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## SPOTLIGHT

# Reshaping the Ukrainian Government

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The changes in the Ukrainian government and the appointment of Yulia Svyrydenko as the new prime minister, approved by the Verkhovna Rada on 17 July, are part of President Volodymyr Zelensky's continued efforts to consolidate power. They are also a response to the persistently low level of public trust in the authorities. However, these changes are not expected to significantly alter Ukraine's foreign or domestic policies. Instead, they indicate a strategic intention to strengthen economic relations with foreign partners.

### What has changed in the Ukrainian government?

The reshuffle initiated by President Zelensky has affected the majority of ministries. Yulia Svyrydenko, the former economy minister, has been appointed prime minister. Her predecessor, Denys Shmyhal, has taken over the post of minister of defence. His main task will be to restore order within the ministry, which under his predecessor, Rustem Umerov, was often referred to as a "ministry of chaos" due to its non-transparent management and arbitrary decisions—particularly regarding the Defence Procurement Agency—leading to declining trust from international partners. Two of Svyrydenko's close collaborators and former deputies in the Ministry of Economy, Taras Kachka and Oleksii Soboliev, have taken key roles: Kachka as deputy prime minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, and Sobolev as head of a newly created super-ministry combining the former ministries of Economy, Environment, and Agrarian Policy. Simultaneously, the Ministry of National Unity, established in December 2024, was dissolved, and its functions are to be transferred to the Ministry of Social Policy.

### Who is the new prime minister?

Svyrydenko was previously responsible for managing Ukraine's economic relations with the U.S. and the EU and served as the chief negotiator of the raw-materials agreement signed in May this year. She is considered a good

economist with managerial skills, a professional, and a person not associated with any of the corruption scandals. Her work as deputy minister (2019-2020) and later as minister of economy (from 2021) has been positively assessed. She was responsible for stabilising the economy and supporting businesses during the full-scale war. She is also associated with Andriy Yermak, the head of the Presidential Office, and in 2020-2021 she served as one of his deputies. Now, through the appointment of her close associates, Svyrydenko has gained influence over key ministries responsible for the economy (excluding energy), international cooperation, and EU negotiations.

### What are the reasons and goals behind the reshuffle?

Similar to the earlier reshuffle in September 2024, the goal of the changes is to refresh the government's image and ease growing public frustration. Under martial law, holding elections is impossible, so personnel changes are intended to create the impression of a symbolic "restart" of the government. The reshuffle was a response to the low public trust in Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and his Cabinet. According to a Rating Group survey conducted in June, only 25% of respondents expressed trust in Shmyhal. Overall trust in the government has remained low, at around 20-22%, since 2023, despite changes in the composition of the Cabinet in 2024. The current changes are primarily a personnel reshuffling, moving loyalists of President Zelenskyy and Yermak into key roles. This reflects the continued consolidation of power around the presidential

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circle. Additionally, the reshuffle aims to remove individuals deemed ineffective or publicly criticised.

### **Will the new government change Ukraine's foreign policy?**

Ukraine's foreign policy will remain unchanged, including its stance toward Russia and peace talks. Andrii Sybiha will continue to serve as foreign minister. However, the appointment of Svrydenko as prime minister signals an increased focus on economic cooperation with the West,

particularly with the United States. EU integration, especially economic relations, will also remain a key priority, as evidenced by the restructuring of ministries overseeing these areas. Ukraine will continue to seek Western military and political support essential to defending against Russian aggression. Relations with Poland are expected to remain stable, with greater emphasis likely to be placed on economic cooperation, including attracting Polish investment into Ukraine.