

Ukraine's approaching election discussed at TWG Leadership Conference



Speakers at the panel on Ukraine's elections (from left): panel moderator Orest Deychakiwsky, Ambassador Nelson Ledsky, Dr. Nadia Diuk, Marta Kolomayets, Dr. Taras Kuzio and Gene Fishel.

by Christine Demkowych

ARLINGTON, Va. – The October presidential election is a high-stakes election with the potential to free Ukraine from its Soviet past. But experts in the field invited to assess the pre-election environment at The Washington Group Leadership Conference this summer said the steady onslaught of dirty election tactics will most likely result in keeping Ukraine's ruling elite in power.

"There are more violations in the election process now because the government knows the population doesn't want to vote for [President Leonid] Kuchma's regime," said Nadia Diuk, director for Central Europe and Eurasia at the National Endowment for Democracy. "They [the ruling elite] realize they're losing and it's the only way they can stay in power."

Dr. Diuk was one of many speakers at The Washington Group's 20th anniversary Leadership Conference, held on June 11-13 at the Key Bridge Marriott in Arlington, Va. The theme of the conference was "TWG at 20: Reflection, Renewal and Celebration."

Ukraine's October 2004 election represents the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union that an opposition candidate has a strong chance of winning and replacing the old order. The 1994 presidential election – when Mr. Kuchma beat incumbent Leonid Kravchuk by a 7 percent margin in a run-off vote – was a case of presidential power passing from one member of the nomenklatura to another. In 1999, President Kuchma was re-elected to another five-year term.

Of the 24 candidates registered to run in October's race, opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, the government's front-runner, are expected to face off in a second round of voting. Election forecasts predict that Mr. Yushchenko will sweep central and western Ukraine, while Mr. Yanukovich is expected to garner most of his support in southern and eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donbas region.

While most national polls currently show Mr. Yushchenko leading, conference analysts said they fear that Mr. Yanukovich will be installed illegally, even if Mr. Yushchenko wins.

According to Taras Kuzio, visiting professor at George Washington University and resident fellow at the University of Toronto, the final outcome of the presidential race may echo the spring 2004 mayoral election held in Mukachiv, where a candidate representing the government's interests was declared the winner after he clearly lost the vote.

"The Mukachiv election crossed the bounds of what is free and fair," Dr. Kuzio said. "The gap between Yushchenko and Yanukovich can only be overcome by outright falsification during the counting."

Dr. Kuzio pointed out, however, that President Kuchma believes Western institutions will only consider the election free and fair if a member of the opposition wins.

Gene Fishel, senior analyst for the State Department Office of Russian and Eurasian Analysis, said there have been several incidents of pre-election tampering over the past few months, including the closing of Radio Liberty's offices, attempts to shut down select independent Ukrainian newspapers, sudden tax inspections and illegal searches of opposition candidates' offices.

Mr. Fishel said there have also been reports of citizens being intimidated by authorities when they have demonstrated their support for the opposition candidate. The distribution of unauthorized opposition leaflets and the removal of opposition candidates' billboards has become a common occurrence. Coverage of the campaign on state-controlled television channels is heavily biased in favor of Mr. Yanukovich, while opposition candidates are blocked from having access to electronic media. Physical assaults designed to intimidate and unnerve opposition candidates are reported on a regular basis.

"It is difficult to imagine free and fair elections under these conditions," Mr. Fishel said.

In an effort to help voters have a clear understanding of candidates' platforms, the U.S. government has invested approximately \$13 million in voter education. According to Marta Kolomayets, director of Partnership for a Transparent Society, a project of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the focus of NGOs this election year is to raise voter participation and election awareness among urban youth and rural women.

However, Ms. Kolomayets said that numerous NGO organizations based in Ukraine have been attacked for trying to carry out their assignments. Some have been subjected to tax audits, while others have been closed down. Monitors are also concerned by recent reports showing evidence that government agents might seek to provoke ethnic tensions between Tatars and Russians in Crimea and by allowing extremist groups to incite ethnic hatred.

Orest Deychakiwsky, staff advisor at the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, said the need to ensure a free, fair, open and transparent presidential election in Ukraine was highlighted in the closing statement of a letter recently sent to President Kuchma to encourage compliance with standards of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The letter called into question Ukraine's commitment to OSCE principles in light of the troubling pre-election environment.

There is no doubt that the election is of critical importance to the future of Ukraine. Panelists at the conference suggested that sanctions be imposed on Ukraine if the election is deemed unfair. Dr. Diuk noted, however, that the entire population of Ukraine should not be penalized for the actions of certain government officials. "Sanctions should only be imposed against the individuals committing the crimes," she said.

Ambassadors' Forum

Speaking during the Ambassadors' Forum at the Leadership Conference, former ambassadors of Ukraine and the United States underscored that Ukraine's October presidential election will play a pivotal role in determining whether the significant decline in bilateral relations between the United States and Ukraine improves.

"Ukraine is now at a crossroads," said Oleh Bilorus, Ukraine's first ambassador to the United States (1991-1995). "It [Ukraine] has reached a point of inertia, especially in the sector of executive power. A time for change has come."

The ambassadors agreed that the best strategy Ukraine can follow at this time is to hold free and fair elections in October.

"Nothing would give a more positive impulse than getting the election process right. It would be a huge affirmation that it [Ukraine] is going toward democracy," said former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Steven Pifer (1998-2000).

"If Ukraine meets international standards [during the election process], we're eager to work with whomever emerges as the winner," Mr. Pifer added, noting that the U.S. vision for Ukraine is that of a stable, independent and democratic state with a strong market economy and increasingly strong ties to Europe.

Mr. Pifer attributed the slump in bilateral relations to a few significant events, includ-

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Panel focuses on future of professional organizations

by Christine Demkowych

WASHINGTON – The future of Ukrainian American professional organizations depends on attracting younger members, broadening membership criteria, forming alliances with other organizations and ensuring that events and publications are more accessible to non-Ukrainian speaking members.

That was the message delivered by directors of the Ukrainian Medical Association of North America (UMANA), the Ukrainian National Women's League of America (UNWLA), the Ukrainian Engineers' Society of America (UESA), and the Ukrainian American Bar Association.

Of the four groups, UMANA, in existence since 1950, has experienced the largest increase in membership over the past few years. Dr. George Hrycelak, executive director of UMANA, says the organization averaged 370 members in the 1990s. But in 2002 membership jumped to 412. Interest in the organization continued growing in 2003, with membership increasing to a record number of 453. In 2004, membership levels are expected to eclipse last year's figures.

Dr. Hrycelak says he believes a 2001 board decision to pay the executive director an annual salary of \$30,000 is responsible for the increase in membership. In his capacity as executive director, Dr. Hrycelak handles membership, writes press releases, contributes to the newsletter, and responds to all phone, e-mail and fax inquiries.

"Volunteers can only put in so much time," Dr. Hrycelak says. "I am always available to respond to member problems or questions. So far membership is growing."

Dr. Hrycelak explained that one of the biggest problems UMANA faced in past

years is that it was perceived as a regional organization. "When our main office was in New York for the first 25 years, everyone thought we were an East Coast outfit. When our headquarters moved to Chicago, the same attitude was adopted for the mid-West," he said.

In an effort to address the misconception, Dr. Hrycelak said board members now represent all parts of the country. Board meetings are held four times a year, and each board member travels to attend the meetings. More recently, Dr. Hrycelak said board meetings are teleconferenced.

Other measures recently adopted by UMANA include the expansion of membership criteria to include Ph.D.s, nurses and chiropractors, among others. In addition, all financial records related to UMANA's activities and expenditures are open to members for review.

"Our biggest challenge right now is figuring out a way to engage young members. If we don't, they'll go elsewhere," Dr. Hrycelak said.

The Ukrainian National Women's League of America (UNWLA) is a 75-year-old organization with over 3,000 members. The UNWLA unites women who are of Ukrainian descent, or belong to the Ukrainian community, for common action in preserving their cultural heritage and developing an enhanced sense of identity.

In an effort to address issues related to women's health and well-being, the UNWLA is taking active steps to forge alliances with other organizations and governmental institutions in the United States and Ukraine. The UNWLA has also become a member of several women's clubs in the United States, including the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the National Council of Women in the United States.

According to Oksana Xenos, parliamentarian of the UNWLA, the organization is continually seeking ways to increase membership. Ms. Xenos said the UNWLA is reviewing a concept that would provide inactive members – those with job and family responsibilities – with access to Ukrainian day care centers. The theory is that the inactive members would return as active members once their time frees up and they can again offer their services to the organization.

Ms. Xenos said the UNWLA is experiencing increased interest among members who are requesting the establishment of new English-only branches, and that it is receiving requests to hold its conferences and seminars exclusively in English. Ms. Xenos said that when UNWLA's Branch 95 decided to follow-up on the English-only conference suggestion and held such a meeting last

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Discussing "Improving Our Professionals' Organizations" (from left) are: Nancy Medwid (UABA), Andrij Wowk (UESA), Oksana Xenos (UNWLA), George Masiuk (TWG) and Dr. George Hrycelak (UMANA)

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ing the arms transfer shipments to Macedonia in 2001 that took close to eight months to terminate; the lack of follow through with hundreds of signed agreements; the Melnychenko tapes that implicated President Kuchma in the death of journalist Heorhii Gongadze; and the Kolchuha case in which President Kuchma was accused of authorizing the transfer of an aircraft detection system to Iraq, considered potentially threatening to U.S. pilots' safety.

Despite Ukraine's setbacks in political reform, the ambassadors noted the tremendous progress Ukraine has made with its economy. "Ukraine is one of the fastest growing economies in Europe," Mr. Pifer said, acknowledging that Ukraine's GDP had increased recently by 9 percent.

Although it was pointed out that much of Ukraine's economic growth is being driven domestically, with the majority of investments coming from Russia, Mr. Bilorus criticized the United States for not actively investing in Ukraine at this time.

According to former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine William Miller (1993-1998), the initial road map that was created to help Ukraine achieve a prosperous and democratic nation can be traced back to his tenure in Ukraine. Mr. Miller's mission was to improve bilateral relations through a policy of direct engagement. The goal was to create a prosperous and independent Ukraine within a new Europe; overcome decades of stereotypical thinking; eliminate all nuclear weapons; lay a foundation for a new relationship; encourage the development of democratic institutions of governance; and develop a sizeable free market sector in the economy.

Between 1993-1998, Ukraine became high policy priority for the Clinton-Gore Administration. U.S. officials were concerned that if Ukraine failed to achieve its goals, the revival of an imperial state in Russia was a very real and highly undesirable threat that could not be ignored. As a result, the frequency of visits by U.S. officials increased dramatically, as face-to-face discussions were considered crucial for a

positive outcome. "Official presence was constant and very visible," Mr. Miller said.

Other benchmarks that contributed to Ukraine's development were the 1997 NATO Summit in Madrid, where a formal partnership with Ukraine was launched, and the 2002 Prague Summit that resulted in an action plan for political and economic reform.

While the agreements and various treaties provided Ukraine with a blueprint for strategic partnerships with both the United States and Europe, the ambassadors said Ukraine failed to meet many of the requirements outlined in the negotiations. "Ukraine would be close to [NATO] membership if it had implemented 90 percent of the steps defined at the Prague Summit," Mr. Pifer said.

The ambassadors concluded, however, that even if Ukraine is successful in holding a democratic election this fall, it still needs to demonstrate that its political-economic structure is compatible with NATO countries. Ukraine needs to implement a defense structure consistent with NATO guidelines, showing that it can make a contribution to Euro-Atlantic security. Ukraine also needs to adapt its laws to conform to World Trade Organization rules.

Other conference highlights

Other major speakers at the conference included Ambassador Mykhailo Reznik, Ukraine's current envoy to the United States, who spoke at The Washington Group's anniversary luncheon on Saturday, June 12, and Kostyantyn Morozov, independent Ukraine's first minister of defense, who addressed the brunch on Sunday, June 13.

On the eve of the conference, Friday, June 11, a reception was hosted at the Embassy of Ukraine in Washington, and a banquet and dance were held on Saturday evening.

The 2004 Leadership Conference's chairman was George Masiuk. Both he and TWG President Ihor Kotlarchuk, delivered opening remarks.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The materials above are edited versions of stories written by Christine Demkowych for TWG News.

Panel focuses...

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year at Soyuzivka, it had an encouraging turnout.

The Ukrainian Engineers Society of America (UESA), founded in 1948, has expanded its membership guidelines to include scientists, economists, businesspeople and technical professionals.

Andrij Wowk, president of the UESA, said a review of the organization's mission in 2001 revealed several challenges that needed attention: the UESA's membership base was primarily composed of retired professionals; the organization provided membership to many non-paying members due to a faulty dues collection process; the organization was perceived as an old boy's club whose only sponsored event was an annual debutante ball; and the UESA had limited visibility in the Ukrainian American community.

Mr. Wowk said that in 2003 the UESA agreed to implement a centralized dues collection process and a system of fiscal transparency within all the chapters. The UESA will expand its membership base to students and associate members who may not be degreed professionals but work in the technical field. A system of deactivating non-paying members was also put into place.

The UESA has increased its visibility in the community by publishing a column in The Ukrainian Weekly on science and technology news. Members of the UESA have also started giving lectures in the New York area.

"As a result of all our efforts, member-

ship among younger people has increased," Mr. Wowk said, noting that the UESA plans to take better advantage of funding possibilities that are available from U.S. organizations.

The Ukrainian American Bar Association (UABA) was founded 26 years ago. Its initial aim was to offer pro-bono legal services, provide a scholarship fund to help Ukrainians coming to the United States to attend law school, and help those in need navigate through immigration laws.

Today, according to Nancy Medwid, the UABA hopes to promote a better understanding of the law profession; facilitate exchanges of students, lawyers and scholars; create local chapters throughout the United States, Canada and Ukraine; hold bimonthly lunches; create a newsletter; expand access to its membership directory to non-members; offer advertising on its website; provide a mentor program with local law schools; and offer scholarships to Ukrainian students wanting to attend law school.

The directors of Ukrainian American professional organizations agreed that ideas and methods used to increase membership must be reviewed on a regular basis to reflect the concerns of the community and the changing environment. They also noted that paying attention to the needs of the "Fourth Wave" of Ukrainians is vital to the future of any Ukrainian-American organization, and offering discounts, scholarships and other forms of financial assistance to potential members whose incomes prevent them from joining, is an investment with strong, long-term gains.

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