



Less than two years after the Orange Revolution, Ukrainians went to the polls on March 26, 2006 in free and fair elections that demonstrated that democracy is alive and thriving. After winning independence and democratic government, Ukraine is not about to look back. **Edmonton East Member of Parliament Peter Goldring** was an observer of the March elections, as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Mr. Goldring was also an observer of the November and December 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine, but particularly stayed on in Ukraine to witness and report on the historic Orange Revolution. He shares his thoughts here.

I recently returned to Canada after observing the March 26, 2006 Ukrainian parliamentary elections. I was honoured to have been chosen as one of three Canadian parliamentarians acting as election observers, sponsored by the Parliamentary Assembly of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Along with my colleagues, Manitoba Member of Parliament Joy Smith and Senator Consiglio Di Nino, as well as 150 observers supported by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and 40 sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency, I contributed to monitoring the March 26 parliamentary elections and was pleased to report that they were free from fraud, co-



5 large clear election ballot boxes in one poll station only containing approximately 1600 multi-page ballots total in all boxes

ercion and were respectful of the multi-party democracy that Ukrainians had come to expect from their political leadership.

I had previously been in Ukraine as a sponsored election observer in November 2004, when widespread vote fraud had ignited large public protests immediately following the election—protests that began the Orange Revolution. My reports of election irregularities were widely reported in Canadian

media at that time. I chose to remain in Ukraine to witness and report on the developments that resulted in the November, 2004 election being declared void, after a tumultuous, though peaceful ten day revolution. I was privileged to be a witness to



history and to have my views on what I was observing considered to be quite newsworthy. I returned to Ukraine as a sponsored observer the December 26, 2004 elections that brought Viktor Yushchenko to power. My sponsor for the November, 2004 election was the Institute for Ukrainian Studies of the University of Alberta, while my sponsor for the December, 2004 election was the Canadian International Development Agency. It was during this time that I was encouraged to join the Parliamentary Assembly for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to continue to be involved in the promotion of democratic evolution. As a result of this association, I joined approximately 100 parliamentarians from around the world in observing the March, 2006 elections.

The passion in the streets during those heady weeks in November, 2004, when Ukraine's people, peacefully but with conviction and determination, took back their democracy and put up a large roadblock in the path of political corruption, was evident to all. Then and now, the Orange Revolution was about respecting democracy. Its



In Ottawa, Member of Parliament Peter Goldring attending farewell luncheon with Mykola Maimeskul, Ukrainian Ambassador to Canada

success is evident in the 2006 electoral outcomes, which resulted in what observers considered to be a free and fair election. The results indicated that most voter support was split among the parties or political blocs of multiple parties led by Yushchenko, Yanukovych and Tymoshenko. In addition, a number of smaller parties and party blocs were supported, with a major issue being whether they have reached the 3% threshold in popular support required for political recognition. The results demonstrated that democracy, which is larger than any ideology, cannot be encapsulated in one person or political movement.

At every opportunity during the March elections, Ukrainians of diverse opinions demonstrated the depth of their commitment to elections that were free, fair, transparent and a model for other Eastern European nations. The elections that had just occurred in neighbouring Belarus, involving voter intimidation and ballot box fraud, had exhibited everything that Ukraine was trying to avoid.

On Sunday, March 26, election day, the balloting was incredibly complex, with over



7,000 persons contesting the 450 seats in the Parliament of Ukraine. Over 200 political party names, representing some 45 political blocs, were on a ballot approximately one metre long. As if this wasn't enough, four other multi-name ballots were to be used to elect multiple regional and mayoralty candidates. For hours, while I watched the process, talked with Ukrainian voters and formed an opinion of the event, it was obvious that what was transpiring was little different than election day in



Elderly lady sitting in Kiev polling station trying to decipher complex ballots. Parliament ballot alone listed 45 blocs for selection from 7000 persons running for 460 seats and was 1 meter long

Canada or any other longstanding democracy. No intimidation, no disappearing ballot boxes, no curious activity behind the scenes. Also lacking was any general reporting of fabricated results or predetermined victors; in fact, the results were anything but immediately obvious. Journalists were even doing exit polling to determine how the race was looking, just as a CNN or CBC Newsworld reporter might do in the United States or Canada when these older, established democracies have elections.

After all was said and done, one can only say "Well done, Ukraine." Ukrainians have endured centuries of hardship, invasions,

occupations, dictatorial governments and loss of status. Ukrainians have fought for recognition as a people, as a nation and as a democracy. They have achieved much and they now stand as examples to Eastern Europe and to the world as to just how this concept of democracy should be shared and practiced. There are many reasons why Ukraine might not have succeeded as the democratic example that it has become. Consider, as but one example, the

reams of paper from which candidates were to be selected. There were many prospects for electoral impediments, yet everything was very well-managed at the polls, since the will to democracy is very strong. The result is a free and democratic Ukraine, serving as an example for determined democratic progress everywhere.

Having observed three elections in Ukraine over the past two years, I now hope to be able to turn my efforts towards the enhancement of trade and economic opportunities mutually beneficial to Canada and Ukraine. Newly emerging nations are often challenged by economic uncertainty and deprivation. Therefore, Canada's reinforcement of support for a strong and de-

mocratic Ukraine can be particularly demonstrated through enhanced trade and cooperative economic relationships. While in Ukraine, I had the privilege of discussing with Her Excellency Abina Dann, Canada's Ambassador to Ukraine, the possibility of establishing a form of "Canada House" in Ukraine, which would serve as a gathering together of existing and new initiatives, enhancing a natural gateway for trade and cultural exchanges. The Ambassador was supportive of this idea, which I hope to be able to explore it further in Canada over the next several months. As an immediate past Director of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Committee, I am

in the process of promoting the Committee's work in the new Parliament and participating in its reconstitution.

Canada and Ukraine: partners in democratic futures. Democracies must build and reinforce each other. That is why Canada should reinforce its commitment to democracy and economic development initiatives in Ukraine. And that is also why so many Ukrainians and Canadians, both in business and as members of the general public, wish to be part of that mission.

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9111 - 118th Ave.
Edmonton, AB T5B 0T9
(780) 495-3261
Fax: 495-5142

Web Site:
www.petergoldring.ca
Email:
goldrp1@parl.gc.ca

411 Justice Bldg.
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
(613) 992-3821
Fax: 992-6898

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: _____

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
Postal Code: _____
Telephone: _____



Peter Goldring
Member of Parliament
Edmonton East
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6