

UPDATED RECOMMENDATIONS of the Democracy and Civil Society Task Force (July 2020)

When Ukrainians elected a new president and parliament in 2019, they sent a clear signal about the need to reinvigorate efforts to strengthen democracy and rule of law, combat corruption, bolster and protect civil society and fulfill Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The elections and their outcomes raised hopes among Ukrainians and international partners that President Zelenskyy, the new government and the Verkhovna Rada would seize the opportunity to carry out reform commitments, advance Ukraine's democracy and accelerate its integration with the European Union and NATO.

Although several significant reforms have been adopted by the Rada since the 2019 elections, including passage of legislation on the creation of an agricultural land market and banking regulations that prevent the return of nationalized banks to previous owners, the dismissal or forced resignations of many reform experts and champions from key government positions, including key cabinet positions, anti-corruption institutions and the National Bank of Ukraine, and the questionable qualifications of replacements has raised growing concerns. Ukrainian civil society leaders and Ukraine's international partners warn that reforms that have been achieved since the Euro-Maidan Revolution of Dignity impacting Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic future are threatened by the inability or unwillingness of the Zelenskyy government to implement reforms and advance a sustainable and long-term reform agenda. The bar on reform progress in Ukraine must be higher, sustainable and systemic and it is no longer enough for the Ukrainian government to simply adopt new laws without a real effort and plan for implementation. Accelerating the democratic reform process is also essential as the Kremlin and Mr. Putin continue their long-standing assault on Ukraine seeking to prevent progress and internal and Euro-Atlantic integration -- instead stoking conflict and division.

On top of growing concerns, Ukraine's reform efforts have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic and related issues creating far-reaching economic, societal and political challenges. The pandemic and its immediate and long-term impact threaten to slow down and create new obstacles to the reform process and policymaking that undermine Ukraine's progress towards democratic governance free of oligarchic and Russian influence and corruption. The difficult environment facing Ukraine influences the government's agenda in a manner that diverts from the realization of reforms advocated by Ukrainian citizens, civil society, the United States, transatlantic partners and international financial institutions.

A democratic, secure and prosperous Ukraine continues to be in the security, economic and political interests of the United States, European Union and international community. To that end, there remains strong bipartisan support for Ukraine in Washington. Ukraine's democratic and economic reforms, and its Euro-Atlantic integration, which is directly connected to reform progress, are strongly supported by Ukraine's international partners. Ukraine's partners continue to provide assistance and make it a priority to emphasize to the Ukrainian government the importance of carrying out and implementing reforms even as the Zelenskyy government is focused on measures to address the coronavirus. The recent IMF-Ukraine agreement on macroeconomic assistance, supported by the United States and EU, is directly connected to ongoing Ukrainian reform efforts, with future tranches of funding dependent on "concerted reform efforts aimed at tackling corruption and strengthening governance."

As Russia continues to wage a war of aggression against Ukraine it is increasingly important that the United States, European Union and other partners of Ukraine re-energize efforts to strengthen Ukrainian democratic and economic resilience. This includes reinforcing civil society's fight for justice and human rights, and against corruption and disinformation, while partnering with Ukraine to build a vibrant democracy with strong institutions, political parties and independent media. Staying on its reform path and fulfilling its commitment to the Ukrainian public, especially during the coronavirus pandemic, in the area of rule of law, will benefit Ukraine's democracy, economy, security and independence, thwart Russian aggression, and ensure that Ukraine progresses on its Euro-Atlantic path.