Prehistoric Ukraine, as a part of the Pontic steppe in Eastern Europe, played an important role in Eurasian cultural contacts, including the spread of the Chalcolithic, the Bronze Age, Indo-European migrations and the domestication of the horse.[1][2][3]

Part of Scythia in antiquity and settled by the Greuthungi and Getae in the migration period, Ukraine is also the site of early Slavic expansion, and enters written history with the establishment of the medieval state of Kievan Rus', which emerged as a powerful nation in the Middle Ages but disintegrated by the mid-12th century. During the 14th and 15th centuries, present-day Ukrainian territories came under the rule of four external powers: the Golden Horde, the Crimean Khanate, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland. The latter two would then merge into the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth following the Union of Krewo and Union of Lublin. Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire emerged as a major regional power in and around the Black Sea, through protectorates like the Crimean Khanate, as well as directly-administered territory.

After a 1648 rebellion of the Cossacks against the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky agreed to the Treaty of Pereyaslav in January 1654. The exact nature of the relationship established by this treaty between the Cossack Hetmanate and Russia remains a matter of scholarly controversy.[4] The agreement precipitated the Russo-Polish War of 1654–67 and the failed Treaty of Hadiach, which would have formed a Polish–Lithuanian–Ruthenian Commonwealth. In consequence, by the Treaty of Perpetual Peace, signed in 1686, the eastern portion of Ukraine (east of the Dnieper River) was to come under Russian rule,[5] 146,000 rubles were to be paid to Poland as compensation for the loss of right-bank Ukraine,[6] and the parties agreed not to sign a separate treaty with the Ottoman Empire.[6] The treaty was strongly opposed in Poland and was not ratified by the Polish–Lithuanian Sejm until 1710.[6][7] The legal legitimacy of its ratification has been disputed.[8] According to Jacek Staszewski, the treaty was not confirmed by a resolution of the Sejm until its 1764 session.[9]

During the Great Northern War, Hetman Ivan Mazepa allied with Charles XII of Sweden in 1708. However, the Great Frost of 1709 greatly weakened the Swedish army. Following the Battle of Poltava later in 1709, there was a diminishment in Hetmanate power, culminating with the disestablishment of the Cossack Hetmanate in the 1760s and the destruction of the Zaporozhian Sich in the 1770s. Following the Partitions of Poland (1772–1795) and the Russian conquest of the Crimean Khanate, the Russian Empire and Habsburg Austria were in control of all the territories that constitute present-day Ukraine for over a hundred years. Ukrainian nationalism developed in the 19th century.