

Ukraine: political parties and the EU

Ukraine's political landscape mirrors the country's deep divide between the West and Russia. The main result of the parliamentary elections on 26 October 2014 was the victory of Ukraine's pro-European parties. The 'European Ukraine Coalition' took office amid mounting economic and (Russian) military pressure on one side, and urgent calls for reforms and 'lustration' on the other.

Ukraine's elections against the backdrop of Russian 'hybrid warfare'

The first parliamentary elections since Russia's annexation of [Crimea](#) in March 2014 established a clear [pro-European majority](#) in Ukraine's parliament, reflecting increasing anti-Russian sentiments caused by Russia's 'hybrid warfare'. The [pro-Western course](#) of Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk's five-party 'European Ukraine Coalition' is counteracted by increasing Russian and pro-Russian [political and military pressure](#) in the east.

The [on-going crisis](#) in Ukraine erupted after former President Viktor Yanukovich [refused to sign](#) an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU in November 2013 and sought closer ties to Russia. Following radical protests from pro-Western groups, Yanukovich stepped down and [fled to Russia](#). Moscow responded by annexing the Crimea in March 2014, sparking wide-ranging [EU sanctions](#). The EU and Ukraine's [newly elected President](#), Petro Poroshenko, [signed the AA](#) in June. Following the October elections in the rest of Ukraine, rebels in Luhansk and Donetsk – the parts of the eastern Donbas region controlled by pro-Russian forces – held their own '[elections](#)' on 2 November, highlighting Kyiv's lack of power in Donbas.

'European Ukraine Coalition' – one direction, competing approaches

With [288 of 450](#) seats in parliament, the pro-European parties formed a [coalition government](#) on 2 December. The coalition agreement sets out a range of [clear policies](#) supported by all five parties, including on NATO membership, EU integration, the Crimea and the establishment of a new anti-corruption bureau. However, there are differing political interests within the coalition, in particular regarding a lasting peace agreement in Donbas as well as the extent of the planned reforms and [lustration process](#) (exclusion of civil servants who worked for the Yanukovich government) which could [hamper the government's efficiency](#).

The People's Front: assertive newcomer with a tough approach to Russia

Having raised its profile in the election campaign by taking a '[hawkish](#)' attitude to Russia and pushing for the [use of force](#) to resolve the conflict in Donbas, the liberal-democratic, pro-European [People's Front](#) – founded in 2014 – came first with [22.14%](#) of the votes. However, due to Ukraine's hybrid electoral system, which combines first-past-the-post-seats with proportional representation, it is only the second strongest in parliament with 82 seats. Yatsenyuk has declared that the government's '[ultimate goal is Ukraine's EU membership](#)', to which end 'radical changes' are needed.

Petro Poroshenko's Bloc: ties to the 'old guard' and softer on Russia

Comprising the Solidarity Party – founded in 2001 – and Kyiv Mayor Vitaly Klitschko's UDAR party, President [Poroshenko's Bloc](#) was formed in August 2014. The party has a Christian-liberal, pro-Western profile and garnered [21.82%](#) of the votes, slightly fewer than the People's Front, but is still the strongest in parliament with 132 seats. Poroshenko, a businessman who served as foreign minister in 2009-10 and was elected president in May 2014, has been criticised for gathering many '[opportunists and members of the old guard](#)' around him to secure broad support for his party, which advocates a peaceful solution to the Donbas conflict and a softer position on Russia. Poroshenko negotiated and is therefore committed to the September [Minsk ceasefire agreement](#), whereas the People's Front and Self-Help had no hand in it and are thus free to [criticise](#) it.

Samopomich (Self-Help): pushing for lustration, stronger defence and 'full sovereignty'

Originally founded by Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadoviy in 2004, the reform-minded, pro-European [Self-Help](#) party attracted [11%](#) of the votes (33 seats) – mainly from western and central Ukraine – placing the party third.

Claiming to translate '[Christian morality](#)' into '[Ukrainian reality](#)' and calling for strengthened defence and restoration of Ukraine's 'full sovereignty throughout the country' as well as lustration in the public sector, the party attracted reform-minded voters with '[Euromaidan](#)' sympathies.

The Radical Party: 'wild cards' sponsored by oligarchs

The [Radical Party](#) was founded in 2010 as the Ukrainian Radical-Democratic Party and has had its current name and leader Oleh Lashko since 2011. The party came in fifth with [7.44%](#) of the votes (22 seats). Sponsored by oligarchs and with few ties to Euromaidan activists, Lashko and his MPs are seen as [wild cards, likely to behave 'unpredictably'](#) in Ukraine's *Verkhovna Rada* (parliament). Lashko promoted the party's [radical populist](#) profile on oligarchic TV and favours the use of force to resolve the conflict.

Batkivshchyna (Fatherland): from driving force to smallest party in Verkhovna Rada

Yulia Tymoshenko's [Batkivshchyna](#) party was founded in 1999 and was one of the most [important political parties](#) in Ukraine until 2014, when Yatsenyuk left and founded the People's Front. Voters' support fell to [5.68%](#) (19 seats), down from 13% in the May presidential election. The [centre-right, pro-European](#) party advocates a military solution to the conflict in Donbas.

The Opposition Bloc – pro-Russian coalition with close ties to Yanukovich

The other side of Ukraine's political spectrum is clearly pro-Russian. With [3.88%](#) of the votes, the [Communist Party of Ukraine](#) fell below the 5% threshold for the first time since it was founded in 1993 as the direct descendant of the Communist Party of Ukraine, a branch of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The [Opposition Bloc](#) remains the only pro-Russian opposition party in parliament. Founded in September 2014, the coalition party comprises six groups with strong ties to Yanukovich's former government. The bloc is led by Yuiy Boyko – former vice-prime minister and energy minister [under Yanukovich](#) – who claims that his party is 'the voice of eastern Ukraine, the industrial party of the country'. The bloc advocates a peaceful solution to the Donbas conflict and gained [9.43%](#) of the votes (29 seats), placing it fourth.

Unrecognised 'elections' in Donbas with predictable outcome

On 2 November 2014, pro-Russian rebels held '[elections](#)' in the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, although the Minsk protocol stipulated that local elections were to be held in December. In both 'people's republics', the pro-Russian separatist leaders claimed victory and were [sworn in](#) as presidents. Ukraine's President Poroshenko condemned the elections as illegitimate and urged Russia '[not to recognise the so-called elections](#) because they are a clear violation of the 5 September Minsk protocol'. EU High Representative Federica Mogherini called the vote an '[obstacle](#)' to peace and said the EU would not recognise it. Only Moscow [backed the vote](#), saying it 'respects the will of the people of south-east' Ukraine.

Beleaguered government faces severe obstacles in 2015

Coalition governments in Ukraine tend to be [fragile](#), and the 'European Ukraine Coalition' will face further [Russian economic and military pressure](#) on the one hand – with the threat of gas crises, a '[Crimean Corridor](#)' offensive from Russia, and potential intensified fighting in the Donbas 'republics' – and calls for lustration and wide-ranging reforms on the other. Any compromise regarding Moscow's control over Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk could challenge the pro-European course and create rifts in the coalition. At the same time, the [lustration process](#) could split the coalition between hardliners and those advocating a softer approach. In addition to this, Ukraine is on the verge of [financial collapse](#), which would [end its access](#) to international capital markets. The EU granted a financial [support package](#) worth up to €11 billion to Ukraine in March 2014, to assist the transition process and stabilise the economy. Yatsenyuk stated on 16 December that, to 'overcome' anticipated difficulties in 2015, Kiev has a '[desperate need](#)' for international financial support. On 8 January the Commission proposed to provide a [further €1.8 billion](#) of macro-financial assistance, adding to €1.6 billion within the €11 billion package from 2014.

The European Parliament and Kyiv simultaneously ratified the EU-Ukraine AA on 16 September. In its 18 September resolution on Ukraine and the state of play of EU-Russia relations ([P8_TA\(2014\)0025](#)), the EP underlines Ukraine's 'European perspective', states that 'Russia's direct and indirect military intervention in Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea, violates international law', and 'Stresses the reversibility and scalability of the EU restrictive measures depending on the situation in Ukraine'.