The United Ukrainian Diaspora Speaks Out on the Eve of the NATO Summit in Chicago

May 22, 2012, Chicago, Il … The NATO Summit in Chicago was the immediate incentive for the Ukrainian Diaspora to conduct an international conference: “Assessing Ukraine/NATO Relations on the Eve of the Chicago NATO Summit” that took place on May 19, 2012 in Chicago at St. Volodymyr and Olga Conference and Convention Center.

Held under the auspices of the Ukrainian World Congress (UWC), International Conference in Support of Ukraine (ICSU), Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), and Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC), the conference sought to draw international attention to the situation in Ukraine where Ukraine’s democratic future and national security are in jeopardy.

As an international advocacy forum, the assembled speakers were tasked with assessing Ukraine’s relationship to NATO’s stated goal of strengthened security in the Euro-Atlantic area and a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace. It brought together experts of the highest order to discuss the complex paradigm of consolidating the independence of Ukraine, its sovereignty and national security through integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, the EU and NATO, while, simultaneously, supporting fundamental change in Ukrainian government policy towards one that respects democratic governance, rule of law, and human rights. Presentations were made by internationally eminent experts from Kyiv, Brussels, Washington, D.C., London, Warsaw, and Ottawa on the policies of the Ukrainian government, and the roles of the EU, US, Canada, and Russia in supporting or undermining these ends.

Over the course of 12 hours, the conference proceedings included two expanded round tables and a concluding banquet. Pavlo Bandriwsky, Vice President of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, Illinois Division, presided as Conference Moderator and Marta Farion, President of the Kyiv Mohyla Foundation of America, as Banquet Master of Ceremonies.

Roundtable I – “Perceptions of Ukraine in a Strategic Framework” was moderated by Walter Zaryckyj, PhD, Executive Director, Center for US-Ukrainian Relations. Expert analysis was offered from a US, Canadian, EU, Ukrainian, NATO and Russian perspective by John Herbst, former United States Ambassador to Ukraine and current Director of the National Defense University Center for Complex Operations; Andrew Robinson, former Ambassador of Canada to Ukraine and currently a Distinguished Senior Fellow, Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University; Amanda Paul, Policy Analyst and Program Executive at the European Policy Centre; Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, past Director, Security Service of Ukraine and former Member of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine; Ian Brzezinski, Senior fellow in the Atlantic Council’s International Security Program and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Europe and NATO Policy; and, James Sherr, Senior Fellow, Russian and Eurasia Program, Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), respectively.
Roundtable II – “Review of Ukraine/NATO Cooperation. Whence the Breakdown?” was moderated by Ihor Kozak, former officer with the Canadian Forces who served in diplomatic missions on behalf of Canada, the US, EU, UN, and NATO. Authoritative presentations were made from the perspective of Europe, US, Canada, Ukraine, NATO, and Russia. They included, respectively, James Sherr, Senior Fellow, Russian and Eurasia Program, Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House); Stephen Larrabee, Distinguished Chair in European Security at the RAND Corporation; Lubomyr Luciuk, professor of Political Geography at the Royal Military College of Canada; Oleksandr Sushko, Research Director at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Co-operation; Damon Wilson, Executive Vice President of the Atlantic Council and former Chief of Staff and former Director for Central, Eastern and Northern European Affairs at the National Security Council; and, Jan Pieklo, Director, Polish Ukrainian Cooperation Foundation [PAUCI].

Christyia Wereszczak, National President of the Women’s Association for the Defense of Four Freedoms for Ukraine, spoke at the conclusion of the conference on behalf of the Presidents of the ICSU member organizations from the U.S. and Canada, who were Co-Chairs of the Conference and Banquet. She extended appreciation to the distinguished speakers for their deep understanding of and support for Ukraine and its quest for mature nation-statehood.

The conference banquet featured two distinguished Ukrainians. Guest Speaker, Sergiy Kvit, PhD, President of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, focused on the theme “Ukraine’s National Renewal Through Education”. And, the Keynote Address was delivered by Volodymyr S. Ohryzko, PhD, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, who spoke on the theme “Ukraine’s Quest for Nation-Statehood: Perceptions of the West from Ukraine’s Point of View from Brest Litovsk to NATO/Bucharest.”

At the conclusion of the banquet, Adriana Buyniak Willson, National President of the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, thanked the participants and noted that the overwhelming participation of so many in the conference and banquet, is further testament to Ukraine, to historical justice, and to freedom for all nations and freedom for the individual.

The conference was co-organized by the member organizations of the U.S. and Canada Divisions of the ICSU, in cooperation with the Center for US-Ukrainian Relations, and was hosted by the Illinois Division of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, Oles Striltschuk, President.

The Host City Committee was ably assisted by many tireless and dedicated volunteers from the local chapters of CYM, UCCA and others. Also, the conference opening ceremony featured a presentation of bread and salt, a traditional Ukrainian greeting, to Volodymyr S. Ohryzko by students of the School of Ukrainian Studies, Mrs. Luba Markewycz, Director. Also, during the banquet, a welcome presentation was performed by Hromovytsia Ukrainian Dance Ensemble, Roxana Pylypczak, Director. The banquet concluded by a choral performance by the Choir of the Ukrainian American Youth Association (CYM) Mykola Pavlushko Branch, Chicago, Wolodymyr Popowycz, Conductor and Musical Director.

Attendance at the conference exceeded capacity at the St. Volodymyr and Olga Conference and Convention Center with participants hailing from throughout North America, from California and Alberta to Montreal and Atlanta. Moreover, the entire conference was broadcast world wide, live via on-line streaming through the internet, courtesy of VIDA. The conference was free of charge; and the banquet tickets only fifty dollars due to the generosity of the sponsors: Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, Illinois Division; Heritage Foundation of First Security Bank; MB Financial Bank; Selfreliance Ukrainian American Federal Credit Union; Buduchnist Credit Union; Ukrainian American Freedom Foundation; Organization for the Defense of Four Freedoms for Ukraine; League of Ukrainian Canadians; Ucrainica Research Institute; League of Ukrainian Canadian Women; Ukrainian National Association; Providence Association of Ukrainian Catholics in America; Women’s Association for the Defense of Four Freedoms for Ukraine.
The conference Steering Committee was Co-Chaired by the Presidents of the ICSU member organizations from the U.S. and Canada: Stefan Kaczurak, National President, Organization for the Defense of Four Freedoms for Ukraine; Chrystya Wereszczak, National President, Women’s Association for the Defense of Four Freedoms for Ukraine; Andriy Bihun, National President, Ukrainian American Youth Association; Bohdan Harhaj, Chairman, Ukrainian American Freedom Foundation; Bohdan Kowalyk, President, Society of Veterans of Ukrainian Insurgent Army, Inc.; Orest Steciw, National President, League of Ukrainian Canadians; Adriana Buyniak Willson, National President, League of Ukrainian Canadian Women; Olyana Grod, National President, Ukrainian Youth Association of Canada (CYM); Mykola Koshyk, National President, Society of Veterans of UPA; Oleh Romanynshyn, Editor, Homin Ukrainy/Ukrainian Echo.

The Conference Executive Committee was comprised of Borys Potapenko, Executive Director; Pavlo Bandriwsky, Financial Committee Chair; Marta Farion, Public Information Committee Chair; Walter Zaryckyj, Program Committee Chair; Oles Striltschuk, Host City Committee Chair.

The Co-Chairs of the Conference issued a Statement that was read-out at the concluding banquet by Orest Steciw and Stefan Kaczurak. In the Statement the Presidents of the ICSU member organizations from the U.S. and Canada noted that the deteriorating political situation in Ukraine, together with the Russian regime’s efforts to undermine Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration, pose a direct and immediate threat to Ukraine’s security and vital national interests, as well as to Europe’s security, peace and stability:

“We acknowledge and support the international community’s efforts for the Ukrainian government to reverse its authoritarian course and policies. … These policies are seriously undermining Ukraine’s capacity to maintain its relationship with Euro-Atlantic institutions and to enhance its security against Russia’s aggressive policies. They also underscore the importance of continued engagement with Ukraine by the member states of Euro-Atlantic institutions and the institutions themselves. The European Union, NATO and the Euro-Atlantic partnership would be best served by a Ukraine that is democratic, secure within its borders, and in the process of integrating into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. A Ukraine destabilized by authoritarian policies and practices, economic dislocation, rampant corruption, and international isolation can only thwart NATO’s stated goal of strengthened security in the Euro-Atlantic area and a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace. In addition, the role of Russian interference in Ukraine’s internal affairs, to destabilize and isolate Ukraine, cannot be underestimated. These policies are gaining further momentum by Russia’s use of energy and other economic resources as political weapons against Ukraine. … No less alarming are Russia’s disinformation campaigns, such as questioning Ukraine’s very existence as a European nation and by portraying Ukraine and other post-Soviet independent countries as failed states. … Ukraine’s full membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions is indispensable for safeguarding its independence and sovereignty that are, themselves, the only guarantors of its national survival.”

The conference Co-Chairs called on President Yanukovych to reverse course towards one of democracy, national security, and economic prosperity. They also called on NATO and the EU to support democratic forces in Ukraine and to oppose overt and covert efforts by the Russian regime to reimpose its hegemony on Ukraine.

…. “It is imperative for EU and NATO members, individually and collectively, to implement three mutually supporting policies: first – support the consolidation of Ukraine’s independence, its sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security through integration into Euro-Atlantic structures; second - facilitate fundamental change in Ukrainian government policy towards one based on democratic governance, rule of law, and human rights; third – resist Russia’s overt and covert policies and operations to re-impose its hegemony on Ukraine.
The initialing of the EU/Ukraine Association Agreement, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, and the agreement concerning the Annual National Program of Ukraine-NATO Cooperation for 2012, are important measures to maintain engagement and a path to integration.

Engagement with President Yanukovych and other key regime officials responsible for the current antidemocratic policies should be focused on affecting a fundamental change in direction, away from authoritarian rule. Boycotts and sanctions should be targeted at specific officials and not at the Ukrainian people.

The people of Ukraine should be supported in the promotion of human rights, in efforts to build a civil society and independent media organizations. Small and medium size businesses should be supported and encouraged. NGOs and independent civic groups also should be supported in their work to raise national consciousness, restore Ukraine’s historical memory, and to promote democracy, European values and standards.

The EU, NATO, OSCE, the United States and Canada, should put forth maximum effort to assure that the Parliamentary elections in Ukraine on October 28, 2012, including the pre-election political campaign period, are conducted in a fair and transparent manner. Former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and all other political prisoners, as well as civil society and human rights activists should be released from prison or detention and allowed to participate in the political campaign process and to run for office.

The Russian Federation, its current rulers and high ranking officials should be held to account, through targeted sanctions and boycotts, for violations of human and civil rights in Russia itself. It is imperative that Russia’s incessant subversive operations in Ukraine and against Ukraine’s integration into Euro Atlantic institutions cease. Business as usual should not be continued until and unless Moscow demonstrates – both in word and deed – its commitment to abide by international norms of conduct at home and abroad.”

Following the banquet, that same evening, the Statement was made available to the delegations at the NATO Summit and was directly communicated to President Yanukovych and his top advisors. While the Statement by the Conference Co-Chairs encapsulates many of the positions enunciated by the speakers at the conference and banquet, it does not necessarily imply endorsement by the speakers or conference sponsors.

Visit www.UCCAillinois.com and www.lucorg.com for:
  a. Conference Statement by the Presidents of the ICSU member organizations from the U.S. and Canada
  b. Conference Banquet Keynote speech in English and Ukrainian by Dr. Volodymyr S. Ohryzko
  c. Conference program, including speakers’ biographies
  d. Links to video of conference proceedings and pictures
  e. Interviews with conference speakers
  f. Transcripts of statements by panelists during Roundtable sessions (as they become available).