

# CANADA - UKRAINE

## A Unique Relationship

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



PETER GOLDRING

**Canada's international role in the future could well be that of being a purveyor of electoral betterment. Helping to establish the democratic process or helping to advance and better the electoral mechanisms would be an honourable role for our country internationally.**

The historic ties that unite Canada and Ukraine are evident in the sheer number of Ukrainians who have immigrated to Canada over the last century. But our close relationship was never more obvious than during the two Ukrainian presidential elections of November and December 2004, when Peter Goldring personally witnessed the 10-day Orange Revolution and participated in the election monitoring process. The concerns and actions of the Canadian people, over 1,000,000 of whom are of Ukrainian descent, played a significant role in the ultimately fair presidential election of President Victor Yushchenko on December 26.

CANADEM organized the selection process of government-sponsored observers and was rela-

tively speedy, given that the election was to be held barely three weeks from the announcement of Canadian government support. 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, a generous contribution by the Government of Alberta and 500 supported by the Government of Canada, left for Ukraine.

As a Nov. 21 election observer, Goldring volunteered to serve at difficult locations, such as a prison or military base. He was taken to a remand centre near Odessa with approximately 750 inmates, many of whom had been charged with violent crimes, including murder. In Ukraine, as in Canada, remand centre prisoners not yet convicted of crimes have a right to vote. It was

here that Goldring personally observed outright electoral fraud when one man who entered the storage room brought into the voting area an opened, unsealed ballot box. After being observed, he quickly put the box in a corner, under a coat. Then another person jammed a bulky



*Ukraine is bordered by Russia, Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, the Black Sea, and the Sea of Azov.*

*Population: 48 055 439 (estimated, 2003)*



envelope filled with paper ballots under the coat. Goldring then staged a group photo to record the unsealed ballot box and envelope.

After leaving the prison, Goldring travelled by car to Odessa and then by air to Kiev, to further observe electoral processes at a high school just outside the city. Here, with two Canadian TV media groups in attendance, the process of voting was virtually flawless, in distinct contrast that occurring in more remote locations.

The next day, 200,000 people assembled in Independence Square to protest the election results with calls of mass cheating. While civil disobedience and protests grew, the election observer mission left the country and the Canadian Embassy issued an advisory for Canadians to leave. Goldring changed his flight to stay on for the duration of the Orange Revolution that followed. His subsequent contributions are significant and well documented.

Goldring returned again for a repeat election on Dec. 26 when he believed that all Ukrainians were by now sensitized to the importance of the sanctity of elections and that they wished to prove to the watching world that the election this time would be fair and have the democratic outcome desired.

For some time, Mr. Goldring has enunciated his concerns for the immigration case of Ukrainian-

Canadian Wasyl Odynsky. Odynsky's choices, as a young man in Ukraine, were not unlike those of a teenager in Afghanistan, recruited to fight under the Taliban regime. If, after the fall of the Taliban, that individual then applied to immigrate to Canada, he would have faced two scenarios: the first where he is asked if he was a member of Taliban and he either affirms or denies his involvement; and the second, where he is not asked at all about any membership in the Taliban.

In the case against 78-year-old Odynsky, the second scenario occurred. A Canadian court established to its satisfaction that Mr. Odynsky, while still a

teenager in Ukraine, was forced into service by, and attempted to escape from, a Nazi SS auxiliary unit during the Second World War, and that furthermore he did not commit any war crimes. Mr. Odynsky has spent the past five years and virtually all of his savings trying to defend his name and avoid deportation. He even paid 50 per cent of the costs of more than a dozen Canadian court personnel to travel to Ukraine to collect evidence about his wartime circumstances. Odynsky is still facing deportation and his file requires consideration. After 50 years of unblemished Canadian citizenship, Odynsky deserves better than to lose it and be deported on the balance of probabilities that he must not have told the truth when he entered Canada.

Raising issues like these is one reason that Mr.



*Peter Goldring, Member of Parliament in Independence Square in Kiev, Ukraine on November 22, 2004, as demonstrators gather to protest the November 21 election results.*





Goldring has been an active supporter of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group. On March 24, 2005, Mr. Goldring was elected as a director of the Canada-Ukraine Committee in the House of Commons. The committee was formed to further common interests of Canada and Ukraine, subsequent to the inauguration of President Viktor Yushchenko in January of 2005.

On Aug. 3, 2005, Mr. Goldring commended President Yushchenko for abolishing visa requirements for Canadians who travel to Ukraine for less than 90 days. The elimination of visa requirements took effect on

Aug. 1. Goldring pointed out that “the elimination of visa requirements for short-term visits to Ukraine is a welcome development to the encouragement of Canadian tourism and trade with Ukraine. The elimination of visa requirements in Ukraine is a means to provide more of this much-needed support.”

Later that year, at a meeting of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group on Oct. 18, Goldring urged the federal government to consider reciprocal action by working towards granting Ukraine preferred nation status and eliminating the same visa requirements that the Ukrainian government had in the interest of further strengthening the economic and political ties between Canada and Ukraine. This would

enable Ukrainians to engage in short-term travel and business trips to Canada, thus furthering common interests. For Canada, Ukraine could also be a welcoming economic partner at the very gateway of the European Union and Central Asia. Canada’s long term vision of a relationship with Ukraine should be of a preferential economic, political and humanitarian association.

These efforts were recognized on Sept. 30, 2005, when Goldring received a “Special Ukrainian Canadian Congress – Alberta Provincial Council Award.” The award was presented at the annual Hetman Awards banquet, recognizing outstanding

volunteer leaders in the Ukrainian community in Alberta. The previous recipient had been Alberta Premier Ralph Klein. The citation letter from Mr. David Broda, President of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress – Alberta Provincial Council read in part:

“It is my pleasure to advise you that the Board of Directors of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress – Alberta Provincial Council has unanimously agreed to present you with a Special Ukrainian Canadian Congress – Alberta Provincial Council Award. This award is presented periodically to a non-Ukrainian who has made significant voluntary contributions to our community. Your achievements, nationally and internationally and in the House of Commons, are well known and



*Peter Goldring being presented with “Special Ukrainian Canadian Congress—Alberta Provincial Council Award” on September 30, 2005 at the Annual Hetman Awards Banquet (Pictured l. to r.: Dave Broda, Mayor Stephen Mandel, Peter Goldring)*

often quoted. We consider you a strong supporter of the Ukrainian community in Alberta.”

Goldring’s close association with the Ukrainian-Canadian community was again recognized on Dec. 4 when he was invited to represent then-Leader of the Opposition Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party of Canada with a special address at the Canadian Friends of Ukraine annual award dinner in Toronto. The prestigious Profile in Courage Award was presented to Myroslava Gongadze, widow of the late Georgiy Gongadze, the Ukrainian journalist and editor of Ukrainska Pravda, who was brutally assassinated by his critics in September 2000.

At the event, Goldring reminded his audience of the importance of reinforcing democracy in

Ukraine: “I was in Ukraine during the 10 days of the Orange Revolution. I stood with Ukrainians in Independence Square, I felt the excitement of democratic change, I experienced the oppression and intimidation of democracy’s opponents, I watched a proud nation proclaim its democratic freedom with authority and passion. Democracy cannot be smothered by an authoritarian blanket if a free press continues to express a diversity of opinions and political views. There were some who rejected that diversity and they silenced Mr. Gongadze by murdering him, but they could not silence all Ukrainians.”

“Mr. Gongadze’s legacy – political freedom – is alive today in Ukraine.”

**Update:** Mr. Goldring traveled in March 2006 with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to return with Canadian Parliamentarians to observe and track the 2006 Parliamentary elections in Ukraine.

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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 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: \_\_\_\_\_  
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