Wave of Protest, Crisis of Trust, and Strategic Challenges for Ukraine Amid War



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From Anti-Corruption Scandal to Political Instability

The adoption of the Law of Ukraine No. 12414 “On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine to Increase the Efficiency of Anti-Corruption Bodies” by the Verkhovna Rada on July 22, 2025, followed almost immediately by its signing by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy — a law that de facto subordinates the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office (SAP) to the Office of the Prosecutor General — was not merely a legal act. It became a profound political and moral rupture, triggering a crisis of public trust and shattering the fragile consensus between the authorities and civil society amid the existential Russian-Ukrainian war.

This decision not only provoked an immediate backlash from civil society, analytical centers, and international partners, but also cast doubt on the sincerity of the government's European course, its proclaimed anti-corruption agenda, and — in a broader sense — its ability to responsibly govern the country in a time of great war.

That same evening — July 22 — the President hastily signed the freshly passed law, which within hours sparked a wave of outrage, particularly among veterans, youth, volunteers, and human rights advocates. The very next day — under resolute pressure from society and the international community — the head of state was forced to publicly announce the drafting of a new bill that, according to him, would restore the independence of NABU and SAP. However, many perceive this "alternative" proposal as a technical maneuver, rather than a sincere correction of a systemic failure.

Protest Geography: Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Odesa, Uzhhorod...

In dozens of Ukrainian cities — including Uzhhorod, Lviv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Odesa, Vinnytsia, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Chernivtsi — massive, mostly spontaneous protest actions erupted in response to Law No. 12414. On the streets came youth, volunteers, war veterans, human rights defenders, scholars, and internally displaced persons — all those who represent the moral and civic backbone of the Ukrainian state.

Among the protest slogans that rang out, the following dominated:

- «Independent NABU for an independent Ukraine»;
- «Corruption is the death of the future»;
- «Shame on technical deceit!»;
- “The government is not above the law!”

Particularly large-scale demonstrations unfolded in Kyiv, where thousands gathered in the square near the Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theater. This protest was dubbed the “Maidan of

Justice”, which gained symbolic significance — not merely as a protest against a specific law, but as a moral appeal for the renewal of the very essence of governance.

These demonstrations were not about defending bureaucratic institutions, but about defending the very idea of justice, truth, the rule of law, and Ukrainian statehood. They showed that the Ukrainian people are capable not only of heroically defending the country on the battlefield, but also of standing up for the moral foundations of democracy within their own nation.

Psychological Tension: Boiling Point

Ukrainian society — now in the eleventh year of the Russian-Ukrainian war (2014–2025), and in particular the fourth year of Russia’s full-scale military aggression (since February 24, 2022) — is experiencing a state of chronic psycho-emotional exhaustion, which is increasingly transforming into critical internal tension, moral burnout, widespread social anxiety, and rising protest sentiment.

Unceasing losses on the front, economic instability, uncertainty over the duration of the war, delays in the promised victory, demonstrative unprofessionalism of the government in managing state affairs, as well as pervasive, brazen, and unpunished corruption — all of this is accompanied and deepened by a growing perception of systemic secrecy, political falsity, contempt for citizens, and the erosion of basic public accountability in official rhetoric and practice.

Particular attention should be paid to the reaction of Ukrainian youth — especially those of Generation Z (born approximately 1997–2012), who have been shaped by the digital age, global instability, war, post-truth, and manipulative information warfare. This generation is marked by a heightened emotional sensitivity to justice, an innate sense of truth, critical thinking, deep distrust of officialdom, and a sharp allergic response to deception and political disregard.

It is this youth — including those who are currently serving on the front lines under legally mandated mobilization, as well as those who study, work, volunteer, or are active in civic initiatives — who once again became the first to respond to the challenge of societal injustice and the blatant moral degradation of segments of the ruling elite, both in central governance and at the local level.

For these young people — especially students, IT professionals, volunteer fighters, civil activists — politics devoid of morality equals betrayal, and deceit cloaked in patriotic slogans about "unity in wartime" is seen as a direct insult to the dignity of a generation that fights, works, donates, and refuses to remain silent.

The July protests were not a tool of political opposition, but a moral and existential response to the humiliation of dignity, to an attempt to bury truth under procedure and disconnect society from participation in governance. It was the voice of internal resistance — born when fear yields to dignity.

The authorities miscalculated grievously. They underestimated not only the strength of civil society at large, but especially a new generation of Ukrainians who are no longer afraid to speak the truth aloud — a generation unwilling to passively observe while the state is once again reduced to a model of closed, backroom governance.

Lack of Dialogue and Cooperation with Civil Society

In a time of war — when trust, unity, and the mobilization of internal societal resources are matters of national survival — the Ukrainian government continues to demonstrate a chronic inability to engage in genuine, open, and respectful dialogue with civil society. Instead of consolidating the state around the active part of the nation, we witness political insularity and a growing culture of administrative cynicism:

- instead of transparent consultations — backroom agreements within a narrow circle of insiders;
- instead of engaging experts, scholars, and professionals — political expediency prevailing over competence;
- instead of cooperating with volunteers, veterans, freedom fighters, clergy, and youth communities — estrangement, formality, and staged "public engagement" through pre-controlled platforms.

The government does not speak with the people, but over them. It excludes from the decision-making process all those who do not belong to its internal political core. This deficit of horizontal dialogue fuels a widespread sense of exclusion, contempt, and disconnection — even among those who are bearing the brunt of the war on the frontlines and sustaining the state in the rear.

The consequences are clear and dangerous: a deep crisis of trust, which is naturally erupting in the form of peaceful protests, civil resistance, and moral defiance. In the context of martial law, such alienation poses not only a political risk, but also a strategic security threat to the very stability of the state.

Rule of Law as Rhetoric Without Substance

The rhetoric of the state's leadership — including top officials in law enforcement and prosecutorial bodies — regarding their alleged commitment to the rule of law appears especially contradictory in light of recent events. In reality:

the dismantling of the independence of NABU and SAP fundamentally contradicts the essence of a rule-of-law state;

the government's arguments are superficial, unconvincing, often unprofessional, and legally weak;

the prevailing level of legal culture among those in power reflects a profound disregard for the foundational principles the state has pledged to uphold — both before its own people and the international community.

Even President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's urgent announcement about preparing a new anti-corruption program to allegedly strengthen the independence of relevant bodies was perceived not as a systemic initiative, but rather as an attempt to quickly exit a crisis under pressure. There is a serious risk that this will prove to be yet another technical maneuver, and civil society both understands this and will remember — and judge — accordingly.

International Reaction: A Warning Bell

The United States, the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom, and the Group of Seven (G7) — the world's most developed democratic countries: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, and Japan — all key partners that consistently support Ukraine with weapons, finances, diplomacy, and sanctions against the aggressor — have expressed unequivocal concern. The adoption of Law No. 12414, which undermines the institutional independence of NABU and SAP, is seen as a dangerous retreat from the international commitments Ukraine has undertaken in the areas of rule of law and anti-corruption reform.

This law:

- undermines the foundation of partnerships built on trust in reform and transparent governance;
- puts future international financing at risk, particularly direct budgetary assistance;
- complicates and slows down Ukraine's path toward European integration;
- creates a basis for questioning the sincerity of Ukraine's leadership, namely the President, parliamentary majority, government, and the country's law enforcement and judicial institutions.

Ambassadors of the G7 and the EU in Kyiv held urgent consultations with the country's leadership, delivering a clear message: unless real independence of the anti-corruption institutions — NABU and SAP — is restored, the scope of international financial support may be revised or temporarily suspended.

Moreover, failure to resolve this issue could significantly delay or even temporarily block Ukraine's further integration into the European Union, as the independence of the anti-corruption infrastructure is a key requirement under the Copenhagen criteria for membership and a core condition set by the European Commission.

Ukraine risks losing not only international support, but also its moral leadership in the global struggle for freedom, if internal justice is not restored, the rule of law is not ensured, and the desire for true — rather than simulated — reform is not convincingly demonstrated.

Among Ukraine's international partners, a growing conviction is taking hold: the current leadership is simulating reforms, using reformist rhetoric as a cover for centralizing influence and undermining institutional independence.

The Problem of the Absence of State Ideology and the Neglect of the Ukrainian National Idea

The root of the current crisis lies not only in legal or personnel miscalculations. The problem runs far deeper: Ukraine lacks a coherent state ideology — one that would shape a vision for the future, unite the people, provide answers to society's existential questions, and ensure lasting national subjectivity on the geopolitical map of the world.

The current system of power lacks an ideological backbone and fails to publicly uphold the Ukrainian national idea, which ought to serve as the core value framework of state policy, national unity, geopolitical orientation, and the moral legitimacy of government. This idea has been

neglected; it is absent from government programs, missing in strategic documents, and virtually non-existent in official rhetoric.

Moreover, the political center lacks strong, independent political, analytical, and strategic institutions capable of thinking systemically, generating vision, formulating national priorities, and articulating the principles of a Ukrainian state-building philosophy.

The symptoms of this ideological vacuum are clear:

- ideological indifference toward Ukrainian national identity;
- the absence of a substantive, consistent Ukrainian state humanitarian policy;
- systematic disregard for the spiritual and cultural foundations of the Ukrainian nation — its historical roots, values, heroes, and symbols.

Most troubling is the near-total absence in Ukraine's official political and administrative discourse of reference to the Ukrainian national idea as a systemic concept that expresses the right of the Ukrainian people to be masters of their own land, to preserve their language, culture, faith, and historical memory, and to build their state on the foundations of freedom, justice, and spiritual heritage.

The political rhetoric of today's leadership is largely limited to situational PR, declarative responsiveness, and external display — rather than the systemic creation of value-based meanings capable of uniting the nation, consolidating the people, and shaping a strategic direction for the state. Authorities eagerly refer to external benchmarks and international standards, but avoid articulating internal Ukrainian national foundations: Who are we? What are we fighting for? What is Ukraine truly about? What is its true history? And what is its unique civilizational mission in the modern world?

This is not just an ideological gap — it is a strategic threat, especially in the context of the ongoing full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, which is not only military, but value-based, worldview-oriented, spiritual, and identity-driven. At stake is the Ukrainian national idea itself — the foundation of our freedom, statehood, right to life, national identity, and cultural continuity. Victory will go not to those with more weapons, but to those with a clear "why" — rooted in a national idea, spiritual memory, and historical responsibility to both past and future generations.

The most alarming sign is that the machinery of the state seeks to function without the Ukrainian national idea as an organic value-driving force. And without it, statehood becomes merely an administrative mechanism — soulless, directionless, and heartless.

The Position of the People's Movement of Ukraine: The Voice of Historical Responsibility

In a time of deep political, moral, and ideological crisis, the position of those sociopolitical forces that historically led Ukraine's national liberation movement and embodied the idea of Ukrainian statehood takes on special significance. One such force is — and remains — the People's Movement of Ukraine (Narodnyi Rukh Ukrainy, NRU), the oldest Ukrainian national-democratic political party, which in the late 1980s and early 1990s played a key role in organizing Ukrainian society to resist the Moscow-led totalitarian regime of the USSR, governed by the criminal

Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and in restoring Ukraine's state independence on August 24, 1991.

Even though modern information resources — controlled by the authorities and by certain political forces — deliberately attempt to silence both the historic role and ongoing presence of the People's Movement of Ukraine in public life, its clear, balanced, and patriotic stance remains weighty, authoritative, principled, and significant for the Ukrainian people.

In its Statement of July 23, 2025, regarding the scandalous adoption of Law No. 12414, the People's Movement of Ukraine declared, in particular, the following:

- It harshly criticized the law as one that effectively dismantles the independence of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAP);
- It condemned the government's actions, which have led to the dismantling of the country's independent anti-corruption system, calling it a threat to democracy, justice, and Ukraine's national security;
- It emphasized that these dangerous developments are occurring during the deadly Russian-Ukrainian war (2014–2025) — a time when the primary task of all Ukrainian society, political and civic forces, and all levels of government must be unity and solidarity in the fight against the Moscow occupier and for the preservation of Ukraine's state independence and the very existence of the Ukrainian state;
- It stressed the impermissibility of power usurpation, disregard for the Constitution, the destruction of the rule of law, and the narrowing of public democratic space;
- It called for the restoration of full, responsible, and transparent dialogue between the authorities and the people, with broad inclusion of civil society, the intelligentsia, the clergy, volunteers, veterans, and youth;
- It underscored the critical need to develop a renewed state ideological strategy, based on affirming the Ukrainian national idea as a foundation for freedom, truth, spirituality, historical continuity, and national sovereignty.

The Statement of the People's Movement of Ukraine is more than just a political position — it is a moral-historical document, grounded in the depth of national experience and a profound sense of responsibility for Ukraine's future.

Ukraine at a Strategic Crossroads

Ukraine stands at the epicenter of a large-scale geopolitical Russian-Ukrainian war, one into which an increasing number of other states are being drawn — directly or indirectly. Yet the key issue is not just about the battlefield, geopolitics, or weaponry. The central question is: can we preserve ourselves as a nation, as a society, and as a state — internally, spiritually, morally, and politically? And do we have the strength, will, and wisdom to defend Ukraine's state independence and preserve our national sovereignty?

To achieve this, we must:

- turn the state toward the people — not toward schemes and political self-preservation;

- recognize the Ukrainian national idea — not declaratively, but truly — as the foundation of statehood;
- ensure a genuine rule of law, not just rhetorical or selective, one that applies to all and is above all;
- restore trust in institutions — anti-corruption, civic, educational, scientific, and spiritual — as pillars of national resilience;
- form a political team that thinks strategically, acts responsibly, and serves not vested interests, but the Ukrainian national idea, the Ukrainian people, and the nation's interests;
- avoid simulations and closed-door governance — instead, ensure public openness, transparency, feedback, and moral accountability of power to society.

Ukraine will prevail — and there must be no doubt about that. But victory is not only a matter of weapons or diplomacy. Victory is justice, truth, dignity, trust, freedom, and the rule of law. It is an internal victory that unlocks external triumph.

The people are speaking. And their voice is like a bell. It must not be silenced. It must be heard, understood — and followed in heart and in deed. For there lies strength. There lies Ukraine.

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