

Ukraine: Navigating multiple challenges

Five years after the 'revolution of dignity', in which Ukrainians demanded a functioning democracy and an end to kleptocracy, the country elected a new President in April 2019 and a new Parliament in July. The new leaders in Kyiv are facing a wide range of persistent challenges. Russia's ongoing hybrid war against the country, including the illegal occupation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine, as well as the continued reform process dominate the agenda. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission is expected to make a statement on the situation in Ukraine during the October I plenary session.

Background: Ukraine's ongoing battle for democracy

In 2013, the decision by then-President, Viktor Yanukovich, not to sign an [association agreement](#) with the European Union (EU) sparked major pro-European [protests](#) in Ukraine. In February 2014, the Ukrainian parliament voted to impeach Yanukovich, who fled Kyiv. Russia responded by annexing Crimea in March 2014, in [violation](#) of international law, and by launching a [hybrid war](#) (adding economic pressure and [disinformation](#) attacks to its military aggression) against Ukraine. The [EU](#), the [United States](#) and other countries imposed [sanctions](#) on Russia, which retaliated with [counter-sanctions](#). Ukraine is a priority country for the [EU](#), which sees the full implementation of the 2014-2015 Minsk [agreements](#) as the basis for a solution to the conflict. The EU continues to [support](#) Ukraine's democratic progress. The main tools are the Association Agreement and its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).

Ukraine's political and security situation

Since 2014, Ukraine has been undertaking unprecedented [reforms](#). Public anger over widespread corruption was a key driver for change in 2013. As the new President Volodymyr [Zelenskiy](#) was elected with a record 73 % of votes on a promise to fight corruption, while his party won control of parliament in July, the domestic and international pressure to widen anti-corruption [reforms](#) is mounting. Simultaneously, the country is fighting a number of battles on other fronts. Despite the Minsk peace agreements, the war in eastern Ukraine [continues](#) and has so far claimed some [13 000](#) lives, with over [1.5 million](#) displaced people. Ukraine and Russia agreed on a major prisoner swap in September 2019, in line with the Minsk agreements. The [release](#) of Ukrainian [sailors](#) detained in November 2018, as well as 2018 Sakharov Prize winner, Oleg Sentsov, a film-maker jailed for 20 years in 2015 for allegedly plotting terrorist acts in Crimea, was a milestone. However, there was [criticism](#) of Zelenskiy's decision to release Volodymyr Tsemakh, reportedly a commander of air defences for Russian-backed rebels and a 'person of interest' in the Dutch-led investigation into the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine in 2014. Although diplomatic efforts to revive the talks in the [Normandy format](#) – Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France – have been re-activated, Zelenskiy's room for manoeuvre remains limited. Reflecting the will to break the deadlock of the peace accord, on 1 October 2019 Zelenskiy said that Ukraine is ready to relaunch talks on settling the Donbass conflict; agreeing to hold local elections in Donbass under Ukrainian law and OSCE supervision, and enshrining this in law if the elections meet OSCE standards. Nevertheless, the annexation of Crimea will remain an obstacle to peace: Russia is unlikely to compromise. Moreover, Zelenskiy has been [dragged](#) into a domestic dispute in the US at a time when Ukraine is deeply dependent on its Western allies.

European Parliament

The European Parliament has played a key diplomatic role in relations between the EU and Kyiv, and has been leading internal reform and capacity-building [efforts for the Rada](#) (Ukrainian parliament). It has repeatedly recalled the Kremlin's particular [responsibility](#) for the full [implementation](#) of the Minsk agreements.

Statement by the VP/HR: Situation in Ukraine; [2019/2834\(RSP\)](#).

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