



As the crisis in Ukraine continues with the world seemingly at a loss to find a political solution, Peter Goldring suggests the best hope for a lasting solution could be to turn for help to the institution most respected by the citizens of Ukraine: the church.

Americans have a constitutional separation of Church and State that is for all intents and purposes unique. In most countries (including Canada where the head of state, the Queen, is also the titular head of the Anglican Church) the line between the religious and the secular is far less strictly drawn.

This is definitely true in Ukraine, where for 70 years the Christian church, primarily Orthodox and Catholic survived despite persecution under the rule of the atheistic Soviet Union. Communist efforts to eradicate religious belief failed in Ukraine as they did in other Soviet territories, and with independence in 1991 religion once again came to the forefront of Ukrainian public life. In an era where

citizens increasingly distrust their politicians, religious leaders are still respected and seen as authorities in society, as those who can be trusted to put the good of society as a whole ahead of self-interest. This becomes important given the turmoil that has gripped Ukraine since the Euromaidan protests began in November 2013.

The 2010 presidential election had left Ukraine a fractured society, as the two final candidates had fairly evenly split the vote, with the winner, Viktor Yanukovich

receiving most of his support from the predominantly Russian-speaking eastern areas of Ukraine, while Yulia Tymoshenko had benefitted from the votes of the predominantly Ukrainian-speaking populace in the western part of the country. After three years of the Yanukovich presidency however, concerns about corruption, repressive laws and the erosion of

democracy were shared by millions of Ukrainians of all linguistic backgrounds. The Euromaidan protests brought together Rus-



Religious symbols were prominently displayed during marches that were part of the 2004 Orange Revolution. The people of Ukraine trust religious leaders far more than politicians.



sian-speakers and Ukrainian-speakers, uniting them in the desire for peaceful change. When the president responded with more repressive laws, and followed that up with violence and sniper-shooting murders, he was deposed in a popular uprising and fled the country as a wanted man for Russia. Which in theory should have ended the crisis, however the situation degenerated when the new government of Ukraine was sworn in.

Among its first acts the new government repealed recently passed legislation that specifically targeted those who had been taking part in the Euromaidan protests. Unfortunately, in their zeal to roll back the clock and remove all traces of Yanukovich, the decision was made to remove Russian-language protections that had been previously enacted. As the new government was composed almost entirely of Ukrainian speakers from the western part of the country, this was cause for some concern in the east, leading Russian president Vladimir Putin to invade and annex the Russian-speaking Crimea area of Ukraine, to “protect” Russian interests.

At this point there appears to be an impasse between Russia, Ukraine and the West, and there is speculation that Putin will not stop at Crimea. Options for intervention

short of armed conflict are limited. Political leaders acknowledge the problem, but are uncertain what can be done to address it. However, there is one group that has respect across linguistic and ethnic lines in both Russia and Ukraine that could be used to help defuse the current tensions: the religious authorities.

The church is the most trusted institution in Ukraine, far more trusted than political or academic institutions. Political pronouncements by church leaders carry far more weight than similar statements would in Canada.

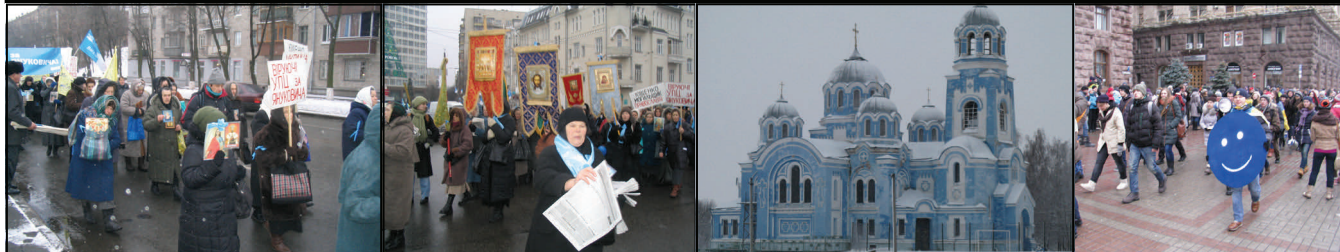
In 2004 I was an election observer in Ukraine during the failed November Presidential election and remained in the country for the entire 10 days of the subsequent Orange Revolution. I witnessed clergy marching in the

streets of Kyiv under the Orange banners of the Yushchenko supporters and the blue and white flags of the Yanukovich faction. It was quite apparent that the clergy were indeed taking sides in favour of one presidential candidate or another and that the divide between “orange” and “blue and white” was frequently along linguistic and religious lines.

In the 2010 Presidential campaign, the three traditional Orthodox churches in



Mr. Goldring met with Archbishop Gabriel (centre) of Montreal’s St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Cathedral and and Father William Milinow, of Ottawa to discuss religion in Ukraine.



Ukraine, Ukrainian Orthodox (Kyiv Patriarchate), Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and Ukrainian (Russian) Orthodox (Moscow Patriarchate), appear to have chosen sides, with only the Moscow Patriarchate (Russian) Orthodox supporting the president, Viktor Yanukovich, and his party. Religious support for political parties was divided not according to positions on issues but along linguistic lines. That understandably lead supporters of one side or another to question the clergy of the church on the opposite side of the political spectrum.

According to 2006 figures, in Ukraine 50.4% of the religious population are deemed to be part of the Kyiv Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church while 26.1% look to the Moscow Patriarchate (the Russian Orthodox Church).

Other groups include the Ukrainian Greek Catholic (8%), Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox (7.2%), Roman Catholic (2.2%), Protestant (2.2%), Jewish (0.6%), and others (3.2%).

Both Ukraine's Constitution and the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religion provide for separation of Church and State, allowing churches to establish places of worship and train clergy. Each region of Ukraine has a department responsible for registering religious groups and moni-

toring their activities as all religious organizations must register with the Committee for Religious Affairs and with local governments. This separation is not absolute, as there are government restrictions placed on foreign religious workers and organizations and it fell to the government to deal with the issue of restitution to the churches for property seized from them during the Soviet era. In both Russia and Ukraine people distrust

their government, but they still have faith in their religious authorities. Recently the two main Orthodox Christian groups, the Russian and Ukrainian churches, have been working together. The new government should engage them, with the other religious groups in the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, to consult all Ukrainians, asking

what they want in terms of linguistic and cultural inclusivity for the future of Ukraine.

The Kyiv-based Ukrainian and Moscow-based (Russian) Orthodox churches in Ukraine have set an example of working together during the crisis, presenting a united front across linguistic and cultural lines and condemning violence and corruption. It is time to empower and deploy them to the regions, to promote linguistic inclusivity and allay fears.



When he visited Euromaidan in Kyiv in December 2013, Mr. Goldring noted the presence of Ukrainian-speakers, Russian-speakers and Crimean Tatars.

In the past the churches of Ukraine have taken sides, supporting one political party or another, a stance that was detrimental to society. That may no longer be the case. In December 2013 I spoke to a crowd estimated at half a million people in Kyiv's Independence Square as part of the Euro-aidan protests. In the Square I observed a unity I had not seen in Ukraine before – Russian-speaking Ukrainians, Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians and Ukrainian Crimean Tatars united across religious and cultural lines, coming together to protest against corruption. There were numerous clergy present, but their role was pastoral, not political.

The recent Russian takeover of Ukraine's Crimean region, supposedly to

protect Russian-speakers, raises many concerns that Vladimir Putin may yet attempt to seize more of Ukraine's territory. However, he is reputed to be a very religious man. If the All-Ukrainian Council, which includes the (Russian) Orthodox Church, messages collectively and clearly that Ukrainians are united in their wish for regional, cultural and linguistic inclusivity, perhaps Patriarch Kirill of Moscow can speak to President Putin to allay his concerns and bring about calm in all regions of Ukraine. Additionally, by doing so now, before the upcoming elections, the candidates will be able to reinforce these linguistic and cultural inclusivity objectives during the campaign.

Update: To date Mr. Goldring has advised this approach for consideration meeting with considerable interest from the Ambassador of Ukraine, Bishop Job of Edmonton's Russo-Orthodox Church, Archbishop Gabriel, Russian Orthodox Archbishop of Montreal, the Russian Embassy and Andrew Bennett, Canada's Ambassador for Religious Freedom.

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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...

Q1: Do you think that the United Nations should act immediately with peace keepers in the Crimea?

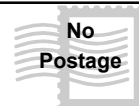
Yes No

Q2: Should elected members of Canada's Parliament help in the process of monitoring elections abroad?

Yes No

Comments: _____

Name: _____
Address: _____
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