

RealClear World



Ukraine's Elections Will Be Free and Fair

By Mikhail Okhendonvskyy
October 24, 2012

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With Ukraine's Oct. 28 parliamentary elections just a few days away, the country is making final preparations to ensure that they are credible and transparent. The stakes are high. Ukrainian authorities have made it clear that European integration is a top priority and therefore, the international community will be watching closely.

We welcome the scrutiny.

As a member of the independent Central Election Commission (CEC), it is my job to ensure that the elections are deemed free and fair. My prediction, as I told U.S. government representatives and non-governmental organizations during a recent trip to the American capital, is that, notwithstanding some reservations concerning a few technical details, this fall's elections will not just meet but exceed international electoral standards for fairness and transparency.

This is in large part due to new legislation that was designed with assistance from the Venice Commission and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The new law was supported by international and domestic experts, and the people of Ukraine. It was adopted by more than 80 percent of Ukraine's parliament members, including representatives from every faction - both the ruling coalition and the opposition.

The new election law re-introduces a mixed electoral system under which half the country's 450 representatives are elected in single-member districts and half through proportional representation in a single nationwide constituency. The law lifts the election threshold from three to five percent, prohibits parties from running together in electoral coalitions, and removes the option of "vote against all" as a choice on the ballot.

While the law includes important reforms, several provisions thereof were ruled unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of Ukraine in April 2012. Those rulings created two serious legal gaps in the law.

First, there is no procedural basis to incorporate tallies from 115 out-of-country polling stations, representing some 439,000 voters living abroad, in the final results of elections, which is to be prepared by the CEC by Nov. 12, 2012. Secondly, invalidation of the rules allowing one individual candidate to run simultaneously on a party list and in a single mandate district opened way for a candidate to run in two or more districts.

While the CEC is trying to resolve the first problem through a resolution, the second problem will obviously remain a challenge. In May 2012 the CEC unanimously supported a number of important technical amendments necessary to fill in the gaps created by the Constitutional Court's rulings and submitted them to parliament. To our disappointment, the parliament failed to pay adequate attention to that initiative.

Regardless of such uncertainty, the CEC has prepared and passed more than 50 resolutions needed to clarify the law and ensure the uniform application thereof by all stakeholders. Roughly 99 percent of these resolutions were passed with a unanimous vote of all 15 commission members. And on April 28, the redistricting process was finished – deemed to be one of the most sensitive issues, much like it is in the U.S.

Furthermore, Ukraine has spent considerable time and resources developing a database of registered voters that is automatically updated on a regular basis. As a result, we can be 99.9 percent confident that every eligible voter in any precinct is on the list and their vote is counted once, and only once. We are proud to say that our voters' registration system is one of the best and most efficient in the world.

With just weeks to go, the CEC still has a lot of work to do. For one, we aim to have webcams at all 32,188 regular polling stations so that anyone in the world with Internet access can watch the elections in real time - an unprecedented level of transparency. What is even more important - the webcams will record the entire counting process at each regular polling station thus enabling the CEC to use the respective data for consideration of possible complaints.

We must also prepare for thousands of international and domestic election observers, including those from the OSCE and, of course, Freedom House, the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. We welcome and encourage the participation of as many observers as possible to help ensure that Ukraine's electoral process is honest and credible. We really want non-partisan, unbiased observers on the ground who can accurately tell the story of this election to the world. We're confident it will be a good one.

The road to a strong democracy is not always straight and although our journey has been imperfect, we have come a long way. In 2010, the presidential election was pronounced clean and transparent – a major accomplishment as this was only Ukraine's fifth presidential election since declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The CEC will do its best to do even better for the upcoming parliamentary elections. In this regard, we continue to rely on the support and the constructive criticism of all American and European institutions during both the pre- and post-election period.

This is a pivotal moment for Ukraine. We plan on seizing it.

Mikhail Okhondovskyy is a member of the Ukrainian Central Election Commission, an independent body comprised of 15 members, who are each appointed to a 7-year term by Ukraine's parliament to supervise and conduct presidential, parliamentary, and local self-government elections, as well as national and local referenda.

UKRAINIAN ELECTIONS

Key facts about the 2012 Parliamentary Elections - Sunday 28 October

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On Sunday 28 October, the people of Ukraine will go to the polls to vote in parliamentary elections. These elections come at an important time for the country, which is undergoing a series of political, legal and economic reforms intended to make Ukraine more modern, democratic and prosperous.

Electoral reform

Sunday's election takes place under a new electoral law. The new law, outlined below and right, helps Ukraine make progress towards genuine, democratic electoral processes in line with European standards. It helps Ukraine to deliver free, fair and transparent elections.

The new electoral law was agreed by more than four out of every five deputies, from both Opposition and Government. The reforms comply with standards put forward by international organisations. They were drafted with the help of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE NEW ELECTORAL SYSTEM

- Adopted by the Verkhovna Rada on 17 November 2011
- Supported by 81% of deputies, from all political groups
- Includes key demands of the Opposition and Government
- Drafted with the help of the Council of Europe and the OSCE
- No more electoral coalitions - each party must run individually
- No 'Vote Against All' option on the ballot

Admission of candidates

5,771 candidates will run in the polls representing a wide range of parties.

The CEC did not register Yulia Tymoshenko, a former Prime Minister, and Yuriy Lutsenko, a former Interior Minister, due to their criminal convictions. The CEC does not have the authority to give a legal assessment of court rulings, it could not act in any way other than to refuse the applications.

International observation missions

Thousands of international and domestic election observers - including a European Parliament delegation - will monitor voting and counting. Observers come from government institutions and parliaments, international organisations, civil society and NGOs.

Several members of the delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) have stressed that the verdict on the probity of Ukraine's elections should not be given before the vote. Mevlüt Cavusoglu, a delegation member and a former PACE President, said that the situation concerning Ms Tymoshenko "should not be used to declare the elections illegitimate prior to their implementation".

The general public will also be able to monitor the conduct of the polls via webcams placed at 34,000 polling stations. A recent poll showed that 60% of Ukrainians who answered the question supported this initiative.

Key criteria for determining free and fair elections

Observers have already been in Ukraine for some time, monitoring the compliance of pre-election procedures with democratic and fair elections principles - such as the fair registration of candidates and voters, transparency in campaigning, the existence of an independent and effective electoral authority, and free and fair media coverage. The first interim report from the OSCE gave a generally favourable review.

On polling day and in the hours afterwards, the observers' focus will shift to access to and conduct in polling stations, the secrecy of voting, and the way in which votes are counted, recorded and delivered to the CEC.

One important measure will be the correlation between exit polls and

THE 2012 ELECTION IN NUMBERS

5

Deputies are elected to the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's Parliament, for a five-year term

450

A total of 450 deputies will be elected on 28 October...

225

...with 225 elected in single-member geographic constituencies, and 225 via nationwide party lists, with seats allocated via proportional representation

A party must win five per cent of the nationwide vote to be able to sit in Parliament - up from three per cent

5,571

The Ukrainian Central Elections Commission (CEC) registered 5,571 candidates for the Election on the party lists and in constituencies

73

According to a poll conducted by GfK in September, 73% of Ukrainians will definitely or probably vote in the elections

Analysis by the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting shows that airtime for the opposition is 1.5 times greater than that for pro-Government parties

34,000

Voting will take place in 34,000 polling stations, and the process can be followed online via webcams installed in each polling station - anyone can be an observer

1,000

Almost 1,000 international observers have already been registered - and the total number of domestic and international observers is likely to reach tens of thousands

the final results. On Sunday, independent companies will carry out at least four exit polls, providing a first overview of voting patterns. Results will emerge within 24-48 hours, with a final result published on 12 November.

Maintaining reform and deepening Ukraine's partnership with the EU

These elections come at a crucial stage for Ukraine and its relations with the EU. All mainstream parties in Ukraine are committed to Europe and to ensuring a high-quality election. However it will be crucial for observers, as well as institutions such as the European Parliament, to base their assessment of the legitimacy of the elections on the process rather than the political outcome.

The reform process in Ukraine is ongoing. As well as electoral reform, there have been updates to the criminal code, increased protection of minorities, economic reforms and other changes to comply with requests from European bodies, bringing Ukraine into line with European standards.

The next step on the path to a closer relationship between Ukraine and the EU will be the final signature and ratification of the agreed Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. This is a step that will have mutual benefits for citizens and businesses in Ukraine and the EU and help secure Ukraine's European future.

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR A MODERN UKRAINE

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ECFMU is a Brussels-based NGO that educates governments, opinion leaders and businesses about advancements in Ukraine in order to build a more prosperous future for the country and a closer relationship with the European Union.



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You Can't Stop History: Ukraine is Europe

By Romano Prodi

Next Sunday Ukraine will hold its parliamentary elections, and their being regular and transparent is considered by many in Europe a necessary condition to proceed to the signing of a very broad agreement of association and free trade with Kyiv.

The Association agreement could in a few years double the actual trade volume of almost €40 billion a year. This scenario would particularly favor Italy, the third largest trading partner of Kyiv, and could represent a nonnegligible opportunity for growth at a time of crisis.

Thanks to its geographical position, gas shale deposits, energy transit infrastructure, as well as vast agricultural resources and aerospace and software expertise, Ukraine could become an important strategic partner of Europe and a geopolitical bridge between Moscow and Brussels.

But the European Union for the moment hesitates. A group of countries has announced that it will oppose the signing of the Agreement as long as the former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, convicted of abuse of office last year, remains in jail.

Personally, I believe that this position is contrary to the interests of Europe and the millions of Ukrainian citizens, many of whom are voters of Mrs. Tymoshenko, who would benefit from better economic opportunities and more advanced standards of civil and democratic society.

Of course, the Tymoshenko case raises questions that cannot be ignored. But even in this context, I believe that we should encourage dialogue and promote closer relations between Brussels and Kyiv. Because in the end you can't stop history. And closer ties between Ukraine and the European Union is an inevitable process.

I agree with the opinion expressed by the Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Konstantyn Gryshchenko, that the signing the Association Agreement could ultimately provide a new tool to promote reforms and democracy in Ukraine, according to best European practices.

The pressure of the European institutions in the meanwhile has already produced various results. Ahead of parliamentary elections on October 28th, the Ukrainian Parliament has approved by a large majority, with the votes of the major parties in government and opposition, a new electoral law designed following the recommendations of the Council of Europe.

Almost four thousand observers representing more than thirty international missions will monitor the regularity of elections. All polling stations have been equipped with web cameras to deter fraud.

Also, when the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recently denounced an impending law that would have criminalised defamation and restricted media freedom in Ukraine – a law in some ways similar is under discussion in our own Parliament – it was interesting to see how the proposed law was immediately withdrawn.

These facts are a clear demonstration of how important are European institutions to promote democracy and human rights. Today, Ukraine is the last big eastern European country seeking EU membership. And frankly it is not in worse conditions than its other neighbors that have preceded it.

We must remember that the historic process of building Europe has always meant, and it will be this way in the future, engagement and dialogue. Not isolation. Even a Ukraine that is committed to integration needs the guiding hand of Europe to achieve some distance from its Soviet past.

You can't stop history. And the Ukraine belongs to our horizon.

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Head of EU Observer Mission Says Election Could Move Association Agreement Closer to Conclusion; Initial Reactions from International Observers Positive

International election observer groups will issue their final verdicts on the parliamentary elections tomorrow, but with nearly 4,000 international observers taking part in today's vote, the initial reactions were positive.

Observers noted technical problems but not major violations that would tilt the outcome of the vote.

"Overall, the organization is excellent, the atmosphere is friendly. These are fair and transparent elections," MEP Daniel van der Stoep (the Netherlands) said at a Sunday news conference.

He noted that the choices of some voters were visible in the transparent ballot boxes, and other observers said that information at some polling stations did not also appear in Russian.

The head of the European Parliament's election observation mission, Pawel Kowal, said the elections could move the EU and Ukraine closer to finalizing their Association Agreement.

"Of course, we need a new incentive for the signature and ratification of the Association Agreement," he said, according to an Interfax account of a discussion Sunday in Kiev. "Personally I think that Ukraine is a normal European democracy."

MEP Gerhard Huber (Austria) said that the elections were transparent on the whole.

"I want to congratulate the organizers that they were able to organize open elections. I have no criticism of the electoral process," he said.

"I talked to many observers, they are satisfied with the process, and I am glad that the Ukrainian government is doing everything possible to enable people to express their will," British MP John Whittingdale said Sunday in Kiev.

Alex Miller, an Israeli observer said, "Basically everything goes fine."

An observer from the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Valery Shnyakin, added: "I would not say that everything is perfect... Unfortunately, there are shortcomings," but she added that she did not think they were significant enough to impact the outcome.

"We have noticed that everything was quiet, and everyone with whom we spoke confirmed that everything was democratic, without any problems and failures," Stella Misauli, an observer for Cyprus, said.

Representatives of the Central European Group for Political Monitoring also pronounced themselves satisfied with the conduct of Election Day. At a briefing Sunday afternoon, representatives from the group said they had not recorded any serious violations in two days of observation.

"This is a well-organized election campaign, with no extraordinary events," American political scientist Srdja Trifkovic said.

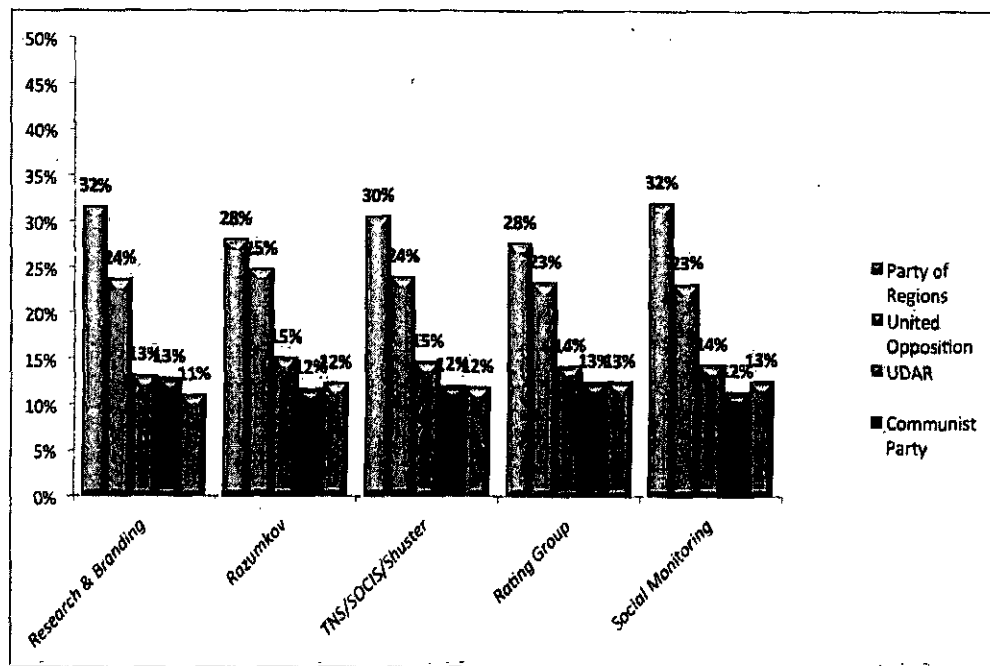
Party of Regions Leads All Public Exit Polls; Five Parties Cross Parliamentary Threshold

Multiple exit polls show that Party of Regions, the United Opposition, UDAR, the Communist Party and Svoboda will all cross the 5 percent threshold required to gain seats in the Verkhovna Rada (Ukraine's Parliament) in today's parliamentary elections.

The Party of Regions is projected to earn between 27.6 and 31.6 percent of support, with an average of a six-point lead over its nearest competitor.

Additionally, polling shows the United Opposition with a lead over UDAR after the two were locked in a battle for second and third place.

Finally, the Svoboda party is projected to significantly exceed the 5 percent threshold required to win seats in the Ukrainian parliament. Yulia Tymoshenko's Fatherland party recently formed an alliance with Svoboda, which gave the right-wing group legitimacy, resulting, at least in part, in an increase in the polls from 5 percent to as much as 12 percent in today's vote.



Statement on Elections from Party of Regions Chairman Mykola Azarov

Party of Regions Chairman Mykola Azarov issued the following statement today on the conduct of parliamentary elections.

"Today the people of Ukraine took another step forward on the road to becoming a more developed European democracy.

"Ukrainians expressed their free will in an election that had almost no problems in the voting process.

During the election campaign as well as during the voting process no major infringements were committed that could cast doubts on the democracy of these elections.

"The election officials at all levels performed in a professional and responsible way, showing their patriotism and commitment to the democratic norms."

You can read the full statement [here](#).

Requests for Home Ballots Down

In Ukraine, voters are able to request home voting ballots if they aren't able to make it to the polls because of a medical disability, an important accommodation that allows people – primarily the elderly and the disabled – to be able to exercise their democratic rights.

In the run-up to this year's election, just over a million applications for home ballots were made – about 2.7 percent of the total electorate, in line with international standards. That figure is down from 4.3 percent in 2007 and 3.89 percent in 2010.

To prevent fraud, at least 3 commissioners from different political parties must accompany the mobile ballot box when it goes out to collect the ballots of people voting from home; all ballots that go out must be strictly accounted for, and observers and party representatives may monitor mobile voting.

Mobile balloting occurred without incident in the 2006, 2007, and 2010 national elections.

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R&B exit poll: Five parties make it to the VR

<http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/1414950/print>

According to the results of the exit poll conducted by Research & Branding Group, five parliamentary parties qualified to the VR in the 2012 election. R&B exit poll covered 500 polling stations, 12,500 voters were surveyed.

Party of Regions - 31.6%

United Opposition - 23.7%

UDAR - 13.2%

CPU - 13%

Svoboda - 11%

Ukraine-Forward - 1.8%

Our Ukraine - 1.3%

**Statements of Election Observers, Expert Organizations and Other
Individuals on the Outcome of the Ukrainian Parliamentary Elections -
October 28, 2012**

Pavel Koval (MEP, Head of the European Parliament Observation Mission) - "Today's elections are the best ever held. Observing the elections is not everything. There is also a broader message that goes together with our presence here: that Ukraine is important to the people of Europe".

"I don't think the legitimacy of these elections can be put in question. And I don't think the EU or the opposition will question it. Today Ukraine has shown that it is not comparable to Kazakhstan, Belarus or any other post-Soviet country. What is in question is whether Ukraine will be allowed to join the EU and not that it has to be considered a normal European democracy".

"Yes, there are some minor concerns, but only if they are measured against the backdrop of the high EU standards. I think we now need a new signal from the EU towards Ukraine. We need fresh impetus on signing the Association Agreement. At the same time we need a signal of equal strength in the opposite direction. What should really come out of the new Parliament is a clear strategic choice about the EU."

John Whittingdale (MP from UK with PACE) - "I talked to many observers, they are satisfied with the process and I am glad that the Ukrainian government is doing everything possible to enable people to express their will."

Ian Tombinsky (EU Ambassador to Ukraine) - "It is clear, based on statements of various political leaders, including Mr. Yatsenyuk (whom I have just spoken with) that this country has a functioning democracy. I think that is very important to recognize as a political fact."

UDAR, Communist Party satisfied with preliminary results of elections Viktor Pynzenyk (Former Ukrainian Minister of Finance and current UDAR member) - "This is a good result, although our political force always was under pressure. "I don't see any sensations, everything is understandable."

Alexi Kochetkov (Observer with CIS-EMO) - "In our opinion, the elections were held successfully in Ukraine. They were transparent. The obtained result reflects the will of the Ukrainian people."

Oleksandr Holub (Member - Ukraine Communist Party) - "Ukraine should be satisfied with the results, that's what important."

Alex Miller (Observer - Israeli Parliament) - "Basically everything goes fine."

Yuval Zellner (Observer - Israeli Parliament) - "It may happen that soon you will need no observers, because everything is happening at a very high level."

Arsneniy Yatsenyuk (Leader, United Opposition) - "Look, the exit polls shows that the people of Ukraine support the opposition, not the government. That's the clear sign that we still have the democracy in this country."

Stella Misauli (Observer - Cyprus) - "We have noticed that everything was quiet, and everyone with whom we spoke confirmed that everything was democratic, without any problems and failures."

Daniel van der Stoep (MEP Netherlands) - "Overall, the organization is excellent, the atmosphere is friendly. These are fair and transparent elections."

Gerhard Huber (MEP Austria) - "I want to congratulate the organizers that they were able to organize open elections. I have no criticism of the electoral process."

Srdja Trifkovic (Observer from Central European Group for Political Monitoring) - "This is a well-organized election campaign, with no extraordinary events."

Leon Litinetski (former member of the Israeli Knesset) - "The day of silence was held in accordance with the law." He also noted that these elections were characterized by greater

transparency due to a record number of observers and a wide representation of observers from various political parties at polling stations.

Oleksandr Chernenko (Chairman, Committee of Voters of Ukraine) - "Generally speaking, the situation is very tense at the polling stations. But the number of violations that we get does not exceed the normal level."

"No, the election is unlikely to be considered invalid. This is evidenced even by international observers."

Cyrill Svoboda (former Minister of Foreign Affairs – Czech Republic) - Former Czech Foreign Minister

He said he "did not see any violations." "There is no doubt that the election was fair and transparent." "Democracy is alive in Ukraine." "I was pleasantly surprised that people are willing to go vote. A lot of people, just like at home."

Sergey Markov (Observer – The Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation) - "The elections to the Ukrainian parliament were successful, democratic and organized according to standards even better than in some of the European Union member states."

Kazbek Taisaev (Observer – The Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation) - "Everything was organized very well, at the high level, and in general the elections were held at a worthy level."

Thierry Mariani (Observer, French MP and former Minister) - "Transparent ballot boxes, webcams, live debates in front of million TV viewers. It is difficult for an election to be more transparent than that."

"This is the first time that I have seen such a transparent competition. "These elections are a great success for Ukraine and a great success for democracy. "Today Ukraine is a real European democracy."

"Collaboration between the EU and Ukraine is absolutely necessary. I hope this can lead to the signing of the Association Agreement. It's in our mutual interest."

Vladimir Titov (Observer from CIS-EMO) - "At the moment all the violations registered by our experts are not systematic... We can not say that the election is terrible, undemocratic."

Svetlana Goryacheva (Observer of Inter-Parliamentary of the CIS) - "No violations were registered at the 17 polling stations in Kyiv I visited. The only thing is bad light in some of polling booths, but this is not a violation, it only created discomfort for voters."

Kazbek Taisaev (Observer – Russia) - "Everything was organized very well, at the high level, and in general the elections were held at a worthy level."

Volodymyr Shapoval (Head of the Central Election Commission) - "One gets the impression that...the electoral process has proceeded normally."

Observers from different countries positive about Ukrainian elections

Kyiv, October 28 (Interfax-Ukraine) – An observer from the United Kingdom, John Whittingdale, has said that observers on the whole were positive about the preparations for the parliamentary elections in Ukraine, but it is too early to make any final assessment.

"I talked to many observers, they are satisfied with the process and I am glad that the Ukrainian government is doing everything possible to enable people to express their will," the British politician said at a press conference in Kyiv on Sunday.

He added that there are some reasons for concern, but elections cannot be perfect in any country of the world.

An observer of the Israeli parliament, Alex Miller, also praised the voting in Ukraine. "Basically everything goes fine," he said.

His colleague Yuval Zellner confirmed that the electoral process was democratic. "It may happen that soon you will need no observers, because everything is happening at a very high level," he said.

An observer from the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS, Valery Shnyakin, noted good working conditions for international election observers in Ukraine, however, he noted some flaws in the process of voting. "I would not say that everything is perfect... Unfortunately, there are shortcomings that will not affect the progress of the election campaign at large," he said.

An observer for Cyprus, Stella Misauli, said that she visited several polling stations where she was able to get a glimpse of the electoral process in Ukraine. "We have noticed that everything was quiet, and everyone with whom we spoke confirmed that everything was democratic, without any problems and failures," she said.

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CEC Member Mikhail Okhendovskyy Responds to EU Observer Mission's Assessment

Mikhail Okhendovskyy is a member of the Central Election Commission, an independent body comprised of 15 members, who are each appointed to 7-year terms by Ukraine's parliament to supervise and conduct presidential, parliamentary, and local self-government elections, as well as national and local referenda.

During his years of service in electoral supervision, Okhendovskyy has been an appointee of multiple political factions.

Yesterday, he issued the following statement in response to the assessment of parliamentary elections offered by the EU election observer mission:

I believe that the any detailed comments now would be premature. It's quite difficult to understand and assess in a few minutes the conclusions that have obviously been prepared for a long time.

I must admit that today I was expecting a fair and unbiased assessment of the work the Central Election Commission, and our state as a whole, did over the last year to organize free and fair elections of people's deputies of Ukraine. However, after some initial disappointment, I thought it was important to pay attention to several fundamental aspects.

First of all, the statement on preliminary findings and conclusions of the European Election Observation missions issued today has no assessment of the credibility of the results and the election's legitimacy, as well as their compliance with recognized international standards. In my opinion, the statement the groups issues was a list of the problems traditionally encountered in the organization of elections in many countries of Eastern Europe. Obviously, these problems are evaluated as they are seen through the eyes of Western observers, representing mature democracies. Unfortunately, we are yet to see the real

assessment of the elections as a technical process, as procedures. We hope that this kind of assessment, without undue predominance of the political component, will be given in the final report of the mission's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Secondly, it is important that the statement does not question the fact that the election results reflect the full measure of the will of Ukrainian voters. Indeed, it notes that the electoral process was competitive across Ukraine, and voters were able to choose from a wide range of parties and candidates. The process of voting and vote tabulation was organized properly. Thus, the legitimacy of the newly elected parliament is already beyond doubt both in Ukraine and abroad.

Thirdly, it should be noted that the head of mission of the European Parliament announced today continued support of Ukraine's European integration aspirations. In particular, on accelerating the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union.

Remarks

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State

Presidency

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

October 30, 2012

Regarding Ukraine, we share the view of the OSCE monitors that Sunday's elections constituted a step backward for Ukrainian democracy. It was a step backward from the parliamentary elections and the 2010 presidential election. And we reiterate our deep concern that the politically motivated convictions of opposition leaders, including former Prime Minister Tymoshenko, prevented them from running and standing in these elections, and we call upon the Government of Ukraine to put an immediate end to the selective prosecution and detention of political opponents.

Like the rest of Europe, the people of Ukraine deserve so much better. They deserve to live in a country with strong democratic institutions, that respects the rule of law, and these elections did not advance those goals. So the United States remains committed to the people of Ukraine. We

want to work with them to strengthen their democracy, sovereignty, and independence of their state, as we have for more than 20 years. And we call upon the leadership to stop the backward slide that Ukraine is in and start, once again, living up to the aspirations of the Ukrainian people, and the United States will stand with them as they do.



Press office

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

Tuesday, 30 October 2012
Press Release (2012) 129



Statement by the Secretary General on Ukraine Parliamentary Elections

I welcome the strong voter turnout in the parliamentary elections.

I have taken note of the concerns expressed by the International Election Observation mission in its preliminary findings regarding the conduct of the parliamentary elections in Ukraine. These preliminary findings outline a mixed picture with several shortcomings, including the lack of a level playing field and that certain aspects of the pre-election period constituted a step backwards compared with recent elections.

Ukraine is an important partner for NATO. An independent, sovereign and stable Ukraine, firmly committed to democracy and the rule of law, is key to Euro-Atlantic security. The Alliance stands ready to further assist Ukraine in its reforms.

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OP-ED: Don't Isolate Ukraine, and Watch Those Neo-Fascists

Oct 30, 2012

By Tim Judah

Bloomberg

Ukraine this week held a deeply flawed election, in which the main opposition leader was jailed and the biggest gains went to a party of neo-fascists, who appear to have won 10 percent of the vote. For a country that eight years ago staged an inspiring uprising to overturn a stolen election, it's hard to imagine a more depressing outcome.

The breakthrough by Svoboda, an extreme-right-wing party from the nation's Ukrainian-speaking west, is just another sign that all is not well in this divided country. Before the Oct. 28 election, Ukraine was already being shut out by the European Union over its democratic failures and pressured by Russia to join a customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan instead. Now neo-fascists will take their seats in parliament.

But here is why Ukraine is so difficult to read and handle, for all of its neighbors. To start with, Svoboda (which translates as Freedom), must be Europe's only neo-fascists who are also pro-EU. Meanwhile, Yulia Tymoshenko, the jailed heroine of the 2004 Orange Revolution, says the EU is wrong to punish Ukraine for her treatment by freezing its association agreement with the bloc. And the supposedly pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich doesn't even want to join Russia's customs union, if he can avoid it.

Widening Fissures

Svoboda's success and Yanukovich's behavior are troubling. But for the EU and the U.S. alike, the priority should be to avoid widening the fissures between the Ukrainian-speaking west and Russian-speaking east, or driving the government into the arms of Vladimir Putin, Russia's President.

Svoboda has cleaned up its act. In 2004 it changed its name from the Social-Nationalist Party

and dropped a Swastika-like emblem. Still, much of its appeal lies in hardcore ethnic-Ukrainian nationalism and a hatred of Poles, Russians, Jews and gays. These have deep roots in Ukraine's history and should give pause.

Svoboda's leaders glorify those Western Ukrainians who welcomed the Nazis in 1941, seeing the Germans as potential liberators from Soviet rule. Those same Ukrainians also collaborated in the widespread murder of Jews and Poles. As in the Baltic states, there is a sharp division here over how to interpret the motives of those who worked with the Nazis and how they should be remembered today.

What the election result shows is a growing risk that disenchanted voters will again mix up Ukrainian nationalism with xenophobia. Svoboda, led by Oleh Tiahnybok, supported the 2004 Orange Revolution. It was later expelled from the group surrounding former president Viktor Yushchenko, when Tiahnybok made a speech saying that Ukraine was ruled by a "Moscow-Jewish mafia." It was not the only speech he made that was loaded with this sort of language.

Tiahnybok has said that while he does not regret using those words, he was misinterpreted. He also says his party is neither xenophobic nor anti-Semitic. In any case, for Svoboda's supporters, Russophobia remains the party's main attraction. All votes have not yet been counted, but the party looks set to win about 33 of the Rada's 450 seats.

On election day, while on a trip to Ukraine organized by the German Marshall Fund, I went to Irpin, a small town outside Kiev. There I met Sergei, a 48-year-old musician, who didn't give his full name because he was at a polling station. He told me he had voted for Svoboda because he wanted "Ukraine to be a powerful country, and if we have to choose between Europe and Russia it is Europe for us. Russia is Asia and I don't trust Asians."

Bedrock Support

The party presents itself as the only one that wants a "Ukraine for Ukrainians," and not for the ethnic Russians who make up 17.3 percent of the population and who live mostly in the east. Ethnic Russians form the bedrock of support for the ruling Party of the Regions, but many more are simply Russian speakers who switch happily between the two Slavic languages, depending on the circumstance.

In July, the Party of the Regions pushed through a controversial language law that, while dressed up as protection for minority languages, was intended to bolster the use of Russian and probably a first step to making it an official state language, along with Ukrainian. Most probably Yanukovich believed this would help garner support in his eastern heartland.

In reality, the status of Russian is not an important issue for most Ukrainians, who can speak it freely. Instead of gaining votes in the east, the net result of the language law probably was to push some nationalist voters -- especially in the west -- into the arms of Svoboda, entrenching the country's historical divisions.

Svoboda activists also have the advantage of being seen as conviction politicians, in a country where there is now a widespread belief that pretty much all of the current establishment leaders are only out for what they can get for themselves. Like fringe parties around Europe in recent years, they have gained from a protest vote.

How important a political role Svoboda will be able to play now that the party is in parliament is unclear. Vitali Klitschko, the reigning champion of the World Boxing Council, who also heads what looks set to become parliament's third largest party, UDAR, says he'll work with Svoboda, but will have nothing to do with its radical nationalist policies. Tymoshenko's Fatherland, which remains the second-largest party, has already signed a cooperation agreement with Svoboda. Many in the Ukrainian opposition believe that time is taming the neo-fascists, and that its leader is on the same course as that taken by Gianfranco Fini, the Italian politician who over a period of years moved to the respectable end of the country's right-wing politics.

Toughest Line

It's the ruling party that's taking the toughest line on Svoboda. Oleg Voloshyn, the foreign ministry spokesman who echoes the views of the Party of the Regions, condemned the opposition "for inviting an openly anti-Semitic party to join them." He says that the party is toning down its extremist language because it does not want to scare off too many voters. Hitler did the same, he said, in his quest for votes in the 1930s.

Svoboda needs to be watched and Yanukovich's anti-democratic behavior needs to be discouraged. But the EU's association process should also be resumed. It's a way to tie Ukraine into the West and its institutions -- however much they are in trouble today -- and that's why Tymoshenko supports it from her cell. Too much is at stake to isolate Ukraine.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-10-31/are-u-s-elections-cleaner-than-ukraine-s-.html>

Are U.S. Elections Cleaner Than Ukraine's?

By Leonid Bershidsky Oct 31, 2012 12:02 PM ET

When U.S. voters head to the polls next week to choose their president, they can take pride in an electoral system far superior to what, for example, Ukrainians experienced in their parliamentary elections last weekend.

Or can they?

True, the Ukrainian government jailed the main opposition leader, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, well ahead of the vote. Lavish state spending helped candidates of the ruling Regions Party win mandates throughout the country's east and south. In many cases, wealthy Ukrainians effectively bought their way into the parliament.

That said, consider the U.S. The two-party system locks out many candidates who could have national appeal. Billionaires, some of whom built their fortunes in part thanks to government subsidies, are lavishing unlimited funds on their favorite candidates through political-action committees.

All told, one wonders whether the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's assessment of the Ukrainian elections could not just as easily apply to the land of the free: "Considering the abuse of power and the excessive role of money in this election, democratic progress appears to have reversed."

For all its flaws, Ukraine's was a bona fide election, an act of high political drama of the kind people in neighboring Russia can eye only wistfully as their country sinks into gray authoritarianism. There were plenty of upsets, notably in the capital, Kiev. Money was not everything: Ten multimillionaires tried and failed to get into the parliament, known as the Supreme Rada. Opposition parties, albeit including one with an abhorrent platform, took a large share of the vote.

With 97 percent of the vote counted by late Tuesday night, President Viktor Yanukovich's Regions Party was on track to win about 200 seats, probably enough to build a ruling coalition with the Communists in the 450-member parliament. The ruling party gained 74 seats with about 30 percent of the national vote. It garnered the rest in single-mandate constituencies, where pro-Yanukovich candidates sometimes hid their affiliation so they could win in opposition strongholds. The result looks like a slight improvement on the 195 seats the Regions Party held in the outgoing parliament.

The ruling party's tactics merited the OSCE's disdain. To help guarantee a parliamentary seat for Alexei Azarov, son of Prime Minister Nikolai Azarov, the Ukrainian government allocated about \$21 million to projects in his Donetsk Region constituency in 2012 and 2013, compared with a paltry \$2 million in 2011, according to the Ukrainian magazine Focus (where I serve as an editorial consultant). Azarov Jr., whose picture was all over the local press and dozens of billboards throughout the district even though he actually lives in Vienna, made it clear that the windfall was his doing. Pragmatic locals quickly recognized on which side their bread was buttered.

Azarov's is probably the most extreme example, though other ruling-party candidates reportedly used the power of their offices or their fat purses to get votes. One observer in the industrial city of Dnepropetrovsk photographed a children's playground decked out in Regions Party colors. Built with city money, it had been touted by a Regions candidate as his contribution to the community. The same candidate provided free WiFi in a local park, requiring users to enter his last name as the password.

Such power plays were universally effective only in the east and south of Ukraine, the ruling party's traditional base. Elsewhere, money and clout didn't always prevail. Two of Ukraine's 100 richest men, retail magnate Igor Balenko and oil tycoon Stepan Ivakhiv, failed to get into parliament. Another eight multimillionaires suffered more or less humiliating defeats. Real-estate developer Vadim Stolar lost in a Kiev district after filling it with his billboards and spending a fortune fixing hallways and potholes.

In a protracted battle in another Kiev constituency, well-connected Oles Dovgi spent months and untold sums on gifts such as food packages and manometers marked with his name. He lost to a little-known candidate representing UDAR, a party led by boxing superstar Vitaly Klichko (the party's name translates as "blow" or "strike").

"To me, this will be the most symbolic victory in this parliamentary election," journalist Mustafa Nayyem wrote on Facebook about Dovgi's defeat. As of this writing, Dovgi was still hoping for a last-minute reversal as votes were counted and recounted. It appeared the result would stand.

The opposition carried Kiev as well as central and western Ukraine. In the national vote, Timoshenko's Batkivshina ("Fatherland") party took second place with 25 percent despite its leader's imprisonment. Boxer Klichko's UDAR won almost 14 percent, better than expected and narrowly beating the Communists. In one of the election's biggest surprises, the ultra-nationalist party Svoboda got into parliament for the first time, with 10 percent of the vote. All the opposition parties fared relatively poorly in single-member constituencies, where it was harder to beat money and power. Yet if they manage to band together, they will be a force to reckon with in the parliament.

Klichko's party, which presents itself as a moderate liberal force and a champion of small and medium business, ran on a pragmatic economic program not too heavy on social promises. Its leader, one of Ukraine's few international celebrities, proved willing to compromise with Batkivshina: Right before the election, the parties made a deal not to compete with one another in several dozen constituencies.

Svoboda leader Oleg Tyagnybok campaigned relentlessly, traveling throughout Ukraine and sleeping in the back of a Toyota Sequoia. His party, which has not been above openly anti-Semitic rhetoric, has vowed to rid Ukraine of Russian influences, ban abortions, crack down on gays and nationalize whole sectors of the Ukrainian economy.

Many of the votes for Svoboda came from people who do not share the party's extreme views. "God forbid they come to power," IT specialist Roman Petrusha wrote in a comment on Facebook. "Yet they will make a good opposition. This is a chance that parliament will not just be a Yanukovich toy. Svoboda's crazy program does not matter: No one will give them the power to implement it."

Many Ukrainians, especially educated city dwellers, are looking for someone -- anyone -- to take on Yanukovich and a regime they see as rampant with corruption and nepotism. "Until we see a prospect of a better life, our life is a fight," wrote public-relations executive Victoria Bondar on Facebook. "It's still better than standing still and adapting like chameleons."

Journalist Olga Kashpor, writing in the magazine Focus, likened the populace's relationship with Yanukovich to one of domestic abuse. "The half of Ukraine that voted for Regions is like the woman whose husband beats her but she won't even hear of divorce," she wrote. "He's family, he brings money home and he doesn't hit too hard -- not hard enough to kill, at least."

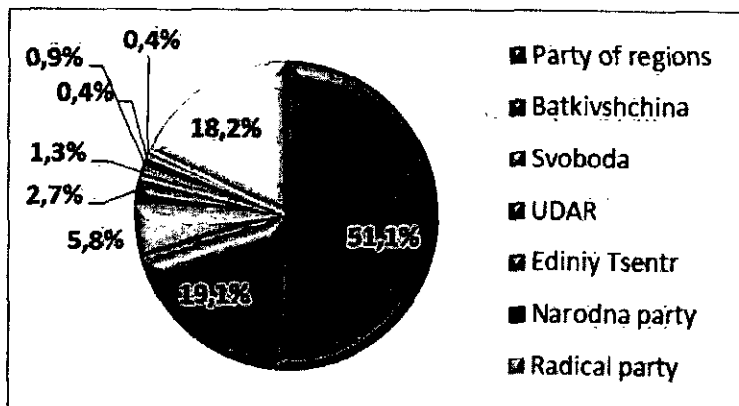
The regime's opponents have gained a foothold in parliament that is only a distant dream for their Russian counterparts -- a position they can exploit to challenge the president at a time when the Ukrainian economy is in shaky condition. The country faces an almost-certain currency devaluation, an increase in bread prices and, next year, a possible debt crisis. The OSCE may yet be surprised at how seriously Ukrainians take their democracy when push comes to shove.

Could U.S. voters show the same fighting spirit if, say, their political system proved too dysfunctional to resolve the problems facing their country? We'll see.



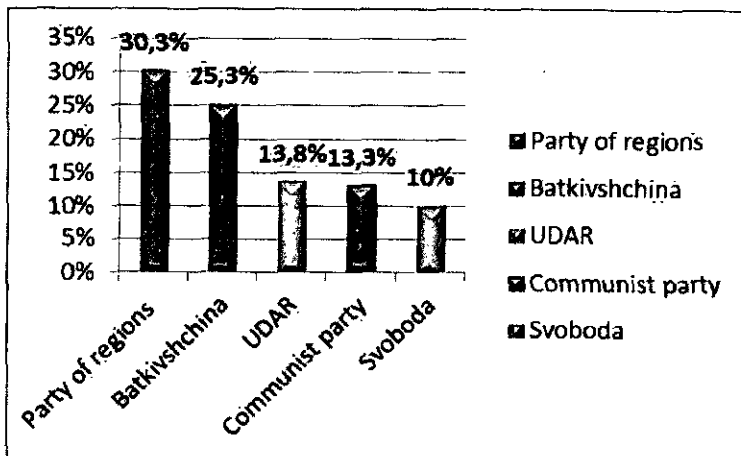
Election Newsflash

Single-mandate constituencies (97.3% counted)



Source: The Central Election Commission of Ukraine; 8:34 am, 31st Oct 2012 (around 97% counted)

Multi-mandate constituencies (97.6% counted)



Source: The Central Election Commission of Ukraine; 8:34 am, 31st Oct 2012 (around 98% counted)

Ukraine Elections Update is published by the European Centre for a Modern Ukraine, a Brussels-based NGO that educates governments, opinion leaders and businesses about advancements in Ukraine in order to build a more prosperous future for the country and a closer relationship with the European Union.

Vote Totals Match Independent Exit Polling, Parallel Vote Tabulations

With around 97 percent of the votes tabulated in Sunday's parliamentary elections, the final totals (see above) correspond with independent exit polling data and the parallel vote tabulations of both parties.

Currently, the ruling Party of Regions (PoR) has garnered 30.32 percent of the vote. Of the five exit polls from Sunday, the Party of Regions scored between 32 percent and 28 percent. According to the parallel vote tabulation from the opposition Batkivshina party, the Party of Regions was expected to secure roughly 30 percent of the vote.

"The data published on the CEC website, in general coincide with those of the exit polls and the data presented by sociologists," Prime Minister Mykola Azarov said. "This is a classic example of free and democratic elections. What kind of fraud can we speak about, if the official data almost completely matched with the exit polls?"

The vast majority of vote tallies from the precincts were counted in a timely way with only protocols from some regions, where the Party of Regions is not as strong, trailing the rest of the country. As those numbers have come in, the PoR's share of the vote has steadily decreased.

Still, the delay has prompted some observers to question the tabulation process. Yesterday, the Interior Ministry issued a statement explaining the isolated cases of delay: problems caused technical issues at the local level, where law enforcement and party representatives are protecting the integrity of vote totals throughout the process.

Additionally, Azarov is asking international observers to provide details of alleged violations – from the vote count or from Election Day.

"Objective assessments are extremely important for us, and we make conclusions from them in order to improve future practice of democratic elections," Azarov said. "We are grateful to the observers for their review and comments. At the same time, when there are claims, I would like to see such claims to be substantive. In some reports, I have not seen any concrete examples of violations. And I would be grateful to the representatives of missions, if they could provide us with such specific examples – in order we could objectively look at them."

European Jewish Group Expresses Concern about Rise of Ultra-Right Party in Sunday's Vote

A European Jewish group has expressed concern about the safety of Jews in Ukraine following the surprise victory of a xenophobic and anti-Semitic party Svoboda in Sunday's parliamentary elections.

The Jewish organization's leader is calling on the government to protect the safety of Jews in Ukraine.

"We are not intending to interfere in internal Ukraine affairs and its voters' decisions, but we are very concerned about the safety of Jews in Ukraine and throughout Europe in light of growing anti-Semitic movements in Europe," Rabbi Menachem Margolin, General Director of the European Jewish Association (EJA), said in a statement.

As a Bloomberg story notes, Svoboda supported the Orange Revolution but was later expelled from the group "when [Svoboda leader Oleh] Tyahnybok made a speech saying that Ukraine was ruled by a 'Moscow-Jewish mafia.' It was not the only speech he made that was loaded with this sort of language."



Yeliseyev: Respect the Choice of Ukrainian Voters

Ukraine's representative to the European Union, Kostiantyn Yeliseyev is encouraging European leaders to embrace the choice made by the Ukrainian people in Sunday's election, and reiterated the call to sign the association agreement with the country.

"Brussels should not ignore the choice of the people of Ukraine in favor of the values of European democracy and accession to the family of European nations," Yeliseyev said in a statement. "It is important to realize that it is the people of Ukraine who won this election, who, despite the shortcomings of the electoral process, made their free political choice, expressing a vote of confidence in Ukraine's course towards European integration," reads the statement.



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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

ELECTION OBSERVATION DELEGATION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE

(28 October 2012)

Report by
Pawel Kowal, Chair of the Delegation

Annexes:

- A. Final programme (including list of participants)
- B. International Election Observation Mission Preliminary findings and conclusions
- C. Declaration of the Chair of the EP Delegation at the Press Conference of the IEOM

Introduction

Following an invitation by Mr Volodymyr Lytvyn, Chairman of the Parliament of Ukraine, the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament authorised, on 6 September 2012, the sending of an enlarged delegation of 15 Members to observe the parliamentary elections in Ukraine on 28 October 2012. The Conference of Presidents also authorised the Bureau of this delegation to travel to Ukraine on a pre-electoral visit ahead of election day, in order to meet relevant interlocutors and prepare the ground for the election observation delegation itself.

At its constitutive meeting on 27 September, the Delegation appointed Mr Pawel Robert KOWAL, Chair of the Delegation; Mr Michael GAHLER, Mr Juan Fernando LÓPEZ AGUILAR and Mrs Rebecca HARMS were appointed Vice-Chairs.

Background

Prior to the elections, the European Union has repeatedly emphasised that these would be an important test of Ukraine's democratic credentials. In the latest resolution of European Parliament of 24 May and in the Final Statement and Recommendations of Nineteenth Meeting of EU-Ukraine PCC the importance of the parliamentary elections for further progress in realtions of Ukraine with the EU was underlined.

Since the 2010 presidential election, the governing coalition formed by the Party of Regions, the Communist Party and the People's Party/Lytvyn Bloc, has enjoyed a clear majority in parliament. These parties competed against opposition parties, primarily the United Opposition-Batkivshchyna (Motherland) and the non-parliamentary parties United Democratic Alliance for Reform (UDAR) and Svoboda (Freedom).

While the 2010 presidential elections were described by the International Election Observation Mission and ODIHR as "meeting most international commitments", the subsequent 2010 local and regional elections were marred by significant irregularities (European Parliament resolution of 25 November 2010 on Ukraine).

Two leading opposition figures, Ms Yulia Tymoshenko and Mr Yuriy Lutsenko, remain in prison banned from running in the elections. The European Parliament has addressed the situation in Ukraine repeatedly¹.

Pre-electoral visit

The pre-electoral visit authorised by the Conference of Presidents took place from 8 to 10 October, with the participation of Mr Pawel Kowal and Mr Michael Gahler. Ms Harms was represented by a member of staff from her political group.

¹ European Parliament resolution of 24 May 2012 and European Parliament resolutions of 9 June 2011, 27 October 2011 and 1 December 2011.

The Bureau of the EP Election Observation Delegation met the EU Head of Mission in Kyiv, Mr Jan Tombinski, Dame Audrey Glover (Head of the long-term ODIHR mission) and her core team; Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine Mr Olefirov; the Central Electoral Commission; OPORA and CVU domestic observers; and representatives of political parties (Party of Regions, Batkivshchyna (Fatherland), UDAR, Ukraine Forward (Natalia Korolevska) and Svoboda. The Bureau also met with the head of the OSCE PA election mission, Ms. Walburga Habsburg Douglas.

The Bureau of the EP Election Observation Delegation noted stakeholder's concern around several issues:

- The implementation of the new electoral law: The new law for parliamentary elections was adopted in November 2011 by a broad majority in the Parliament of Ukraine, after abandoning the project to follow-up ODIHR's recommendation for a new electoral code. According to the ODIHR long-term mission and other sources, some important issues remain unaddressed and political will is essential to ensure effective implementation. The law returns to a mixed electoral system which existed before 2006, bans electoral blocks and raises to 5% the threshold to enter parliament.
- Central Electoral Commission's capacity to act: while recognising the intents by the CEC to act in a professional manner, ODIHR confirmed its lack of transparency (closed doors meetings) and the procedure followed to nominate members of the District Electoral Commissions (DEC) and the Precinct Election Commissions (PEC). Most positions in electoral commissions (at the district level and at polling stations level) were filled by a single lottery instead of a prior practice to hold a lottery for each DEC, as a result of which some technical parties obtained representation in all DEC's while other parties with candidates throughout the country were not represented at district level at all. Almost half of PEC and 60 per cent of DEC members were subsequently replaced.
- The opposition denounced that the participation of "technical parties" ("fake" parties created only to gain representation at the electoral commissions) gave all opportunities for forged results.
- Opposition parties denounce that some candidates have been pressured to withdraw, including by means of tax inspections, prosecution on old criminal charges and threats.
- Lack of a level playing field, pressures on freedom of press and absence of political pluralism in media; lack of enforcement of provisions on campaign financing; abuse of administrative resources.

Imprisonment of former government members and opposition leaders that the EP resolution describes as selective justice comes on top of all these framework conditions.

The Bureau of the EP Election Observation Delegation verified during its pre-election visit, the low level of trust among electoral participants and with regard to the electoral administration itself. The election campaign evolved against a background of intense polarization among political actors and reports of violations of the electoral rules.

The OSCE/ODIHR long-term Election Observation Mission conducted media monitoring from 16 September until the start of the electoral silence on 27 October. The long-term mission also followed up closely the response and remedies provided by competent bodies and law enforcement bodies.

Election Observation

The European Parliament Election Observation Delegation (EP EOD) was composed of fifteen Members, nominated by the political groups of the EP:

Mr Pawel Robert KOWAL (Chair), ECR, Poland
Mr Michael GAHLER (Vice-Chair), EPP, Germany
Mr Juan Fernando LÓPEZ AGUILAR (Vice-Chair), S&D, Spain
Ms Rebecca HARMS (Vice-Chair), Verts/ALE, Germany
Ms Anna Maria CORAZZA BILDT, EPP, Sweden
Mr Andrzej GRZYB, EPP, Poland
Mr Joachim ZELLER, EPP, Germany
Mr Jan KOZLOWSKI, EPP, Poland
Mr Jacek PROTASIEWICZ, EPP, Poland
Mr Mário DAVID, EPP, Portugal
Mr Norbert NEUSER, S&D, Germany
Mr Marek SIWIEC, S&D, Poland
Mr Kristian VIGENIN, S&D, Bulgaria
Mr Marek Henryk MIGALSKI, ECR, Poland
Mr Adrian SEVERIN, NI, Romania

The European Parliament Delegations perform election observation in accordance with the Declaration of Principles of International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for international election observers. Members of the EP Delegation signed the Code of Conduct for Members of the European Parliament Election Observation Delegations, in conformity with the decision of the Conference of Presidents of 10 December 2009.

The Delegation conducted its activities in Ukraine from 26 to 29 October and was integrated within the framework of the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), with OSCE/ODIHR in charge of the long-term observation mission. The EP Delegation cooperated closely with the OSCE/Parliamentary Assembly Delegation headed by Ms. Walburga Habsburg Douglas, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe headed by Mr Andreas Gross, the Delegation of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, headed by Mr Assen Agov and the OSCE/ODIHR mission headed by Dame Audrey Glover.

Program

Before election day, the parliamentary delegations integrated in the framework of the IEOM were extensively briefed by experts from the OSCE/ODIHR mission. Presentations were made on the political environment, the campaign activities, the media landscape and the legal framework of the parliamentary elections. The joint programme also included a series of meetings with media representatives, NGOs and the electoral administration.

The EP Election Observation Delegation also held bilateral meetings with the Chairs of main parties and with the CEC

Election day

On election day, the EP delegation was deployed in Kyiv, Lviv, Dubno, Odessa and Dnipropetrovsk (and around these cities) All teams visited a significant number of polling stations from opening to the closure and the counting process and not encountered difficulties in observation.

Overall, the EP delegation observed a peaceful E-day even if rumors about carousels and other violations of the law were widely spread, most of them related to the majoritarian part of the election. Teams that followed the counting process noted the cumbersome procedures.

The International Election Observation Mission also concluded the voting and counting process on election day was orderly and well organized in the large majority of polling stations observed, with only minor procedural problems noted. However, the unusually high number of homebound voters in some election districts raised concerns. Following the received information from long term observers the tabulation process was assessed negatively in one third of DEC's observed, mainly due to problems with PEC protocols and limited transparency. The active involvement of a large number of domestic observers throughout the entire electoral process enhanced its overall transparency during the election day.

Press conference of the International Election Observation Mission

As usual, the statement of preliminary findings and conclusions was shared between the OSCE/ODIHR mission and the four parliamentary delegations. All the stakeholders of the IEOM shared a common assessment of the pre-electoral period and their findings concerning election day were also in line with one another.

The press conference took place on 29 October and attracted high media attention. Substantial shortcomings led the IEOM to conclude that 'certain aspects of the pre-electoral period constituted a step backwards compared with recent national elections'. The main areas of concern outlined by the IOEM include:

- Lack of transparency of campaign and party financing, which is problem of systematic character and concerns all political parties.
- The new electoral law, adopted in November 2011, reinstated a mixed electoral system without the required wide consensual discussion and re-introduced deficiencies that were noted when it was previously used. The law includes some important improvements, in particular with regard to voter and candidate registration although it also contains a number of shortcomings, mainly regarding the full enjoyment of candidacy rights, adequate campaign finance provisions, absence of clear criteria for the delimitation of single-mandate election districts, and lack of effective sanctions for serious violations of the law.
- Candidate registration was inclusive, even though over 400 nominees were rejected, almost half for minor technical problems and 2 opposition leaders (Tymoshenko and Lutsenko) were denied registration.
- Abuse of administrative resources and cases of 'harassment' and 'intimidation' of candidates.

- Lack of balanced media coverage due to limited diversity in media ownership and pluralism and the need for considerable resources to reach out to voters via TV (five times more paid political advertising compared to standard reporting) and also due to broadcasting restrictions imposed on independent TVi.
- Lack of transparency (mentioned in interim report) in the decision-making process of the Central Election Commission (CEC) due to closed pre-session meetings. There were claims, some of which were verified by the OSCE/ODIHR EOM, that election commissioners nominated by technical parties were, in fact, affiliated with other parties, especially the ruling Party of Regions. The CEC did not always take steps to ensure a consistent implementation of the electoral law.
- Vote buying and indirect vote bribery (providing material goods or services), issues that were not addressed by the CEC.
- Lack of transparency during the tabulation process.

The assessment is subject to further careful observation of the post-electoral phase: Tabulation of results and complaints and appeals procedures are still ongoing at the time of writing.

Results

The Central Electoral Committee announced on 29.10.12 that turnout had reached 58% (compared to 62% in 2007). It has been assessed as 'high' by most international observers who highlighted the Ukrainians' interest in the electoral process.

The following results, for the proportional part of the election, are to be confirmed, they are based on the preliminary counting of 96.2% of ballots as of 31.10.12. Indeed, due in part to the complexity of the mixed electoral system and the fact that complaints are yet to be addressed, the final results will be established till 12th November and announced till 17th November.

Summary of the 28 October 2012 <u>Verkhovna Rada</u> election results							
(preliminary result with 96.20% of the ballots counted)							
Parties	List votes	%	Swing %	Seats (proportional representation)	Seats (constituencies)	Seats (total)	Change (2007)
Party of Regions	5,944,238	30.50	▼3.87	74	117	191	▲16
All-Ukrainian Union "Fatherland" (incl. United Opposition)	4,905,656	25.17	▼5.54	61	42	103	▼53
UDAR (Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform)	2,682,779	13.76	<i>New party</i>	33	6	39	<i>New party</i>
Communist Party of Ukraine	2,609,345	13.39	▲8.00	32	—	32	▲5
All-Ukrainian Union "Freedom"	1,993,381	10.23	▲9.47	25	10	35	▲35
Independents	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	—	43	43	▲43
Total (turnout 57.98%)			▼4.04	225	225	450	—

The Parties United Centre, People's Party and Union, not participating in the election for proportional representation, obtained 6 seats in the "majoritarian" election.

Preliminary conclusions

In general the pre-election period was assessed negatively, because of a number of shortcomings in the new electoral law and lack of a level of playing field. The process of voting and counting of votes on the election day has been assessed as relatively positive. There have been many negative comments concerning the tabulation process, which has not been completed yet. The criticism focuses on tabulation in some single-mandate districts, in contrast to proportional districts, where tabulation is assessed rather positively.

The widespread presence of representatives from different political parties and individual candidates in the election commissions can be read as a sign of high social involvement in the election process.

The high election turnout shows a clear commitment on the part of Ukrainian society to belong to the family of European democracies. It must be underlined that Ukrainian people

having possibility to choose gave strong support to the parties which support integration with the EU.

The OSCE/ODIHR long term mission will remain in the country until the end of the election process and will issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for improvements, some eight weeks after the completion of the election process.

The European Parliament Election Observation Delegation recommends that the Election Coordination Group, the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee follow-up closely the conclusions and recommendations of this final report and reaction of Ukrainian side.

Debrief by Pawel Kowal on the Election observation mission to the parliamentary elections in Ukraine on 28 October 2012

6 November 2012

18.00 – 18.50

**Committee on Foreign Affairs
(AFET)**

Summary: according to the speaker, an unusually large mission was sent to Ukraine, led by MEP Kowal (head of the EP delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC). The elections were characterized by a lack of level playing field, a lack of transparency, a lack of balanced media coverage and an abuse of administrative resources. While the official results are still not ready, it appears that 5 single-seat constituencies will see re-elections.

MEP Kowal (ECR) – opened by stating that 15 MEPs were sent to Ukraine on mission, ahead of the 28 October parliamentary elections. The preparation period allowed for communication with the representatives of many political parties and organisations, as well as Ambassador Tombinski and the head of the long-term OSCE/ODIHR mission, Audrey Glover. The mission reported to the AFET committee and participated in a joint-seminar ahead of the elections. **CONCLUSIONS** – the new election law (2011), accepted by both ruling and opposition parties, introduced a mixed voting system, which failed to function at the level of legislation and implementation. There was a lack of clarity at the level of commissions. Fictitious parties participated in election committee work, while parties like UDAR and Svoboda were not included in such committees. A lack of pluralism in the media, especially in terms of information programs, was also problematic (the EP mission drew attention to this in advance, that it might be a danger).

MEP observers signed the code of conduct and the general level of cooperation was very good, including the Council of Europe (CoE), OSCE/ODIHR and NATO, allowing the EP's voice to be heard clearly.

Ukraine has European aspirations – that is why the EU must treat the country with a rigorous standard – especially as it will lead the OSCE in the near future.

The joint report, published the day after the elections with Mrs. Habsburg Douglas, should be considered.

In terms of election day, the EP mission was present in many locations. The voter turnout was lower than in 2007, but still higher than in some parts of the EU. A large number of observers were present. Election day itself was free and transparent.

In terms of electoral law, there were many shortcomings, leading to negative outcomes. Ahead of the elections, candidates did not have a level playing field.

In terms of the decisions of courts, two key opposition figures were denied participation in the election process, Tymoshenko and Lutsenko.

In terms of vote counting, the full results are still missing and should be finished as quickly as possible. *In terms of proportional voting*, the numbers (final results) correspond with exit polls and other publications in advance of the elections. *In terms of first-past-the-post system*, problems occurred. Votes were purchased (a crime under Ukrainian Law). *In assessing the elections*, all parts of the process must be considered.

In comparison to other post-Soviet states, Ukrainians are able to make choices. However, these elections should be compared with past elections, for example in 2007 and 2010, and Ukrainians should be reminded that these elections are no better than in the past.

In terms of the proposal to repeat elections in 5 constituencies, this issue needs to be sorted out under Ukrainian Law. Robust solutions are needed and must be explained by courts.

Finally, there must be discussion about changes to future electoral code.

MEP Gahler (EPP) – thanked MEP Kowal for his leadership during the EP mission.

In terms of the overall election process, election day went very well, while issues surrounding voting lists, constituencies and vote counting, are worthy of more criticism.

The MEP stated that while elections can be held in a free and fair way, *IF THE POLITICAL WILL is present*, this was not present in Ukraine. He said that the EU should continue cooperating with Ukraine and assisting them. The alternative of excessive criticism – pushing Ukraine towards Russia – is not the answer. Ukraine must be forced to 'come up to the EU level' and meet EU values.

Finally, he stated that *the EU should carry on implementing its standards and applying the same criteria applied by the OSCE* and others, while assisting Ukraine into the future. A good will and the honesty of implementation is necessary for the future.

MEP Severin (NIJ) – stated that the shortcomings should be addressed in a rational and constructive way, without radicalizing the opposition. The EU must not hold back from using the instruments and resources for harmonising the political cultures of the EU and Ukraine. Geopolitical goals should be kept in mind as well, and the EU must not push Ukraine away from its geopolitical interests.

Mrs. A. Corazza Bildt (EPP) – said that the counting was assessed the day after the elections, but unfortunately a deterioration of the counting process cannot be assessed as positively as election day itself. She suggested that the EP continue to be united in supporting Ukraine, but should not allow its support to be misused. In addition, it is important to separate the election situation with the long-term strategy for Ukraine. An impartial mission based on international standards must be kept in mind. Democracy is not 'a la carte' and a joint position must be reached.

MEP Neuser (S&D Group) – stated that *small steps of cooperation are key*. Reform is still needed in Ukraine. *In terms of future relations with Ukraine*, the EU may have to 'lower the bar' regarding its expectations. Better administrative structures are necessary, but Ukraine is doing well in some areas, i.e. visa liberalization. The first stage of the Action plan could be agreed upon within the next few months, and the Energy Community should be focused on, as well as the Eastern Partnership. *Finally*, the situation with Tymoshenko and Lutsenko should be dealt with separately.

MEP Sijwec (S&D Group) – stated that the mission was difficult. The 'technology' of the elections was far from perfect (as well as the election campaign), but Ukrainians had a choice and selected 5 parties to represent them. The product of this technology is not perfect, but it will work. The question is: does the EU 'buy' this product, despite its shortcomings? We should cooperate with Ukraine. (He also noted that the election was a type of referendum on the Tymoshenko situation.)

MEP Tannock – stated his support for the Kowal report and noted that a collective 50% result for all opposition parties will allow for a challenging of President Yanukovich. The MEP asked whether a recount would require another EP election mission.

MEP Protasiewicz (EPP) – stated that the situation in Ukraine is unclear, with the opposition first going against the results and next negotiating new ideas.

Conclusion: In closing, MEP Kowal – stated that the role of the EP mission in the future will be considered, as it continues to work with the bureau of the parliament.

[feedback note prepared by Andy Edgel, 6 November 2012]

UNEVEN CAMPAIGN PLAYING FIELD CAUSES UKRAINE ELECTIONS TO FALL SHORT

October 29, 2012

[Read release in Ukrainian \(PDF\)](#)

Kolbe (right) talks to a polling station chairman (middle) at a station in Kyiv.

Kyiv, Ukraine – While overall Ukraine's October 28 parliamentary elections were administered in an orderly manner, Ukraine continues to fall short in ensuring voters a campaign in which candidates have an equal opportunity to be heard and they can be confident that their individual votes count. Despite the efforts of polling officials and voters who turned out to cast their ballots, after more than 20 years of independence, Ukraine still faces significant obstacles to its democratic development.

"A country that imprisons its political opponents, removes independent television from the air and harasses civil society is not an example of a country progressing in its democratic development," said Congressman David Dreier, who has led election observation teams throughout the world. "This is a message I heard throughout the day and is most disheartening to many Ukrainians, who want a better life and a better government but had months ago lost hope that these elections would bring about the change they have so eagerly hoped for."

[Click here to view more photos from Ukraine's parliamentary elections.](#)

IRI delegation co-leader former Congressman Jim Kolbe also noted that, "While there didn't appear to be systemic violations on Election Day, there are a number of issues that we are concerned about. The most significant issue is the **Central Election Commission's [CEC]** refusal to release results at the polling station level to ensure official results from the CEC can be compared with what was recorded during the count. This is a critical component of transparency in any democratically conducted election and I urge the CEC to reconsider its decision and release the results in this manner."

Dreier (left) looks at the video footage being broadcast from the polling station.

IRI delegation observed more than 160 polling stations on Election Day, the second step in a process that also includes the campaign period, ballot counting, adjudication of complaints and acceptance of results. While observers did report some irregularities they did not report incidents that were systemic election abuses.

However, during the campaign period significant problems combined to create a very uneven playing field that made it difficult for the opposition to compete. These included the following:

The Law on Parliamentary Elections, which was adopted on November 17, 2011, and established a mixed electoral system – half of the deputies being elected under a closed-list proportional system and the other half selected through individual mandates in a majoritarian system – was a return to the system last used in 2002 when international observers reported significant fraud. While several countries in the region have successfully instituted similar electoral systems, the Venice Commission strongly criticized the law for over-politicizing the electoral process. In addition, this is the fourth election system utilized by Ukraine since independence, and was implemented to maximize a political advantage for the ruling party.

The government increased pressure on independent media. The independent television station ATN was closed in September 2011 and in April 2012, the tax authorities, a body increasingly used as a tool of government to exert pressure on the media, began to target TVi and this past summer opened a criminal case against the station's owner.

The Ukrainian government has also started to more closely monitor and regulate activities of domestic civil society organizations. Tax authorities have targeted independent civil society organizations with criminal cases and in one case the Association of Ukrainian Banks came under pressure from the tax authorities to cease its work.

Political parties and candidates have suffered intimidation and investigation by tax authorities and security forces that reduced their ability to compete in the elections.

Key opposition figures – including Yulia Tymoshenko, former Prime Minister and head of the united opposition – were prevented from participating in the elections, due to their incarceration stemming from politically motivated charges against them for acts undertaken by the previous administration.

A woman casts her ballot.

The lottery system – outlined in the November 2011 election law – meant the composition of election commissions was uneven, and major parties were at times excluded from membership in polling stations commissions. IRI observers also noted what appeared to be pseudo parties that may have been created with the sole purpose of allowing the ruling party to dominate membership of commissions. As a result, the composition of precinct election commissions suffered from a lack of representation of legitimate political parties competing in these elections.

Today, the CEC indicated that it would not release election results by polling station protocol totals. This is a major failure in the administration of elections and the lack of transparency will undermine public confidence in the electoral process.

Ukraine had made good progress in the administration of elections and ensuring a level playing field in its most recent presidential election and the last two parliamentary elections. The problems in the campaign period and on Election Day are particularly troubling, as they indicate that Ukraine has not progressed in the way that it should

and has not advanced as far as other former Soviet Republics, including Georgia, which just saw its first peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected government to another.

IRI delegates from Cyprus, Lithuania and the United States observed voting and ballot counting at polling stations in Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Crimea, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lutsk, Lviv, Mykolayev, Odesa and Zhytomyr.

IRI's delegation was led by U.S. Congressman David Dreier (CA-26) and Jim Kolbe former U.S. Congressman (AZ-8) and a Senior Transatlantic Fellow for the **German Marshall Fund of the United States**, both of whom serve on IRI's Board of Directors. Other delegates were:

Ballots being counted. Rina Amiri, former Senior Advisor on Afghanistan for the Office of the Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan at the U.S. State Department;

Gahl Hodges Burt, Vice Chairman of the American Academy in Berlin and a member of IRI's Board of Directors;

Nadia Diuk, Vice President of Programs for Africa, Europe, Eurasia, Latin America and the Caribbean at the National Endowment for Democracy;

Rich Galen, political consultant;

Mindaugas Jurkynas of Lithuania, Associate Professor at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University;

Michael V. Kostiw, former Republican Staff Director of the Senate Committee on Armed Services and a member of IRI's Board of Directors;

Constance Berry Newman, member of IRI's Board of Directors, former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and former U.S. Agency for International Development Assistant Administrator for Africa;

Bill R. Phillips, former Deputy Mayor of Nashville, Tennessee;

Kostas Sasmatzoglou of Cyprus, Spokesman and Head of the Press and Communication Department of the European People's Party; and

Brad Smith, Chief of Staff to U.S. Congressman David Dreier.

IRI staff also served as observers and assisted in the mission. IRI staff were led by **Judy Van Rest, Executive Vice President of IRI, and Stephen B. Nix, Regional Director of IRI's Eurasia division.**

Prior to the election, delegates were briefed by representatives from the U.S. Embassy, political party representatives and Ukrainian election officials. They were also briefed on the rights and responsibilities of international observers and Ukrainian election law.

Since 1983, IRI has monitored more than 150 elections in more than 46 countries, including Ukraine's 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2007 parliamentary elections and the

1999, 2004 and 2010 presidential elections.

###

**Statement of the EAEO Observation Mission in Ukraine
(Parliamentary elections, Sunday, 28 October 2012)**

"Ukraine's parliamentary elections broadly in line with democratic standards, according to international observers"

As members of the official delegation of the *European Academy for Elections Observation*, 56 parliamentarians and experts from 14 European countries, observed the October 28th Elections.

Some 36 members of the delegation are serving MPs or Senators, with a further 10 former members of parliament. Many of our observers have significant experience of elections observation as members and former members of organizations such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, the OSCE-Parliamentary Assembly, the NATO-Assembly, and the WEU-Assembly.

Some 28 of our observers were members of the European People's Party (EPP), 6 from the Socialist Group (SOC), 6 from Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), 4 from the European Democrat Group (EDG), 4 from Unified European Left Group (UEL), and 8 technical experts.

Most international observers arrived last week. Therefore we cannot comment on the campaign prior to the elections. On election day, observers were deployed in 28 constituencies, observing election and counting proceedings in more than 300 polling stations in Kiev City, Kiev Region, Odessa, Lvov, Dnepropetrovsk, Lugansk, Poltava, Vinnitsa and Khmel'nitsky.

The country was calm during election day, with only isolated instances of minor technical organizational problems. In some instances we observed overcrowded polling stations, which reflects genuine interest of the voters, but also indicates that in future elections this technical issue should be tackled. No systemic abuses were reported.

Access to the polling stations was free and without limitations. However, access for older and disabled people was sometimes too difficult. It is encouraging to note that so many local observers were present in all polling stations.

There were no significant problems with the identification of voters, suggesting that the work of the Central Election Commission had strengthened the voter

files. There were enough ballots and the vote was secret.

We welcome the presence of webcams allowing online real-time monitoring of the elections in almost all polling stations, and archived footage of the vote counts.

The PECs appeared to be properly staffed and the volunteers well-trained.

The voting procedures were carried out in a professional and well organized manner, helping to make these elections broadly in line with international standards. Therefore we can qualify proceedings on election day as free and fair.

The vote counts we witnessed were open and transparent, with opposition party members and election observers given correct access and oversight.

The implementation of the new Electoral Reform Law voted by the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) was an encouraging sign, especially since it was approved by both opposition and government members of parliament. We encourage the country to continue to strengthen democratic institutions on the European model, through constructive dialogue between the opposition and the ruling parties, and to further comply with OSCE and Council of Europe resolutions and commitments, in close cooperation with the Venice Commission.

Resuming, from our standpoint, this election qualifies as a good election, not perfect but clearly acceptable and broadly in line with international standards.

- Thierry MARIANI, MP, France, Head of the E.A.E.O. Observation Mission

Statement approved unanimously by all present participants of the E.A.E.O.-mission on Sunday October 28th at 23.30h in Kyiv.

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Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kostyantyn Gryshchenko: Elections underlined Ukraine's commitment to democracy and the West

BY UKRAINIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KOSTYANTYN GRYSHCENKO - 11/27/12 03:00 PM EST

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KIEV — Ukraine just completed parliamentary elections that, while imperfect, were credible, free and competitive. They fully reflected the will of the Ukrainian people.

Now Ukraine's parliament must work to further our democracy and usher in needed reforms — work that will include listening to voices that are critical of our political progress.

Those voices haven't been shy.

On the eve of our Oct. 28 national parliamentary elections, a number of world leaders made statements questioning the health of Ukraine's democracy. As soon as the polls had closed, and in the days afterward, more concerns were voiced.

But let me offer a few facts that suggest the dire predictions about our elections were premature and overly negative.

First, an important facet of any democracy is openness, and Ukraine actually asked for international scrutiny. The government invited in election observers, and by Election Day, there were nearly 4,000 on the ground, in addition to tens of thousands of domestic observers. No matter how one ultimately felt about the campaign and how it was waged, one cannot suggest that Ukraine shrank from tough, honest scrutiny.

Meanwhile, voters and members of Ukrainian political parties could file complaints against perceived election abuses, and international election assessments found that the authorities processed those complaints in a timely way. Cases were often won by the complainants.

Second, everyone agrees that we had a calm and orderly Election Day. The voting process and vote counting were well-organized with only minor problems, and was "assessed positively" by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in no fewer than 96 percent of the polling stations it observed. And the 34,000 webcams installed in our precincts showed no systemic violations.

Results from 90 percent of precincts were reported within 24 hours. Importantly, the proportional vote results announced for the national parties corresponded directly with pre-election and exit-polling data, as well as the parallel vote tabulation done by the opposition. Save for a handful of districts that will see a re-vote, we can say with certainty that the choice a citizen made in the voting booth was the choice that was recorded.

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Finally, election assessments have concluded that the contest was competitive. Monitoring of TV news reports in the immediate run-up to the vote showed that opposition parties received more than 65 percent of the coverage, though concerns have been expressed about a dearth of reporting over the entirety of the election period. Print media coverage of the government was often highly critical, and our Internet and social media has remained uncensored and among the freest in the world.

The election's results reflected an electorate that had real choices in front of it. The opposition parties were elected to over 40 percent of the national party list seats and will be well-represented in the new parliament.

All this is not to suggest that the parliamentary elections were flawless. No election is. The problems that have been uncovered in five of the first-past-the-post districts, for example, are unacceptable, and the results are being thrown out. Still, we're talking about roughly 10,000 votes out of 21 million cast.

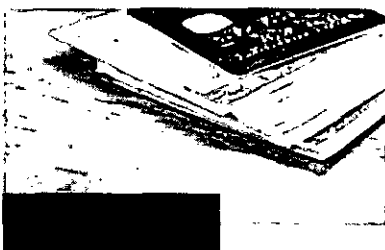
This government is prepared and willing to respond to constructive criticism, and as a young democracy, we recognize that there's more work to do to strengthen the entirety of the election process. But I absolutely believe, alongside many international observers who saw the vote firsthand, that the reality turned out to be much better than some of the negative predictions.

Election by election, Ukraine is becoming a more serious democracy; its institutions are growing stronger. That trajectory is clear.

We are a strong partner for the United States and Europe, with a clear commitment to the NATO partnership and a desire to become a full member of the European Union.

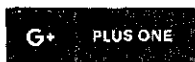
That's not going to change.

Kostyantyn Gryshchenko is foreign minister of Ukraine.



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Special envoy Aleksander Kwasniewski: Ukraine's geopo value to Europe and the United States

BY SPECIAL ENVOY ALEKSANDER KWASNIEWSKI - 03/04/13 02:00 PM EST

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On the one hand, and significantly, Ukraine agreed at a European Union summit held just a week ago in Brussels that it wants to deepen trade and political ties. Ukraine is already a strong partner of NATO and has contributed troops and military personnel to missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa.

On the other hand, Ukraine is facing serious economic challenges as it liberalizes and reforms, none greater than the cost of buying gas from Russia, where it is locked into a 10-year deal that features the highest prices of any European buyer.

Together with Pat Cox, former president of the European Parliament, as a special envoy for European Parliament, I am trying to find common ground and compromises in the Tymoshenko case, and to push for progress on judicial reforms that will bring Ukraine more in line with values shared by the U.S. and EU, including changes that provide important new rights to defendants and measures to strengthen the impartiality of the judiciary.

My message here in Washington and in Europe is that the West needs Ukraine, and Ukraine needs the West — in economic, political and military terms.

Against the backdrop of a resurgent Russia and Moscow's efforts to reconstruct at least the spirit of a superpower through the fledgling Customs Union, Ukraine is of great geopolitical importance to Europe.

Although not a member, it is a de facto part of the security umbrella provided by NATO.

In fact, if managed carefully, relations between Europe and Ukraine can benefit the West on areas as wide-ranging as defense and energy security.

Ukraine is a critically important energy transit route for Russian gas to much of Europe. It also has its own as-yet-undeveloped shale gas reserves, which Chevron and Shell are beginning to explore.

In fact, Ukraine is in a crucial phase in its development as a post-Soviet democracy, a partner of NATO, and a market for U.S. and European trade and investment.

As such, Ukraine can be a source of stability and security in the region, a non-NATO nation that nevertheless cooperates with NATO and provides a counterweight to growing Russian regional power. It represents an enormous opportunity for Europe's security that should not be squandered.

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Ukraine is a natural buffer with Russia, and its willingness to work with NATO not only helps enhance NATO's security umbrella over the continent but also reassures Russia that NATO's expansion does not threaten Moscow. Its ability to act as a bridge between Russia and the European Union also enables cooperation between the two, especially in areas where their interests overlap.

Cooperation between NATO and Ukraine therefore makes the balance of peace in the area easier to maintain.

At the same time, we must understand that Ukraine has deep traditional and historical ties with its neighbor. For it to prosper, for this nation of 47 million to reach its potential, it must maintain a productive, mutually beneficial relationship with Russia.

To be clear, Ukraine is not without its faults. The judicial and legal systems are in need of much reform in order to come into line with Western norms. The electoral system, while showing improvement as a result of bipartisan reform, still needs further changes. As a special envoy to Ukraine for the European Parliament, I am deeply aware of these shortcomings and committed to helping Kyiv overcome them. That includes finding a positive resolution to the detentions of Tymoshenko and former Minister Yuri Lutsenko.

Yet for all of that, Ukraine's importance is undeniable. We should make sure Ukraine enjoys deeper European integration and cooperation with the United States and Europe on energy security and defense. It should be a priority shared on both sides of the Atlantic.

The author is the former president of Poland and a special envoy to Ukraine for the European Parliament.



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ALEKSANDER KWAŚNIEWSKI

***** PRESIDENT OF EUROPE *****

March 4, 2013

The Honorable Eliot Engel
2161 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman,

I am truly sorry that I was unable to see you during my visit to the United States last week. My flight originating from a connecting city was cancelled in Europe and it delayed my trip until the following day.

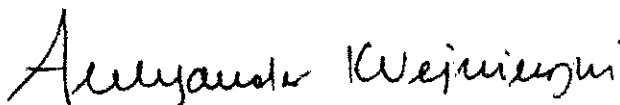
My intent was to raise and discuss important issues regarding the future of the European Union, among others, and the current situation in Ukraine where I currently serve as a special envoy on behalf of the European Parliament.

Recently, the EU and Ukraine held a successful summit in which the parties affirmed their commitments to the integration of Ukraine into the EU. We are expecting Ukraine to meet the final criteria discussed at the Summit, which is necessary to finalize the signing of the Association Agreement later this year. We see no reason why this should not occur as scheduled.

This is an important time for the EU and Ukraine, and it will also impact the United States. The country is under considerable pressure from neighboring Russia, largely driven by the high gas prices levied against Ukraine. There is no doubt that Ukraine should align with the EU and my efforts as co-chair of European Parliament monitoring mission on Human Rights cases - Yulia Tymoshenko and Yuriy Lutsenko, will work to ensure the successful inclusion of Ukraine as one of our neighbors.

It is my sincere hope that we will be able to meet during my next visit to the United States within the next few months so we may discuss these and other important matters. I look forward to seeing you on my next visit.

Sincerely,



ALEKSANDER KWAŚNIEWSKI

***** PRESIDENT RE 1013 2013 *****

March 4, 2013

**The Honorable Ed Royce
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515**

Dear Congressman,

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Aleksander Kwasniewski

ALEKSANDER KWAŚNIEWSKI

PREZYDENT RP 1995-2005

March 4, 2013

**The Honorable Dana Rohrabacher
2300 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515**

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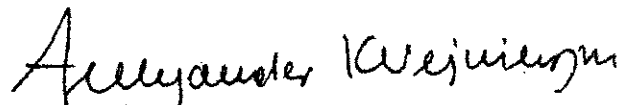
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ALEKSANDER KWAŚNIEWSKI

~~***** POLY JUNE 1995 - 2005 *****~~

March 4, 2013

**The Honorable Christopher Murphy
SD-B40A Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510**

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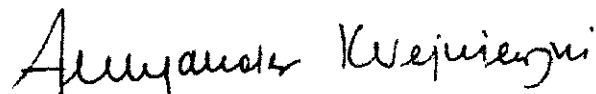
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ALEKSANDER KWAŚNIEWSKI

~~PRESIDENT OF POLAND 2005~~

March 4, 2013

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Principal Deputy National Security Advisor
Office of the White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20500**

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The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

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EU should welcome Ukraine as a partner for Europe's own good

Ukraine is important to Europe as a source of economic growth and energy security, as well as a bridge to Russia. Western interests and values are best served by engaging Ukraine as a solid European partner.

By Romano Prodi | APRIL 2, 2013

Bologna, Italy

For all the troubling news from Europe – economic uncertainty and political instability – conditions were much more threatening after World War II. During that anxious era, the United States and other Western democracies responded not by pulling back but by reaching out to former adversaries and vulnerable allies with economic assistance and international alliances that contributed to stable democracies, prosperous economies, and a lasting peace.

Now, the Western nations have the opportunity to make another pragmatic and courageous decision in the tradition of the policies that provided for postwar peace and prosperity. Ukrainian leaders recently concluded talks with the European Union about moving forward toward an EU Association Agreement (a treaty between an EU and non-EU country). The agreement would expand trade and travel and pave the way for closer Ukrainian integration with the EU.

Having overseen the addition of eight Central and Eastern European nations in 2004 – the largest single enlargement of the EU – I remember that at the time some expressed concerns about these countries on the basis of their post-Soviet legal regimes, their economies, and their cultures. Some of these recently admitted EU members were in a worse position than Ukraine is in now.

Yet today these nations, including former Soviet bloc countries, are vital and well-established members of the EU. Especially during difficult economic times, some EU members may be tempted by authoritarianism. For instance, Hungary has adopted a constitution and additional laws that endanger the free press and the independent judiciary. But EU membership serves to restrain anti-democratic impulses.



Vitali Klitschko, chair of Ukraine's opposition party Udar, attends a rally in front of the parliament building in Kiev April 2. Several thousand demonstrators rallied to demand a mayoral election and to complain that the city was slow to clean up after last month's blizzard. Op-ed contributor Romano Prodi, Italy's former prime minister, writes: 'A partnership with Ukraine offers the EU new markets.' (Sergei Chuzavkov/AP)

Similarly, Ukraine is important to Europe as a source of economic growth and energy security, as well as a bridge to Russia. On the economic front, Ukraine's 46 million citizens are highly educated, including expert software engineers, skilled industrial workers who power the country's commercial export industries, and capable farmers whose work allows the nation to be the breadbasket of Europe.

Indeed, Ukraine's information and high-tech industries can help continue Europe's transformation into the knowledge center of the world. With continued economic progress, a partnership with Ukraine offers the EU new markets and new investment opportunities, as well as new workers.

Moreover, energy security is another advantage that Ukraine offers Western nations. Ukraine has the third-largest shale gas deposits in Europe — 42 million cubic feet of technically recoverable reserves that are currently being developed by Shell and Chevron. This is an environmentally friendly energy source not only for Europe but also for an entire planet whose population will continue to grow through the middle of this century.

As it leaves behind the legacy of Soviet-style communism, Ukraine can serve as a source of inspiration to its neighbors and nations throughout the world for how a country can move forward to free-market democracy and the rule of law. Ukrainians demand democracy, free speech, and a free press, in line with European traditions.

Bringing Ukrainian laws and norms in accordance with those of the EU will help to achieve symbolic and substantive progress for democracy regionally and worldwide. It is of economic, political, and geostrategic importance to Europe and the US that Ukraine comes under the European umbrella of shared values and free trade.

While Ukraine is not a member of NATO, it has proven a reliable partner. So bringing Ukraine closer to the EU is also positive in terms of Western security interests, especially since recent polling shows Ukrainians are caught between clashing loyalties to the West and the East and closely divided on whether to join the EU or the Russian-sponsored Customs Union.

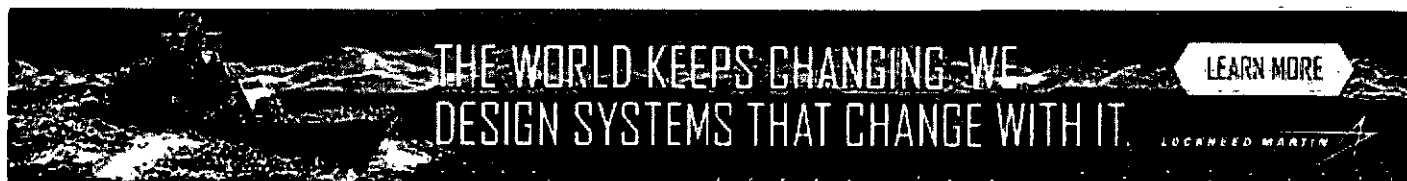
Indeed, Ukraine is perfectly positioned to become a geopolitical and economic bridge between Europe and Russia. In many ways, Kiev was the original cradle of Russia, and Ukraine still has strong ties to Russia in terms of heritage, faith, culture, and language. In fact, alongside its Ukrainian population, Ukraine boasts a large, Russian-speaking population, with familial and cultural connections to Russia. But Ukraine wants to align itself with Europe and with European values, and Western nations should embrace this opportunity before we lose it.

Make no mistake: Western interests and values are best served by engaging Ukraine as a solid European partner. This is a serious geopolitical opportunity for Europe and the US. We should make the most of it.

Romano Prodi is a former prime minister of Italy (1996-1998 and 2006-2008). He also served as president of the European Commission from 1999 to 2004.

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NATO and Ukraine: Unlikely Team in Piracy Fight

By: Aaron Willschick

March 28, 2013 4:55 AM • Updated: March 28, 2013 10:21 AM



Ukrainian Defense Minister Pavlo Lebedev and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, February 22, 2013. Atlantic Council Photo

When it comes to maritime security, piracy has become one of the most prevalent issues for NATO to deal with. In considering which nations are most involved in combating maritime piracy, Ukraine is probably not the first name that comes to mind. As it turns out, this non-NATO, non-EU Eastern European nation is heavily involved in the fight against piracy at sea. Ukraine has even become a valuable ally to NATO in anti-piracy campaigns, something not exactly expected from a

nation so closely aligned with Russia on the geopolitical map.

Impact of Piracy on Ukraine

At the end of last month, NATO announced that Ukraine would actively take part in NATO's anti-piracy operation in the Indian Ocean. Kiev has agreed to offer a frigate and a helicopter in the second half of 2013 for Operation Ocean Shield, the mission designed to deter and disrupt pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa. While it is not readily apparent, the impact of piracy on Ukraine is very real and a significant security concern for the former Soviet nation. From 2008 to mid-2012, over 140 Ukrainian sailors were victims of piracy, many of whom suffered brutal torture and abuse at the hands of their captors. Of today's global security challenges, piracy may have the most disproportionately large impact on Ukraine. Even though Ukraine's merchant fleet is relatively small at 1.8% of the world total, the country has somewhere between 80, 000 and 100, 000 merchant sailors at sea, or 8-10 percent of the world's total. It also supports over twenty higher education establishments that train seafarers, and Ukraine is the third largest contributor of commercial crews in the world, second to Russia and the Philippines.

When taking into account demographics, Ukraine arguably has the world's greatest concentration of merchant sailors in its workforce and thus, the greatest exposure as a country to the human cost of piracy. In addition, the Ukrainian economy also bears substantial costs. With 2, 782 km of coastline, one of the world's best navigable river systems and considerable maritime trade, Ukraine's economy is very dependent on its waterways. Piracy directly affects a large amount of the country's maritime exports, which transit through the Suez Canal and into the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. With such a large share of its goods exposed to piracy, Ukraine bears a disproportionate share of the estimated \$7-12 billion annual cost of piracy to the world economy. With such high risks, insurance costs and protective measures add over \$300,000 to the cost of each trip. For ships that reroute around Africa, the cost is \$1-10 million per trip, not to mention additional travel time. These costs are made up for with increased transportation fees that cuts into profits for Ukraine exporters, shippers and producers and raises prices for purchasers, ultimately lowering the demand for Ukrainian products.

Counteracting the Costs of Piracy

Because of its lack of international presence, the only way that Ukraine can effectively combat the costs of piracy on its citizens and economy is through multinational cooperation. This is why Ukraine has become increasingly involved in a partnership with NATO. The first cooperation on maritime piracy occurred in **October 2005** when Ukraine called to requests NATO's assistance in responding to the capture by Somali pirates of the Ukrainian-owned vessel *MV Panagia*. Since then, the partnership has grown to the point that Ukraine's Navy has deployed ships for extended operations with NATO's Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean on five separate occasions. Last summer **Kiev and Brussels announced** that Ukraine would join Operation Ocean Shield with the direct contribution of a ship-based helicopter and a group of naval Special Forces.

Further illustrating its commitment to counter-piracy, Ukraine co-hosted Sea Breeze 2011, the Black Sea's largest annual multinational naval exercise, with the United States in Odessa. In response to common threats facing the world today, the exercise was dedicated to counter-piracy training operations, evacuation procedures and search and seizure training. Sea Breeze 2011 was also designed to improve regional stability in the Black Sea and strengthen maritime partnerships. Exercises such as these have helped to heighten Ukraine's international profile and increase its credibility with western nations.

A Step to the West?

Some have interpreted Ukraine's efforts against maritime piracy as an indication that the former Soviet state is serious about joining the West's security framework. Not only has it become a close maritime partner of NATO, but Ukraine has also been active in the European Union's anti-piracy campaign, Operation Atalanta. Ukraine's work against maritime piracy is admirable and should be applauded. It also could act as a good starting point for the country to join NATO in the future and ultimately distancing itself from Russia. However, it is important to keep in mind that Ukraine is a nation that still faces many obstacles in its quest to join Western institutions. While recently praising the country for its work against piracy, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen **warned Ukraine** that it must further commit to respecting democracy and the rule of law. Counteracting piracy is one thing; building and respecting democracy is another. Despite some progress, Ukraine still has a long way to go beyond maritime operations if it wishes to be taken more seriously by the West and gain acceptance into Western institutions.

A version of the commentary was published with The Atlantic Council of Canada.

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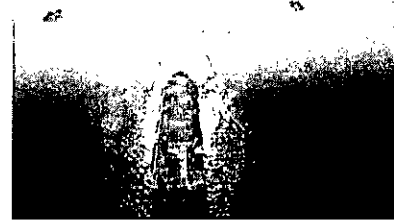
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About Aaron Willschick

Aaron Willschick is currently a researcher and the Maritime Securities Program Coordinator at the Atlantic Council of Canada. He holds two MA degrees in European, Russian and Eurasian Studies from the University of Toronto and in Political Science from York University.

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The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

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EU should welcome Ukraine as a partner for Europe's own good

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By Romano Prodi | APRIL 2, 2013

Bologna, Italy

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Romano Prodi is a former prime minister of Italy (1996-1998 and 2006-2008). He also served as president of the European Commission from 1999 to 2004.



NATO and Ukraine: Unlikely Team in Piracy Fight

United States Naval Institute

By Aaron Willschick

March 28, 2013

When it comes to maritime security, piracy has become one of the most prevalent issues for NATO to deal with. In considering which nations are most involved in combating maritime piracy, Ukraine is probably not the first name that comes to mind. As it turns out, this non-NATO, non-EU Eastern European nation is heavily involved in the fight against piracy at sea. Ukraine has even become a valuable ally to NATO in anti-piracy campaigns, something not exactly expected from a nation so closely aligned with Russia on the geopolitical map.

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A version of the commentary was published with The Atlantic Council of Canada.

<http://news.usni.org/2013/03/28/nato-and-ukraine-unlikely-team-in-piracy-fight>

Highlighting US-Ukraine Relations

The US-Ukraine Strategic Partnership

The United States-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership, which was signed in 2008 by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Minister of Foreign Affairs Volodymyr Ogrzyzko, highlights the importance of the US-Ukraine bilateral relationship. It lays out a vision of enhanced cooperation in the areas of defense, security, economics and trade, energy security, democracy, and cultural exchanges.

To fulfill one of the key tenets of the charter, the United States and Ukraine established the Strategic Partnership Commission, which works to enhance bilateral relations in the aforementioned areas. Through the ongoing work of the Commission, the United States and Ukraine continue their partnership on an array of issues, including the following.

Promoting Energy Cooperation

The US is fundamentally committed to helping Ukraine achieve energy security and independence. Ukraine is the twelfth-largest energy market in the world, exporting its excess electricity to such countries as Russia, Slovakia, Romania, Poland, Moldova and Hungary, and is home to Europe's third-largest shale gas reserves. The chief area of US-Ukraine energy cooperation and support is the 2011 US-Ukraine Unconventional Gas Memorandum of Understanding. This memorandum provides a framework for mutual cooperation between our two governments in the exchange of knowledge and expertise on the characterization and assessment of unconventional gas resources.

The US-Ukraine Energy Security Working Group was created in 2009 under the auspices of the Strategic Partnership Commission. The Energy Security Working Group serves as a forum that allows the United States and Ukraine to discuss energy policy and ways in which both nations can cooperate.

In 2012, Ukraine selected US companies Chevron Corp and ExxonMobil for projects to explore and develop Ukrainian shale gas and gas fields, respectfully.

Strengthening Defense and Security Cooperation

Ukraine has a proven track record of actively contributing to several NATO and international peacekeeping missions. Ukraine has been a NATO Partnership for Peace Member (PfP) since the program's inception in 1994. This program was initiated to address the recognized fact that the more politically and militarily secure the other nations of Europe are, the more peaceful and secure the Euro-Atlantic region will be. PfP is recognized as a first step toward full integration into the NATO alliance.

In US-led conflicts, Ukraine contributed officers to the NATO Training Mission in Iraq and forces to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. Recently, Ukraine has been in discussions with NATO to provide transit services for the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan through its territory. Furthermore, Ukraine has deployed more than 130 troops to KFOR, the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo, and it has participated in NATO-led anti-piracy operations off Somalia. Indeed, it is currently the only NATO partner country actively contributing to each of the critical ongoing NATO-led operations and missions.

Over the past two decades, Ukraine has contributed over 34,000 "blue helmets" to global peacekeeping efforts. Ukraine is currently the lead contributing nation of helicopters to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. During sessions of the US-Ukraine Strategic Partnership Commission, the US and Ukraine have underscored the importance of efforts by the international community to assure the provision of well-trained and deployable military units for multilateral peacekeeping missions, including concerted efforts to address chronic gaps faced by UN peacekeepers.

In February 2013, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, on behalf of Secretary-General of the UN Ban Ki-moon, expressed his thanks to President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich for Ukraine's decision to participate in the UN Operation in Republic of Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and cross-border transactions within the framework of cooperation between the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and UNOCI.

Combatting Maritime Piracy

To combat piracy, Ukraine has become an active participant in NATO and EU maritime operations. Ukrainians are one of the most frequent victims of assaults by sea pirates, second only to the Filipinos. In 2011, six Ukrainians from the MV Blina spent 10 months in captivity after their ship was captured by Somali pirates. Since 2008, 42 ships with over 180 Ukrainian sailors have been victims of piracy. Many have suffered brutal torture and abuse; at least two have been killed. Although Ukraine's merchant fleet is relatively small – 900 vessels or 1.8 percent of the world total – the country has between 80,000 to 100,000 merchant seamen, around 8 to 10 percent of the world's total. Supported by more than 20 higher education establishments that train seafarers, Ukraine is the third-largest contributor of commercial crews in the world, second only to Russia and the Philippines. When taking into account demographics, Ukraine arguably has the world's greatest concentration of merchant sailors in its workforce and thus, the greatest exposure as a country to the human cost of piracy.

Further illustrating its commitment to counter-piracy, Ukraine co-hosted Sea Breeze 2011, the Black Sea's largest annual multinational naval exercise, with the United States. In July 2012, NATO announced that Ukraine would join Operation Ocean Shield, and recently, in March 2013, NATO announced that Ukraine would actively take part in NATO's anti-piracy operation in the Indian Ocean. Not only has it become a close maritime partner of NATO, but Ukraine has also been active in the European Union's anti-piracy campaign, Operation Atlanta. Exercises such as these have helped to heighten Ukraine's international profile and increase its credibility with western nations.

In April 2013, a report from The United States Naval Institute (USNI), based at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, noted that Ukraine is "heavily involved in the fight against piracy at sea" and called Ukraine "a valuable ally to NATO in anti-piracy campaigns." USNI added that "Ukraine's work against maritime piracy is admirable and should be applauded."

Supporting HIV/AIDS Prevention and Research

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Ukraine is one of the fastest growing in the world. The US and Ukraine have highlighted their intent to increase joint efforts against trafficking in persons and HIV/AIDS by signing a bilateral Cooperation Plan on Combating Human Trafficking and the Partnership Framework on cooperation in countering HIV/AIDS from 2011 to 2015.

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PACE President welcomes liberation of Yuri Lutsenko in Ukraine

[08/04/2013 -President]

Strasbourg, 08.04.2013 – Jean-Claude Mignon, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), this morning welcomed the liberation by the Ukrainian authorities of former Interior Minister Yuri Lutsenko.

"I warmly welcome the liberation of Mr Lutsenko. During my recent visit to Ukraine I had a long talk with President Yanukovich during which I again expressed my position, and that of the Parliamentary Assembly, that the problem of imprisoned former government members needed to be swiftly resolved.

I am happy that this message was heard, and I hope that yesterday's pardon is a clear sign of a turnaround in the Ukrainian authorities' approach to dealing with those cases considered by PACE as arising from the selective application of justice.

I now call on the authorities to rapidly find a solution, in line with Council of Europe principles, to the emblematic case of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, and to reform the legal system so that such cases do not recur."

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Schulz welcomes release of Yuriy Lutsenko

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Press Release - Marseille -07-04-2013
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Commenting on the pardon granted by the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich to former Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko, the President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz said:

"I wish to deeply thank Presidents Cox and Kwasniewski for their efforts in securing the pardon and release of Yuriy Lutsenko. Presidents Cox and Kwasniewski's commitment, under my tutelage, have ensured that Yuriy Lutsenko is a free man who can enjoy his first night in years with his family. I welcome Yuriy Lutsenko's pardon and release as a positive sign.

Fair and independent justice is needed in Ukraine and the release of Mr Lutsenko is a step in the right direction. It follows an earlier release of former Defence Minister Valeriy Ivashchenko last August. Our efforts to improve the conditions and address the case of Yulia Tymoshenko who is still held by Ukrainian authorities continue."

Note to editors:

After fourteen intensive missions to Ukraine, Presidents Cox and Kwasniewski will report back on 18 April 2013 to the Conference of Presidents in Strasbourg on the progress achieved.

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World Digest: 11 Afghan civilians are reported killed in NATO strike

The Washington Post

April 8, 2013 Monday, Suburban Edition

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The Washington Post
washingtonpost.com

Distribution: Every Zone

Section: A-SECTION; Pg. A06

Length: 720 words

Body

afghanistan

11 civilians reported killed in NATO strike

A NATO airstrike killed 11 Afghan civilians, including 10 children, during a fierce weekend gun battle with Taliban militants that also left one U.S. civilian adviser dead in eastern Afghanistan, Afghan officials said Sunday.

The U.S.-led coalition confirmed that airstrikes were called in by international forces during the Afghan-led operation in a remote area of Konar province near the border with Pakistan. The coalition said it was aware of reports that civilians were killed but had no immediate information about their deaths.

Afghan civilian casualties have been a major point of contention between international forces and the Afghan government, prompting President Hamid Karzai this year to ban his troops from requesting coalition airstrikes.

Wasifullah Wasify, a government official in Konar, said the airstrike Saturday targeted a house and killed 10 children and one woman inside. He also said seven Taliban suspects were killed inside the house.

The American adviser who died was one of three U.S. civilians killed Saturday. The two others were killed in a suicide bombing in southern Zabol province.

- Associated Press

egypt

One killed in clashes outside cathedral

One person was killed and more than 80 were wounded in clashes at St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in central Cairo on Sunday after a funeral service for four Egyptian Christians killed in religious violence, state media said.

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World Digest: 11 Afghan civilians are reported killed in NATO strike

The state-run Middle East News Agency said 84 people were injured in fighting after a ceremony at the cathedral, which was pelted with stones, petrol bombs and birdshot by a mob.

Police fired tear gas to disperse the crowds, but the clashes continued late into the evening.

The violence erupted after hundreds of angry Copts came to the funeral service at St. Mark's. Some shouted slogans during the ceremony accusing President Mohamed Morsi of failing to protect Christians.

Morsi, who is allied with the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, condemned the violence, telling Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros II in a telephone call that any attack on the cathedral "is like an attack on me personally," the news agency reported.

After the church service, young Christians started hurling rocks at police officers outside the cathedral. Some protesters, thought to be Copts, smashed six private cars and set two on fire, angering Muslims living in the area, who threw homemade firebombs and stones at them, a witness said.

- Reuters

Syria

Airstrike campaign kills at least 20

After weeks of rebel gains in the south, Syria's government launched widespread airstrikes Sunday that targeted at least seven cities or regions and killed at least 20, activists said.

The regime also urged rebels to surrender their arms, warning in cellphone text messages that the army is "coming to get you."

State TV said the primary goal of the airstrikes was to "recapture areas taken by the terrorists," the term the regime uses to refer to the opposition fighters.

Rebels trying to topple President Bashar al-Assad have been making gains in recent weeks, especially in the south near the border with Jordan. They have seized military bases and towns in the strategically important region between Damascus, the capital, and the border with Jordan, about 100 miles away.

Last week, they looked poised to take over the area along the Jordanian border, which could be used to stage an attack on Damascus, Assad's seat of power.

- Associated Press

Explosions kill 4 in northwest Iraq: A trio of bombs exploded Sunday in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, killing four security officers and wounding seven people, officials said. The violence began with a car bomb that killed two soldiers and wounded five, officials said. A second bomb, placed under a vehicle, wounded two people. Later, a roadside bomb killed a police officer and a soldier.

Ukraine's president pardons 2 Tymoshenko allies: A top ally of imprisoned former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko walked free from jail Sunday after Ukraine's president pardoned him and another ex-minister, moving toward fulfilling a key demand on Kiev's path to closer integration with the European Union. President Viktor Yanukovich signed a decree to pardon former interior minister Yuri Lutsenko and former environment minister Heorhiy Filipchuk.

- From news services

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DefenseNews

US Needs More Allies in Fight Against Piracy

June 10, 2013

By Retired US Navy Rear Adm. Terry McKnight

When director Kathryn Bigelow accepted an Academy Award in 2009 for her film, "The Hurt Locker," depicting a US Army bomb-disposal team, she thanked "the women and men in the military who risk their lives on a daily basis in Iraq and Afghanistan and around the world."

Fast forward to a future awards ceremony: If Tom Hanks is honored for his forthcoming film, "Captain Phillips," about the hijacking of a US cargo vessel, will he thank the international effort against maritime piracy, including some surprising allies?

Hanks' biopic can help Americans learn about the threats we face and the allies we need. With Americans imperiled by bombings in Boston, turmoil in the Middle East and nuclear blackmail on the Korean Peninsula, maritime piracy also endangers our lives and livelihoods. The international response to this threat helps Americans appreciate which countries we can count on in a crisis.

In the incident that inspired Hanks' film, four years ago this April Somali pirates seized a US-flagged cargo ship, the MV Maersk Alabama, 240 nautical miles southeast of the Somali port city of Eyl. In the fast-paced events of April 8-12, 2009, although the crew fought back bravely, the pirates captured Richard Phillips and held him on a lifeboat.

Meanwhile, the US Navy frigate Halyburton reached the Maersk Alabama. Then arriving with a Navy SEAL platoon, the destroyer Bainbridge killed the pirates and freed Phillips. Under armed guard, the Alabama was escorted to its original destination, the port of Mombasa, Kenya.

Until only three days before the hijacking, I had served as commander of Task Force 151, a multinational naval unit confronting piracy off the coast of Somalia.

In September 2008, when the Ukrainian-operated MV Faina was hijacked off the coast of Somalia, the cruiser Vella Gulf was responsible for protecting the crew and its cargo. The Faina was carrying a veritable armory: 33 Soviet-built T-72 tanks, anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenades, a multiple-launch rocket system and 182 rounds of ammunition.

Fortunately, after 133 days of intense negotiations, the Faina's cargo of weapons was secured and her crew was safely released from captivity.

The seizure of the Faina underscores the threat posed by piracy to US economic and national security interests, as well as the importance of international efforts to defend maritime navigation. Maritime piracy costs the world economy an estimated \$7 billion to \$12 billion a year, while the United States and its allies spend \$1.09 billion annually on military operations to protect international shipping, and private companies pay another \$1.65 billion to \$2.06 billion for guards and security equipment.

The stakes include protecting the free flow of commerce on the high seas and preventing the proliferation of sophisticated weapons to terrorist organizations in Somalia.

Piracy has declined since 2009. One of the most important reasons has been overwhelming support from more than 25 countries in the international maritime community, including forces ranging from Spanish P-3 maritime patrol aircraft to the Swedish Navy's deployment with Operation Atalanta.

Addressing the Naval War College in 2005, then-Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Mullen unveiled a coalition strategy, the formation of a global fleet or "1,000-Ship Navy." This vision for how coalition forces could defeat a common enemy in the maritime environment has been fulfilled in the fight against Somalipirates.

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One prime example of an unexpected but important ally in the fight against maritime piracy is Ukraine. Ukraine has been active in Operation Atalanta, the EU naval force's military action to prevent and combat acts of piracy off the coast of Somalia. On five occasions, Ukraine's Navy has deployed ships for extended operations with NATO's Operation Active Agenda to prevent the movement of terrorists or weapons of mass destruction in the Mediterranean Sea.

In addition, two years ago, Ukraine joined the US in co-hosting Sea Breeze 2011, the largest annual multinational naval exercise in the Black Sea. In February, Ukraine announced it would take part in Operation Ocean Shield, NATO's anti-piracy operation.

A major maritime nation with between 80,000 and 100,000 merchant sailors, Ukraine's efforts against maritime piracy demonstrate this former Soviet republic's commitment to participating in the West's economic and security framework.

As the struggle to secure the seas reveals, the US and Western Europe need more partners. NATO and the EU should keep our eyes, our minds, and our doors open to contributions from nations such as Ukraine.

Retired US Navy Rear Adm. Terry McKnight was the first commander of the anti-piracy Combined Task Force 151. He is vice president of government relations at defense firm Cobham. These views reflect only those of the author's.

<http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130609/DEFREG02/306090007/US-Needs-More-Allies-Fight-Against-Piracy?odyssey=nav%7Chead>