

Ukraine Program Summary

Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has been transitioning into a fully functioning democracy. Since the 2004 Orange Revolution, Ukraine has made great gains in developing a strong civil society, independent media, and citizens enjoy basic human rights of freedom of religious worship and the right to travel. At the same time, Ukraine's democracy building has suffered from persistent political infighting and instability. Ukraine's highly politicized environment was only exacerbated by the severe global economic crisis, which paralyzed the Ukrainian economy in September 2008. This situation is likely to continue until the January 2010 presidential elections are held.

The objectives of the International Republican Institute's (IRI) program in Ukraine are to support the development of national, broad-based and well-organized democratic political parties; promote good governance; and monitor and strengthen civil society organizations.

Since the 2004 Orange Revolution, significant progress has been made in strengthening political parties in Ukraine; however, many challenges still remain. Geographic regionalization of parties persists, which thwarts their nationwide development. Additionally, because political parties are too often leader-focused, rather than issue-focused, they are easily susceptible to personal conflicts rather than ideological debates. In this context, IRI's programming is instrumental in developing Ukrainian democracy by equipping parties with the tools and skills necessary to nationalize their forces.

Likewise, since 2004, much progress has been made in the ability of Ukraine's elected officials to govern responsively. IRI's comprehensive approach to political party development focuses its programming on equipping elected officials with the skills necessary for good governance. IRI trainings provide elected officials with the knowledge of how to relate to and communicate with their constituents and the media in the fulfillment of their campaign promises.

In situations where the government does not meet its constituency's expectations, a vibrant civil society is necessary to hold its elected officials accountable. To this end, IRI's public hearings and young political leadership schools enable Ukrainian civil society to bridge the gap between citizens and elected officials. These activities are particularly important in Crimea, a region with an underdeveloped civil society, where IRI is increasing its focus because of heightened tensions in the region.

The goal of the public hearings project is to increase citizen participation in the governance process by targeting a specific problem and training citizens on how to address that problem through the mechanism of a public hearing.

In cooperation with two regional nongovernmental organizations, IRI focuses on increasing the level of participation of young people in the politics of Crimea and Ukraine; integrate Eastern Ukrainian and Crimean youth, particularly the quickly expanding Muslim minority Tatar population, into Ukrainian national political youth structures. The youth wings operate within and alongside political parties and advocacy campaigns; advocate for Ukrainian territorial integrity, minority rights and pluralistic dialogue among all youth of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine; and educate the next generation of Crimean and Eastern Ukrainian political leaders in a civil society's responsibility to act as a check on political power.