



Policy Brief

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How to Help Ukraine Strengthen Democratic Resilience During and After the War

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Summary

Russia's full-scale invasion since 2022 has transformed Ukraine's domestic landscape, forcing the state to balance wartime governance with the pursuit of long-term transformative reforms. Despite the centralization of power under martial law, the government has continued efforts toward EU integration and institutional strengthening. Political competition has narrowed but not disappeared: while opposition parties challenge aspects of governance, they support the war effort and reform trajectory. Civil society and volunteer groups have assumed unprecedented roles in oversight, service delivery, and sustaining national morale, compensating for state limitations. Independent media, though operating under pressure, remain critical in keeping the government accountable and countering disinformation. The public's confidence increasingly rests with the country's wartime leaders, reflecting a shift in political legitimacy. Even under severe economic and humanitarian strain, the population's commitment to democratic values and a European future endures.

Ukraine's integration into Western political, economic, and security structures deepened after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and accelerated following the full-scale invasion. International assistance remains vital for sustaining its defense, economy, and reform agenda. The EU's €50 billion Ukraine Facility and progress in accession talks highlight its continued commitment, yet divisions among member states, notably Hungary's veto threats and differing priorities, slow collective action. Meanwhile, US policy toward Ukraine under President Donald Trump has become more transactional and unpredictable, creating uncertainty over long-term military support. NATO members and partners have stepped up coordination through mechanisms such as the Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List, but the lack of unified Western leadership complicates strategic planning.

This brief outlines for the medium term three scenarios for Ukraine's democratic resilience, depending on how the war, diplomatic efforts, and domestic political dynamics evolve. The most likely one is the war continuing without a ceasefire, and ongoing martial law, societal fatigue, and political uncertainty eventually create the conditions for a government of national unity. The second-most likely scenario is a ceasefire providing temporary relief and space for governance, and opening the way for increased pressure for elections even with the war unresolved and the country exposed to Russian interference. A peace agreement followed by elections is the least likely scenario at the time of writing, which, without complete domestic acceptance and strong international security guarantees, could destabilize Ukraine politically.

To help Ukraine sustain its sovereignty, democratic governance, and European integration, its international partners should provide continuous, reliable military support and concrete security guarantees. They should reinforce independent institutions, including anti-corruption bodies and the judiciary, while backing civil society and independent media to maintain accountability. Supporting the development of new political actors and harnessing the growing influence of veterans can also strengthen democratic norms and political pluralism. Assistance should also promote cohesion across government and society to prevent and to reduce polarization and external Russian interference, ensuring Ukraine's resilience during the war and in the ongoing and postwar reconstruction.

Introduction

This brief presents an overview of Ukraine's domestic political landscape and international context, looking into how the war has reshaped governance and accelerated the transformation of civil society, independent media, and volunteer networks into key pillars of accountability, resilience, and democratic continuity. It also discusses the critical role of the assistance at all levels by the EU, NATO, and the United States. Finally, the brief outlines three scenarios to the end of next year related to the evolution of efforts to end or to pause the war and of the resurfacing of political competition. The brief concludes with recommendations for Ukraine's partners as to how they can strengthen its democratic resilience during and after the war.

The Domestic Situation

Ukraine's domestic political trajectory before February 2022 was defined by the reform agenda born out of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity. Successive governments, responding to strong public demand for democratic governance and Euro-Atlantic integration, pursued reforms to overhaul the judiciary, to strengthen public administration, to advance decentralization to empower local governance, and to combat corruption. Progress was uneven, but reforms and debates over democratic oversight, the rule of law, and economic modernization dominated political discourse. This unfolded in parallel with Russia's war in Donbas and annexation of Crimea, which shaped political and security priorities.

The full-scale invasion shifted the focus to defense and survival, yet the reform agenda, especially measures tied to EU accession, was not put on hold. Ukraine has fought on the military and institutional fronts, with the latter seen as essential to strengthening resilience and securing its future in the EU, which for many also represents a path to greater security.

Despite wartime challenges and restrictions on freedoms under martial law, Ukrainians remain committed to democracy and European integration, two key pillars of national identity today. In a 2024 survey, 93% said they strongly supported democratic values,¹ and in another one this year 68.9% said they were in favor of joining the EU.² The European Commission has commended Ukraine for maintaining democratic governance, strengthening legislative procedures, and advancing reforms that support transparent, accountable decision-making.³ Freedom House classifies Ukraine as "partly free" and as a "transitional or hybrid regime."⁴ In a poll carried out in July, 66% of respondents said Ukraine was a democratic state, though 21% said they had influence over political decision-making.⁵

The war has placed significant pressures on democratic institutions. The parliamentary and presidential elections that were supposed to take place in October 2023 and spring 2024 respectively could not be held under martial law. There is a broad societal consensus that holding elections before the war ends is unconstitutional and risky. In the July poll, 64% of respondents said they opposed holding a presidential election during the war, 57% parliamentary elections, and 49% local elections.⁶ Many citizens, especially soldiers and those abroad, would not be able to vote. Russia could also take advantage of wartime elections to destabilize the country through cyberattacks or other interference.

Political life is not frozen, however. Parties engage with their voters, with some expanding their regional and local networks through initiatives such as mobilizing resources and support for the armed forces. Opposition parties openly criticize Zelenskyy, his Servant of the People party, and the government. Simultaneously, most remain united in supporting Zelenskyy's agenda when it comes to advocating continued military, economic, and political support of Ukraine. In a May poll, he was by far the most trusted politician (74%), followed by volunteer and public figure Serhiy Prytula (50%) and Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko (43%).⁷ In the July poll, though, in which Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the former commander-in-chief of the armed forces and current ambassador to the United Kingdom, was included, he scored higher than Zelenskyy (81% vs. 65%).⁸ In both polls, prewar heavyweights former president Petro Poroshenko and former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko were far behind with high levels of distrust.

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The traditional "oligarchic" political influence has been greatly reduced under wartime de-oligarchization laws, media restrictions on oligarch-owned channels, and detention of figures like Ihor Kolomoisky. While their economic assets still matter, oligarchs no longer openly shape the political agenda to the extent they once did.

The postwar balance of political forces will likely involve incumbents and established opposition political figures facing individuals whose public standing and legitimacy have been forged in the wartime circumstances, including figures from the armed forces, prominent volunteers, and local leaders. The example of Zaluzhnyi, who has consistently high approval and is not openly pursuing political ambitions, suggests that senior commanders could become influential political actors once their military service ends and normal political competition resumes. The president's statement in September that he will not seek reelection after the war but intends to push for elections during a potential ceasefire further underscores the likelihood of significant political realignment once hostilities subside.

The war has disrupted the balance between branches of government. Zelenskyy had considerable power and a parliamentary majority before, and power has become more concentrated since 2022. This has enabled him to more effectively mobilize international military, economic, and diplomatic support. Yet, the majority of Ukrainians say the Office of the President exerts excessive influence over state institutions, particularly parliament and the government. In a poll conducted in August 2024, 59% said so (up from 52% in 2023), and 55% said its influence on the judiciary, law enforcement, and anti-corruption bodies was excessive.⁹

Two major political developments in July showed the extent of presidential power, but also the constraints on it. The details of the new government announced by Zelenskyy came as a surprise even to some members of his party, but they fell in line. The reshuffle also allowed the Office of the President to sideline figures whose presence in government was tarnishing Zelenskyy's image. The

parliament then passed a law placing the two main anti-corruption bodies—the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office—under the authority of the prosecutor general. This sparked the largest public demonstrations since 2022 and concern from the EU. Civil society and EU officials viewed the law as undermining the independence of these bodies and threatening Ukraine’s EU accession. In response, Zelenskyy introduced, and parliament swiftly adopted, a revised bill restoring their independence. This episode demonstrated the decisive role that civil society and international actors continue to play, and that checks on those in power remain tangible, especially when both are united.

Nevertheless, it also underscored concerns that the authorities are undermining the anti-corruption framework. This was exemplified by the initial reluctance to appoint Oleksandr Tsyvinsky as head of the Bureau of Economic Security, despite his selection through an open competition. While officials cited national security concerns, pointing to his father’s Russian citizenship and residence, Tsyvinsky was eventually appointed following sustained pressure as civil society and business groups criticized the authorities’ stance as opaque and politically influenced. In July, more than 50 civil society organizations (CSOs) also condemned as groundless the criminal charges and raids against the prominent anti-corruption activist Vitalii Shabunin.¹⁰ His defenders argue this is part of a campaign of pressure against government critics.

Over the last decade, civil society has emerged as a powerful driver of democratic and EU-oriented reform and watchdog. The 2022 invasion sparked the strongest wave yet of civic mobilization, with many volunteers and CSOs stepping into new roles, from humanitarian relief to helping the military. Ukraine has a generally enabling environment for civil society.¹¹ However, the sector faces challenges, including staff shortages as many activists joined the armed forces, burn out from prolonged emergency and crisis work, physical threats to volunteers operating near frontlines, and reduced external support, notably from the United States. Despite these pressures, civil society remains highly mobilized and committed to holding institutions accountable and ensuring that Ukraine stays on its democratic and EU path.

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The independent media remain a vital pillar of the democratic ecosystem, essential for holding power accountable and ensuring transparency. Despite facing serious challenges, such as the end of US funding, limited access to official information under martial law, and high physical risks for journalists in frontline areas, independent outlets report stories that the frequently criticized state-controlled United News telethon in place since 2022 often overlooks. Russia’s disinformation campaigns continue to spread, particularly on platforms like Telegram and TikTok. Ukrainians have some resistance to this, but Moscow’s methods have improved and its sophisticated social media campaigns subtly polarize society—often without people realizing they are the targets. The propaganda manipulates divisions, for example, between those in the military and those avoiding service, or between citizens and “corrupt politicians”. A large number of independent media outlets that could counter disinformation have lost US

funding. In this environment, independent journalism is more important than ever for providing reliable, fact-based reporting in the face of mounting financial and political pressure as well as of an increasingly hostile information landscape.

The war has caused staggering economic and infrastructural losses, with recovery needs estimated at the end of 2024 at \$524 billion over the next decade.¹² The cost grows higher with each day of the war. The economy contracted by 28.8% in 2022, rebounded with growth at 5.3% in 2023 and 3.5% in 2024, and is projected to grow by 2% this year.¹³ Despite the unprecedented challenges, Ukraine has maintained all public services and sustained business activity. In the first quarter of 2025, businesses showed stronger optimism for the economy and their own growth.¹⁴

The majority of Ukrainians, though, view the economic situation negatively.¹⁵ The economy faces challenges: slowing growth and heavy dependence on uncertain foreign aid, extensive war-related damage to infrastructure, and persistent inflation. Labor shortages caused by mobilization, displacement, and emigration strain productivity. A major challenge lies in addressing the housing difficulties faced by over the estimated 3.7 million internally displaced people and the struggles veterans face reintegrating into civilian life.

Ukrainians have shown remarkable resilience and found ways to adjust to the pressures of war, displacement, and economic strain. However, should conditions deteriorate further, persistent economic hardships and uncertainty about the future could seriously erode trust in government institutions and increase the risk of social unrest and discontent if not carefully addressed.

The International Context

From 2014 to 2022, following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, Ukraine increasingly aligned itself with Western countries and institutions, deepening political, economic, and military cooperation with the EU, NATO, and the United States. This period saw a gradual but significant integration into broader European security frameworks, though full membership in these structures remained elusive. The full-scale invasion in 2022—Europe's most serious security crisis since the Second World War—put Ukraine at the top of the international security agenda. In response, the EU, the United States, and the other G7 countries mobilized unprecedented military and financial support, as well as imposing heavy sanctions on Russia. These developments have dramatically elevated Ukraine's place in the Western security architecture, including its relationship with NATO.

At the time of writing, the war remains a grinding, high-intensity conflict with no decisive breakthroughs for either side. In recent months, Russia has intensified drone and missile attacks on towns and cities while conducting a slow but persistent offensive along parts of the eastern front. It continues to defend key positions, launches localized counterattacks, and continues to degrade production, logistics and energy networks in Russia. At the same time, the army faces personnel shortages and remains heavily dependent on Western support, which, particularly since the election of Donald Trump in the United States, became more uncertain and politically contingent.

After the full-scale invasion, Ukraine applied for EU candidate status, which was granted in June 2022. EU support for its integration is strong in principle but sometimes fragmented in practice. As of late September, the European Commission had completed the screening process for all six clusters of negotiation chapters, an important step toward membership. In 2024, the EU established the Ukraine Facility, a financial instrument providing up to €50 billion in grants and loans until 2027 to support reconstruction, macro-financial stability, and reform efforts.

However, some member states have hindered progress in relations with the EU. Hungary continues to block the opening of formal accessions negotiations, with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán raising the prospect of vetoing Ukraine's membership. The EU is exploring ways to advance Ukraine's integration despite this, but no solution to bypass "Orbán's veto" has been found yet. Hungary has also repeatedly tried to block EU sanctions on Russia and to limit military assistance to Kyiv. Other member states, such as Slovakia under Prime Minister Robert Fico, have expressed reservations over security guarantees or the pace of integration. Belgium, despite its overall support for Ukraine, resists the proposals to unfreeze Russian assets being held at the Brussels-based financial institution Euroclear. Thus, different political considerations within the EU can slow collective action, creating a gap between formal commitments to Ukraine and their implementation.

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The international context in recent months has been shaped by two connected factors. First, the Trump administration's incoherent efforts to broker a ceasefire and peace, which have been combined with frequent criticism of Zelenskyy and a slowdown or halt in the flow of weapons that had already been promised and financed under the previous administration. At the same time, there have been some positive steps on the military front, such as Washington's approval in September of the first weapons shipments to Ukraine funded by NATO allies under the Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List (PURL). Second, the EU and other Western partners have sought to bolster Ukraine's position and military capabilities ahead of any potential negotiations, but Trump's words and actions have complicated and, at times, undermined these efforts.

Ukraine's relationship with the United States has evolved significantly over the past decade. Under Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden, Washington focused on military, economic, and democracy aid to counter Russia's aggression and to bolster democratic reforms. During his first term, Trump linked military assistance directly to his different strategic and political goals, exemplified by the 2019–2020 suspension of nearly \$400 million in security aid. Trump's second term so far has seen a similarly transactional approach, emphasizing strategic benefits, exemplified by this year's deal that grants the United States preferential access to critical resources like lithium and titanium as well as established a joint investment fund for reconstruction. Trump has also positioned himself as peacemaker. His summit with President Vladimir Putin in August produced no concrete results but clearly benefited the latter. Putin used his first trip to the United States since 2015 to project legitimacy and break out from partial

isolation, while Trump shifted from pushing a ceasefire to endorsing a broader “peace agreement”—a position closer to that of Russia.

Since the summit, Ukraine’s allies have explored ways to continue strengthening it and what security guarantees could be provided to it. As of June, NATO countries had allocated €35 billion in assistance to Ukraine this year,¹⁶ compared to over €50 billion for the whole of last year. The PURL is a new NATO initiative in which the country’s partners can contribute financially for the bulk purchase of weapons and essential equipment from the United States. The aim is to ensure Ukraine receives critical capabilities efficiently while distributing the responsibility for arming it more evenly among NATO members. Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden have pledged \$2 billion in four separate PURL packages. Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia are finalizing their contributions.¹⁷ In recent months, a “coalition of the willing”—around 30 countries including most European countries, Australia, Canada, and Japan, but not the United States—has also focused on coordinating and expanding military support, while the debate continues on the potential deployment of a multinational force, contingent on a ceasefire, with Europe taking primary responsibility. But this remains a work in progress. The coalition emphasizes Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and freedom to cooperate with other countries. It is also exploring the possibility of using frozen Russian assets to support defense and reconstruction. The EU has so far trained over 80,000 Ukrainian soldiers,¹⁸ and member states have expressed support for expanding its military training mission to operate inside Ukraine as part of security guarantees in the event of a ceasefire.

What Lies Ahead?

In the medium term, Ukraine’s future may follow one of three scenarios, depending on how the war, diplomatic efforts, and domestic political dynamics evolve. In the most likely one, there is no ceasefire and ongoing martial law, societal fatigue, and political uncertainty eventually create conditions for a government of national unity. In the second-most likely scenario, a ceasefire provides temporary relief and space for governance, and increases pressure for elections. The least likely scenario is a peace agreement that is not universally accepted in Ukraine and is followed by preparations for elections, which could destabilize Ukraine politically.

No Ceasefire and a Government of National Unity

In this scenario, there is no ceasefire and Russia continues to pursue its political and military objectives in Ukraine. With the United States disengaged, due to its inability to secure a ceasefire and to other priorities, and European countries lacking the capacity and political will to provide comprehensive military support and security guarantees, Ukraine remains exposed to ongoing attacks. Martial law continues, elections are still postponed, and the population is under growing strain. Society continues to support the military but fatigue and anxiety increase. There are signs of a weakening of the public’s resolve to endure prolonged hardship and to sustain military mobilization. Support for Zelenskyy and Servant of the People diminishes. Civil society and the public continue to demand accountability from the political leadership, particularly regarding corruption and the effective allocation of scarce resources to ensure military operations are adequately supported. These pressures create incentives for compromise among major parties and the idea of a government of national unity becomes central to the political debate.

In late 2026, four parties—Servant of the People, European Solidarity, Holos, and Fatherland—agree to form one after Zelensky-led negotiations and civil society supporting the coalition-building process. The goals are to stabilize the political landscape, to showcase political unity at a time when national defense is increasingly challenging, and to demonstrate to international partners that Kyiv is capable of delivering inclusive governance even under deteriorating wartime conditions. This development meets with a positive reaction from Ukraine’s international partners and the public.

At the time of writing, a government of national unity appears unlikely. Ukrainian media increasingly highlight rising political competition with different actors preparing for eventual elections, suggesting that most existing parties currently prioritize political positioning over forming coalitions—a dynamic reinforced by a history of rivalry and lingering animosities. However, if the war continues and thus martial law too, making elections impossible, political and social pressure in that direction could increase. Even if a government of national unity was not formed at the beginning of the full-scale war, this does not mean it cannot happen should the situation worsen. There are precedents of states in existential crisis turning to one as a survival mechanism, and of parties facing strong incentives to demonstrate patriotism and responsibility rather than appear divided during the critical moments of their country’s history. Nothing today precludes this from being an option for Ukraine, depending on circumstances. With the prospects for a ceasefire in the coming months very uncertain, by late 2026 intensifying public expectations for transparency and awareness among political elites of the war’s existential stakes, active advocacy by civil society, and the mounting costs of the war could create conditions for the formation of a government of national unity. Already in 2023, 37% of respondents in one survey expressed support for one and 38% neutrality about the idea.¹⁹ Ukraine’s international partners may also increasingly demand more inclusive and accountable governance structures to ensure effective resource management and sustained legitimacy in the context of their ongoing military and reconstruction support. They would likely view a government of national unity as a sign of political maturity.

Ceasefire and Growing Pressure for Elections

In this scenario, hostilities slow significantly, and the front line stabilizes into a largely frozen conflict. Faced with sustained US pressure and a deteriorating economy, Russia agrees to a ceasefire, calculating it can still pursue its political and territorial objectives by exploiting divisions within Ukraine. A peace agreement remains out of reach and martial law is kept, though the authorities consider easing restrictions in some regions. Civilian suffering is reduced, troops gain rest, critical infrastructure is stabilized, and the authorities have breathing room to focus on governance. Kyiv uses this relative calm to accelerate reforms and European integration. However, most Ukrainians view the lull as an opportunity for Russia to regroup and prepare for a future offensive. Calls for national elections mount, with domestic and international actors framing this as a test of democratic legitimacy. Opposition figures amplify these calls while criticizing the government’s management of the war, economic hardship, and the persistence of corruption. A political debate emerges over the timing of elections: some argue that holding them sooner would signal democratic strength while others caution about the risks of a campaign under uncertain security conditions. Regional leaders, especially from areas less affected by the war, advocate elections to resume full democratic accountability. CSOs intensify their demands for transparency, highlighting the need to ensure that electoral procedures are credible and inclusive. Public

opinion is divided: many support elections as a demonstration of democratic resilience but a significant number of people are wary of holding them under martial law and ongoing uncertainty. Russia escalates its interference in politics, activating dormant or semi-active proxies and exploiting the debate over elections to undermine confidence in the government. It amplifies further the narratives emphasizing corruption and economic stagnation, and it uses figures like the discredited former president Viktor Yanukovich to sow confusion and polarization.

The occurrence of a ceasefire in the coming months is, at the time of writing, very uncertain. Should one be achieved, Zelenskyy has indicated he would be prepared to hold elections, even though Ukraine faces complex debates over their timing, security, and procedural fairness. The interplay between public opinion, opposition activism, civil society advocacy, and Russian interference will shape the political climate and the government's strategic choices. Moscow's objective is not to create a viable pro-Russia political bloc, which is implausible, but to erode trust in institutions and certain political actors, to undermine governance, and to strain Kyiv's international relationships. Ukraine's partners, particularly the EU, would likely approach the situation with caution, avoiding to overtly pressure it to hold elections. At the same time, they would quietly encourage Zelenskyy and the government to articulate a credible electoral roadmap that signals to domestic and international audiences that democratic processes will continue.

A Not Universally Accepted Peace Agreement Followed by Elections

In this scenario, a formal peace agreement is reached, facilitated by the United States. Ukraine's international partners pledge to continue security, economic, and diplomatic support. The EU promises to do all it can to speed up the country's European integration politically and economically, but NATO remains noncommittal about its membership prospects. Martial law is lifted not long after the agreement is announced. The authorities start preparations for holding the postponed parliamentary and presidential elections, encouraged by key partners to organize an orderly democratic process within a reasonable time. The public reaction to the agreement is mixed. Some cautiously welcome it but remain watchful to see how reliable international partners' sovereignty and security guarantees will be. Others view the agreement as conceding too much territory, weakening security, and compromising sovereignty. This threatens to destabilize the political situation and to increase polarization, and thus to erode further trust not only in the government but in state institutions. Zelenskyy reiterates that he does not want another term and his political influence begins to decline, as does that of Servant of the People. This creates political space further for former military leaders like Zaluzhnyi, leaders of volunteer movements, or other new actors promising strong governance and security. The presidential contest becomes a high-stakes race between wartime political figures, former military leaders, and prominent figures from volunteer or civic movements. The parliamentary elections look likely to produce a dramatic reshuffling of power, with Servant of the People facing heavy losses and a more promising outlook for the opposition parties, new veteran- or volunteer-led movements, and even some dormant pro-Russia actors who do not openly express their support for Moscow. Russia escalates its interference through coordinated disinformation campaigns on social media, targeted hacking of party communications, leaks of sensitive documents, and amplification of divisive narratives about territorial concessions or corruption. Pro-Russia actors act as conduits and amplifiers for these efforts. The aim is to reduce trust in the electoral process, sway undecided voters, and exacerbate polarization.

At the time of writing, the likelihood of a peace agreement being reached in the next months is low. Reaching one that would satisfy Ukraine's security requirements and be acceptable to the public is highly challenging, given Russia's ongoing aggression and imperial vision that denies Ukraine's sovereignty and national identity, and repeated breaches of prior agreements. Moscow is using the prolonged negotiations as a delaying tactic, while Kyiv and its partners face significant difficulties in crafting a deal that includes strong and enforceable security guarantees. Should a peace agreement that Ukraine's leadership thinks is acceptable be reached, much of what will follow will depend on how critically the population judges its exact terms, especially regarding territorial concessions and security guarantees from partners, regardless of their fatigue from four years of full-scale war and more than ten since Russia's first aggression in Crimea and Donbas. Ukrainians will carefully weigh their yearning for stability against their determination to defend territorial integrity, to demand justice and reparations from Russia, and to press the government for lasting reforms and full transparency. The greater the share of society that is dissatisfied with an eventual peace agreement, the more turbulent politics will be in the runup to the next elections.

What Help Does Ukraine Need?

The foremost priority for Ukraine is to defend its sovereignty and achieve a durable and just peace. Without robust security, progress in democratic governance, credible elections, and reconstruction cannot be achieved. For this, Kyiv needs continuous, reliable military support, including advanced defensive and offensive capabilities, alongside concrete international security guarantees to stop current as well as to deter future Russian aggression. The ability to defend its territory and uphold full territorial integrity is the essential foundation for long-term institutional stability, the resilience of democratic institutions, and ongoing integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. At the same time, democratic institutions must remain robust, independent, and accountable. The EU and its member states, the United States, and other international partners must continue to provide support while making it clear that criticism of the authorities during the war is not only acceptable but necessary when they risk undermining the progress the country has made. The public expects that anti-corruption agencies and the judiciary remain free from political interference, and that the government is held accountable for decisions that threaten transparency, accountability, or EU integration. The country's current leadership should not be treated as if it were untouchable. Thus, constructive pressure from partners is essential to prevent backsliding, to reinforce the rule of law, and to demonstrate to Ukrainians that democratic norms are non-negotiable even under wartime conditions.

To help Ukraine navigate the coming period in which the political scene will become livelier, regardless of which path efforts to end the war takes, the EU and its member states, the United States, and other international partners should:

- **Expand support for civil society and independent media:** Ukraine needs strong and resilient CSOs and independent media, especially at the local and regional levels, to sustain its democratic transformation. They have not only been at the core of progress, pushing for reforms, transparency, oversight, and citizen engagement, and countering Russian disinformation; they have also been a critical part of Ukraine's defense efforts. CSOs and independent media require secure, core

long-term funding that ensures they can operate consistently and independently, even under the pressures of war. In addition to their existing assistance to support civil society, the EU and its member states should “adopt” successful projects and organizations previously supported by the United States, integrating them into EU-backed frameworks such as the Ukraine Facility and postwar recovery plans. This approach would strengthen civil society, make EU support more coherent, and tie civil society assistance directly to Ukraine’s reforms and European integration

- **Nurture a better political culture through new forces:** Strengthening Ukraine’s political landscape requires the encouragement of new political actors with a democratic orientation as well as empowering citizens to engage more fully. By focusing on the development of grassroots movements that are inclusive, participatory, and committed to democratic values, Ukraine can foster a political culture that supports pluralism, strengthens institutions, and advances European integration. Support should be directed to helping these new actors build effective internal governance, develop coherent policies, engage voters, organize campaigns, and create coalitions—thus enabling them to connect with citizens in meaningful, responsible ways. Additionally, initiatives that educate and motivate voters, particularly first-time ones, will help revitalize democratic engagement and reinforce the legitimacy of postwar elections.
- **Harness veterans’ influence for a resilient democracy:** A central issue will be the political awakening of veterans whose wartime contributions have earned them deep public legitimacy. As different formal and informal veterans’ groups begin to shape the civic and political landscape, it will be important to create conditions in which genuine democratic leadership can take root inside them. This means identifying and encouraging those figures who demonstrate integrity, competence, and commitment to democratic values, while ensuring that new veterans’ movements are not captured or manipulated by oligarchic or other entrenched interests, as has happened in the past. Otherwise, left unsupported or co-opted, these actors could drift toward populist or exclusionary politics. Well-designed support programs can help channel veterans’ energy, public influence, and wartime experience toward strengthening democratic governance. Many existing rehabilitation programs provide a foundation for this and could incorporate such civic and governance-oriented components.
- **Strengthen unity across society and governance:** Ukraine needs strong unity across all sectors of society, at every level of governance, to ensure its survival during the war and to secure a stable democratic future. Polarization among different segments of society and political groups—for example, based on military service, political affiliation, geographic proximity to the front lines, social circumstances, or displacement—is a potential threat, and one that Russia will always seek to exploit to weaken Ukraine. International partners can play a crucial role in reinforcing unity by supporting inclusive governance mechanisms, promoting dialogue across groups, and backing initiatives that foster citizen engagement, dialogue and collaboration. Assistance should focus on enhancing coordination between national and local governments, civil society, and emerging political movements to ensure broad participation and shared responsibility. By strengthening these connections, partners can help Ukraine maintain cohesion and resist external manipulation.

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About GMF

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GMF champions the principles of democracy, human rights, and international cooperation, which have served as the bedrock of peace and prosperity since the end of the Second World War, but are under increasing strain. GMF works on issues critical to transatlantic interests in the 21st century, including the future of democracy, security and defense, geopolitics and the rise of China, and technology and innovation. By drawing on and fostering a community of people with diverse life experiences and political perspectives, GMF pursues its mission by driving the policy debate through cutting-edge analysis and convening, fortifying civil society, and cultivating the next generation of leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. Founded in 1972 through a gift from Germany as a tribute to the Marshall Plan, GMF is headquartered in Washington, DC, with offices in Berlin, Brussels, Ankara, Belgrade, Bucharest, Paris, and Warsaw.

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