

Panelists review the parliamentary elections in Ukraine

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WASHINGTON – The Washington Group (TWG), in conjunction with the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), on April 10 hosted a presentation titled “The Recent Parliamentary Elections in Ukraine: A Review.” Speakers included Orest Deychakiwsky, senior staff advisor at the U.S. Helsinki Commission and an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) election observer in Ukraine; Adrian Karatnycky, president of The Orange Circle; and Serhiy Kudelia, Ph.D. candidate at the SAIS.

The panelists assessed the procedure of the first parliamentary elections in Ukraine after the constitutional reform had come into power, analyzed how the elections were conducted and gave their perspectives of the election’s implications.

As the evening’s first panelist, Mr. Deychakiwsky emphasized the importance of the post-election assessment of the OSCE-led election mission, which included observers from the parliamentary assemblies of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, European Union, Council of Europe and NATO. This was the first time the OSCE had called any elections among the 12 former Soviet republics outside the Baltics “free and fair.” This, according to Mr. Deychakiwsky, underscores the consolidation of democratic gains made in the Orange Revolution.

Comparing the recent elections to the first two rounds of the 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine, Mr. Deychakiwsky noted that “temnyky,” state interference, and the use of administrative resources and intimidation, harassment and outright fraud were largely a thing of the past. This time there was a freer media and decidedly more balanced media coverage, and the elections were conducted in an atmosphere of true competition. He also compared the Rada elections with the presidential elections in Belarus held a week earlier, describing the latter as a “farce.”

However, there still were some shortcomings in the election process, Mr. Deychakiwsky said. The holding of both national and local elections at the same time added to difficulties in the efficiency of the election process, leading to long lines and overcrowding in some polling stations. Outdated or incorrect information in voter lists with the recent voter registration overhaul also led to complications – even disenfranchising some voters.

Mr. Deychakiwsky praised the hundreds of thousands of election workers and non-partisan domestic and party observers for their hard work in ensuring the transparen-

cy of the voting and vote count. He stressed that the shortcomings were mostly organizational and logistical, and not the result of a centralized, planned attempt to manipulate the election, and that the election results reflected the will of the people. With these elections, said Mr. Deychakiwsky, “Ukraine’s leadership and people have shown their commitment to democracy in a very tangible way.”

Mr. Kudelia focused on the results of the elections. He strongly criticized President Viktor Yushchenko for his failure to unite the Ukrainian people after the Orange Revolution of 2004. “Cultural and regional identities in Ukraine transformed into political ones,” said Mr. Kudelia. He characterized the election campaign of the president’s political party, Our Ukraine, as a “brilliant failure.” To make his point, Mr. Kudelia compared Our Ukraine’s 24 percent support rate in the 2002 parliamentary elections with the less than 14 percent backing received in 2006.

At the same time, the speaker underlined the success of the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc, which came second with 22 percent of the vote, outpolling Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine two to one or higher throughout most of central and eastern Ukraine.

Panelists review...

(Continued from page 9)

ised that rich people would help the poor.”

Closing his presentation, Mr. Kudelia expressed hope that politicians would stop using the symbols of the Orange Revolution that divided Ukrainians, but would try to find common ground and achieve reconciliation.

The final speaker was Mr. Karatnycky, who gave his overview of the elections and the business component in Ukrainian politics. The speaker assured the audience that the “Orange” parties (Our Ukraine, the Tymoshenko Bloc and the Socialist Party) still remain the majority with 54 percent of votes, if you combine their results in the parliamentary elections. He also indicated there was “no question” that Ms. Tymoshenko will be Ukraine’s next prime minister in an “Orange” government.

Mr. Karatnycky’s remarks raised serious concerns about the Party of the Regions, which received the largest share of the votes in the elections with 32 percent. He noted there were two distinct groups inside this party. The first group comprises marginal, pro-Moscow politicians and those

There are some reasons for this success, remarked Mr. Kudelia. Firstly, unlike President Yushchenko, Yulia Tymoshenko “has passed the test of power.” “During her term as prime minister, she did not steal anything. On the contrary, she tried to return the stolen property to the people,” said Mr. Kudelia, explaining the popularity of Tymoshenko among common citizens.

Secondly, according to Mr. Kudelia, Tymoshenko won the corruption debate that dominated the election. Having dismissed Ms. Tymoshenko from the government in September 2005, President Yushchenko accused her of plotting a coup against him and favoring certain businesses. Ms. Tymoshenko, in turn, accused Mr. Yushchenko of surrounding himself with corrupt politicians who manipulated him. “The untransparent gas deal with Russia in January 2006 served as the critical evidence of corruption among Ukraine’s top officials,” stated Mr. Kudelia.

Thirdly, Ms. Tymoshenko in her election campaign appealed to socially unprotected people, like students, pensioners and doctors. “It was not new for Ukrainian politicians,” said Mr. Kudelia, “but this time she prom-

who were responsible for the 2004 presidential election fraud; the second group represents Ukrainian businessmen who have interests in the West, led by Rynat Akhmetov of System Capital Management.

In Mr. Karatnycky’s view Mr. Akhmetov is the true power in the Regions group and a “pragmatist,” but he must distance himself through “concrete action” from discredited politicians in the Regions bloc.

According to Mr. Karatnycky, the Industrial Union Group, the powerful group of enterprises that originated in eastern Ukraine, already has 40 percent of all its investment in the countries of the European Union. The interest of Ukrainian businesses in getting access to European and American markets will spur governmental policy toward Euro-Atlantic integration.

Mr. Karatnycky noted that this free and fair parliamentary election has marked the end of the post-Soviet era in Ukraine and that, finally, Ukraine was moving in the right direction.

Among those present for the panel in the SAIS Rome Auditorium were representatives of think-tanks and NGOs, the mass media, the Ukrainian diaspora and the Embassy of Ukraine to the United States. A reception followed the event.