



On October 18, 2011, the House of Commons, at the urging of Peter Goldring and other Conservative Members of Parliament, spent four hours discussing concerns regarding the ongoing erosion of democracy in Ukraine, including the apparently politically motivated and arbitrary prosecution and conviction of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko.

Mr. Goldring added his voice to those who have expressed their deep concern about recent developments in Ukraine. He explained that his deep concern for the unfolding of recent events in Ukraine led him, as a member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, to recently call for a committee study on the geopolitical realities of Canada-Ukraine relations today. As former chair and executive member and now vice-chair of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group, he has expressed concerns at many levels.

He noted that for Canadians who have followed Ukraine's development closely since 1991, these latest developments are deeply troubling. As the only Canadian Member of Parliament in Ukraine during the entire Orange Revolution, he asked how things could have gone so wrong since that time and what can Canadians do to help Ukraine get back on a democratic track?



Members of Parliament from all parties expressed support for democracy in Ukraine at a special debate in the House of Commons.

Mr. Goldring pointed out that what happens in Ukraine is of particular interest to Canadians, as our ties with that country are strong: there are 1.2 million Ukrainian Canadians who have helped make Canada the successful, secure and democratic country that it is today. Mr. Goldring's ties to Ukraine come through family: his wife's family, the Taschuks, came to northern Alberta from Ukraine in the early 1900s. His wife Lorraine, his two daugh-



ters, Corinna and Kristina, and his three granddaughters, Katelin, Alexandra and Eleanor, are all of Ukrainian heritage.

Canada was the first western country to recognize Ukrainian independence in 1991. The transition to an open and democratic society after 70 years of Soviet rule, to say nothing of the years of the Tsarist regime before that, has been difficult. Almost from scratch, not just institutions but whole cultures of dialogue and trust have had to be developed, and that development is not yet complete. He pointed out that Ukraine suffers from the weaknesses of civil society, and governance structures remain fragile.

Mr. Goldring has returned to Ukraine six times since the Orange Revolution, five times as an election monitor and once to take part in the annual Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the OSCE, and he witnessed the growing political frustration and discord. While many positive changes did take place, such as increased media and political freedom, many of the population's hopes were not met. Corruption, for example, was not tackled and continued to permeate all levels of government and society.

In the 2010 presidential elections, where Mr. Goldring represented Canada as an observer, Viktor Yanukovich, who had been discredited during the Orange Revolution, became President in an election judged by observers to be free and fair. Unfortunately, while democratic development had failed to move forward under the previous president, it appears under the Yanukovich administration it is being forced back.



As the Member of Parliament with the most experience on the topic Peter Goldring's speech on democracy in Ukraine was one of the highlights of the special debate.

While certainly the electoral process has been greatly improved to international acceptance standards, elections in and of themselves are not enough to allow a democracy to grow. A vibrant civil society and active and independent media are essential components of democracy. Mr.

Goldring said the current Ukraine administration has been hampering democratic development on all fronts. It has been arresting former members of the opposition, ostensibly on charges of corruption, but those charges consistently change as the judicial process progresses. Journalists, academics and human rights civil society organizations have all been the victims of harassment and have not received due protection from the State, who through the



Ukrainian Security Services have occasionally been the instruments of this harassment.

A vibrant democracy with a vibrant and free press is the only foundation on which a just society, and a thriving economy, can be built. While it is only the Ukrainian people themselves who will be able to truly defend it and to build the society they want, Canada and the international community must stand up to condemn these anti-democratic practices. Mr. Goldring said Canada must also continue to provide whatever support we can to help put the building blocks of a democratic society in place: institutions that function transparently and in the interests of the people; an independent justice system; a strong, independent media; and a strengthened civil society.

As Prime Minister Stephen Harper said to a Ukrainian audience when in Ukraine in October 2010, “the government must work in the interests of the people, not the other way round.

“Countries which respect the rights of their own people are more likely to respect the rights of other nations and to be good world citizens,” he added. “If peace is your goal then a free and democratic society is the

way to go.”

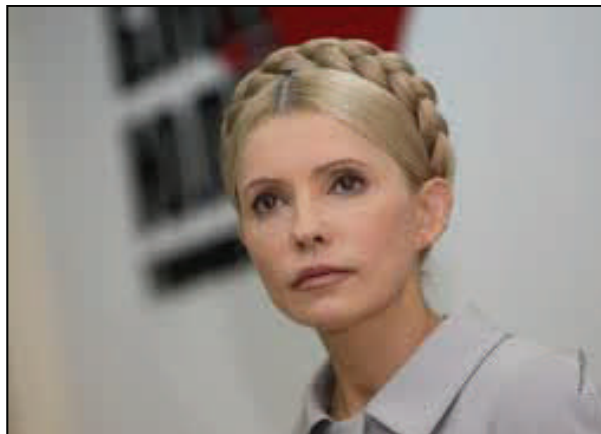
Mr. Goldring pointed out that since one of the cornerstones of Canada’s foreign policy is the promotion of the values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, it is our moral responsibility to speak out against the apparent bias that has been the Tymoshenko trial and conviction.

An open, democratic society invites thought, innovation, enterprise and investment. A closed society can only feed upon itself and eventually there is nothing left but a hollow shell which can only implode. After seventy years of Soviet rule, Ukrainians know this better than most.

Canada will not sacrifice our principles for the sake of engagement, Mr.

Goldring said, and will repeat its criticism of shortcomings that threaten the building of a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous Ukraine. It is through this type of critical engagement that Canada can most effectively support the Ukrainian urge for freedom and democracy.

Mr. Goldring suggested there are many ways Canada can influence Ukraine. Perhaps the trade agreements could include human rights protection wording or to have



The arrest, trial conviction and jailing of Yulia Tymoshenko, former Prime Minister of Ukraine appears to be politically motivated and has sparked an international outcry.

a meeting of the Parliamentary friendship committees of both countries, engaging parliamentarians on issues of mutual concern. He added he felt Ukrainian authorities, including the President, were following the debate in the House of Commons.

Asked for his impressions on the arrest, trial, conviction and imprisonment of Yulia Tymoshenko, Mr. Goldring said it was troubling for all parliamentarians. His understanding of the issue is that while she was in office, where she had at least an implied immunity or an actual immunity she is now being accused of breaking a law. For someone who is in a law-making, decision-

making process while they are in politics to be subject to criminal charges when they leave politics runs counter to the understanding of parliamentary democracy as we know it.

He suggested no-one would want to come into a political decision-making role if they were to be subject forever and for all time to someone's reading of a rule from the law books when, especially the laws themselves may be unreasonably inflexible Soviet-era dictates.

Update: Following the debate in the House of Commons the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development began a study on the geopolitical situation in Ukraine, a study that had been previously requested by Peter Goldring.

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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 continue to send observers to determine if elections in Ukraine are free and fair?
 Yes No

Question 2 Should Canada continue to press for the release of Yulia tymoshenko from prison?
 Yes No

Comments: _____

Name: _____
 Address: _____
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No
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