

# MANAGING DIVERSITY IN PLURAL SOCIETIES

## PROJECT REPORT: UKRAINE

### Executive Summary

In May 1997 a team of Canadian scholars and officials visited Ukraine to conduct seminars (in the capital, Kyiv [Kiev], and in Crimea) within the framework of a broader project entitled "Managing Diversity in Plural Societies". The general aims of this project are as follows.

- 1) To promote Canadian values of inter-cultural understanding and respect for human/minority rights in regions of actual/potential tensions or conflict, especially where there is a clear interest in outside expertise in understanding and managing the challenges posed by politicized diversity.
- 2) To strengthen regional security in Central/Eastern Europe by examining some of the root causes of local political instability and proposing measures to improve conflict management capabilities.

To date there have been only isolated cases of inter-ethnic conflict in Ukraine, and Ukraine's record concerning the treatment of minorities has generally been assessed favourably. However, the relative calm which has characterized inter-ethnic relations in Ukraine is largely due to the political passivity of Ukraine's population, the absence of effective demagogic leaders eager to take advantage of ethnic tensions, and the ambiguity of government policy in certain sensitive policy areas. A shaky status quo has been maintained among Ukraine's ethnic communities, but this is because the government has avoided clearly defining government policies concerning certain controversial issues and has only half-heartedly implemented other policies (e.g., on language use, on punishing those responsible for the production and distribution of xenophobic literature, etc.).

As these policies are gradually clarified and implemented more forcefully the potential for conflict will increase rather than decrease in Ukraine, a country of very great geopolitical importance. Ukraine's government officials and community leaders lack many of the skills needed to cope with the challenges related to ethnic diversity. Thus the Kyiv seminar played a useful role by promoting a frank exchange of views on painful issues and encouraging in-depth discussions of the application of various conflict management strategies in a Ukrainian setting.

The Kyiv seminar focussed on topics such as language and migration issues, managing ethnic/regional differences, and the status of indigenous peoples, which have provoked heated debate in Canada and were of great interest to the Ukrainian audience.