



The black soil of Ukraine and the hidden reality in a ruined country

Blessed with some of the world's most fertile black soil and vast mineral wealth, Ukraine has since 2014 become a geopolitical battleground—plundered by foreign interests and devastated by war.

Wolfgang Bittner

Fri 03 Oct 2025

Ukraine, which has been at war with Russia since 2022, is known for its fertile black soil (Russian: chernozem), a nutrient-rich humus soil up to three meters deep that produces high agricultural yields. The area covers 56 percent of the land area,[1] mainly in the east and south. That is more than 32 million hectares of farmland, which corresponds to about one-third of the total agricultural area of the EU and 30 percent of the world's black earth reserves.[2]

Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe after Russia, and recently its extensive mineral resources such as coal, iron ore, lithium, graphite, manganese, potassium, lignite, oil, and natural gas have become a topic of discussion. However, it is little known that, thanks to its fertile soil, it supplies a large surplus of agricultural products to the world market and, before the war, was the third-largest exporter of corn and the fifth-largest exporter of wheat.[3] It also had a significant share of the world market for barley, sunflower oil, rapeseed, and sugar beets.

Grain cultivation and export

Of the approximately 60 million tons of grain produced annually (mainly corn, wheat, and barley), over 50 percent was exported. This meant that, just a few years ago, Ukraine was the seventh largest grain producer in the world.[4] In 2019, it achieved a record harvest of around 75 million tons. In 2020, grain production amounted to around 64.3 million tons (in comparison, Germany produced around 43.2 million tons).[5] However, after 2022, conditions for cultivation and distribution have deteriorated, and the situation after more than three years of war remains uncertain.

Since the Maidan coup in 2014, Ukraine has received extensive financial and military support from the West in its war against Russia. Grain exports to the EU were temporarily subsidized in this context, but this led to distortions of competition and vehement protests, especially from Polish farmers,[6] so that the subsidies were discontinued.

After the war began in February 2022, Russia blocked Ukraine's sea exports via Odessa, Chornomorsk, and Yuzhne (Pivdenne), among other ports, causing grain exports to come to a standstill. This led to food shortages in so-called developing countries. However, on the initiative of Turkey and the United Nations, a Black Sea Grain Agreement, also known as the "Black Sea Grain Initiative," was concluded in July 2022, an agreement between Russia and Ukraine with Turkey and the United Nations that guaranteed safe sea routes.[7]

However, in July 2023, Russia refused to extend the grain agreement because commitments had not been honored. In a memorandum of understanding, the UN had agreed to work toward the unhindered export of Russian food and fertilizers to world markets. Russia had also demanded that its agricultural bank be reconnected to the SWIFT international payment system. This did not happen, and the agreement expired. However, Ukraine continued to export via the Black Sea without any security guarantees.

Who owns the black earth?

After the pro-Western government in Kiev took power, the West quietly began to exert its influence on the Ukrainian economy. After many board and management positions were filled by members of the US political caste in 2014,[9] the privatization of public institutions and the battle for the black earth began. The Association Agreement with the EU, which was rejected by former President Yanukovich and signed by Petro Poroshenko, for which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided \$17 million at the time, was subject to conditions that served the interests of the US, the UK, and the EU.

Under pressure from the West, the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian parliament, relaxed the ban on land sales with the aim of "market liberalization," giving Western agricultural corporations access to the market. In a question submitted by the Patriots for Europe (PFE) group in the European Parliament on November 13, 2014, to the EU Commission, under the heading "Ukrainian farmland increasingly in US ownership", it states "According to several disturbing reports, US and Saudi agribusiness and investment companies in particular are buying up large tracts of Ukrainian farmland. Cargill, ADM, Blackrock, Oaktree Capital Management, and Bunge Limited have reportedly gained control of a large portion of Ukrainian farmland." [10]

Economist Frédéric Mousseau, director at the Oakland Institute in California, wrote in 2015: "After the pro-Western government took power, the IMF introduced a reform program aimed at promoting private investment in the country as a precondition for lending. The package of measures also included reforming public water and electricity services and eliminating what the World Bank has called the 'structural causes' of Ukraine's current economic crisis: the high costs for companies doing business in the country. The Ukrainian agricultural sector is one of the primary targets of foreign private investment and is therefore considered by the IMF and the World Bank to be in need of priority reform. Both financial institutions praise the new government's willingness to follow their recommendations." [11]

The "agricultural reform" launched in 2014 paved the way for "easier access to agricultural land, less regulation and controls in the food and crop sector, and lower taxes and tariffs for companies," according to Mousseau. His research corresponds to the inquiry submitted to the EU Commission on November 13, 2014: "According to several disturbing reports, US and Saudi agricultural and investment companies in particular are buying up large tracts of Ukrainian farmland. Cargill, ADM, Blackrock, Oaktree Capital Management, and Bunge Limited are said to have gained control over large parts of Ukrainian farmland."

Mousseau stated: "The effort being put into the Ukrainian agricultural sector with its extensive black soil could hardly be greater." And he specified: "The maneuvering for control of the agricultural sector is a decisive factor in the biggest East-West conflict since the Cold War. [...] Agricultural corporations such as Monsanto, Cargill, and DuPont have been present in Ukraine for some time and have significantly increased their investments in recent years. [...] Although Ukraine does not allow the production of genetically modified seeds, Article 404 of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU, which sparked the conflict that led to Yanukovich's removal from office, contains a clause in which both parties undertake to 'expand the application of biotechnology within the country'." – a "door opener that large agricultural and seed companies such as Monsanto want in order to bring their genetically modified products to the European market." [12]

The war in Ukraine and the refugee crisis have overshadowed and pushed almost all of this information into the background. Since the regime change in 2014, an entire country has been gradually taken over by foreign powers, with far-reaching consequences for Europe, but this has remained largely hidden from the public. The same is true of the fact that the war could have been avoided, as Donald Trump has admitted. "This is not my war," he declared on May 19, 2025. "We got involved in something we should not have been drawn into." [13]

The hidden reality of Ukraine

Just a few months after the Maidan coup, Ukraine was already bankrupt and dependent on IMF and EU bailouts. According to research by journalists Friedhelm Klinkhammer and Volker Bräutigam (former employees of Norddeutscher Rundfunk), by mid-2018 around eight million Ukrainians had left their homeland to escape poverty and unemployment. At that time, the country was already €13 billion in debt to the EU and a further \$11 billion to the International Monetary Fund. "This burden would only be bearable if it were offset by an adequate gross national product," the authors wrote in 2018. Their forecast at the time: "However, it is completely unclear how the Poroshenko regime intends to raise the first repayment installments due next year and meet its repayment obligations. [...] The EU and the IMF are putting pressure on the Ukrainian government to finally lift restrictions on the sale of farmland [the valuable 'black soil'], in which international investors in the agricultural industry are very interested. In addition, the export ban on round timber is to be abolished in the near future. Ukrainian forests may soon be a thing of the past." [14]

Since 2014, there has been a complete impoverishment of the war-torn country, which has been plagued by scandals, corruption, and crime. But there is hardly any reporting on the partial destruction of black soil and the precarious situation of the Ukrainian population. The public only learned in passing about a series of mysterious deaths of Ukrainian opposition figures and former high-ranking officials, functionaries, and politicians. Among them were the former head of the State Land Fund, Michael Chechetov, the former governor of Zaporizhia, Alexander Pekluschenko, the former chairman of the Kharkiv Regional Council, Nikolai Sergienko, and the former mayor of Melitopol, Sergei Walter. Although there were no suicide notes and the circumstances suggested murder, the official version in each case was "suicide."

What Ukraine looked like in 2022/23 and what the Western media did not report was documented in a thoroughly credible report by Russian television, from which journalist and Russia expert Thomas Röper translated the following passages: "Ukraine has turned into a wilderness, with each district commanded by its own warlord. Odessa went to Maxim Marchenko, the former head of the nationalist Aidar battalion. He was appointed governor. He immediately mined Langeron Beach. Civilians are being used as human shields. In Mariupol, Ukrainian army soldiers have set up artillery behind a kindergarten. In Kharkiv, they stand with machine guns on the balconies of high-rise buildings. What kind of humanitarian corridors are we talking about? The inhabitants of Mariupol tried to leave the city, but were stopped in shot-up cars and ambushed by the nationalist Azov battalion. The order was not to let anyone out and to leave as much destruction as possible [...] They abolished visa requirements for foreign mercenaries, released prisoners, and distributed weapons to anyone who wanted them [...] They even invented their own punishment for dissenters: flogging, by tying the victims to a tree with duct tape." [16]

Corresponding images were shown for all of the claims. The conclusion was: "Ukraine is a consumable for the US and Europe; its historical task is to harm Russia. That's all." The television report showed a country in chaos, ruled by criminal gangs such as the Azov and Aidar troops, who set up their positions near kindergartens or in residential buildings, murdered opposition figures, and carried out false flag operations, such as in Bucha. [17]

This did not prevent the German government from assuring the Kiev government that Germany would support this completely dilapidated state with the Zelensky government "as long as necessary," militarily, financially, and politically. [18] This was in line with the policies of the Obama and Biden administrations, but not with German interests, which were irresponsibly disregarded, as was the existential threat to the whole of Europe.

Recent developments

Donald Trump's presidency has dramatically changed the situation for Ukraine, but also for Germany and Europe. Trump, who obviously intends to avert the collapse of the US economic and financial system, wants to make deals and has distanced himself from Obama and Biden's Ukraine policy. He is interested in the country's mineral resources in order to recoup the billions spent by the US on the war in Ukraine.

But this is nothing new. Some neocons and warmongers in Washington have long viewed these "investments" in Ukraine as a win-win situation. In an interview with US broadcaster CBS on June 10, 2024, prominent US Senator Lindsey Graham said: "They are sitting on \$10 to \$12 trillion worth of critical minerals in Ukraine. I don't want to give Putin that money and those assets to share with China." [20] For Graham, Ukraine is a gold mine to be exploited: "They could be the richest country in all of Europe [...] How Ukraine ends up is a very big deal. Let's help them win a war we can't afford to lose." But Trump wants to handle it differently. It remains to be seen to what extent Russia, which until recently was to be defeated and denationalized for strategic and economic reasons, will accommodate the Trump administration.

Meanwhile, the war continues. Since 2022, the areas in eastern Ukraine have been fiercely contested, resulting in the partial destruction of farmland due to the massive use of artillery, drones, and mines, among other things. The blowing up of the Kakhovka dam also caused severe damage in the Russian-controlled areas along the Dnipro River and has severely hampered trade in agricultural products.

A country blessed by nature has been partially destroyed and ruined because it lies on Russia's doorstep, whose resources are ultimately the target of Western covetousness, apart from its strategic goals. The "gateway to Russia" has been ruined for decades, and reconstruction after a peace agreement will cost billions, most of which will have to be raised by Western European countries.

The writer and journalist Dr. jur. Wolfgang Bittner lives in Göttingen. He has published over 80 books, including "Die Eroberung Europas durch die USA" (The Conquest of Europe by the USA) (2014), "Die Heimat, der Krieg und der Goldene Westen" (Home, War and the Golden West) (novel, 2019), "Deutschland – verraten und verkauft" (Germany – Betrayed and Sold) (2021), and "Geopolitics at a Glance: Germany-USA-EU-Russia" (2025).

Sources and notes

- [1] Vgl. www.faz.net/aktuell/wissen/ukraine-die-kornkammer-europas-838136.html
- [2] Vgl. Frédéric Mousseau: Die schwarze Erde lockt, der Freitag, 8.4.2015, www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/die-schwarze-erde-lockt
- [3] *ibid.*
- [4] See <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukraine#Wirtschaft> (from 9.6.2025)
- [5] See https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_größten_Getreideproduzenten (from 9.6.2025)
- [6] See www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/getreide-ukraine-polen-100.html
- [7] See Initiative für den sicheren Transport von Getreide und Lebensmitteln aus ukrainischen Häfen
- [8] <http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/getreideabkommen-reaktionen-verlaengerung-104.html>
- [9] See Wolfgang Bittner, „Die Eroberung Europas durch die USA“, Westend, Frankfurt/Main 2017, S. 48 f. with further notes.
- [10] See www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2024-002526_EN.html#:~:text=According%20to%20several%20disquieting%20reports,over%20much%20of%20Ukraine%27s%20
- [11] Frédéric Mousseau, *ibid.*
- [12] Mousseau, *ibid.*
- [13] See www.n-tv.de/politik/Trump-erklaert-europaeischen-Staatschefs-Putin-will-Krieg-nicht-beenden-article25786517.html
- [14] See www.nrhz.de/flyer/beitrag.php?id=25127, and www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2015-03/ukraine-landwirtschaft-schwarzerde-monsanto
- [15] See RT Deutsch of. 04.16.2015, www.rtdeutsch.com/17071/headline/mordserie-gegen-oppositionspolitiker-in-der-ukraine-haelt-an-und-die-westlichen-medien-schweigen/ (abgerufen am 24.7.2015); See also: *Die Zeit*, www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-04/ukraine-morde-busina-upa
- [16] quoted from *Anti-Spiegel*, March 7, 2022; www.anti-spiegel.ru/2022/in-der-ukraine-herrscht-das-chaos-und-selensky-lallt-vor-der-presse/?doing_wp_cron=1667614361.9042179584503173828125
- [17] Dazu Wolfgang Bittner, „Geopolitik im Überblick, Verlag Hintergrund, Berlin 2025, S. 107-112.
- [18] Siehe www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2022/10/221028-Alles-staerken-was-uns-verbindet.html
- [19] Vgl. www.tagesschau.de/ausland/amerika/selenskyj-washington-102.html
- [20] Vgl. www.youtube.com/watch?v=YS1s8GN77h0 [abgerufen 25. Februar 2025]

ARTICLE TAGS:

Mousseau, Frédéric Poland Russia Turkey Ukraine United Kingdom BlackRock EU SWIFT United Nations (UN) Cargill Oaktree Capital Bunge Limited Klinkhammer, Friedhelm Bräutigam, Volker International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Bank Analysis