanding issues in their bilateral relationship. These include Ukrainian interest in a discount on gas prices, inventorying of property in Crimea leased to the Black Sea Fleet, arrangements on Fleet movements (notification procedures, timing and responsible authorities), as well as Russian interest in modernizing/replacing increasingly obsolete Black Sea Fleet ships.

Ukraine's ambiguous geopolitical position

Ukraine has steered a cautious course between Russia and the West. One reason is Ukraine's ambiguous geopolitical position. While Ukraine has had some Western support, its aspirations to join the EU and NATO cannot be realized for years. Ukraine's relations with the West have been strained by such issues as the fate of the Chernobyl nuclear power station and the absence of significant economic reform, and more recently by Ukraine's failure to act effectively against economic crime, and politically-motivated trials of opposition figures. Meanwhile the Ukrainian economy, including the arms industry and the energy supply, depends heavily on close ties with Russia.

Divergent wishes of eastern and western Ukraine

Another reason is the need, as in domestic policy, to take account of the divergent wishes of large groups in eastern and western Ukraine. Many in eastern Ukraine wants closer ties with Russia and more effective cooperation within the CIS, while many in western Ukraine want Ukraine to keep its distance from Russia and leave the CIS altogether. By way of compromise, Ukraine has remained a member of the CIS but blocked its development into an effective supranational union. Ukraine has been willing to cooperate with other post-Soviet states only on conditions that preserved its full sovereignty. For example, Ukraine has rejected Russia's view that CIS member-states are collectively responsible for defending the "external borders of the CIS."

Ukraine maintains observer status in the [Eurasian Economic Community](#).

Putin and the 2004 presidential election

The intervention by Russian President Putin supporting the "victory" of Yanukovich in the first round of the second round election created a backlash in Ukraine, especially in the western regions. The eventual victory by Yushchenko, and Putin's evident displeasure at the outcome and at the involvement of the West and of the OSCE in Ukraine's electoral process increased these tensions at the beginning of 2005.

NATO

The NATO-Ukraine relationship dates back to 1991, soon after Ukraine's independence when it joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. Ukraine joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994. In 1997, the NATO-Ukraine Charter on a Distinctive Partnership identified areas for consultation and cooperation, and established the NATO-Ukraine Commission. A NATO-Ukraine Action Plan was adopted in 2002, and an Intensified Dialogue launched in 2005.

After the 2004 Orange Revolution, there were some Ukrainian hopes of rapid integration into NATO and perhaps even the EU. Relations with Europe were set back, however, when the pro-Russia Party of Regions entered the government. Ukraine ended its 2-year deployment of 1,650 troops in Iraq in 2005, fulfilling a Yanukovich election promise.

Although strongly supported by the U.S., Ukraine was not offered a Membership Action Plan at the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit. The Summit did pledge, however, that Ukraine would eventually be offered membership. Still, the impact of the Russian-Georgia War of 2008 and strident Russian opposition have reduced support among key NATO members like Germany and France to Ukrainian entry into the Alliance. In addition, while Yushchenko was a strong advocate for entry, Tymoshenko backed away from support for entry. Pointing to Russian opposition and domestic divisions, she stated at a 2009 NATO Security Conference that participation in some kind of all-European collective security system in which Russia was a full participant might be the best option for Ukraine.

During the first NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting in 2010, following formation of a new more Moscow-friendly government, Ukraine made clear that it wished to maintain its current level of cooperation with the Alliance, fulfill existing agreements, and implement partnership programs.

In 2010, President Yanukovich signed legislation asserting a non-bloc policy (despite agreeing to the extension of the lease for Russian bases in the Crimea), apparently dropping interest in membership in NATO.

Meanwhile, Ukraine has continued to co-host, together with the United States, the annual two-week long Partnership for Peace "[Sea Breeze](#)" joint air, naval and land military exercises in the Black Sea area, which included 15 NATO and Middle East countries in its 15th iteration in 2012.





BLACK SEA, July 12, 2012. Ukrainian navy frigate Hetman Sahaydachniy (U 130) leads Turkish navy patrol boats TCG Kalkan (P 331), TCG Tufan (P 333), and the Georgian coast guard vessel Sokhumi (P 24) during a ship handling exercise during Exercise Sea Breeze 2012 (SB12). SB12, co-hosted by the Ukrainian and U.S. navies, aims to improve maritime safety, security and stability engagements in the Black Sea by enhancing the capabilities of Partnership for Peace and Black Sea regional maritime security forces. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class William Jamieson/Released)

Ethnic relations

Although the relative status of the Ukrainian and Russian languages has been a sensitive issue, relations between Ukrainians and Russians as ethnic communities in Ukraine have not been tense in most places. One exception is Crimea (see below). Another is Lviv in western Ukraine, where the local Russian community is treated with greater intolerance than in central and eastern Ukraine.

Cautious “Ukrainianization”

The lack of tension is due in large measure to the cautious approach of the government regarding the “Ukrainianization” of the Russian-speaking regions. Despite the influence of Ukrainian nationalism in the early years of independence, an inclusive concept of the state has prevailed, based on common citizenship rather than ethnicity.

Ethnic polarization between Russians and Ukrainians is also restrained by the presence of a large intermediate group of Russian-speaking Ukrainians and others of mixed Russian-Ukrainian identity. Even geography has helped in avoiding conflict. Between nationalist western Ukraine and anti-nationalist eastern Ukraine stretches the broad expanse of central Ukraine.

Language, however, has continued to be a sensitive issue. In 2006, several pro-Russian legislators declared Russian a “regional” language. Then President Yushchenko called the change in language status unconstitutional. In 2012, Ukrainian president Yanukovich signed a law allowing local and regional governments to give official status to Russian and other languages spoken by at least 10 percent of residents.

[The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities](#), Knut Vollebaek expressed concern that the new language law could divide the country. Russian is spoken primarily in the country's east and south; Ukrainian is spoken in the west and center. And Ukrainian speakers fear that Russian could crowd out Ukrainian, as it did in Soviet times. The High Commissioner also expressed concern at the manner in which the law was adopted. He particularly referred to the parliamentary majority's refusal to consider any of the more than 2,000 amendments put forward.

Little conflict between ethnic groups

There has also been little conflict between the two main ethnic groups and the various small ethnic minorities—again with the exception of Crimea. In 1992 the governments of Ukraine and Hungary negotiated an agreement to guarantee the rights of the [Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia](#). The issue of whether the [Rusyns in Transcarpathia](#) should be recognized as an ethnic group distinct from Ukrainians is potentially a source of tension.

Religious conflict

While there has been little ethnic conflict in Ukraine in the 1990s, there has been religious conflict between four Christian Churches. These are:

- The Russian Orthodox Church controlled by the Patriarch in Moscow
- The breakaway Ukrainian Orthodox Church, loyal to the government of independent Ukraine



- The rival Ukrainian Orthodox Church established by Ukrainian migrants in North America after World War Two
- The Uniate Church, a local variety of Catholicism that recognizes the authority of the Pope but retains some Orthodox rites.

Parishioners of these different confessions have struggled with each other for possession of church buildings.



Culture

This section touches on some noteworthy aspects of contemporary life in Ukraine.



Kyiv

Kyiv, the capital city of 2.6 million, stands astride Ukraine's greatest river, the broad and majestic Dnieper. The modern center and the surviving parts of the old city are on the hilly west bank of the river. The main street, called the Khreshchatik, runs between two steep hills. Here are the big hotels, department stores, and government buildings.

Opposite the metro station is an open square, the Maydan, with fountains where people gather to rest and talk. On the street corners you can buy hot snacks, books, and other things at outdoor stalls. The Maydan was the principal site of the demonstrations supporting the Orange Revolution during the 2004 presidential elections.



A view of Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in the center of Kyiv. The huge plaza has been the site of many political protests, the most famous being the Orange Revolution of 2004. During holidays the square is the scene of parades and open air concerts. (CIA Factbook)

Pecherskaya Lavra.

A short trolley ride will take you up to the ancient Monastery of the Caves ([Percherskaya Lavra](#)).



Back to Thumbnails Previous Image Next Image Caption The Uspensky Sobor (Dormition Cathedral) at the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra (Kyiv Monastery of the Caves) complex. Originally constructed between 1073 and 1078, it was further enlarged over the subsequent centuries. Destroyed by the Soviet Army in 1941, the cathedral was rebuilt between 1998 and 2000. (CIA Factbook)

Babi Yar

A slightly longer bus trip will take you to Old Woman's Ravine ([Babi Yar](#)) and the haunting [memorial to the 33,000 Jewish victims](#) of the Nazis murdered there.



Babi Yar Memorial (by permission of Roland Geider)

Old Kyiv

A little to the west of the Khreshchatik you come to Old Kiev. Great damage was done to its architecture and art treasures under Stalin and during World War II, but much of the old city has now been restored. The recently reconstructed Golden Gate marks where the city's fortified wall once stood, while the [Cathedral of St. Sophia](#) has mosaics and frescoes dating back to the 11th century.



Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv was completed in 1037 during the reign of Yaroslav the Wise. The ruler was buried in the church in 1054 in a six-ton marble sarcophagus that still survives. Although the cathedral's exterior was remodeled into the Ukrainian Baroque style in the 17th century, its original Byzantine interior was preserved. It was the first Ukrainian monument to be inscribed onto the World Heritage List. (CIA Factbook)

Dnieper River

Above them looms the giant statue of a sword-bearing woman who represents the [Soviet Motherland](#) defying the invader. Crossing the bridge to the flat east bank of the Dnieper, you reach the newer sections of the capital, dominated by big clusters of apartment blocks and industrial zones. Approaching the river, the slopes are covered by woods and parkland.



The Soviet-era Motherland Monument, sometimes referred to as the "Iron Lady," was supposed to symbolize the Soviet "Motherland." The 62-meter-high statue stands at the National Museum of the History of World War II in Kyiv, and still displays the Soviet coat of arms on its shield. (CIA Factbook)

Other cities

Ukraine has several other big cities besides Kyiv. In the east of the country are the old and decaying centers of heavy industry and coal and iron ore mining as well as the republic's former capital Kharkiv. In the south, on the Black Sea coast, lies the famous cosmopolitan port city of Odessa, while the historic center of western Ukraine is the city of Lviv.

Geography

Over a third of the country's people live in the countryside, mostly in large villages of 1,000 to 5,000 inhabitants. Rich black soil and a mild climate with adequate rainfall provide excellent conditions for agriculture, compensating to some extent for the effects of communism and economic stagnation.

The south is open and flat, watered by many streams that empty into the badly polluted Black Sea. Further north the terrain becomes hilly and wooded, except for marshlands in the northwest. In the far west of Ukraine the land rises to the wooded heights of the Carpathian Mountains.

Crimea

The beautiful Crimean peninsula, in the south, juts out into the Black Sea. Crimea is known for its health spas and ancient ruins, for its wines and garlic — and for the world's longest trolley bus route (from the capital of Simferopol to the resort of Yalta). Rocky mountains provide the backdrop for the palm-lined beaches that used to serve as the Soviet Union's playground.

Cuisine

Ukrainian cooking is famous for its dumplings. Varenyky are dough pockets filled with potato, cheese, blueberries, cherries or prunes, often served with onions and sour cream, while vushka are boiled dumplings filled with chopped mushroom and onion. There are various kinds of sausage, like the smoked ham kovbasa and kyshka, which is made from buckwheat and blood. Other popular dishes are borshch (beet soup), nalysnyky (crepes), and holubtsi — baked cabbage-leaf rolls made in the shape of doves, stuffed with rice and covered with tomato sauce. Two specialties traditionally served on Christmas Eve are "God's food" or kutia, a cold dish of boiled wheat mixed with poppy seeds and honey, and "God's drink" or uzvar, a mixture of 12 different stewed fruits. Linked to the celebration of Christmas and Easter are many old customs going back to pagan times.





CHAPTER 3

Moldova

Moldova is a sovereign state in Eastern Europe that was formerly part of the Soviet Union. This chapter contains the following sections on Moldova:

- Key information
- Historical background
- Domestic politics
- Foreign relations
- Ethnic relations
- Culture



Key information

Geography

Item	Description
Area	13,000 square miles
Natural resources	Moldova is best known for its grapes and wines. There is some brown coal (lignite) and minerals.

People

Item	Description
Population	3.657 million (2012 est.)
Ethnic groups	According to the 2004 census (which did not include the Transdnierster region): Moldovans/Romanians 78.2%, Ukrainians 8.4%, Russians 5.8%, Gagauz 4.4%, Bulgarian 1.9%, Other 1.3%. A separate census held in the Transdnierster region recorded Moldovans at 32% of the region's population; Russians, 30%; and Ukrainians, 29%. Gagauz live mainly in the area around Comrat, profess Orthodox Christianity, and speak a form of classical Ottoman Turkish.
Religions	Eastern Orthodox 98%, Jewish 1.5%, Baptist and other 0.5% (2000 est.)
Languages	Moldovan is virtually identical to Romanian, which belongs to the Romance group of the Indo-European language family. Moldovan was written in the Cyrillic script to emphasize the supposed difference during the Soviet period. The Latin script is now again in use (except in the Transdnierster region).

Government

Item	Description
Capital	Chisinau
System of government	Parliamentary democracy
Head of state	Nicolae Timofti
Currency	Leu



Regions

The present-day Republic of Moldova occupies the same territory as the Soviet republic that it replaced, the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. To understand the historical background of this territory, we must make a clear distinction between the two main regions.

Region	Description
Right Bank	Between the Rivers Prut and Dniester, an area that corresponds to the greater part of what was known in the 19th and early 20th centuries as Bessarabia
Left Bank	Also known as the Transdniester region



Historical background

This section describes the historical background of Moldova:

- Before Russian rule
- Under Russian and Soviet rule
- From Perestroika to independence



Before Russian rule

In the Late Middle Ages, [Bessarabia](#) was part of the principality of Moldova. During the second half of the 15th century, the principality fought off attacks from Ottoman Turkey under the leadership of [Prince Stephen the Great](#), who is now regarded as the father of the Moldovan nation. However, when Stephen died in 1504, Moldova became a Turkish dependency. In the 18th century it came increasingly under Russian influence. In 1812, Bessarabia was incorporated into the Russian Empire. Then in 1918, during the Russian Civil War, it was incorporated in Romania, where it remained until 1940.



Under Soviet rule

Before the Soviet period, the [Transdniester region](#) had always been regarded as part of Ukraine, not of Moldova or Bessarabia. Only in 1924 was it artificially given a Moldovan identity as part of a new [Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic \(ASSR\)](#) within the Ukrainian SSR. This formation was created to facilitate the eventual re-absorption of Bessarabia into the Soviet Union—a goal finally achieved in 1940 as a result of the [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact](#).



Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov signs the German-Soviet non-aggression pact in Moscow, August 23, 1939. In the background also appear Joachim von Ribbentrop and Joseph Stalin standing among the translators and secretaries. (nara.gov)

Moldavian SSR

In 1941 Romania joined its ally, Nazi Germany, in attacking the USSR, and occupied Bessarabia together with a broad swath of Ukrainian land further to the east. In 1944 the Soviet army re-conquered Bessarabia. Only then were the two parts of present-day Moldova joined together to form the Moldavian SSR. At the same time, about one-third of Bessarabia, including its entire Black Sea coastline, was incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR.

However, the two parts of the Moldavian SSR remained different in important ways. The Transdnister region, having long been part of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union, remained more Russified and Sovietized than Right-Bank Moldavia. The difference widened with intensive postwar industrialization that brought a big influx of Russian and Ukrainian workers into the Transdnister region.

Moldovan Popular Front (MPF)

Latent tensions came out into the open when Gorbachev started liberalizing the Soviet political system. In May 1989, the [Moldovan Popular Front](#) (MPF) was established in Right-Bank Moldavia. The MPF served as an umbrella organization for Moldovans who sought Moldova's secession from the USSR and (in most cases) unification with Romania. Two opposing movements also developed:

- The Intermovement, representing pro-Soviet Russian-speakers, and
- [Gagauz Khalky](#), representing the Gagauz minority.

Soon after, there began the long series of rallies, protests, and strikes that led to violent clashes and eventually civil war.

Clashes in October 1990 lead to split

In March 1990, the MPF gained control of the Supreme Soviet of the Moldavian SSR in the first competitive elections to that body. Alarmed at the apparent prospect of finding themselves unwelcome minorities within a Greater Romania, the Gagauz and Russian-speakers of Left-Bank Moldavia reacted by proclaiming Gagauz and Transdnister autonomous republics (ASSRs) within Moldova (in November 1989 and January 1990 respectively). The MPF-dominated Supreme Soviet, however, refused to recognize these autonomous republics.

In June 1990, the Supreme Soviet declared the sovereignty of the Moldovan (no longer the term "Moldavian," which expresses inclusiveness of all ethnic groups) SSR, and appointed its chairman Mircea Snegur president. Although that did not mean full independence yet, this was evidently the goal. In September 1990, the Gagauz area and the Transdnister region proclaimed themselves Union Republics of the USSR (SSRs) outside Moldova.

In October 1990, a confrontation between crowds of MPF and Gagauz activists, many armed, ended without violence thanks to the intervention of Soviet troops and the negotiation of mutual concessions. But in November 1990 the first violent clashes did occur between Transdnister volunteers and Moldovan police in the city of Dubossary on the Dniester River.

From Perestroika to independence

The Republic of Moldova (the country's official name since May 1991) declared independence in the wake of the attempted hard-line coup in Moscow in August 1991. The Communist Party of Moldavia was banned. The Transdnister region immediately responded by declaring its independence as the Transdnister Moldovan Republic, with Tiraspol as its capital.



Flag of the Transdnister Moldovan Republic

Domestic politics

This section describes domestic politics in Moldova, including:

- Elections
- The Gagauz conflict
- The “frozen” Transdniester conflict



Since independence

1991 presidential election

Marcea Snegur, a former communist party official who advocated independence, ran unopposed as an independent and was elected the first president of Moldova in 1991.

Meanwhile, Moldovan politics became increasingly polarized between the Moldovan Popular Front (renamed in February 1992 the Popular Christian Democratic Party (PPCD) on one side and communist and post-communist forces on the other. From about 1993 a realignment began to take shape.



Marcea Snegur (Moldova official presidential website)

1994 parliamentary elections

In May 1993, the moderate nationalists, who opposed union with Romania, were expelled from the PPCD and founded the [Social-Democratic Party of Moldova](#). In the parliamentary elections, the PPCD lost most of its support, retaining a mere 7.5% of the vote.

Two post-communist parties — the [Agrarian Party of Moldova](#), whose deputies were mostly village mayors and collective farm managers, and the former Communist Party, renamed the [Social Democratic Party](#) won the elections. Neither the Democratic Labor Party, representing the managers of large industrial enterprises, nor the [Party of Reform](#), representing urban professionals supportive of private enterprise, overcame the 4% threshold necessary for a party to enter parliament.

A month after the election, a [referendum](#) was held in which over 90% of voters approved the

continued independence of Moldova and rejected unification with Romania, thereby laying the issue to rest. In July parliament ratified a new [constitution](#).

1996 presidential elections

[Petru Lucinschi](#), who had been First Secretary of the Communist Party of Moldavia from November 1989 to August 1991, defeated President [Mircea Snegur](#).



Petru Lucinschi (Moldova presidential official website)

1998 parliamentary elections

The post-communist parties lost their majority in the parliamentary elections of March 1998. Although the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova, with 30% of the vote, did better than any other single party, a governing coalition of center-right parties (together representing 45% of voters) was formed under the name “Alliance for Democracy and Reforms,” led by former President Snegur.

International observers assessed Moldovan elections as largely free and fair. For most of the 1990s, Moldova had a mixed parliamentary-presidential system, with the president elected by popular vote.

In 2000, parliament amended the constitution to enable it to elect the president.

2001 parliamentary elections

The Communist Party won over 50% of the vote on pledges to bring Moldova closer to Russia and restore living standards to Soviet-era standards. The communists gained more than two-thirds of the seats in parliament, while the PPCD won only 11 seats. In March, the new parliament chose Communist Party leader [Vladimir Voronin](#) as president.



Vladimir Voronin, third president of Moldova (NATO)

Government pressures on opposition

In January 2002, the communist government responded to [opposition demonstrations](#) against compulsory Russian language classes in schools by suspending temporarily the activity of the PPCD. Relations between the government and the opposition were tense, and independent media (especially radio stations) were harassed.

2005 parliamentary elections

The elections produced a 56-seat majority (out of 101 seats) for the ruling Communist Party. The Communist Party won 46% of the vote (down slightly) on a campaign emphasizing a pro-European orientation, the Democratic Moldova Bloc won 29% (doubling), and the PPCD won nearly 10% (no change). The other 12 parties contesting the elections did not clear the 6% legal threshold.

The International Election Observation Mission concluded that the elections were generally in compliance with most OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and other international election standards.

2005 presidential election

Voronin easily won reelection by parliament as president with 75 votes, 14 more than required.

Continuing pressure on opposition

Amnesty International criticized Moldova in September 2006 for the arrest of nine NGO activists who held an anti-government demonstration.

2007 local elections

The Communist Party took 33 % of the votes, which was considerably less than the 54% it had won four years earlier. The [Party Alliance Our Moldova](#) came in second with 14% of the votes.

The International Election Observation Mission noted that the local elections gave voters a genuine choice, and were generally well administered. Other aspects of the elections, however, fell short of international commitments. Intimidation of candidates was one of the major shortcomings. Media coverage of state authorities benefited pro-government candidates. There were also cases where local authorities failed to guarantee equal conditions for all parties and candidates.

First woman prime minister

In 2008, President Voronin nominated Deputy Prime Minister [Zinaida Greceanii](#), another Communist, as the first woman prime minister in Moldova's history.



Zinaida Greceani (Moldova government website)

2009 parliamentary elections

The Communist Party again won a majority, 60 out of 101 seats, in the April election. The opposition Liberal, Liberal Democratic and Our Moldova Alliance Parties won, 15, 15 and 11 seats respectively. Turnout was 59.49 percent, above the 50 percent needed for the election to be valid.

The International Election Observation Mission reported that the election met many international standards and commitments, although further improvements were required to ensure an electoral process free from undue administrative interference and to increase public confidence.

Protests against the alleged election results

On the second day of the protest, an estimated [10,000 protestors](#) stormed and ransacked the

presidential office and parliament in reaction to the results that were announced on April 7, claiming that the election had been rigged. Opposition leaders backed the protests, but condemned the violence. Riot police retook the two buildings, leaving one dead, more than 270 police and demonstrators injured, and hundreds arrested. The 25-year old journalist, [Natalia Morar](#), and several other young activists organized a demonstration in front of the Moldovan parliament to protest the election results. The activists used the social media site Twitter.

At the time of the protests, the bodies of four Moldovans who had taken part in the demonstrations were also discovered. They had been tortured before being killed. It is believed that the Moldovan Ministry of Interior is responsible for their deaths.

President Voronin reacted to accusations that the election had been rigged by asking the Constitutional Court to conduct a recount. The opposition dismissed his action as a trick, and said it would take no part in the process.

Meanwhile, Voronin accused protestors of acting on behalf of Romania to bring down his government. Russia and other members of the CIS backed Voronin. The U.S. and EU urged an end to violence.

The recount confirmed the Communist Party's win. Nonetheless, the Communist Party had not garnered the 61 parliamentary votes necessary to elect its candidate, Zinaida Greceani, to the presidency.

More elections do not resolve formation stalemate

Voronin dissolved parliament after it twice failed to elect a new president. New parliamentary elections were held in July, giving four opposition parties 53 seats and the Communists 48 seats. The victors established a coalition, the [Alliance for European Integration](#) (AEI), which formed the new government. The AEI's parliamentary speaker, [Mihai Ghimpu](#), became Acting President.

But the AEI was unable to elect its candidate, Marian Lupu, to the presidency in two more parliamentary ballots. The AEI was also unable to successfully amend the constitution in a popular referendum in 2010 due to insufficient voter turnout. With the presidential electoral process deadlocked, parliamentary speaker Ghimpu continued as Acting President.



Mihai Ghimpu (Wikimedia Commons)



Marian Lupu, leader of the Democratic Party (Council of Europe)

2010 parliamentary elections

Due the failure of constitutional referendum, the Constitutional Court of Moldova ruled that acting

president of Moldova, Mihai Ghimpu had to dissolve the parliament and hold new elections.

New elections were held in November 2010. The AEI Coalition (Liberal Democratic, Democratic and Liberal Parties) ran against the Communist Party, winning 59 seats --2 short of the 61 needed to elect a President. Moldova's highest court ruled on 8 February 2011 that the government could stay in place without early elections even if it was still unable to elect a new president.

Observers from the OSCE and the Council of Europe lauded the election, with the head of the Parliamentary Assembly delegation of OSCE, Tonino Picula, saying "These elections reflected the will of the people".

December 2011 and January 2012 presidential elections

Due to parliament's inability to break their deadlock and elect a president, Moldova had an acting president for 900 days. In December 2011 the Commission for Constitutional Reform in Moldova was established by presidential decree to resolve the constitutional crisis. After the December election failed to elect a president, a second attempt was made in January 2012. However, that vote was annulled as being unconstitutional since it had not been held in a secret vote.

In March 2012, parliament elected [Nicolae Timofti](#) as president by 62 votes out of 101, putting an end to a political crisis that had lasted since 2009.



*Current President of Moldova,
Nicolae Timofti (Moldova
presidential website)*

Governing coalition splits

Scandals and rivalries divide AEI

A series of scandals, accusations and governmental in-fighting since December 2012 has led to the collapse of the governing AEI coalition. An alleged cover-up by Prosecutor Valeriy Zubco of

the shooting death of a businessman during a hunting trip led to his forced resignation.

(Participants in the hunting party included some 20 senior judges, prosecutors and state officials, including Zubco). Zubco is affiliated with the Democratic Party (PDM), one of the AEI components.

Subsequently, the PDM-controlled Anti-Corruption Center started investigating ministers from the AEI's partner (and rival) Liberal-Democratic Party (PLDM) of Prime Minister Filat. The corruption investigations--including in the Prime Minister's own office-- received heavy attention in the PDM-controlled Prime and Publika tv channels. Filat responded by terminating the coalition agreement with the PDM in February 2013, saying it had to be completely revised. The PLDM also voted with the opposition communists to suspend the PDM first deputy parliamentary chairman, Vladimir Plahotniuc (also Moldova's wealthiest businessman and believed to be the financial backer of PDM leader and chairman of Parliament Marian Lupu). Mihai Ghimpu's Liberal Party, the third AEI partner, has backed the PLDM against Filat.

Meanwhile, excerpts from illegal wiretaps fed to the media were alleged to show Prime Minister Filat directing the head of the Moldovan Tax Inspectorate, Nicolae Vicol, to show flexibility with a foreign investor in Moldova.

Vote of no-confidence in government passes

The opposition communists took advantage of the implosion of the AEI coalition to press a parliamentary motion of no-confidence. The motion passed March 5 with the support of the communist, Democratic Party and some independent deputies. All of Lupu's Democrats voted to bring down fellow AEI Prime Minister Filat's government.



Vlad Plahotniuc (Flickr)

The Gagauz conflict

Although clashes did take place between Gagauz demonstrators and Moldovan police in 1991, the situation in the [Gagauz area](#) never escalated to large-scale violence. As a fairly small minority living in a poor and isolated agricultural area, the Gagauz—unlike the Transdnier—were not perceived by Moldovans as a significant threat to the country’s independence and territorial integrity.

Establishing a recognized autonomous territory

Discussion of draft laws to create a recognized autonomous territory for the Gagauz began as early as October 1991, and in April 1993 a Gagauz congress decided that the Gagauz would remain within Moldova provided that they received the necessary guarantees. However, resolution of the conflict on this basis was blocked so long as the parliament remained dominated by the MPF. The blockage was removed in February 1994 by the election of a new and less nationalist parliament.

Special status of the Gagauz area

The new constitution adopted in July 1994 envisaged the granting of special status to the Gagauz area (as well as to the Transdnier region). The basis for resolving the conflict was established in December 1994, when a law was passed codifying the [autonomous status of Gagauzia](#). The OSCE Mission to Moldova played an important supporting role in nurturing the negotiation process and monitoring implementation of the new arrangements.



The flag of Gagauzia.

Elections

Dimitru Croitor won the 1999 elections and started using the rights granted to the Gagauzia governor in the 1994 law. Tensions erupted, as central government authorities were unwilling to go along with the changes. Croitor resigned in 2002 under pressure from Chisinau. He was not allowed by the Central Elections Council to run again for governor. [Mihail Formuzal](#) was elected

Gagauzia governor in 2007 and reelected again in 2010.



OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier (I) meets the Governor of the Gagauzia autonomous territorial unit of Moldova, Mihail Formuzal, Chisinau, 17 July 2012. (OSCE/Igor Schimbător)

Challenges for Gagauzia

The economic situation in the largely agricultural Gagauzia is no better than in the rest of Moldova. Governor Formuzal has requested the central government to fund Romanian language studies in the autonomous territory. In 2011 a large percentage of school children failed [Romanian language](#) exams needed for entrance to University. During Soviet times Gagauzia had mainly Russian-speaking schools. Without the Romanian language, Gagauzians have limited employment options.

The “frozen” Transdniester conflict

Meanwhile, Slavs in Transnistria took the lead in declaring a “[Dneestr Moldavian Republic](#),” with its capital at Tiraspol, as a part of the Soviet Union. [Igor Smirnov](#) was elected “president” of the Dneestr Republic. Fighting broke out in the city of Dubrasary in 1990. Combatants included local militia and Moldovan police, and eventually involved the newly formed Moldovan internal security troops, soldiers of the new Moldovan National Army and Transdniester Guard, volunteers from Romania (with the Moldovans), and Cossack volunteers from Russia (with the Transdnjesters). The Russian 14th Army, deployed on the Left Bank, remained officially neutral, but its members sympathized with the Transdnjesters and provided them with arms. By June 1992 hundreds had been killed, over a thousand wounded, and at least 100,000 refugees.

On June 25 the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania met and agreed on a plan to enforce a ceasefire. The forces of the two sides were to be separated, a peacekeeping force interposed between them, and a (Russia, Moldova, Transdnjesters) Joint Control Commission established in Bendery. These arrangements have been in place since August 1992. The peacekeepers are mainly Russian troops together with small Moldovan and Transdnjesters contingents.



Transdnjestrian Leader Igor Smirnov; Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, Ambassador Philip Remler, and Moldovan Prime Minister Vlad Filat, leaving the OSCE Mission's office in Bender after a meeting, 21 November 2011. (OSCE/Igor Rotari)

Negotiations and OSCE

Hostilities have not resumed. Neither, however, have the numerous rounds of negotiations between the two sides made much progress toward a settlement. Negotiations have been conducted between the Moldovan government and the Transdnjestrian authorities, under the joint auspices of Russia and the OSCE, with a Ukrainian representative also present from 1996 onward. (The U.S. and EU joined the process as observers in 2005.) The OSCE mission has played an active role, keeping channels of communication open and attempting to mediate a lasting political settlement between the sides. It has also sought to monitor human rights in all

parts of the country, including Transdniestria.

From an early stage Moldovan leaders have accepted that the Transdnister region should be given a special autonomous status within Moldova, including the right to secede in the event that Moldova unites with Romania. A [proposal](#) for a special status for Transdniestria was presented in 1993 by the CSCE mission to Moldova and accepted by the Moldovan government, but not by the Transdnisterian authorities.

[The OSCE Mission to Moldova](#)

Some agreements

Concessions offered by successive Moldovan governments have never been enough to satisfy Transdnister leaders, who seem willing to contemplate only a loose association with Moldova. Agreement has been reached only on the non-use of force (July 1995), some confidence building measures, and certain practical matters. In June 2001, Smirnov and Voronin met and agreed to dismantle checkpoints, rebuild bridges across the Dniester, and cooperate in the economic field.

OSCE proposal for federation

In 2002, the OSCE Mission proposed a federal solution to settle the Transdnister conflict. Several rounds of negotiations followed between the Moldovan government and Transdnisterian authorities with mediators from the OSCE, Russia, and Ukraine.

Moldova federation plan

A 2003 Moldovan proposal for a Joint Constitutional Commission (JCC) to draft a new constitution within three months was approved by Tiraspol. Despite several months JCC meetings, the agreement to devise a Moldovan federation masked unresolved basic differences between the two sides.



Ambassador William Hill, Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, hosts a historic meeting of a joint commission which will draft a new constitution for the country, Chisinau, 24 April 2003. (OSCE)

Russian Kozak plan

As a result, later in 2003, President Voronin turned to Russia and asked it to put forward a proposal for a federation, which was announced as the [Kozak plan](#). (Putin aide Dmitry Kozak was

the author of the document.) Transdnierster leaders accepted the plan, which envisaged an equal or symmetric federation, and dropped their earlier demands for a loose confederation. In any case, the Russian proposal was equally favorable to the Transdnierster authorities. In the face of U.S. and EU opposition, Voronin turned away from the Russian plan.

2005 Ukrainian initiative

In May 2005, new Ukrainian President Yushchenko proposed a new peace plan to reintegrate Transdnierstria into Moldova. Ukraine's stepped-up involvement was publicly welcomed by both Transdnierstrian and Moldovan authorities. A meeting was held in Ukraine attended by Moldovan and Transdnierstrian representatives, but nothing followed.

5+2 Negotiating process launched

In October 2005, the EU and U.S. joined the negotiating process as observers. The process thus became the 5+2 format (Moldova, Transdnierstria, OSCE, Russia and Ukraine + U.S. and EU).

During mid-2007, media reports asserted that the Voronin government was again engaged in secret bilateral talks on a Transdnierstria package deal with Russia outside the 5+2 format.

2008 Voronin-Smirnov meeting

Voronin and Smirnov unexpectedly met on April 11, 2008 for the first time in seven years.

According to official reports, they agreed:

- To form confidence-building working groups that will propose concrete projects in infrastructure development, road construction, security and disarmament, and in the social, cultural and humanitarian fields
- On concrete steps to enhance the negotiating process
- Moldova would ask the U.S. and EU to cancel their travel bans on Transdnierster leaders, and that Transdnierstria would cancel its restrictions on the entry and freedom of movement for all Moldovan officials

They did not make any public comments on resumption of the 5+2 negotiating process.

Smirnov reportedly put forward a "[Treaty of Friendship Between Moldova and Transnistria](#)" which treated them as equals, and included Moldova's recognition of Transdnierstria's secession and a Russian military presence there. These are all positions that Moldova had previously rejected.

Another high-level meeting in 2009

Russian President Medvedev hosted Voronin and Smirnov at a meeting outside of Moscow on March 18, 2009. The three leaders committed themselves to finding a solution to the Transdnierstria conflict, but there was no suggestion of any progress in addressing the core issue of the secessionist area's status.

5+2 Talks resume in 2011

The 5+2 Talks resumed in 2011. Five official meetings were held in 2012. The December 6-7,



2012 OSCE Dublin Ministerial meeting adopted a statement on the negotiations:

- Welcoming adoption during 2012 of “Principles and Procedures for the Conduct of Negotiations” and "a comprehensive agenda for the negotiating process"
- Looking forward to advancement of the negotiations on all three baskets of the agreed agenda: socio-economic issues, general legal and humanitarian issues and human rights, and a comprehensive settlement, including institutional, political and security issues;
- Expressing satisfaction that resumption of work in the “5+2” format has been accompanied by reactivation of the work of expert working groups and direct contacts between the sides, leading to concrete achievements such as resumption of rail freight traffic through the Transdniestrian region



Chişinău Railway Station in the Moldovan capital provides the starting point for the 180km journey to Odessa – which passes through the heart of the Transdniestrian region. The region saw intense fighting in 1992, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, over control of the area mostly situated between the left bank of the Dniestr/Nistru River and the border with Ukraine. (OSCE/Jonathan Perfect)

High level meeting with new leaders in 2012

Another high level meeting, bringing together a new generation of Moldovan and Transdniestrian leaders, took place on the margins of an OSCE conference in Germany in June 2012.



Ambassador Erwan Fouéré (c), the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the Transdniestrian settlement process, opens the meeting between Moldovan Prime Minister Vladimir Filat (l) and Transdniestrian leader Yevgeny Shevchuk (r), in the presence of the 5+2 representatives on the margins of an OSCE conference on confidence-building measures, Rottach-Egern, Germany, 20 June 2012. (OSCE/Igor Schimbator)

Ukraine OSCE CiO: Transdniestrian settlement process "highest priority"

OSCE 2013 CiO, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara, has termed the Transdniestrian settlement process his chairmanship's "highest priority."

5+2 meetings were held February 18-19 in Lviv. Kozhara wanted to include some political and security issues on the agenda, as well as schedule a CiO meeting with Moldovan Prime Minister Filat and Transdniestrian leader Shevchuk on the margins of the 5+2 talks.

Russia and Tiraspol vetoed any shift from the current dead-end socio-economic track to consideration of political and security issues. Russia also pressed an uncertain Shevchuk not to meet with Filat on the margins of the 5+2 meeting. The Lviv meeting broke down over Tiraspol's demands on transportation--which it termed "freedom of movement" issues--which actually involve de facto recognition of Transdniestrian separation from Moldova.



Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson for protracted conflicts, Ambassador Andrii Deshchytsia, chairing a 5+2 meeting on the Transdniestrian settlement process in Lviv, 19 February 2013. (OSCE/Sarah Crozier)

Related Transdnistria settlement issues

Promised Russian withdrawal -- still not implemented

Moldova and Russia signed a 1994 agreement on the withdrawal of all Russian forces together with their equipment within three years. Transdnister representatives, concerned that the agreement would undercut their existence as a Russian entity, walked out of the talks.

At the OSCE Summit in Istanbul in 1999, Russia promised to complete the withdrawal by the end of 2002. Russia did not withdraw its troops as promised. The deadline was then extended. Of the 20,000 troops in the 14th Army (name changed in 1994 to Operational Group of Russian Forces in Moldova), about 1,200 still remain.

Moldova has called for Russia to withdraw its "peacekeeping" troops from the region, a demand rejected by Russia.

Remaining munitions, weapons, vehicles, and equipment

The problems in the Transdnister region involve not just the remaining Russian troops, but also the enormous quantities of old munitions, weapons, vehicles, and equipment still stored in the area. According to the [OSCE Mission to Moldova](#), only about half of the 42,000 tons of ammunition stored in Transdnistria was shipped back to Russia during 2001-2003.

Transdnister leaders have done everything in their power to block the removal or decommissioning of the stores, which they aim to bring under their own control.



OSCE personnel inspect a train of Russian munitions before their shipment out of Transdniestria, 4 October 2002 (OSCE).

Role of EU Border Assistance Mission

A substantial majority of OSCE participating states, in the absence of full consensus, expressed great disappointment that the withdrawal of Russian forces from Transdniestria slowed considerably in 2004. In addition, CiO Passy noted at the OSCE ministerial meeting in December 2004 that “most ministers” supported an initiative on Border and Customs Monitoring on the Ukrainian border with Moldova (i.e., Transdniestria), intended to facilitate the often interrupted flow (by the Transdniestrian authorities) of traffic on roads and railway lines across this border.

Subsequently, Moldova and Ukraine asked the EU to provide advice and training to their border and customs services to help them prevent smuggling, trafficking and customs fraud. A [EU Border Assistance Mission \(EUBAM\)](#) was established in December 2005, and currently consists of about 100 EU police personnel.

In early 2006 Ukraine tightened its border with Transdniester to reduce smuggling, at the urging of Moldova and the EU.



EUBAM staff in the field (EUBAM)

U.S. favors multilateral peacekeepers to replace Russian force

In 2007 the U.S. suggested replacement of the current Russian peacekeeping force by a broader more genuine multilateral force, which would also include Russian participation.

Russia claims it has satisfied all its Moldova obligations

Speaking to the media after the Bucharest NATO-Russia Council Meeting in 2008, Russian President Putin again asserted that Russia's obligations in Moldova were limited to scrapping or evacuating heavy weaponry from Transdniestria, that it had fully complied in this, and that this compliance had been internationally verified. He also said that Russia was obligated to withdraw all its forces from Moldova by 2002 (extended to 2003), but it maintains "peacekeeping" forces there and has transferred part of its heavy weaponry to Transdniestrian forces which blocks international verification or inspections there.

Transdniestria 2011 "presidential" election

Over 73 per cent of voters cast their ballots for Yevgeny Shevchuk in a second round run-off poll on December 25, 2011. Shevchuk beat incumbent president Igor Smirnov, who had been in power since Transnistria declared independence in 1990. Moscow was perceived as having shifted its support to Shevchuk, considering him better suited to protect its interests in Transdniestria. Soon after taking office, [President Shevchuk](#) announced that approximately 90% of Transnistria's hard currency accounts had disappeared and may have been transferred out of the region with the knowledge of former president Smirnov.

Shevchuk expressed his determination to convince international bodies to recognize Transdniestria's statehood and, in addition, cooperate more closely with Russia. He said that Moldova and Ukraine will remain good, stable neighbors, and stressed that he would work with Chisinau to facilitate freedom of movement across Transdniestria's borders with Moldova.

Shevchuk soon made good on his word, and in January 2012 repealed the 100 percent customs duty on goods imported from Moldova, which was introduced in 2006.



Yevgeny Shevchuk (Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain)

Deadly incident involving Russian peacekeepers

In January 2012 a Moldovan civilian who disregarded warnings to stop while driving across a bridge between Moldovan and Transnistrian communities was shot by Russian peacekeepers and later died of his wounds. Moldovan officials were critical of the Russian action.

The U.S. and Germany expressed readiness to engage in discussions to demilitarize the area and convert the current peacekeeping force into an OSCE-led one.



Russian peacekeeping contingent has been deployed in Transnistria since 1992 (Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation)

Transdnistria sees Russia as its legal model?

According to the Moldovan media, a group of nine Russian officials from the State Duma and scholars visited Tiraspol in February 2013 to take part in a conference called: “Adjustment of local legislation to the Russian one – baseline of the Transnistrian statehood.”

Foreign relations

This section describes Moldova's foreign relations with:

- Russia
- The West
- Romania



Russia

During the years after independence, Moldova's economy remained highly dependent on the rest of the former Soviet Union, and on Russia in particular. Romania did not prove viable as an alternative economic partner.

The breakdown of economic links with other post-Soviet republics had a severe impact on Moldova. The conflict with the Transdniester region, which lies astride the lines of communication connecting Moldova with Ukraine and Russia, made matters even worse, especially as nearly all of Moldova's electricity generating capacity is on the Left Bank.

These realities do much to explain why Moldova distanced itself from Romania after 1994 and moved closer to Russia and the CIS in its foreign relations. Indeed, they do much to explain why Moldovan politicians, willing to re-orient the country in this direction, were able to come to power.

Eurasian Economic Community

In 1993 Moldova became an observer in the Eurasian Economic Community, the customs union of the core CIS countries.

The West

Moldova's turn to Russia neither helped it deal with its dire economic situation nor helped it find a solution to the Transdnistria problem. After 1999, Moldova increasingly started turning to the West for solutions, both economic and political. Moldova became a partner country with the EU's European Neighborhood Plan (ENP), with a joint EU-Moldova ENP Action Plan.

In 2005, the ruling Communists made a complete reversal in their policy line and campaigned on a pro-European and markedly anti-Russian platform. EU officials have encouraged domestic reforms, holding out hope for Moldova's eventual membership in the organization. Since 2009, the Alliance for European Integration (AEI) coalition has emphasized achieving an association agreement with the EU. This goal seemed attainable at the November 2013 EU Eastern Partnership Summit to be held in Vilnius, at least until the AEI internal coalition crisis overshadowed broader policy issues.



Romania

Romania's entry to the European Union at the start of 2007 made Moldova an EU neighbor. This does not seem to have facilitated a more productive relationship. Moldova-Romania relations have often been marked by acrimony.

Moldovan requests for Romanian citizenship (and documentation) appear to have increased since Romania joined the EU in 2007. The number of approved application, however, is disputed.



Ethnic relations

Citizenship has never been an issue in Moldova in the way it has been in Estonia and Latvia. The Citizenship Law of June 1991 granted automatic citizenship both to those who resided in Moldova before 1940 (when it was part of Romania) and their descendents and to those who resided in Soviet Moldova before 1990.



Is the Transdniester conflict an ethnic conflict?

There are Moldovans who support the Transdniester side, while there are Russians who support the Moldovan side. Indeed, 40% of the Left Bank population is Moldovan. While not ethnic in the narrowest sense, the conflict did initially pit groups with opposed political interests and divergent linguistic and cultural orientations against each other: toward Romania on one side, toward Russia on the other. Now that Moldova has a central government that is not seeking to embrace either of its neighbors, this contrast no longer exists.

If the Transdniester leaders want (and continue to be able) to preserve their enclave as an independent mini-state, it is presumably for the sake of power and the benefits, including criminal income that go with it. Moreover, the Transdniester authorities are able to maintain the status quo because they have the support of Russia.

The renewed [5+2 Talks](#) in 2012 created anxiety among some Transdniestrians that the EU was pushing unification of their region with Moldova. The Union of Russian Communities, the Union of Moldavians and the Union of Ukrainians wrote a joint letter to Russian President Putin claiming that the absolute majority of the people of Transdniester have opted for close historic and spiritual ties with Russia and cited the 2006 referendum where 97% of the Transdniestrian population voted in support of integration with the Russian Federation. Approximately 170,000 residents of Transdnistria have applied for and received Russian citizenship.

Right Bank Moldova

Ethnic relations in Right-Bank Moldova have greatly improved in recent years. Moreover, Russian-speakers in the capital Chisinau have always been less hostile to Moldovan independence than their counterparts on the Left Bank.



Language policy

In 1989, Moldovan was declared the sole state language. Proficiency in Moldovan was made a condition of state employment in 1990 (though this law did not come into full force until 1994). The 2002 decision by the newly-elected communist government to make Russian language classes compulsory in schools led to protest by the [Popular Christian Democratic Party](#) (PPCD), the main opposition party.

Language Policy in Transdniestria

Moldovan, alongside Russian and Ukrainian, is an official language in Transdniestria, though state schools are required to teach it in the Cyrillic and not the Latin script. There are, however, seven schools in the Transdniestria region that use the Latin alphabet in teaching Romanian/Moldovan. These schools are funded by the Moldovan Government and follow the Moldovan curriculum, but have periodically been faced with closure by the Transdniestrian authorities.

Supporting parent rights to choose the language of instruction, the OSCE Mission in Moldova, in cooperation with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, reached an agreement with Transdniestrian authorities in 2003. This agreement should have allowed the schools to register and function without difficulty. Transdniestrian officials, however, did not observe this agreement or an amended version mediated by the Mission later that year and tried to close the schools in 2004. OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Rolf Ekéus condemned the forced closure of a Moldovan-language high school in Tiraspol.

Due to the Mission's efforts, the schools were able to reopen. In 2005, the schools received permanent registration based on the 2003 agreement. The Mission has been mediating a dispute involving eight Moldovan schools in the Transdniestrian region which are administered by the Moldovan Government and continue to use a Moldovan curriculum. The Mission monitors the functioning of the Moldovan-administered schools in the Transdniestrian region and mediates between central and Transdniestrian region education authorities to find solutions for outstanding issues and to prevent the emergence of new crises.

The OSCE Mission to Moldova and the High Commissioner on National Minorities issued a [report](#) in November 2012 on the status of the eight Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools in Transdniestria.



Vladimir Berlinksy (right), Deputy Director of Moldovan School No. 19 in Benderi, briefing a high-level OSCE delegation in June 2004 about the threats they are facing (OSCE/Neil Brennen)



Students at the Lucian Blaga school in Tiraspol, 2 February 2012. (OSCE/Igor Schimbător)

OSCE language use

In Moldova, the OSCE uses the term the “state language” to avoid calling it either Moldovan or Romanian, either of which may be divisive. Similarly, although the OSCE always refers to Transdnistria, it is important to note that it is Trans (across) the Dniester only from the perspective of Chisinau, Bucharest, and other points west. Viewed from Moscow, Kyiv, or even Tiraspol, the region is not Transdnistria, and is thus called in Russian and other Slavic languages

“Pridnestrov’ia” or “by” or “near” the Dniester. Anyone trying to mediate in this region must be sensitive to these linguistic usages in order to avoid getting into trouble.



OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier (I) speaking with the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, Ambassador Jennifer Brush, on the bridge over Dniester/Nistru River connecting the towns of Tiraspol and Bender, 18 July 2012. (OSCE/Igor Schimbător)

Culture

This section includes cultural information on Moldova, including:

- Chisinau and Tiraspol
- The countryside
- Economics
- Folk traditions
- Cuisine

Chisinau

The capital [Chisinau](#) (Russian name Kishinev) is home to about one-sixth of the country's inhabitants. It is built along the River Bik, a tributary of Moldova's main river, the Dniester. The Old City was built in the 15th century on seven hills west of the river. Its narrow crooked streets and intricate architecture contrast sharply with the broad and straight tree-lined boulevards of the 19th-century New City that surrounds it. The central avenue is named after Moldova's founding prince [Stefan the Great](#).

There is a monument to Stefan the Great at the entrance to the park that also bears his name. Other sights are the Holy Gates, the three cathedrals, and several churches. The old water tower that is now the city museum is across the Bik River on the east bank, as are the circus and the railroad station. Chisinau is the main economic and cultural center of Moldova.

Tiraspol

Tiraspol, the capital of the Dnestr Moldavian Republic, has a large proportion of the country's industry. .



Chisinau street scene, 2004 (USIP/Ted Feifer)



A statue of Lenin is seen the city of Tiraspol in front of the government headquarters of the separatist Transdniester region of Moldova. June 18, 2000 (©AP/Wide World Photo/Vadim Ghirda)

Countryside

The countryside is fairly flat, wooded in places and with some low hills. The mild climate and rich black soil are good for growing cereals, tobacco, fruit and vegetables, and especially grapes: Moldova is well known for its wines. Milesti Mici, with almost 2 million bottles, has the largest wine collection in the world, and stretches for 250 km, of which only 120 km are currently in use. The town of Cricova also has an extensive network of underground tunnels that stretch for 120 km.



Milesti Mici, (by permission of Moldova Photo Series.Serhio)

The Economy

The economy is in an abysmal condition. A majority live under the poverty line and most people's wages don't cover their basic needs. They survive thanks to their garden plots. Many seek work abroad, often in Russia.



Folk traditions

An attempt is now underway to revive Moldovan folk traditions that were discouraged under Soviet rule. Many of these traditions are associated with Christmas and the New Year — for example, celebrating Ignat (a holiday preceding Christmas), exchanging lichie (flat wheat cakes) between relatives on Christmas Eve, and wearing fairytale masks on New Year's Eve. In the countryside, after Christmas dinner, children carry small decorated wooden plows around the village to bring good harvests.



Cuisine

Moldovan cooking is almost the same as Romanian cooking, though it reflects a certain amount of Russian influence. A proper meal starts with a hearty soup of potatoes, vegetables, and meat, served in small pots with bread. The main course is likely to be meat with potatoes or mamaliga, which is a mixture of corn mush and salad in vinegar. Then roasted sunflower seeds may be nibbled. Plenty of wine, vodka, or palinka (Moldovan brandy) is drunk. Other dishes you may come across are chicken heads in jelly, salad made of beans and sausage, noodles with poppy seeds and cheese, and dumplings filled with cabbage or cheese.



A woman sells chicken in a market near Chisinau in Moldova, 2002 (OSCE/ Neil Brennan)