

MANAGING DIVERSITY IN PLURAL SOCIETIES

PROJECT REPORT: UKRAINE

FORUM EASTERN EUROPE

Executive Summary

In May 1997 a group of Canadian scholars and officials visited Ukraine to conduct seminars (in the capital, Kyiv, Odessa, 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 diversity, and to examine the challenges posed by political 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.

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FOCUS: CRIMEA AND THE CRIMEAN TATARS

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 centrifugal 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 of xenophobic literature, etc.).

November 1997

John Jaworsky

As these policies are gradually implemented more forcefully the potential for conflict will increase. 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 Kiev seminar played a useful role by providing a frank exchange of views on political issues and encouraging in-depth discussions of the application of various conflict management strategies in a Ukrainian setting.

The Kiev seminar focused on issues such as language and minority issues, and the role of the state in managing ethnic diversity. The seminar also provided an opportunity for Canadian officials to meet and discuss with Ukrainian officials the Canadian approach to managing ethnic diversity in Canada and ways of greater cooperation between the two countries.