

NEWS AND VIEWS

# You think Ukraine has problems...

by David Marples

Last week [in late September], Canada's ambassador in Kyiv, Andrew Robinson, criticized Ukraine's presidential election campaign, arguing that irregularities would undermine democracy. He was duly admonished by the Ukrainian government in Kyiv. Evidently the ambassador's comments were made with the full approval of the Canadian Foreign Affairs Ministry.

There are some grounds for Mr. Robinson's concern. The leading candidate in the elections, Viktor Yushchenko, checked into a Vienna hospital after a suspected poisoning attempt. In past years, several political opponents of President Leonid Kuchma have died in suspicious circumstances.

Mr. Kuchma's government has made no secret of its support for the current prime minister, Viktor Yanukovich. Recently, while campaigning in western Ukraine, Mr. Yanukovich was struck by an object and fell to the ground. It turned out to have been nothing more lethal than an egg. Cynics have maintained that the whole incident was staged to prove that Mr. Yanukovich is equally vulnerable to death threats.

Such shenanigans aside, however, Canada's concern seems misdirected. The Ukrainians at least have a contest. One month prior to the election, it is impossible to forecast a winner. In contrast, Ukraine's neighbors have no such choices. A brief survey of the states closest, or most analogous to, Ukraine in demographic make-up and recent history reveals that the choices are truly limited.

The past week, for example, saw a parliamentary election in Kazakstan, ruled like a fiefdom by its only president since independence, Nursultan Nazarbayev. The campaign resulted in the triumph of two parties: the president's own Otan Party received 42 percent of the vote; and the Asar Party, led by the president's daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva, received almost 20 percent. The government has become a family concern.

Earlier this year, Russia's presidential election was won convincingly in the first round by the incumbent, President

Vladimir Putin, when none of the likely challengers (most notably Communist Leader Gennadii Zyuganov) decided to join the campaign. Since the tragic events in Beslan, Mr. Putin has cracked down on foreign residents in Moscow, abandoned the practice (supposedly enshrined in the Russian Constitution) of electing regional governors and pondered the idea of a government takeover of the giant oil company Yukos, whose former CEO, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, remains in jail and has been accused of links to mafia bosses.

Belarus will hold a parliamentary election on October 17. Almost half the candidates were removed from the campaign at the registration stage, in one instance for declaring her pension to be less than 1 cent below the reality. Two leading rivals for president languish in jail, including a respected former ambassador to the Baltic states.

Meanwhile the president, Alyksandr Lukashenka, has announced that the election will be accompanied by a referendum on whether he may run for a third term as president. He used the occasion of a public commemoration of the victims of Beslan to make the announcement, commenting that under his rule Belarus has never suffered a terrorist attack.

It would be the third such referendum under Mr. Lukashenka. The first reduced the power of the Parliament to a small rump body and removed the national flag and symbols; the second amended the constitution to enhance presidential powers and ensure a first extension of his time in office. Polls suggest that Mr. Lukashenka will get his way.

Moldova lacks even a unified country, with a breakaway Slavic republic on the Dniestr River still defiantly resisting rule from Kishinev after a 12-year hiatus. It also occupies the lamentable position of "poorest country in Europe."

At least in Ukraine, Mr. Kuchma, despite fears to the contrary, did not run for a third term. Nor has he managed to convince the electorate thus far that Mr. Yanukovich is a viable successor. Recently the parties supporting the prime minister lost their majority in the Ukrainian Parliament. Moreover, whenever there has been a transgression of electoral rules – and such problems began with the April mayoral contest in Mukachiv – international and national publicity has been rapid and damning.

This is not to argue that politics in Ukraine are democratic. Nevertheless, they are far more diverse, complex and unpre-

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# Who are these people?

by Roman Solchanyk

The idea of taking a closer look at how Ukrainians (and Russians) in Ukraine see themselves – specifically, in terms of national identity, attitudes toward state independence, ties to Russia and related issues, all of which can probably be subsumed under the heading of national consciousness, occurred to me about a year ago, after reading an article in the Kyiv daily Den that left me somewhat depressed, but also quite skeptical.

The author, commenting on the results of a nationwide public opinion survey conducted in the summer of 2003, concluded that nearly 75 percent of respondents had either a negative attitude toward Ukraine's independence or were indifferent. This, after 12 years of independence!

The skepticism was twofold. First of all, the figure itself seemed rather high. Maybe the author got his countries mixed up and transposed data from Belarus to Ukraine. Second, the conclusion was based on a question that – although I am very much a dilettante when it comes to the "exact science" of sociology – seemed not to warrant the categorical conclusion that was drawn – namely: "What emotions does the celebration of Independence Day (August 24) elicit from you?" After all, attitudes toward Independence Day and attitudes toward independence are not quite the same thing.

Still, the data are what they are, and they are something less than uplifting. Moreover, some of the other results from the poll were even more disturbing. It turns out that the proportion of respondents in the age group 18-24 – that is, the young people that basically have come to maturity in independent Ukraine – who were either negative or did not care about independence was about the same (71.6 percent) as for the general population. In western Ukraine, which we have all come to view as the bastion of Ukrainian nationalism and patriotism, the number of those proud of Ukraine's independence was less than half (47.6 percent).

The only "bright" side to this picture was that the bulk of those on what might be termed the negative side of the ledger were indifferent (47 percent) rather than hostile.

At about the same time in 2003 the Razumkov Center in Kyiv released the results of its survey. It showed that if a referendum were to be held on independence, only 46.5 percent would vote in favor. Moreover, that number was on the decline over the past several years. In 2001 it had been 51.3 percent; in 2002 it fell to 48.8 percent. Let us recall that in December 1991 over 90 percent of voters supported independence. Thus, the new numbers are not very encouraging.

The question emerges: Who are these people?

Several months later, Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, who is realistic but usually fairly optimistic about Ukraine's future, told the Ukrainska Pravda website that Ukraine will either become an important country within Europe or the bulk of the country will become a Russian periphery. Ukraine's main problem, he said, was "the absence of a deeply rooted national understanding of civic responsibility." In other words, Ukraine is not Poland.

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I am not sure what exactly "a Russian periphery" is, but it certainly does not sound good. This leads to more pessimism, because no one in his right mind can imagine Ukraine becoming an important country within Europe now, soon, later, or perhaps even ever. For that to happen, two things would need to change: the figures cited above, and how Europeans and their leaders view Ukraine. And since neither is likely, we are left with the periphery option.

There were some other not altogether inspiring developments in 2003. Early in the year, the presidents of Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Kazakstan announced their intention to form a "Single Economic Space." The agreement was reached in the fall of 2003 and ratified by the Ukrainian Parliament in the spring of this year. To one degree or another, 81 percent of Ukrainians supported the move.

I am even more of a dilettante when it comes to economics, but I was under the impression that Ukraine's official policy at the time was to enter the European economic space and then join the European Union (EU). Who are these people? But there is a bright side here as well. Thus far, all manner of integration schemes and "common" and "single" spaces in what was once the Soviet Union have pretty much been a failure.

In mid-June, Den carried the news that 59 percent of Ukrainians think that they and Russians are one people ("narod," which in Ukrainian and Russian implies "nation"). Even more annoying was the fact that the proportion of Russians who felt the same way was about the same (61 percent). In other words, Ukrainians and Russians were on the same page. One could go on along these lines, particularly in connection with how Ukrainians responded to the Tuzla crisis and to Anatolii Chubais' offer of a liberal Russian empire, but enough said.

What about now? Several months ago, instead of doing what I was supposed to be doing, I was once again reading Kyiv and Moscow newspapers and looking at websites. The gazeta.ru site had an interesting comparative perspective on Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. It turns out that the proportion of Ukrainians who want a union – admittedly, a somewhat vague notion – with Russia and Belarus is actually higher than the percentage of Russians and Belarusians who favor a Slavic union. Also, the proportion of those who prefer living in the CIS or in a restored USSR is greater in Ukraine than in Belarus. Conversely, a considerably larger percentage of Belarusians than Ukrainians want to be in a united Europe (see table).

Where do you want to live? (in %)

	Ukraine	Belarus	Russia
United Europe	15	28	11
Slavic union	23	17	9
CIS	11	7	7
Restored USSR	19	15	19
Own country	32	28	51

Analysts have been warning that if things do not change for the better, Ukraine will be facing the "Belarusian scenario." Is Ukraine already there? Or do my colleagues in the analytical community have a seriously distorted view of the nature and level of national consciousness in Belarus? Or are both true?

Most Belarusians continue to hold a positive view of the idea of integration with Russia, which, curiously, they imag-

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# Who are...

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ine to be the Soviet Union and not Russia as such, where residential buildings explode and other very unpleasant things happen. At the same time, at the end of 2003 almost 72 percent of Belarusians supported the independence of their country. Moreover, the proportion of Belarusians and Ukrainians wishing to join the EU is about the same. Indeed, when faced with choosing between Russia and the EU Ukrainians and Belarusians think much alike.

In a survey conducted in Ukraine in August-September of this year, when asked where life would be better, in a union with Russia and Belarus, or in the EU, 49 percent of respondents chose their "Slavic brothers," while 29.3 percent opted for the EU. In a similar question posed to Belarusians in June, 47.7 percent of respondents chose Russia and 37.6 percent selected the EU. Thus, there was not much difference, except that a higher proportion of Belarusians than Ukrainians viewed the European community favorably. Maybe the "Belarusian scenario," at least insofar as all of those things subsumed under the heading of national consciousness, is not such a bad thing.

Finally, if we look at one of the latest issues of the Kyiv monthly National Security and Defense, what we find is more lamentable food for thought. While the proportion of those in Ukraine supporting a foreign policy that prioritizes relations with European Union countries has been stable at about 30 percent over

the past four years, the percentage that looks to Russia has doubled, from 21 percent in 2000 to 41 percent in 2004.

Against this background, it is not surprising that strong supporters of Ukraine's "European choice" are no longer to be found in the Cabinet of Ministers (Borys Tarasyuk, Oleksander Chalyi, Yevhen Marchuk). Equally unsurprising is the fact that Ukraine's prime minister, one of the leading contenders in this month's presidential election, says that he favors granting the Russian language official status; dual citizenship, obviously with Russia in mind; and a retreat from the official policy of eventual membership in NATO.

In this connection, the question that was recently raised in The Washington Post as to whether citizens of the former Soviet Union really want to be "like us" deserves thoughtful consideration. In that article, Prof. Roman Szporluk was quoted as saying: "For people to survive under Stalin, under communism, you had to pretend to be stupid. If you go on this way generation after generation, you really create a certain mode of behavior." Was he suggesting that the "Soviet people" and the "Soviet way of life" are alive and well, let's say, in Ukraine?

If so, much of the ongoing discussion about the need for democratic reforms and honest elections, as well as the resolutions recently adopted by such august bodies as the EU and the U.S. House of Representatives, although necessary and well intentioned, are not likely to have much of an impact.

At least not at this juncture, when we are still asking: Who are these people?

# ELECTION WATCH

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backing Mr. Yanukovych, while it noted that there are virtually no similar signs for his main rival in the presidential race, Our Ukraine leader Viktor Yushchenko. (RFE/RL Newswire)

## Church leaders discuss elections

KYIV – The spiritual and moral aspects of the electoral process were discussed at a meeting of the heads and delegated representatives of the Christian Churches of Ukraine on September 30. The meeting took place as part of the general work being done to establish cooperation between the Christian Churches of Ukraine. A statement of the leaders of the Christian Churches of Ukraine to the Ukrainian people concerning Ukraine's presidential election followed as a result. Perspectives for future cooperation between the Churches in the defense of human life were also discussed, as was the situation of legislative bills concerning the activities of religious organizations and civic morals. The following participated in

the meeting: Patriarch Filaret (Denysenko), head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate; Bishop Vasyl Medvit, exarch of Kyiv and Vyshhorod of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church; Bishop Stanislaw Shyrokoradiuk of the Kyiv-Zhytomyr diocese of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine; Hryhorii Komendant, president of the All-Ukrainian Union of the Association of Evangelical Baptists; Mykhailo Panochko, head of the All-Ukraine Union of Churches of the Evangelical Christian Faith-Pentecostals; Volodymyr Krupskiy, president of the Ukrainian Union of the Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church; Elder Bishop Leonid Padun, head of the Council of Bishops of the Ukrainian Christian Evangelical Church; Senior Presbyter Vasyl Raichynets of the Union of Free Churches of Evangelical Christians of Ukraine; Franz Shumeiko, president of the Brotherhood of Independent Churches and Missions of Evangelical Baptists of Ukraine; and members of the Council of Representatives of the Christian Churches of Ukraine. (Religious Information Service of Ukraine)

# You think...

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dictable than in other post-Soviet states. Mr. Yushchenko, for example, ostensibly a pro-Western and pro-American candidate (he has an American wife) has announced that one of his first actions upon taking office would be to remove Ukrainian troops from Iraq. Mr. Yanukovych has vowed to keep them there.

Two other candidates are likely to receive significant votes: Socialist Party Leader Oleksander Moroz, and Communist Party Leader Petro Symonenko. No one knows to which of the leading candidates their support will eventually be transferred.

Perhaps Canada is expecting too much of Ukraine? True, it does not behave like the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe, which are now part of the European Union. The past 13 years have seen some disappointments. Corruption is endemic. Local city clans tend to run the economy and play a major role in politics. The government controls most of the media and TV channels.

But why single out Ukraine? The situation in Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Moldova is markedly worse in terms of voter choice. Our concern should surely be the general demise of democracy in former Soviet states.



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