



I was chosen to be a member of the CANADEM delegation heading to Ukraine as an election observer for the October 2012 election. During my time in Ukraine I conducted a special investigation to further my understanding of religion's effects on the politics of Ukraine. What is written below is the result of this investigation:

When Canadian delegations are deployed to other countries to act as election monitors to help ensure free and fair elections, it is imperative that a base understanding is instilled of the different motivators and factors that effect that given country's politics.

Canada's Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade recently put out a report entitled *'The Rule of Law, Democracy and Prosperity in Ukraine: A Canadian Parliamentary Perspective.'* The members of the Committee are to be commended for this extensive project. I take a certain amount of pride in that the study was first sug-

gested by me when I was a member of the Committee.

As extensive as the report is, I feel a vital aspect of democracy and political life in Ukraine was totally overlooked by the Committee, an area of life that is essential to understanding not only the history of Ukraine and its culture but its political life today – the tremendous influence of the Church on society and political life.

Our North American traditions (especially in the United States) have tended to move toward

a separation of church and state, a dichotomy between sacred and secular that has become the norm. Priests of the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec no longer stand in the pulpit before election day and tell their parishioners how they should vote, as was once common practice. However that is not the case in Ukraine, where religious involvement in political action re-

mains strong. Churches and church leaders frequently align themselves with one party or



In Ukraine, religion is on the rebound as many new Churches are being constructed across the country to meet the rising demand.



another.

In Ukraine, a concern is that the religious support for political parties is divided not according to positions on issues but along linguistic lines. The three traditional Orthodox churches in Ukraine, Ukrainian Orthodox (Kyiv Patriarchate), Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and Ukrainian Orthodox (Moscow Patriarchate), appear to have chosen sides, with the Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox predominantly supporting the President, Viktor Yanukovich, and his party. That understandably leads supporters of one side or another to question the clergy of the church on the opposite side of the political spectrum.

While I was in Ukraine this past October to monitor their Parliamentary Elections, I decided to further probe the issue of religion and politics in Ukraine. William Pardy arranged, at my request, for several personal visits with particular people to discuss the issue of religious political influences in Ukraine. I want to thank him and his staff for their excellent work.

The first person I met with was Jurij Kresack, who is deputy consul and teaches religion at the European University. He stated that he was delighted to be meeting with me because I am the first person to ask the question, and to want to explore the issue, surrounding the combination of Ukrainian religion and politics.

He went on to say that the church is a very big contributor to the political influences in Ukraine, primarily the two Orthodox religions, but the Catholic and protestant religions as well. The reason is simple: under the Soviet Union, religions were discouraged, to say the least. When the Soviet Union collapsed, religion came back with such fervour that he characterizes that now 80 percent of Ukrainians are religious to varying degrees, and church building is booming - as I have personally witnessed.



Peter had the opportunity to meet with religious leaders in Ukraine to discuss the phenomena of religious influences on politics.

“Ukraine is a very religious country,” Mr. Kresack said. He stated that, “In Ukraine, although they are not supposed to, all religions promote the choice candidates, mostly for those that have helped their church financially. There is an exception with the Russian Orthodox Church, which seemingly often supports the candidate

ordained for support from the Moscow Patriarch. The difference is largely due to the fact that, while the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, like in most other countries, is administered from its Moscow Patriarch, while the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has independent administration in Ukraine.

What this effectively means is that the Russian Orthodox Church in many other countries, as well as Ukraine, is in fact a conduit of considerable political influence. I am told that



no known survey has been conducted on the influence of religion on Ukrainian politics and that one should be done. At the very least, one should follow the outcome of the last Presidential election in Ukraine, region by region, juxtaposing outcomes with Russian Orthodox Religion membership, or belief base, throughout the country. The information garnered from such a study will give better understanding to the issue of religious political involvement in Ukrainian politics.

Another meeting with a Priest, who wishes not to be named, could provide some insight to possible change in the future that could alter the dynamics of this issue considerably. Once a month a meeting is held in Kiev and in Volyn – and possibly in many other parts of Ukraine as well – that is attended by consuls of the nation's churches. They of course discuss many other issues, but during their overall debates representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as well as the Russian Orthodox Church have had amiable discussions on the possibility of a merger of their respective churches.

I am assuming that this potential new formation, positively approached, could become a desirable Ukraine-based influence as opposed to a Moscow-based influence. I believe that Canada could have a positive role in helping the political dichotomy of Ukrainian politics dip-

tomatically by exploring the religious impact issue more. That, I believe, would be beneficial for all to understand these issues better.

Understanding the issues fully, both the implications and approach of the religious factions, impacts not only the politics of Ukraine but also most of the former Soviet Union countries. These countries, similar to Ukraine, have religious political concerns. It also would help to bridge the Religious gap in Canada

between the Ukrainian Orthodox, Ukrainian Catholic, and the Russian Orthodox Religions, and also be beneficial for the Ukrainian-Canadian diaspora.

The difference between the two religions – Ukrainian Orthodox and Russian Orthodox – is little. The Russian Orthodox liturgy is old Slavonic from the 1700s. The Ukrainian Orthodox, on the other

hand, is more modern, using language that most people understand today.

I do regret that I was not able to attend and participate in the Foreign Affairs Committee study of politics in Ukraine, nor be part of the Committee's visit to Ukraine to explain further. However, as I noted before, the essential element of this discussion was not broached during that time or, as Jurij Kresnack says, never has been broached before. It seems to me that bringing together the two religious fac-



Throughout the country-side there are many smaller sites attended to regularly for religious observances and beliefs.

tions under the flag of Ukraine would be going a long way towards greater political and economic stability in Ukraine.

It would be best to avoid approaching the major Canadian-Ukrainian organizations on this until it is better explored in Ukraine, as there will be many who carry the bitterness of the Soviet-era control of Ukraine and lay some blame of this on the Russian Orthodox Church, even here in Canada. The response from people that I have interviewed on this subject suggests that there are powerful political influences from Russia through the Russian Orthodox Church's Moscow Patriarchy. It is so obvious to them that they characterize it with the question, "Is the Pope Catholic?" That being

said, it was unfortunate that the Foreign Affairs Committee did not fully explore this issue in all of its most recent efforts and thorough studies on the politics of Ukraine.

Perhaps it is time for a sensitive exploration of religious freedoms in former Soviet Union Entities.

UPDATE: Upon Peter's return to Canada following the 2012 Ukrainian Parliamentary elections, he wrote a letter to Minister Baird, Prime Minister Harper, Minister Fantino, and Minister Uppal, highlighting the importance of exploring religion in Ukraine and similar former Soviet entities to get a greater understanding religion 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 Did you follow the 2012 Ukrainian Parliamentary election?

Yes

No

Question #2 Do you think it is important to further explore religion's role in former Soviet entities?

Yes

No

Comments: _____

Name: _____
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