THE UKRAINIAN DIASPORA*

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The term diaspora refers to communities of people who share the same cultural or “home” background but live permanently in different countries throughout the world, who retain a form of their identity, and maintain a real and/or symbolic relationship with their “home” country. This includes communities of people who at one time or another emigrated from their original “home” country for whatever reason: political, economic, family or personal. It includes all the generations of those who originally emigrated, as long as they retain an identity and a relationship to the culture or the country of their ancestors. It also includes communities who are indigenous minorities in countries neighboring the “home” country with which they share their cultural background. These are autochthonous communities in areas ethnically contiguous with the home country but within different political state boundaries.

The definition also assumes that the people form more or less organized communities within each country of residence and that the identity of the people usually involves a more or less distinct cultural heritage background believed by the individuals to have originally derived from one people or one “home” country.

Relationships with the home country can take place on either a personal level or an organizational level. The personal level includes: family contacts, personal business contacts, tourist visits and the like. The organizational level includes: diaspora organizations that develop formalized contacts with different private or public agencies in the homeland. The purposes of these contacts vary. Diaspora organizations may intend to influence the homeland’s government policies, or they may try to extend help to people in the homeland who need it, or they may aim to establish business relationships with groups of people in the homeland; they may want to establish cultural,

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scientific or recreational contacts or exchange. It may also involve the reverse, i.e., agencies in the homeland exerting influence on, or extending help to the diaspora.

Finally, the diaspora-homeland relationship may also involve contacts with agencies in the places of diaspora settlement or other countries, with the purpose of influencing their policies or activities toward the homeland.

What follows will first present a general historical and statistical picture of the Ukrainian diaspora and its organizational structure. As identity retention and relationship with the homeland are the two defining characteristics of a diaspora, most of what follows will then deal in some detail with these two aspects of the Ukrainian diaspora.

The Ukrainian Diaspora throughout the World

The communities forming the Ukrainian Diaspora can be grouped under two large categories: The Eastern and the Western Diasporas. The Eastern Diaspora is comprised of the Ukrainian communities more or less east of Ukraine, particularly Eurasia, or those historically under the “Eastern” influence of Russia, specifically, Ukrainians in Russia itself and in Belarus. The Western Diaspora includes those countries that historically have been under Western influence. Most of what will be said here will refer to the Western diaspora, particularly North America, as historically it has been the most active in relation to the home country.

Eastern Diaspora

The numbers of Ukrainians in the Eastern Diaspora are estimates, some based on censuses, but these are usually considered by the respective communities to be under-representative. The following numbers are therefore a combination of various census results and/or estimates.¹

Thus in the Russian Federation, the official 2002 census reports 2,943,471 Ukrainians, but unofficial estimates are more than 10 million.