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- EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
- REFORMS AND RECOVERY
- CONTAINMENT THROUGH ENLARGEMENT

UKRAINE – EUROPEAN UNION

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UKRAINE'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION POLICY IN PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF NATIONAL MINORITIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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Ukraine continues to fulfil its European commitments in terms of the protection of national minorities, combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia, through active international engagement and systematic cooperation with EU institutions. Steps have been taken to systematically implement European standards concerning the rights of national minorities. Measures were implemented to advance the Roadmap on the Role of Law and the Action Plan on the Protection of Minorities, within the framework of negotiations between Ukraine and the European Commission.

The protection of Ukraine's national minorities is one of the priorities outlined in the negotiating framework for Ukraine's accession to the European Union. This issue is integral to the EU enlargement process. Ukraine adheres to these priorities and is improving its legislation concerning ethnic policy, in line with the recommendations of international institutions. In June 2022, following Ukraine's acquisition of EU candidate status, the European Commission provided the country with seven key recommendations to maintain its candidate status and commence accession negotiations. The seventh recommendation directly concerned issues relating to national minorities: "Completion of the reform of the legislative framework for

the protection of the rights of national minorities in accordance with the recommendations of the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission)"¹. As of September 2025, according to European Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos, Ukraine has completed its 'homework' on ensuring the rights of national minorities. This allows for the opening of the first cluster of negotiations ('Fundamentals') on EU accession. She positively noted the steps taken by the Ukrainian authorities, in particular the adoption of the Action Plan on the Protection of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities, and the incorporation of European standards into legislation.²

1 European Commission of the Council of Europe 'For Democracy through Law' (Venice Commission). <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/events/>

2 European commissioner Kos on meeting with representatives of national minorities: no one expressed concerns about protection of rights, Interfax-Ukraine, 02.10.2025, <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/1109235.html>

Legislative and Regulatory Activity

With the adoption in December 2022 of the new Law of Ukraine on National Minorities of Ukraine³, systematic work continued to improve ethnic policy, despite the challenges posed by the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war.

Following the opinion of the Venice Commission of 12 June 2023, amendments were made to the Law of Ukraine 'On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine',⁴ with the aim of bringing provisions of the law in line with the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, the 1995 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. On 21 September 2023, the Verkhovna Rada adopted the Law of Ukraine 'On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine "On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine" regarding certain issues of the realisation of the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities (communities) of Ukraine', which took into account the aforementioned recommendations of the Venice Commission.

The Venice Commission's new opinion of 9 October 2023⁵ noted positively that many of the previous recommendations had been taken into account. The Venice Commission commended the efforts of the Ukrainian authorities aimed at implementing the recommendations, and bringing the

provisions of the Law of Ukraine 'On National Minorities of Ukraine' in line with international standards. At the same time, it made recommendations to introduce further amendments to the laws 'On National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine', 'On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language', 'On Media' and 'On Education'. In accordance with these recommendations, the amendments were adopted on 8 December 2023⁶.

In December 2023, the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Denys Shmyhal, met the leaders of civil society organisations representing national minorities in Ukraine. Issues related to the interaction between executive authorities and the public, and the state of affairs regarding the protection of the rights of national minorities, were discussed.

On 27 December 2024, representatives of national minorities met the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Following the meeting, a number of specific proposals were submitted to the president regarding the improvement of the protection of the rights and interests of Ukraine's national minorities during the war. Implementation of these proposals by the relevant state authorities is currently ongoing. Presidential Decree No. 883/2024 was adopted on the introduction of a national holiday – the Day of Interethnic Harmony and Cultural Diversity, which is celebrated annually on 21 May.

3 The Law of Ukraine on National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine. – December 2022. – [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2023\)019-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2023)019-e)

4 CDL-AD(2023)021-e Ukraine – Opinion on the Law on National Minorities (Communities), adopted by the Venice Commission at its 135th Plenary Session (9-10 June 2023), [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2023\)021-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2023)021-e)

5 CDL-AD(2023)028-e Ukraine – Follow-up opinion to the opinion on the law on national minorities (communities) (draft law #9610), adopted by the Venice Commission at its 136th Plenary Session (6-7 October 2023), [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2023\)028-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2023)028-e)

6 Law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine to Take into Account the Expert Assessment of the Council of Europe on the Rights of National Minorities in Certain Areas, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 10.12.2023. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3504-20#Text>

In 2023–2024, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted 11 subordinate regulatory legal acts concerning ethnic policy and the protection of the rights of national minorities, among them the Concept of the State Programme ‘Unity in Diversity’; ‘On the Approval of the Procedure for Determining the List of Settlements Traditionally Inhabited by Persons Belonging to National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine’; ‘On the Approval of the List of Languages of National Minorities (Communities) and Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine that are at Risk of Extinction’; and ‘On the Approval of the Methodology for the Use of the Languages of National Minorities’.



In 2023–2024, over 40 consultations were held with civil society organisations representing national minorities and regional military administrations

Five orders of the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience (DESS) were approved regarding the protection of the rights of national minorities. Eleven meetings of the Council of Public Associations of National Minorities of Ukraine, which has been operating since May 2024 under the DESS, were held.

The regulatory acts were drafted by the DESS in a transparent manner, involving extensive consultations with public associations of national communities and relevant state authorities.

Consultations with Public Associations of National Minorities

In 2023–2024, over 40 consultations were held with civil society organisations representing national minorities and regional military administrations, as well as four national seminars, which served

as a means of regular engagement with the regions, and ensuring the relevance of minority rights issues in the policy-making process. A significant number of similar consultations took place the following year as well.

In working with civil society organisations, the focus was on participation in the drafting of legislation covering the list of languages at risk of extinction, the identification of areas of compact settlement for minorities, etc. The initiative to establish Inter-Ethnic Harmony Day was put forward for discussion among representatives of national communities, as a response to the need for a symbolic gesture of solidarity in the context of collective resistance to Russian aggression. Other practical outcomes include the adoption of legislative acts that form the basis for policy implementation at the local level: a methodology for the use of minority languages in settlements, a list of languages at risk of extinction, procedures for identifying areas of traditional minority settlement, as well as guidelines on budgetary funding for measures in this field. A procedure for the establishment of National Minority Centres has been developed, providing for the creation of a new institutional platform, as well as the acts necessary for the functioning of the Council of Public Associations of National Minorities, etc.

A number of large-scale forums were held for the Greek, Polish, Romanian, Czech and Hungarian communities, as well as a nationwide forum on inter-ethnic policy, and the First Congress of the Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine, which created a space for public discussion of the positions of national communities on key areas of state ethnic policy. A broad, comprehensive approach enabled the gathering of a wide range of participants, including both community representatives and experts from state and non-state bodies.

In 2024, the procedure for selecting and approving the membership of the Council of Public Associations of National Minorities of Ukraine was implemented, and support was provided for its regular meetings. Six meetings of the Working Group on the Development of the Spelling of the Crimean Tatar Language were held; the draft text was finalised and revised, to take into account the proposals of the National Commission for the Development of the Crimean Tatar Language. The aforementioned spelling system, based on the Latin alphabet, was adopted by a decree of the Government of Ukraine.



A number of large-scale forums were held for the Greek, Polish, Romanian, Czech and Hungarian communities, as well as a nationwide forum on inter-ethnic policy, and the First Congress of the Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine

In 2025, a meeting of the DESS Expert Council was held to consider legislative initiatives in the field of languages under threat of extinction. A Working Group of Experts on the Revival and Development of these languages was established, and it held around ten meetings. In April 2026, the relevant Strategy for the Development of Endangered Languages of National Minorities in Ukraine, together with an operational plan for its implementation, was to be adopted by the government.

Reporting on Ukraine's Fulfilment of Its Commitments Regarding the Implementation of the Provisions of International Treaties

In April 2024, Ukraine's Fifth Periodic Report on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages⁷ was submitted to the Council of Europe Secretariat.

The Sixth Periodic Report on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM)⁸, covering the period from 2021 to the first quarter of 2024, was submitted to the Council of Europe's Advisory Committee in January 2025, as part of the Council of Europe's monitoring.

Work has begun on resuming the activities of four intergovernmental commissions; in particular, the membership of the Intergovernmental Ukrainian-German Commission on the German Minority Living in Ukraine has been renewed (2024), and the 12th meeting of this Commission was held in Berlin in October 2025. The new membership of the Ukrainian side of the Bilateral Ukrainian-Slovak Commission on National Minorities, Education and Culture has been approved (2025). This year, the issue of resuming the work of the Bilateral Ukrainian-Romanian Commission is being addressed.

International activities within the framework of the National Strategy for Ensuring the Rights of Roma until 2030 included participation in projects of the Council of Europe, the OSCE and UNESCO, as well as negotiations in Brussels. Participation in these forums focused on

7 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Council of Europe, 1950, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/european-charter-for-regional-or-minority-languages>

8 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Council of Europe, 1995, <https://rm.coe.int/16800c10cf>

highlighting Ukraine's progress in fulfilling its obligations regarding the protection of minority rights, particularly those of the Roma, and on supporting institutional changes to implement EU standards. Since 2023, we have organised and participated in nearly 40 international and nationwide civil society events dedicated to Roma issues.


Activities Relating to European Integration

Presentations were prepared for bilateral meetings with the European Commission under Chapter 23 of the negotiation process on Ukraine's accession to the EU, 'Judiciary and Fundamental Rights'. Ukraine's officials participated in screening meetings with the European Commission delegation in September 2024, during which the issues of freedom of conscience, combating racism and xenophobia, non-discrimination, and safeguarding the rights of national minorities, including the Roma, were raised.

Reports were submitted on the compliance of national legislation with EU standards, implementation of the national cultural programme 'Unity in Diversity', participation in intergovernmental commissions, and the fulfilment of international obligations. In September 2024, the screening under Chapter 23 was completed in Brussels, and work began on the European Commission's recommendations to address certain gaps in Ukrainian legislation. A final report on the alignment of Ukrainian legislation with the EU acquis was prepared.

Following the completion of the screening, the Government of Ukraine launched consultations on the development of a roadmap for bringing Ukrainian legislation into line with EU legislation in the area of 'Rule of Law', in particular regarding freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, combating discrimination, combating hate speech, hate crime, Roma issues, and the rights of national minorities.

In 2024, the first rounds of consultations with the European Commission on the content of the roadmap took place, and the relevant comments were addressed. Following the European Commission's preliminary approval of the roadmap and its coordination with the relevant authorities, it was adopted at the national level in May, with subsequent approval by the European Commission and EU Member States.



Ukraine continues to ensure the fulfilment of its European integration commitments, in protecting the rights of national minorities (communities), combating discrimination, racism, xenophobia, hate speech and hate crimes through active international engagement

A separate annex to the roadmap is the Action Plan on the Protection of the Rights of National Minorities until 2027. The action plan, like the roadmap, is a strategic document within the framework of Ukraine's EU accession negotiations. The action plan takes into account the provisions of the EU Negotiating Framework (points 39 and 40) and the results of the screening of Ukrainian legislation under Chapter 23. It covers the following objectives: strengthening institutional capacity for the protection of the rights of national minorities; updating the legal framework for protection against discrimination and hate speech; developing a methodology for monitoring hate speech; ensuring inclusive representation of minorities in government; safeguarding linguistic and educational identity; and addressing the consequences of the war in regions with a significant minority presence.

Ukraine continues to ensure the fulfilment of its European integration commitments, in protecting the rights of national minorities

(communities), combating discrimination, racism, xenophobia, hate speech and hate crimes through active international engagement, participation in monitoring mechanisms, the preparation and defence of international reports, as well as systematic cooperation with the institutions of the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the UN, in particular UNESCO and other partners.

During its visit to Ukraine in July 2025, the FCNM delegation held working meetings in Uzhhorod, Kontsove and Berehove with representatives of local authorities, civil society and national minorities, to assess the implementation of the FCNM provisions, discuss the implementation of previous Council of Europe recommendations, and address the current challenges arising from the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine.

In 2025, Ukraine successfully presented its report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination⁹ at the 115th session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in Geneva. Ukraine presented comprehensive information on legislative, institutional and practical measures aimed at combating discrimination, and highlighted the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on national minorities in Ukraine. The event demonstrated a high level of inter-agency coordination and cooperation, as well as Ukraine's ability to properly fulfil its international obligations, even under martial law.

Ukraine actively cooperated with other monitoring mechanisms of international human rights and security organisations, particularly in assessing the fulfilment of obligations to combat racism and intolerance. An important milestone in this cooperation was the monitoring visit by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)¹⁰ in July 2025, as part of the Council of Europe's sixth monitoring cycle on the situation in Ukraine. The ECRI delegation held consultations with representatives of state authorities, law enforcement agencies, civil society organisations and national minorities in Kyiv and Zakarpattia Oblast.

Following earlier stages of engagement with the CLRD, ECRI and the FCNM, the DESS has acted as the coordinator and main contact institution between Ukraine and these international mechanisms since early 2025. Its participation in facilitating monitoring visits and meetings helped to ensure an open and constructive dialogue between Ukraine and European institutions, regarding the implementation of international standards for the protection of the rights of national minorities.

Ukraine's Participation in the Working Committees of International Organisations

In recent years, Ukrainian representatives have been actively involved in Council of Europe activities; in particular, over the past year, they participated in the 11th and 12th Plenary Sessions of the Steering Committee on Non-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) in Strasbourg, during which issues relating to the protection of linguistic diversity, non-discrimination, the integration of national minorities, the

9 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. UN. 21.12.1965, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-elimination-all-forms-racial>

10 The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance>

fight against hate speech, and intercultural inclusion in the context of contemporary international challenges were discussed.

Policy regarding the Roma national minority remained a significant component of European integration activities in 2025. Ukraine participated in the 11th and 12th Plenary Sessions of the ADI-ROM Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers, whose work promotes and protects the rights of Roma and Travellers in Council of Europe member states, as well as equal opportunities, diversity and social integration through the fight against discrimination and Anti-Gypsyism. The committee supports the governments of member states in developing and implementing laws, policies, programmes and measures, to ensure the effective implementation of Council of Europe human rights standards, and their tangible benefits for Roma and Travellers. These activities are based on the strategic guidelines agreed by the Committee of Ministers and set out in the Council of Europe's Strategy on the Integration of Roma and Travellers.


Working meetings were also held with representatives of the Council of Europe to discuss current priorities for cooperation and the implementation of European standards, in particular regarding Ukraine's implementation of the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and Ukraine's new ratification mechanism for the charter.

In parallel, cooperation took place with the institutions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Meetings were held with representatives of the PACE, during which issues of freedom of conscience, the protection of the rights of national minorities, and Ukraine's fulfilment of its international obligations in this area in the context of full-scale armed aggression were discussed.

In 2025, significant attention was paid to countering hate speech and hate crimes.

Ukraine took part in the first meeting of the leadership of the European Commission's High-Level Group on Combating Hate Speech and Hate Crime, marking an important step towards establishing systematic cooperation with the EU in this area, as Ukraine became the first non-EU country invited to participate in EU working committees.

A separate area of focus was cooperation with the Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), particularly following his official visits to Ukraine in 2025 and 2026, as well as measures to deepen institutional cooperation. Ukraine continued to actively participate in the OSCE ODIHR's annual review events on the implementation of commitments in the organisation's humanitarian dimension.



Determined efforts were made to implement the Roadmap on the Rule of Law, a comprehensive strategic document that defines a set of reforms within the framework of the negotiation process on Ukraine's EU membership

In 2025, bilateral cooperation with EU Member States in protecting the rights of national minorities and freedom of religion continued. Dialogue with Romania aimed at raising issues related to the protection of the rights of national minorities, in line with European standards. Particular attention was paid to bilateral cooperation with Germany, which covered both the protection of the rights of persons of German origin, and the broader context of support for national minorities and Roma integration. The process of resuming the activities of the bilateral Ukrainian-Romanian, Ukrainian-Slovak and Ukrainian-Hungarian commissions for the protection of national minorities has begun.


Marta Koss, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, visited Ukraine in 2025, and spoke highly of Ukraine's progress towards EU membership, particularly regarding securing the rights of national minorities. This assessment became a key element in the overall assessment of Ukraine's progress in fulfilling its European integration commitments, amidst full-scale Russian aggression.

Implementation of the Roadmap on the Rule of Law and the Action Plan for the Protection of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities in Ukraine

Determined efforts were made to implement the Roadmap on the Rule of Law, a comprehensive strategic document that defines a set of reforms within the framework of the negotiation process on Ukraine's EU membership. This document is one of the key prerequisites for the opening of official negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU within Cluster 1 'Foundations of the EU Accession Process', which is the first to be opened and the last to be closed in the negotiation process. Its development and subsequent implementation demonstrate Ukraine's readiness to meet EU standards, strengthen trust among member states, and reinforce Ukraine's status as a reliable partner of the European Union. The following measures were implemented as part of the roadmap:

- the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion were safeguarded, as were the formulation and implementation of state policy in the field of religion and its effective functioning in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights;
- mechanisms for legal protection against racism, xenophobia and hate speech were established at the national level, in accordance with EU Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA;

- measures were taken to establish effective legal protection against discrimination through the professionalism of law enforcement personnel, and by raising awareness among members of the Roma national minority regarding improved access to education, employment, healthcare, social services and housing, in accordance with EU legislation;
- measures were implemented to ensure the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in Ukraine, in accordance with international human rights standards.

 ***in recent years Ukraine's activities in the field of fulfilling European integration commitments have been aimed at the systematic implementation of European standards in the field of the rights of national minorities and indigenous peoples***

At the same time, measures were implemented to fulfil the provisions of another strategic document, the Action Plan for the Protection of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities of Ukraine, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on 14 May 2025. It is an important part of the negotiation process, and plays a key role in bringing Ukrainian legislation in line with European standards and ensuring equal rights for all national minorities (communities) in Ukraine. The plan is intended to serve as a reliable and effective instrument for the protection of national minorities (communities) in Ukraine, and will lay the foundations for meeting European standards. The action plan ensures the implementation of the provisions of the Roadmap on the Rule of Law.

In the recent two years Ukraine's main efforts have been focused on achieving the following objectives:

- strengthening the institutional capacity of public authorities in the field of protecting the rights of national minorities, and shaping state policy regarding national minorities and indigenous peoples (regional cooperation, monitoring, reporting, etc.);
- promoting the national and cultural diversity of our country through the media and public events;
- improving the legal framework to combat discrimination, intolerance and hate speech, and establishing a unified methodology for monitoring and assessing the spread of hate speech;
- creating the conditions to ensure the representation of national minorities in state bodies, so that their interests are taken into account in the decision-making process;
- guaranteeing the right of representatives of national minorities and indigenous peoples of Ukraine to education and linguistic identity;
- overcoming the consequences of the war, in particular ensuring equality and social justice in regions with a significant presence of national minorities and indigenous peoples affected by the Russian aggression.

Conclusions

Officials involved in the implementation of the Roadmap on the Rule of Law and the Action Plan on the Protection of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities of Ukraine actively participated

in bilateral meetings with international partners within the framework of the practical implementation of these documents; coordination meetings and broad discussions were held, with the participation of interested ministries and departments, and public organisations of national minorities of Ukraine.

Overall, it should be noted that in recent years Ukraine's activities in the field of fulfilling European integration commitments have been aimed at the systematic implementation of European standards in the field of the rights of national minorities and indigenous peoples, ensuring effective interaction with international monitoring bodies, and strengthening the trust of partners of relevant international organisations in Ukraine's policy in these areas, in the context of the ongoing Russian armed aggression against Ukraine.

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