

Ukraine's new ministry for communication with the diaspora

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On 3 December, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine appointed Oleksiy Chernyshov as Deputy Prime Minister and head of the newly established Ministry of National Unity, which was formed through the reorganisation of the former Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories.

In August, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced plans to create a government agency tasked with liaising with Ukrainians residing abroad. The precise scope of the ministry's responsibilities and powers remains unclear. According to initial statements, its objectives include creating conditions to encourage emigrants to return to Ukraine, such as providing assistance in securing employment and accommodation. The president also identified combating Russian agents within the Ukrainian diaspora as one of the ministry's tasks. Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal claimed it was necessary to establish the ministry in view of the need to safeguard the identity of Ukrainians abroad and prevent their assimilation.

The Ukrainian government's stance on emigrants has been ambivalent so far. The newly established Ministry of National Unity is therefore intended to mark a shift in this approach. However, there remains serious concerns about the purpose of creating this new government agency and its effectiveness, largely due to doubts surrounding its leader and the still undefined scope of its prerogatives.

Commentary

- **The new ministry has been established in an attempt to centralise emigration policy within a single institution.** This move reflects the government's failure in communication with migrants. Ukrainians living abroad have often complained that Kyiv treats them as second-class citizens or even traitors. Such sentiments have been particularly pronounced among men accused of evading military service, even if they had left the country long before Russia's invasion. A prime example of this attitude was the government's decision in April this year to suspend consular services for military-age men abroad. At the same time, however, the government hopes that emigrants will embrace the role of 'ambassadors of Ukraine abroad.'
- **Between 7 and 9 million Ukrainian citizens currently reside abroad, including 5–6 million refugees.** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates that the entire Ukrainian diaspora consists of 15–25 million ethnic Ukrainians. Faced with significant demographic challenges (see '[Ukraine in the face of a demographic catastrophe](#)'), which are anticipated to result in a labour shortage, the government cannot afford to alienate such a substantial segment of the population. Measures aimed at preserving and

strengthening emigrants' ties to the homeland include the proposed introduction of dual citizenship for Ukrainians (the legislative process is already underway) and the creation of the E-Consul electronic platform.

- **Institutional challenges cast doubt on whether the new ministry will be able to fulfil its responsibilities**, since neither the formal scope of its duties nor its action plan has been outlined. As a result, its prerogatives may overlap with those of other ministries, leading to a potential dispersion of its activities. Furthermore, it has not been clarified how the ministry will combat Russian agents abroad or coordinate such efforts with relevant security services. Additionally, the 'restructuring' of the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories has, thus far, primarily amounted to little more than a name change. The opposition has criticised the move as an unnecessary waste of funds. Notably, a group of deputies from the Servant of the People party refused to endorse Chernyshov's nomination, with some expressing that their dissent stemmed from a lack of clarity regarding the new ministry's purpose. The required majority was achieved with the backing of the Platform for Life and Peace, a faction originating from the formerly pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life.
- **Concerns have been raised regarding Chernyshov's appointment as head of the new ministry**, as his educational background in law and economics does not include experience in engaging with emigrant communities. He is believed to have close links to Andriy Yermak, the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine. From 2020 to 2022, Chernyshov served as Minister for Communities and Territorial Development, and since November 2022, he has been the CEO of Naftogaz, Ukraine's state-controlled gas distribution monopoly. Prior to the cabinet reshuffle in September (see '[Ukraine: a major government reshuffle](#)'), the media suggested that he wanted to replace Denys Shmyhal as prime minister. Chernyshov was also considered a candidate for Minister for Communities, Territories, and Infrastructure Development or Ambassador to the United States. However, his reputation has been tarnished by a corruption scandal involving allegations of accepting a bribe from a property developer.