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Washington conference examines Ukraine's progress in nation-building

by Yaro Bihun
Special to The Ukrainian Weekly

WASHINGTON – More than 200 official and non-governmental representatives with an interest in developments in Ukraine gathered here for a conference on September 19-20 to exchange views on Ukraine's progress in its nation-building efforts and external relationships.

The two-day event, titled "Ukraine's Quest for Mature Nation Statehood: A Roundtable," included a dozen panel discussions, with more than 70 panelists and discussants participating. The conference sessions were held at the U.S. Library of Congress and the Council on Foreign Relations, and were transmitted live on the World Wide Web and videotaped for cable television by C-Span.

The program featured two keynote speakers – national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and former undersecretary of defense in the administration of President George Bush, Paul Wolfowitz – as well as remarks by Ukraine's Foreign Affairs Minister Borys Tarasyuk [who has since been relieved of that post – see story on the right], Prime Minister Viktor Yuschenko's Chief of Staff Oleh Rybachuk, U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell, and Rep. Sander Levin, a co-chair of the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, one of the conference's numerous sponsors.

In his keynote presentation, which he titled "Ukraine is not Russia," Dr. Brzezinski underscored the various areas in which Ukraine outshines Russia, among them in protecting human rights, building a democracy, economic reforms, effective use of foreign assistance and in its attitude toward Europe, NATO and the United States.

Neither is Ukraine "being misguided by a historical nostalgia for a past that cannot be entirely recreated," he said, as is the current ruling elite in Russia, which he characterized as "the pampered children of a decaying regime" who yearn for the lost empire and international recognition as a superpower, "even though there is no longer a basis for it."

Dr. Brzezinski stressed that the United States should deal with Ukraine as a strategically important independent nation and not tie it to Russia in every level of its relationship, including the "symbolic" level.

"I do not think it is a good practice for the U.S. president, when he visits Moscow, or for the U.S. secretary of state, when the secretary of state visits Moscow, to tack on to the visit a few hours of a hasty visit to Ukraine, punctuated by loud slogans pronounced in Ukrainian regarding America's affection for Ukrainian independence," he said.

Neither, he added, should the State Department handle Ukrainian affairs through an office with the "strangely ambiguous" name of "Newly Independent States." It belongs in the European division, he said.

Dr. Brzezinski currently is counselor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and professor of U.S. foreign policy at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

Dr. Wolfowitz, now dean at SAIS, expressed similar views on how the U.S. government should treat Ukraine independently of Russia and get out of the "Russia must be first" box in developing trade and other relations with Ukraine. Washington should also not pursue a policy that suggests Russia has a veto over Ukraine's entry into NATO and other matters.

He also expressed his disdain for the practice of always tying U.S. presidential visits to Kyiv to Moscow visits.

Dr. Wolfowitz served as undersecretary in Richard Cheney's Defense Department, which, as be pointed out, successfully fought to shift the Bush

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Kuchma dismisses Tarasyuk, names Zlenko as foreign minister

by Roman Woronowycz
Kyiv Press Bureau

KYIV – President Leonid Kuchma dismissed Borys Tarasyuk, Ukraine's Western-oriented minister of foreign affairs, from his position on September 30 "in connection with his transfer to another position." Two days later he announced the appointment of career diplomat Anatolii Zlenko to succeed Mr. Tarasyuk.

Mr. Kuchma said Mr. Tarasyuk's dismissal and the appointment of Mr. Zlenko, who was Ukraine's first foreign affairs minister and served in the post through August 1994, did not portend a change in Ukraine's foreign policy.

While Mr. Kuchma praised Mr. Tarasyuk's professionalism and his successes at the United Nations and in expanded relations with Western Europe, he failed to adequately explain why he relieved the 51-year-old of his post, except to say that the situation in the country had changed and that a more diplomatic type was needed.

The allusion by the president to Mr. Tarasyuk's underdeveloped diplomatic skills only supported assertions by many political analysts here that pressure from Russia had ended the Ukrainian foreign minister's tenure at the top of the diplomatic corps. Many analysts have said that Mr. Tarasyuk was far too open in his disdain for close relations with Moscow and pushed too hard for closer ties to NATO and the European Union.

His biggest failure, according to some analyses, was that while President Kuchma made the required overtures to the West, Mr. Tarasyuk could not convince the West to respond accordingly.

Other analysts, however, have drawn a

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Ukraine completes Games with 23 medals

by Peter Shmigel
Special to The Ukrainian Weekly

SYDNEY – Ukraine added to its overall medal count during the last few days of the XXVII Summer Olympics here in Australia, but gold proved elusive for Ukraine's Olympians in Sydney.

Team Ukraine completed the Olympics with three gold medals, 10 silver and 10 bronze, for a total of 23 medals. Boxers led the way with five medals (two silver and three bronze), followed by the swimmers with four (two gold and two silver).

Two of Ukraine's three golds were the work of individual medley swimming star Yana Klochkova, who won the 200- and 400-meter events; she earned silver in the 800-meter freestyle.

The performance by Ukraine's delegation met one of the targets set by the National Olympic Committee of Ukraine (NOCU) of winning a total of 20 to 25 medals.

However, the NOCU's other target of a top-10 finish based on gold medals was not met (the official Olympic tally is based only on gold medals, not all medals). Ukraine finished 21st overall on the medal table, and the mood in the Ukrainian camp as the Olympic Games came to a close was one of general disappointment. As one official put it: "We won a reasonable number of medals, but we lost many more opportunities."

Boxers in the limelight

Ukraine's young Olympic boxers joined the Klychko brothers, Volodymyr and Vitalii, on the world's boxing stage with a surprise haul of two silver and three bronze medals.

With five medals, Ukraine's fighters surpassed all expectations and strongly improved on their previous international record. In so doing they became the main contributors to Ukraine's overall medal count at the Sydney Games. Ukraine's boxers placed in nearly half of the boxing competition's weight categories.

In the 60-kilogram category, Andrii Kotelnyk made it a contest for the heavily favored Cuban boxer, Mario Kindelan, but ultimately went down by a score of 14-4 in the gold medal bout. A vastly more experienced fighter, Mr. Kindelan is the current world champion.

Mr. Kotelnyk, 23, the 1999 European champion, will be bringing home Lviv's only medal of the Sydney Olympic Games.

In the 67-kilogram category, Serhii Dotsenko fought a tenacious bout

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Pifer leaves Kyiv amid controversy

by Roman Woronowycz
Kyiv Press Bureau

KYIV – Days before his term as U.S ambassador to Ukraine was to end, Steven Pifer became embroiled in a political conflict with the Ukrainian government over a letter that he and his fellow ambassador from Canada and representatives from two international financial organizations sent to the Ukrainian president. The letter set out their misgivings on what have proved to be inaccurate assertions that Ukraine was ready to allow budget reform to die.

On September 29 the Ukrainian government called in Mr. Pifer and the other foreign diplomats to chastise them for interfering in the internal affairs of Ukraine, while pointing out that the diplomats had relied on inaccurate information as the basis for their complaint.

The same day Prime Minister Viktor Yuschenko told reporters the authors of the article "were a bit misinformed" about the current year's budget process. He said that references to the curtailment of budgetary reform were baseless, while adding that the government was continuing the reform process "in cooperation with the Parliament and under direct control of the president."

The controversy reflects the increasing frustration the Ukrainian government is feeling as it unsuccessfully continues to attempt to fulfill requirements of the International Monetary Fund for resumption of a financial program that was suspended a year ago. Ukraine has struggled to make its budget ends meet as it awaits IMF credit approval. Few international lenders, public or private, are ready to extend Ukraine lines of credit without IMF approval of its reform efforts.

The letter was an embarrassment to the U.S. and Canadian governments as well as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank, whose chief Ukrainian representatives also signed the correspondence, because its criticism

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UKRAINE'S QUEST FOR MATURE NATION STATEHOOD: A ROUNDTABLE

Washington conference...

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administration's initial pro-Soviet policy against Ukraine's independence, as demonstrated in the president's so-called "Chicken Kiev" speech, to that of recognition of Ukrainian statehood.

In addition to his position at SAIS, Dr. Wolfowitz also serves as a foreign policy advisor to the Republican Bush-Cheney presidential ticket. He stressed, however, that at the conference he was expressing his own personal views.

One of the last panel discussions of the conference featured foreign policy advisors from the presidential campaigns of the Republican and Democratic parties: William Schneider, president of International Planning Services, who was undersecretary of state in the Reagan administration, and John Tedstrom, of the Rand Corp. who until recently handled Ukrainian and Russian affairs at the National Security Council in the Clinton White House.

Discussing Ukrainian relations with the United States and Europe, Mr. Schneider said that, while granting Ukraine free trade status with the United States is "complicated," the U.S. government should pursue it and it should move to help Ukraine's entry into the European Union and increase its involvement in European security.

Ukraine's reliance on the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank had been a "mixed blessing," he said, adding that what Ukraine needs is more trade, not aid.

Mr. Tedstrom read a letter to the conference from Vice-President Al Gore, in which the Democratic presidential candidate outlined his strong personal interest in Ukraine and his role in developing the U.S.-Ukrainian strategic partnership through the Kuchma-Gore Binational Commission.

Ukraine, he said, still needs a balanced mix of trade and aid.

If elected president, Mr. Gore, with a track record of accomplishments, "won't start from scratch," Mr. Tedstrom said. "And," he added, "there will be no 'Chicken Kiev' served up in an Al Gore administration."

Foreign Affairs Minister Tarasyuk underscored the accomplishments achieved under what he called the "new internal situation" in Ukraine, which boasts a new president, a reformist government and a democratic parliament.

Speaking at an evening reception at the home of Washington businessman George Chopivsky Jr., an investor in the development of Ukraine's agriculture, he pointed out that for the first time since independence there now was an increase (5.6 percent) in the gross domestic product, a 12 percent increase in industrial output, and 260 percent increase in direct investment.

"We know our difficulties; we know our problems," Mr. Tarasyuk said, "and we a very grateful to all of you who are trying with your advice and your expertise to help us to move ahead."

Also addressing the reception guests, Sen. McConnell welcomed these recent improvements in Ukraine and noted that the United States, too, has made some progress – in looking at Ukraine "as an independent entity and not just as still part of the old Soviet Union."

Yaro Bihun

Foreign Affairs Minister Borys Tarasyuk describes "the new internal situation" in Ukraine during a reception at the home of George Chopivsky Jr. (right).

Sen. McConnell said he is proud of the billion dollars in aid the United States has given Ukraine over the past nine years – much of it earmarked in the Senate Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee he chairs.

The ineffectiveness of past U.S. assistance programs in Ukraine as well as such statements as "Ukraine is the third largest recipient of American assistance" was criticized by a number of panelists and discussants at the conference.

Some panelists charged that large amounts of U.S. assistance funds for Ukraine were wasted on highly paid American consultants.

Prime Minister Yuschenko's chief of staff, Mr. Rybachuk, agreed. Ukraine needs "less consulting and more training," he said, especially in the fields of management and communications.

Following similar criticism during an earlier panel by consultant Eugene Iwanciw, Ukrainian World Congress President Askold S. Lozynskyj debunked the oft-repeated representation that Ukraine is the third largest recipient of U.S. aid. He pointed out that Ukraine's $190 million to 225 million annual allocation "pales" in comparison to the $4.5 billion and $2.5 billion received by the top two beneficiaries of U.S. foreign assistance, Israel and Egypt. And on a per capita basis, it amounts to $4.75 – "frankly, a ridiculous amount," he added.

On the question of corruption in Ukraine, a number of American participants cautioned against being so hasty in criticizing Ukraine.

"Americans should be careful about preaching about corruption," said Ambassador William B. Taylor, the State Department's coordinator for U.S. assistance to the new independent states. His feeling was echoed by Ronald McNamara of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, who added that "certainly our record is not stellar here."

Presenting the business viewpoint, Kempton B. Jenkins, president of the Ukraine-U.S. Business Council, appealed for a measure of "intellectual humility" from those who are quick to criticize. Corruption, after all, "is not a Ukrainian phenomenon," he added.

Mr. Jenkins also took issue, as did some other speakers, with those who, for example, pillory Ukraine for detaining gypsies and other "dark-skinned" persons without cause, and fail to see its mirror image in the practice of "racial profiling" used by many in U.S. law enforcement.

During various panels a number of speakers called on the Kuchma administration to do everything possible to locate Heorhii Gongadze, an outspoken Ukrainian journalist, who disappeared without a trace on September 16.

Among the many other experts participating in the conference were: Ukrainian Constitutional Court Justice Petro Martynenko, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty President Thomas Dine, Special Advisor to the Secretary of State on the NIS Daniel Fried, Commerce Department Counselor Jan Kalicki, Verkhovna Rada National Deputy Mykhailo Ratushnyi, American Foreign

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Oleh Rybachuk, chief of staff to Prime Minister Viktor Yuschenko, answers a question from the audience. Next to him is Michael Waller of the American Foreign Policy Council.

Justice Petro Martynenko of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine discusses the rule of law in Ukraine as William Taylor of the State Department and Patience Huntwork of the Commercial Law Project, listen.

"There will be no 'Chicken Kiev' served up in an Al Gore administration," John Tedstrom tells a panel on "Contemplating the Next Administration." Seated next to him are Bush-Cheney advisor William Schneider (left) and moderator George Nesterczuk.

Washington conference...

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Policy Council President Herman Prichner, Freedom House President Adrian Karatnycky, Columbia University Harriman Institute Director Mark von Hagen, Anders Aslund of the Carnegie Endowment, DynaMeridian President William Courtney, Council on Foreign Relations Vice-President Paula Dobriansky, Former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine William Green Miller, William Kaufmann of the World Bank Institute, Olexander Poteikhin and Yaroslav Voitko of the Embassy of Ukraine, and U.S.-Ukraine Foundation President Nadia McConnell.

The conference was organized at the initiative of the Organization for the Defense of Four Freedoms of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, and sponsored by 16 other governmental, academic and private organizations, institutions and foundations: the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, Embassy of Ukraine, U.S. Library of Congress, American Foreign Policy Council, Freedom House, International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, Harriman Institute/Columbia University, SAIS/Johns Hopkins University, The Chopivsky Family Foundation, Romyr & Associates, Ukrainian World Congress, Ukrainian National Information Service, U.S.-Ukraine Foundation, and the Ukrainian Academic and Professional Association.

The two-day meeting was funded by more than 20 business and financial institutions, foundations and institutes.

Hazards of travel...

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but neither fax machines nor Internet connections were working when I was there. Some things never change.

Only rarely have I been forced to stay in hotels in Miensk and Kyiv. The highlight of Miensk's Planeta hotel is its bar and disco, in which locals (mostly young unattached women) congregate in vast numbers into the night hours. The rooms are stark, but the price of $75 (U.S.) per night is reasonable and justified according to the local propaganda by a TV that picks up the BBC News and German quiz shows.

Kyiv is a different story. I have stayed in the Dnipro and watched as one side of the building was flooded after a rain shower. A special prize for grimness has to go to the Bratislava, where guests are awakened by disco beat and the sound of Georgians consuming vodkas at 5 a.m. before leaving for whatever work they are pretending to do. I once ate lunch there without having the remotest idea what I was eating. So where are the decent hotels in the Ukrainian capital?

Look in any travel guide and one will find that the recommended hotel in Kyiv is the Prezident Hotel Kyivskyi, a dramatic structure on the top of a hill, a short distance from the city center. I was rash enough to try it earlier this year along with a University of Alberta colleague.

Upon entry, surly staff demanded our passports. A single room was exactly that. A narrow rock-like bed in a room one step above a prison cell. A double room is two rock-like beds jammed together. The dining room, however, could accommodate the Black Sea fleet. It was invariably deserted, and with good reason – the chef had clearly failed Cookery 100. The one highlight was a harp-playing young woman at breakfast, whose voice was as sweet as the porridge was thick. When it came time to pay the bill, my colleague got involved in a prolonged argument. He had booked his room in U.S. dollars, but was informed that the exchange rate had changed. He pointed out, to no avail, that the dollar had risen not fallen, against the local currency. It appeared that the hotel had its own exchange rate.

Then it was my turn and I came to realize how easy my colleague had gotten off. The manager produced a hotel card purporting to show that someone else was using my room. Upon inspection it turned out to belong to a young woman of 26 called Iryna. I informed the woman that if a 26-year-old woman was in my room then it was quite likely that I would have noticed the fact. After some 20 minutes of arguing, she decided to allow payment for a single room. As we left she said quite sweetly: "I hope you won't have any difficulties next time you come."

"No we won't," said my colleague, "Because there won't be a next time."

I also wondered why it is that in all the hotels where I have stayed in Ukraine the staff is Russian-speaking. This even includes the Grand Hotel in Lviv. Try speaking in Ukrainian and you will receive a bemused, even bewildered look. But switch to Russian and they come alive, even a bit of the gruffness is cast off. Doesn't this say something about hiring tactics, especially when the staff is relatively youthful?

If one wants to measure the slow progress in catering to the needs of foreign travelers in new states like Ukraine and Belarus, then one can visit Poland, where one not only has a Western-standard airline (though to be frank it is hardly punctual) and hotels, but where a discerning traveler can always find bargains, too. In the former USSR one still has Soviet service, but at Western rates, and that is generally offered with unsmiling and often disarming rudeness.

Helsinki Commission...

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trade union newspaper Rabochy; forceful disruptions of public meetings with representatives of the opposition; an apparent burglary of the headquarters of the Social Democratic Party; a ban of the First Festival of Independent Press in Vitebsk; and recent "reminder letters" by the State Committee on Press for independent newspapers to re-register.

Mr. President, Belarusian opposition parties supporting the boycott have received permission to stage "Freedom March III" this Sunday, October 1. At a number of past demonstrations, police have detained, harassed and beaten participants. Those in Congress who are following developments in Belarus are hopeful that this demonstration will take place peacefully, that authorities do not limit the rights of Belarusian citizens to freedom of association and assembly, and that the government of Belarus will refrain from acts of repression against the opposition and others who openly advocate for a boycott of these elections.

Mr. President, the Helsinki Commission continues to monitor closely the events surrounding these elections and we will keep the full Senate apprised of developments in the ongoing struggle for democracy in Belarus.