



From late November to late December, including the Christmas season, I was witness to a crisis in an emerging democracy. I returned to Ukraine on December 20, after Ukraine's Supreme Court had formally voided the November 21 election, based on widespread electoral fraud, and had called for a new election on December 26.

Leading up to the December 26 election, our federal government was prepared only to fund 75 observers. However, after a weekend of presumed reflection on its place in the democratic world, the federal government increased its funding for 500 government sponsored election observers to travel to Ukraine. At a meeting in Ottawa with Polish Ambassador Piotr Ogrodzinski, it was suggested that perhaps Canada could partner with Poland and others to help send more observers. Though this suggestion was not acted upon at the time, it merits further consideration.

The selection process of government-sponsored observers was through an organization called CANDEM (www.candem.ca) and

was relatively speedy, given that the election was to be held barely three weeks from the announcement of Canadian government support. Crucial to the effort, I felt that representation must be unbiased and should have an independent, unbiased person to head the mission, in order to have an overall acceptance of Canadian observers throughout Ukraine, a country of diverse political interests, where the colour orange represented but one viewpoint. Well into the process, it was announced that

former Liberal Prime Minister John Turner was chosen to lead the mission. Some who had applied to observe were disappointed with the government choice of observers and the government's declaration that it was not prepared to sponsor those from Canada who had demonstrated clear bias for either presidential candidate. Many others who wished to go to Ukraine as election observers were sponsored by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress.

Amazingly, 1,000 people, 500 people supported personally or by fundraising activities of expatriate Ukrainians throughout Canada, and 500 supported by the Government of Canada, left for Ukraine.



Peter Goldring, Member of Parliament for Edmonton East with the Alberta delegation of election monitors gathered at Ambassador Robinson's Welcome Party.



As a CANADEM observer, I also was a member of a parliamentary delegation sponsored by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (www.oscepa.org) – the OSCE which flew to Ukraine, to arrive just before the December 26 election.

Our group included Joy Smith (Conservative MP, Kildonan-St. Paul), Bernard Bigras (Bloc MP, Rosemount- La Petite-Patrie), David Christopherson (NDP MP, Hamilton Centre), Borys Wrzesnewskij (Liberal MP, Etobicoke Centre), Andrew Telegdi (Liberal MP, Kitchener-Waterloo) and fellow Edmonton MP David Kilgour



MP's Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul), David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont), and Senator Di Nino (Toronto), at the election monitor training sessions.

(Edmonton- Mill Woods). Liberal Senator Jerry Grafstein was the OSCE leader, while Conservative Senator Consiglio Di Nino was the parliamentary team leader.

In Ukraine, the majority of the people in the east had voted for Prime Minister Yanukovich in the two previous elections, favouring strong ties with Russia, in contrast to opposition candidate Yushchenko, who was viewed as leaning more towards the west. This reflects a social duality in Ukraine, where many Ukrainians, particularly in the eastern regions, still speak Russian as their first language, despite the fact that Russian has no official language status. Yanukovich, who was said to be more comfortable speaking Russian than Ukrainian, favoured official language status for Russian, was supportive of the offer by Rus-

sian President Putin of dual Ukrainian-Russian citizenship for those Ukrainians who wished it and was also a strong supporter of maintaining social benefit levels for the disabled and elderly. This is a significant concern in a country where approximately 18% of the population is

classified as disabled – a level more than twice as high as that found in most industrialized nations, attributed to the large number of war veterans, the long-term human consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, plus high levels of industrial accidents.

Upon arriving back again in Ukraine, I sensed a heightened awareness and sensitivity towards democratic renewal, more confident than that which I had observed a few short weeks earlier. There were an increasing number of blue-white clad Yanukovich supporters in groups and in large, peaceful rallies in Kiev. In the Yanukovich rallies and marches, there was a very strong presence of priests, icons and symbolism of the Russian Orthodox Church which I found personally interesting, given that my family church is St. Barbara's in Edmonton, a Russian Orthodox Church which shares a similar reverence for stoicism, tradition, religious icons and symbolism. While politics seems to be integral to the religious communities of the eastern regions, many question the efficacy of the separation of church and state.

Instead of tension and violence between



the two groups that was so prominent before, I now observed much constructive dialogue and animated debate on differences of opinion for the future of Ukraine. Yushchenko supporters, in this same spirit, travelled to east Ukraine to present their views in the heartland of Yanukovich support. Even the small dark cloud cast over the spirit of goodwill when Yanukovich supporters turned back the Yushchenko "peace caravan" was taken in the overall as being a minor incident. There were also few reports of incidents of violent conflict.

Even the tent city was different this time around. Instead of the many small, 2 person camping tents that I had observed earlier, tents that had sprung up instantly and survived the crucial days until the ease of tensions, were replaced by large, 10-20 person military-style tents, with many amenities. Where the resources, people and money came from for this mammoth paramilitary-style, super-organized encampment is an unanswered question.

I was assigned to observe 12 polling stations in the rural area of Brovary, over one hour's drive outside of Kiev, with David Christopherson, a New Democratic Party Member of Parliament. We shared both delight and frustration of having our driver, a Yanukovich supporter, constantly debating heatedly with our interpreter, a Yushchenko supporter. A country that dialogues is a country that strives for

the collective betterment of all. I nonetheless agree with David that continuous and heated dialogue, however constructive, is a bit too much in a small car.

We spent the day observing the polling, noticing a few irregularities, but nothing of the nature I had previously observed. Everywhere, I was struck with the degree of importance accorded to the voting process, even at our last poll, at a military base, where we appeared as observers towards the end of the voting day, surprising everyone. While a duty officer strutted, somewhat annoyed, our reception by all others was extremely cordial.



Member of Parliament David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre), two Ukrainian soldiers at a military base polling station, with Member of Parliament Peter Goldring.

One would expect that, after two previous elections, there would be a degree of voter fatigue, but none was observed, either in the city proper of Kiev or in the much poorer regions of rural Ukraine. It is important to remember that the life of the average Ukrainian is still largely one of poverty. This was evident in the Brovary area, where some of the polling stations were located in buildings that were modest and in very poor condition in comparison to other European standards, and there were few community facilities of any significance. The international image from Kiev was that of well-dressed and well-fed, western-leaning young people, with all of the western accoutrements associated with wealth. The reality of rural Ukraine is very different. Disparities between

image and reality are also a source of resentment on the part of many in rural and particularly east Ukraine, who believe that their labour in the mines and factories largely pays for a soft life for a number of people in west Ukraine, particularly in Kiev. However, rich or poor, modest country or city dwellers, the commonality was an obvious thirst and desire for democracy. Ukrainians want their voices to be heard by their government.

While changes were made to one of the major areas of concern relating to fraud in the previous elections – that of absentee ballots – Courts of Ukraine also upheld the objection of Yanukoyvch in relation to an intended prohibition against home-cast ballots, which would

have effectively disenfranchised large numbers of the disabled and the elderly who were not able to get to the polling stations.

Once the majority of votes were counted, it became clear that Yushchenko was the victor, by a decided margin of about 8%, a declaration later confirmed by the Supreme Court of Ukraine. The December 26 election for President of Ukraine was seen by vast majority of voters and virtually all of the observers to have been a fair one. Once again, there were fireworks over Kiev. And once again, after the fireworks, I left for home.

Update: On January 7th, 2005, the Supreme Court of Ukraine affirmed the integrity of the election, confirming the reports of thousands of international observers. Candidate Victor Yushchenko, winner of the Presidential election, was sworn in as President of Ukraine on January 23rd, 2005, moving Ukraine forward on the path to democracy.

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This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.

Your Opinion Matters...

Question #1 Should Canada specialize in international election monitoring and do more to support and emerging democracies?

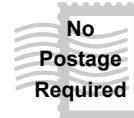
Yes No

Question #2 Should Canada delegate a parliamentarian specifically to do more to develop a special economic and political association with Ukraine?

Yes No

Comments: _____

Name: _____
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