



I was selected to be an official election observer for the seventh time in Ukraine, this time through CANADEM, which is an Ottawa-based non-profit, non-governmental organization established in 1996 with funding from the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

The main purpose of CANADEM is to bolster peace, order, and good governance efforts through connecting international agencies to civilian experts.

The Canadian government deployed 500 election observers, 435 of which were through CANADEM, for the 2012 Ukrainian Parliamentary elections. This was familiar territory for me, as not only do I have family ties to Ukraine through the family of my wife, Lorraine, I have also been selected as an election monitor for the past 6 Ukrainian elections, dating back to before the Orange Revolution.

With that being the case, I was well-versed in Ukrainian politics going into this mission and

as such was aware of the difficulties that Ukraine was facing on the political front. As the election date for the Ukrainian Parliamentary elections was set for October 28, 2012, it allowed for the observers to meet with key figures and get a sense of the levels of fairness and equality, and the sentiments of the Ukrainian public, leading up to Election Day.

The political situation in Ukraine could certainly be classified as disconcerting, as feelings of suppression and a lack of the democratic right has gripped many of Ukraine's citizens.



Peter visited with several candidates running for the Ukrainian Parliament in the October 2012 election to discuss negative influences and transparencies of campaigns.

The country's leader heading into the election, Viktor Yanukovich of the Party of Regions, has been viewed as a controversial leader in Ukraine since the 2004-2005 Orange Revolution. The revolution was highlighted by massive rallies of hundreds of thousands in Independence Square and a tent city of thousands for some 30 days, which were organized by the opposition movement. This

outrage was caused by reports from numerous Ukrainian election monitors that the results of the run-off vote in the November 2004



election between Viktor Yanukovich and then-President Viktor Yushchenko were rigged in favor of Yanukovich, who won the presidency. Indeed I personally witnessed and photographed ballot box stuffing attempts and remained in Ukraine for the entire ten days of the revolution to witness history.

The Orange Revolution resulted in the election being repeated and Viktor Yushenko became elected as President. Recently, though, in 2011 former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, of Orange Revolution fame, was arrested and convicted for abuse of office while conducting natural gas import negotiations with Russia in 2009. She is currently serving a seven-year prison term. Tymoshenko, along with many Ukrainians, feel that this conviction was nothing more than Yanukovich eliminating his political competition.

With the political backdrop leading up to the election set, a report was sent out by the CANADEM observers on October 18, 2012, highlighting the preliminary findings from the 65 long-term election monitors that had prior to been in the country since early September. Many of the preliminary findings were cause for concern. Chief amongst them was the misuse of administrative resources, procedural irregularities, concerns related to the election dispute resolution process, reports of vote-

buying in many regions, and the use of misinformation.

However, the initial report did highlight some positive findings leading up to the election. Notably, the move by Parliament to rescind proposed legislation that would have re-criminalized libel and defamation was seen as a step in the right direction. As well, State Voter Register maintenance bodies had been observed implementing new rules regarding

temporary changes in voter's addresses which made it more difficult to transport voters to different precincts.

It is with these findings that I and the 364 other short-term CANADEM election monitors found ourselves facing when we arrived in Kiev.

Despite the main focus of my fellow election observers being the effects of the political parties and their

leaders on Ukrainian politics, I took it upon myself to travel down a lesser-explored route for other driving factors of what effected politics in Ukraine.

Based on my familiarization of Ukrainian politics, I had a reasonable understanding that one of the main and important factors – which was all but overlooked by the rest of Canada's election observers – was the effect of religion on Ukrainian politics.

Our North American traditions have tended to



The voting process and mechanism in Ukraine is well understood and orderly. Most problems are in the closing of the DEC's and transparency issues.



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

I met with Jurij Kresack, who is deputy consul and teaches religion at the European University in Kiev. He stated that Ukraine is a very religious country and that possibly up to 80% consider themselves to hold some form of religious belief. As such, in Ukraine, although they are not supposed to, religions promote their choice of candidates, mostly for those that have helped their church financially.

Knowledge of this fact, not surprising, is of great importance. Since my return, I have sent a letter to Prime Minister Harper, the Honourable John Baird, the Honourable Julian Fantino and the Honourable Tim Uppal urging them to take a closer look to religion's effects on Ukrainian politics in order to gain a more complete understanding of the Ukrainian political arena.

Besides delving into the religious aspects of

Ukraine, I was stationed at a Precinct Election Commission (PEC) polling facility in Volyn for Election Day, where I observed the practices and protocols that were being followed by the election workers at my polling station. The main concern that struck me was the lack of transparency with election officials. After all of the votes had been counted and recorded at my station, the election official and workers would not bag the ballot information. They all

sat down twiddling their thumbs waiting for my election monitoring colleagues and I to retire for the evening. After an hour and a half stalemate I had my interpreter specifically tell the official that we wouldn't leave the polling station until they do and that we were going to follow them to the District Election Commission (DEC). The official then bagged the ballot information and left with us following

closely behind all the way to the DEC. This secretive behaviour is merely one instance of many that were reported from election observers across Ukraine.

As the results of the election votes came in that night, it was evident that leader Viktor Yanukovich would retain power in Ukraine. However, this would not come without concern from the Ukrainian public as well as the international community.

The post-election report done by CANADEM



Pictured above is the CANADEM group that Peter was working with in the Volyn region of Ukraine, led by William Pardy.

highlighted the main concerns that were noted by Canadian election observers from across the country. These Election Day concerns include: transparency issues during voting; tampering with Precinct Election Commission (PEC) election material; incomplete PEC protocols; and District Election Commission (DEC) transparency issues.

As the election results were confirmed and condemnation rang out from the international community against Yanukovich and his newly re-elected government, it seems that it is fair to say that Ukraine, as a collective, took a step backwards and away from achieving the democratic value. It is this democratic value that is

often times taken for granted in Canada and other countries around the world which are fortunate enough to have truly democratically elected governmental officials.

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.

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

Web Site:
www.petergoldring.ca
Email:
peter.goldring.c1@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 Did you follow the 2012 Ukrainian Parliamentary election?

Yes No

Question #2 Do you think Canada should play a bigger role in helping countries like Ukraine in attaining a stronger democracy?

Yes No

Comments: _____

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



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