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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a briefing on the situation in Ukraine, we'll get started momentarily.

I want to let everyone know that probably in about 10 minutes we're going to have bells, which means we should all leave right away.

I want to seek unanimous consent to make sure we can at least hear the testimony before we come back, which would mean that we go to at least four o'clock. We'll still be back in the House with a lot of time because of where we are.

Do I have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I also want to seek consent. We have a few extra members from the parties at the table again. I believe it's all right if they're all sitting here.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Witnesses, we have a number of votes this afternoon and we apologize for that. We have five witnesses, and you can take about five minutes for testimony so that we can get it all. We will go to the House and we'll do our vote and come back here. I will apologize again. We may have to come back once or twice.

We have until 5:30, but I'm not sure exactly how long the votes will go. I'm just warning you that we'll probably have bells in about ten minutes.

It would be nice if we can get all the testimony. Gentlemen, I'm going to ask you to introduce yourselves very quickly when you speak and tell us what you're currently doing. Mr. Tarasyuk, we're going to get you to start first, sir, and then we're going to move across.

You have five minutes. Before you get started, Borys, I would like to welcome 25 guests from the BCU Foundation's youth leadership program—25 young Ukrainian Canadians from across Canada. To all the young Ukrainian Canadians, thank you very much for being here and welcome to our committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: We'll work to make sure we can get all the testimony in. Mr. Tarasyuk, you're going to start first.

Thank you.

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk (As an Individual): Good afternoon to everybody. I'm Borys Tarasyuk. I'm a member of the Ukraine Parliament; chairman of the committee on European integration; leader of the Rukh party, which led Ukraine to independence; and co-president of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.

Dear fellow parliamentarians, first of all, allow me to express my gratitude to you for paying attention to our country, to Ukraine. This is proof that you Canadian parliamentarians are keeping a close eye on what is going on in Europe and in my country, in particular. I have a special feeling for talking to Canadians, because back in 1991, the then Consul General of Canada to Ukraine, Nestor Gayowsky—who is sitting here—presented a verbal note to the Ukrainian government recognizing the independence of Ukraine. Canada was the first western country to recognize the independence of Ukraine, together with our neighbour, Poland.

Since that time on, Canada, and in particular, the Canadian Parliament, has kept a very good relationship with the Ukraine. I'm happy to say that there are a lot of ties connecting Ukrainians and Canadians because of the huge Ukrainian diaspora—the huge Ukrainian community here in Canada—which contributed a lot to the consolidation of the relationship between Ukraine and Canada after Ukraine resumed its independence back in 1991.

I'm happy to say that Canadian Ukrainians were the first to contribute to the development of the Ukrainian foreign policy infrastructure. This community was the first to present a gift to the Ukrainian government in the form of premises, which to this day are serving as the building of the Ukrainian embassy in Canada, and the building of the consular section of the Ukrainian embassy. I am trying to recognize the great contribution of all Canadians, and of Ukrainian Canadians, to the development of our relationship.

You are now having hearings on the course of democracy in Ukraine. I was told that you are trying to review democracy in Ukraine over the last 10 years. For me, this is very difficult to compare. I will try to help you by saying that the years before 2005 were the years when political forces—which are currently in power and have been since 2010—caused the retreat of democracy in Ukraine.

After the Orange Revolution victory, we had Ukrainian authorities who changed the country and the attitude towards democracy and freedom. As a result, according to the Freedom House index, Ukraine was transferred from a partly free country to a free country. Unfortunately, in just less than one year, the current authorities managed to return the Ukraine from free to partly free country, according to the Freedom House index. So this is the result of their two-year rule.

Unfortunately, the time limit doesn't allow me to explain the backsliding of democracy in Ukraine in a systemic way, but I would like to use this opportunity to ask you, members of the Canadian Parliament, to do whatever you decide necessary, but also to do what we, in Ukraine, expect of you.

● (1540)

We expect that Canada will continue to be an active country, being a member of the most prestigious unions, such as the G-8, the G-20, NATO, and the International Monetary Fund. Also, we expect—and here I am speaking as a member of the Ukrainian Parliament and a member of the opposition—that the results of these hearings in your committee will probably be a resolution by the Canadian Parliament on the situation in Ukraine.

We are moving towards a very important political event in Ukraine, that is the parliamentary elections coming this October 28. We expect that we will change the country. We, as the opposition, are representing the alternative to the current authorities in Ukraine.

We expect that the Canadian Parliament, Canadian NGOs, and first of all, the Ukrainian community will be as active as they used to be in the 2004 presidential elections in international observance missions.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tarasyuk. I apologize for the limited time we have.

I'm going to move over to Valentyn Nalyvaichenko.

Mr. Valentyn Nalyvaichenko (As an Individual): My name is Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, and I am the chairman of the political council of the Our Ukraine political party, and also here representing the NGO renewal of the country.

It's my pleasure today to address you, distinguished members of the Canadian Parliament. Let me start with the agenda of the opposition in Ukraine. We understand now that we have to be united. We really have to propose the agenda for Ukraine for the 21st century.

Let me start with expressing appreciation to your government, to you, for the Canadian physicians who have visited Yulia Tymoshenko in prison to examine her medically. They did a great job. We appreciate that and we'd like to encourage you to continue such missions. They are very important, especially for political prisoners currently in jail and imprisoned by the current authorities, by the regime of Mr. Yanukovych.

Let me also present my strong belief that the only effective means to oppose the existing authoritarian regime in my country are united opposition, a strong civil society, and fair elections.

As Mr. Tarasyuk mentioned, the upcoming elections are crucial and are of great importance for my country. We, as a united opposition, think the only force that can defend and free political prisoners—let me again mention Tymoshenko, Lutsenko, and other members of the opposition—must be united and studying from the same line in order to oppose the current events and the course of the current government.

The course it has chosen is clearly pro-Russian, Soviet-style, with no clear understanding of what Ukrainian independence means for all Ukrainians, what our history is, what our culture is, and what our Euro-integration and Euro-Atlantic aspirations are on the whole.

Again, let me bring your attention to the main point where we'd like to ask you, as distinguished members of Parliament, to support our democracy as much as you can by sending a broad-scale observation mission to Ukraine for the upcoming election, as you did during the Orange Revolution.

We thank our Ukrainian communities in Canada and the United States for conducting such very important missions. Let me again ask you to support, by all means—by governmental means, by parliamentary means—such an observation mission to Ukraine.

Let me conclude with the following. Geopolitically we understand what happened to Ukraine and what we expect from the so-called band of swindlers and thieves, currently back in power in Moscow, in Russia. We are talking about Mr. Putin's aspirations and plans to bring us back to the CIS, a USSR-style union, where we don't see any place for us as a democratic country as Ukrainians do not want to live again under the curtain of a Soviet-style regime.

Let me ask you to understand that the first target for the new, third term of Mr. Putin's presidency, of course, will be the independent Ukraine. It will be, by any means, trying to bring us back, to limit our liberties, and to limit Ukraine's independence. It will, by any means, provide pressure on foreign policy and domestic policy, and as much as it can, separate Ukraine from the western world—the democratic world—to show that the only alternative for such countries, for my country, is being back united again with Russia.

Thank you for your attention. Thank you very much.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move over to Marcin, if you could introduce yourself.

Mr. Marcin Swiecicki (As an Individual): My name is Marcin Swiecicki. I am a member of the Polish Parliament. I used to work in the Ukraine—for the last four years.

Mr. Chairperson and distinguished members of Parliament, it is my great pleasure to testify here in this meeting. Let me first start by reporting on the Polish and the European Union position on human rights and on the future of Ukraine.

The Polish position on Ukraine is determined by the thinking of the famous Polish émigré writer and editor, Jerzy Giedroyc, who in the 1970s had already formulated the so-called doctrine that independent and strong Ukraine, Belarus, and Baltic states are crucial for Polish independence and sovereignty.

That is why Poland was one of two first countries to recognize Ukrainian independence. At the beginning of this century, Poland was disappointed with the developments in Ukraine with regard to human rights, especially after Gongadze's murder. It was distasteful, even, to looking at our president at that time meeting with President Kuchma. However, it proved to be somehow useful later during the Orange Revolution, when President Kwasniewski took the role of mediator and facilitator of the agreements in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution.

The Orange Revolution was welcomed with great enthusiasm in Poland on the basis of solidarity—the same suffering under Communism. The young generation had their chance to participate in a great event, because they were too young at the time to participate in the Solidarity movement. The older generation—all politicians from all sides of the political spectrum—were coming to Maidan Nezalezhnosti to express their support for the fight for democracy and independence.

The developments after the Orange Revolution, from the point of view of human rights, the freedom of the press, freedom of association, and freedom of expression, were quite satisfactory for quite a long time. Although, less satisfactory in terms of the economic reforms, which were moving forward more slowly. What was disappointing for Poland at the time was that the European Union did not offer Ukraine the prospect of membership.

This requires a unanimous vote of the European Council. Only a majority vote in the European Parliament to adopt resolutions can offer such a prospect. Some countries in the European Union, unfortunately, were not offering their vote. We know from our experience that the prospect of membership is the most important factor—mobilizing, disciplining, showing direction for the modernization of the country. It played an enormous role in the accession process for the modernization of Poland and other central European countries. I think the same would be very beneficial also for Ukraine.

The second-best solution is what is on the table right now—the association agreement, which is a special association agreement that also provides for harmonization of legislation. According to the words of Philippe Cuisson, the chief negotiator on the European side, it can offer Ukraine the same legal status vis-à-vis the European Union as Norway and Switzerland have. After implementation, it wouldn't be a problem to join the European Union.

But there are obstacles in this, in particular regarding the human rights situation and the rule of law in Ukraine. Right now, there is a deterioration—the problem of imprisonment of Yulia Tymoshenko and other opposition leaders. There are unfair processes. There is also the deterioration of freedom in the media. All these are problems of great concern for the Polish authorities and Polish society, as well as for the European Union.

Therefore what I consider as crucial is to have fair elections, because this is also one of the conditions of ratifying the association agreement. For ratification, you need to have a vote of approval from 27 parliaments. It will be impossible under the present conditions to get such an approval.

So the assistance for the civil society that is very active in monitoring elections.... They are monitoring elections from the very beginning, registering the candidates, because some of them are intimidated. Access to the media is also very important. So it's not just the election but also the pre-election process and the campaigning that has to be monitored. That's very important.

● (1550)

In the long run, what is also important is the support for an independent society, independent think tanks and universities, etc. I think that part of the development egg should be transferred for the support of an independent society rather than to support some specific economic show of projects.

Regarding the geopolitical future, Ukraine right now is under enormous pressure from Russia. Russia wants to prevent this association agreement, but if Ukraine succeeds in modernization, if Ukraine succeeds in implementing its European aspiration, I think it will also be a very good example for Russia, for all these forces in Russia who are in the minority, but who are fighting for democracy and modernization and a rule-by-law Russia. If Ukraine fails, of course, it will be a disaster because it will nourish all this nostalgia for imperium, for an extension of their influence.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. James Sherr, the floor is yours.

Mr. James Sherr (As an Individual): My name is James Sherr. I am the senior fellow of the Russia and Eurasia Programme of Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, in London.

Chairman, distinguished members of this committee, I have been asked to speak about Russia's response to Ukraine's European policy. That response is proactive, multidimensional, and hostile.

Integration with the European Union represents a civilizational choice, and successful integration would have civilizational consequences not only for Ukraine but for Russia itself. For Russia's governing elite and much of Russia's society, Ukraine is a part of Russia's own identity. This is also true for many of the most liberal opponents of the Putin system who subscribe faithfully to Vernadsky's axiom that Russian democracy ends where the question of Ukraine begins.

For the illiberal Russian state that exists today, identity politics play a central role in foreign policy and they exacerbate every other serious issue—geopolitical, geo-economic, commercial, and security—in the relationship between Ukraine and Russia.

The second reality I wish to discuss is the EU itself. Within the past 10 years, Moscow's views about the European Union have changed decidedly for the worse. In the 1990s, there was a positive attitude about the strengthening of the EU because the EU was seen as a geopolitical counterweight to NATO and the United States. Today, Russians now correctly understand that the EU is first and foremost a project and mechanism of integration on the basis of a sociopolitical and business model different from and antithetical to those that prevail in the post-Soviet states. That model in the post-Soviet states is driven by networks rather than markets. It is producer- rather than consumer-oriented. It is monopolistic rather than competitive in ethos. It is not built on property rights and judicial integrity, but on patron-client relationships, negotiable legal order, and privileged relations at all levels between business and structures of power.

It is also a model based on co-optation and money—lots of money—which is not only being used to reward the networks that sustain it, but to expand those networks and undermine the rules-based ethos and regulatory structures of the EU member states.

My penultimate point is that despite all I have said, the greatest obstacle to Ukraine's EU integration is not Russia but Ukraine itself, specifically the Yanukovych regime and the interests that sustain it. President Yanukovych is an individual who is impervious to his own inability to understand the premises upon which EU integration is based. For him, the EU is about markets, not about making the changes that would enable Ukraine to exploit these markets to its own benefit.

It is doubtless true that Yanukovych would prefer an association agreement with the EU to integration into the Russia-sponsored CIS customs union. But the bigger truth is that Yanukovych would rather be president of a Ukraine reintegrating with Russia, than not be president of a Ukraine integrating with the European Union.

In view of the time constraints, I will leave my final point—the issue of what Canada can do—for our Q and A.

Thank you very much.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sherr.

We'll now finish off with Mr. Piontkovsky.

You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Andrei Piontkovsky (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My name is Andrei Piontkovsky. I am a senior fellow of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a member of the ruling body of anti-Putin opposition, Movement Solidarnost.

I came from Russia just after the so-called election organized by the Putin regime. It was not an election, but a special operation of the Putin kleptocracy on legitimizing its lifetime rule. This so-called election was falsified long before the day of voting, first of all, by barring any opposition candidates from participating in it. Putin himself selected four clowns to orchestrate this special operation.

The subject of Ukraine was very strongly present during this operation. The main slogan of the Putin propaganda was “Stop the orange plague”. They tried to portray the Orange Revolution in Ukraine as a conspiracy of the west, and especially the United States, to dismantle Ukraine, Russia, and other states of the former Soviet space.

I have been frequently asked by U.S. and western audiences about how they can help the cause of democracy in Russia. I always answer that it's rather difficult to help Russia. Russia is a huge country. The most efficient way to help Russia is to help Ukraine. Help Ukraine, and help Ukraine deliver a success story of developing an Euro-Atlantic option. This success story will become the crucial argument in the battle inside Russia between the proponents and enemies of democracy. But the west, especially European Union giants France and Germany, did everything to discourage the European aspirations of the Ukrainian people during the Yushchenko presidency.

My recommendation to the distinguished members of the foreign affairs committee is the same as my Polish colleague: help today. Help the Ukrainian democracy, morally and politically, win in this year's parliamentary election. In today's Russia, the Putin regime has lost all political discourse and narrative. His kleptocracy alienated all creative elements of society, but still kept power. In this unstable balance, the success of our sister country on the road to democracy and European development will be decisive, not only for Ukraine itself, but for Russia and for all the post-Soviet space.

Thank you.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

To our witnesses, thank you very much. I have to suspend the meeting. We have votes in about 12 minutes. Hopefully we'll be back around 4:30.

● (1600)

(Pause)

● (1625)

The Chair: Thank you very much. I apologize again. This will be the last time I apologize for the bells, but we are going to have additional bells, probably in about three or four minutes. What we're going to try to do is get in as many rounds as we can. There are going to be 30-minute bells again, which is going to confuse the rest of the afternoon.

We'll get started right away. We're going to go for five minutes, back and forth, as quickly as possible. The bells will go again. I'll just let the witnesses know that we'll continue for about 15 minutes or so. We'll get in as many questions as we can. Then we're probably going to have to conclude the meeting, because we're going to be back into that again.

I'm going to move over to Ms. Latendresse, who is going to have the first round. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): I would like to start by saying *diakuyou douje*, thank you very much.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for your presentation.

[*Translation*]

And thank you for being here to explain this to us.

Anyone who would like to answer can.

Do you think that the west should focus its efforts on one country in the region, lend its support, and hope that the transition toward democracy ends up bringing democracy to the other four countries around it—Moldava, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia?

Do you think it would be better to focus on one country in particular, rather than spread the effort around? We can see that this is what happened in Caucasus, because Georgia, which is increasingly democratic, is helping the two other countries this way and moving them toward democracy.

I'd like to hear your comments on this, if possible.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Valentyn Nalyvaichenko: Let me start with the following.

Of course, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, and the Baltic States, all should be protected against the new plans of Mr. Putin for a so-called expansion of the former USSR—the so-called CIS, Customs Union, or another Eurasian union.

Even more, in Ukraine we are now thinking that, with our friends from Georgia, Lithuania, and Moldova, we could establish some kind of NGO or something—friends of democracy—that would include all of these countries. I mean, Moldova and Ukraine are in opposition now, but nevertheless, the civil society from Ukraine, the NGOs, and Georgia—that's the best way we could respond to any new expansion plans from Mr. Putin's administration.

● (1630)

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: Thank you for your question.

Of course, being a Ukrainian and being in the Ukraine, sure, I would prefer that the efforts of our friends are concentrated in Ukraine. But to be serious, I would like to say that when democracy gained victory in Ukraine, it was Ukraine that initiated the coordination and the union of like-minded democratic countries in the area, from the Baltic states to the Black Sea through to the Caspian Sea. We created, together with Georgia, the community known as the Community of Democratic Choice.

What I am trying to say is that the more effort you allow to help democracy in Ukraine, which is the biggest country in the region and in Europe, the better.

Thank you.

Mr. Marcin Swiecicki: No democratic forces in any country should be abandoned when they are fighting for democracy and freedom. But at this moment, I think, and in general, if you look at the map, Ukraine is the most important country, and really, foreign assistance can tip the balance. So I would dare to say that Ukraine is crucial in this part of the world for democratic transformation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: We are often told that, to improve democracy in Ukraine in particular, the ideal would be to give direct support to the civil society. This would allow us to establish democracy afterwards, through a pyramid effect.

Where could we focus our efforts, within the civil groups, to improve democracy in Ukraine?

[*English*]

The Chair: It's in order to foster democracy.

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: Thank you for this question. Indeed, civil society in Ukraine is a very important factor in bringing Ukraine to democracy. It was the maturity of the civil society that brought the victory of democracy in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution. A lot of analysts had doubts about the maturity of civil society in Ukraine before 2004, but 2004 proved that the civil society in Ukraine is very strong and is a very influential force for bringing democracy into Ukraine.

What I would like to say is that we are expecting that the Canadian government and the Canadian Parliament will pay enough attention to support civil society in Ukraine, which requires its support, especially taking into account the undemocratic trends of the current authorities.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's all the time we have. I apologize. We're going to move to the next questioner.

Mr. Dechert, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today and sharing this very important information with us.

I have four questions, so I'm going to ask the questions first to four different people and then let you answer in turn.

My first question is for Mr. Tarasyuk.

Mr. Tarasyuk, you mentioned the Freedom House index, which had reduced its press freedom rating in Ukraine from free to partly free. Maybe you can tell us why it did that.

Mr. Swiecicki, will the elections this coming October be fair, in your opinion, if Yulia Tymoshenko and Mr. Lutsenko are still in prison?

To Mr. Sherr, you mentioned that you had some suggestions for what Canada can do to help. I'd like you to expand on that.

I have one last question, for Mr. Nalyvaichenko. You mentioned that Ukraine needs a strong civil society. The Canadian government is supporting civil society through CIDA in Ukraine. One of the programs, which costs $5.6 million, is aimed at combating corruption. Tell us what you think of that and what else we can do to help.

● (1635)

The Chair: All right. You each have one minute. Go ahead.

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: Freedom House is a prestigious international NGO, the activity of which I have traced for many years. I think there is an objective assessment by Freedom House of the human rights situation in Ukraine. Back in 2010—that means a couple of months after the new president assumed power and a new government was created—many analysts were asking why, so quickly, Ukrainian authorities managed to spoil the relationship with democratic institutions like the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Let me remind you that it was in October 2010 that the first critical resolution passed in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe regarding the critical situation of democracy in Ukraine. On November 25, the European Parliament approved the first critical resolution on the situation of democracy in Ukraine.

It required only nine months for the new authorities, led by Yanukovych, to spoil the relationship with the democratic community, which took his predecessor—well, before the predecessor, Leonid Kuchma—six years. For Kuchma, it required six years to spoil the relationship with democratic institutions, and Yanukovych managed to do this in a couple of months.

The Chair: Mr. Swiecicki.

Mr. Marcin Swiecicki: Yes, with Yulia Tymoshenko and Yuri Lutsenko in prison, the elections will not be fully fair—that is certain, but they might be fair enough not to pose obstacles to the ratification of the association agreement, and secondly, to produce the Parliament that will annul the paragraph of the penal code under which Yulia was sentenced.

The Chair: Mr. Sherr.

Mr. James Sherr: We need to persuade the forces that have the key interests that uphold the status quo in both Russia and Ukraine that their socio-economic and business model is not only damaging but unprofitable. The EU has already, in September, in launching raids on 20 enterprises affiliated with Gazprom, taken a very important step in doing what is essential, which is upholding our laws, our norms, and our standards in our jurisdiction.

My belief is that Canada has the experience and the authority to articulate the case for doing this across the board. It is the most effective thing we have the ability to do, which will send tangible messages to people in power in those countries. That's where I think much of our effort should be focused.

The Chair: Finally, Valentyn, go ahead, please.

Mr. Valentyn Nalyvaichenko: Let me support Mr. Sherr in his view that this can be a very influential method—also money-laundering investigations or such anti-corruption investigations.

Anyway, straight to the point that you, honourable parliamentarian, asked of me.

The best way now is to support CIDA and to reconsider their methods and tools—how they support NGOs and civil society in my country. Among the priorities, I would mention those NGOs that stand for fair elections. Also important is not to wait until the election comes in October, but to start now with training courses, with communication devices—even websites for us, for Ukrainians—where we could share information about the preparations, about possible falsifications. We need to begin to protect fair elections now, and not waiting until the day of the actual voting.

The second priority that I would mention is to support Ukrainian diaspora organizations. We have to reconsider what happened and how to protect democracy. The best choice is to start with the Ukrainian diaspora organizations here in Canada, in the United States, Argentina, all around the world. Why? Because they know our country. They speak our language. They know how important it is to support a project like the anniversary of the Ukrainian insurgent army. This could provide a strong message to Mr. Putin and his administration that we are an independent country. We would like the Ukraine to remain Ukrainian, a European country, with our heroes, with our history. That might, in some cases, be a strong and efficient way to provide democracy and to protect it in my country.

Thank you.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you. And thank you for keeping all the answers short.

Mr. LeBlanc.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and my thanks to you gentlemen for your presence here today.

It's certainly been interesting. I regret that these votes and bells keep interrupting what would be a very interesting conversation for Canadians to hear. These sessions are televised. So it's important, not only for Ukrainian Canadians, who naturally have a deep interest in the development of human rights and democracy in Ukraine, but also for other Canadians, who aren't as educated as they should be about the relationship between Canada and Ukraine, as well as the role Canada can play in supporting civil society, democracy, and human rights in Ukraine.

We've heard a lot about some of the problems of the current government and the current administration in Ukraine. It's obviously worrisome. One of the challenges that we hear sometimes is that the opposition is fragmented. I'm talking about the political opposition that could be a counterweight to this particular presidential authority. I'm wondering if there are any prospects in your view for a more united opposition, a more coordinated opposition?

My second question is a direct pickup on what Alexandrine had asked in relation to civil society. We've heard that sometimes in the absence of an effective, free opposition, civil society fills in the gaps. I'm wondering if you could tell us who would be the leaders of this civil society. Who could provide partners for Canadian groups, for CIDA and other organizations that want to contribute to progress in Ukraine?

Finally, if anybody knows of anybody in the current government who might be open to constructive reforms, to real reforms that would bring about some of the changes we heard about on Monday, we'd like to hear from you. Are there any actors in the current government that might be interested in working with Canadian parliamentarians or other groups to try to further this objective?

The Chair: We'll direct that to Borys, and then after to James.

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: Thank you for your questions about the opposition. It was unfortunately true that the Ukrainian opposition was fragmented. I will not concentrate now on the reasons, but that was the case. Unfortunately, it was necessary to arrest Yulia Tymoshenko to get all members of the democratic forces to come to the conclusion that we have to unite. The second day after the arrest of Yulia Tymoshenko, the opposition, including me, signed a declaration on the creation of the committee opposing dictatorship in Ukraine. This committee has been working since August of last year. We have already sent a lot of very important messages to Ukrainian society.

Since the 2004 elections, we have witnessed the majority of the Ukrainian electorate supporting democrats. This is a tendency. What is needed from the leaders of the opposition? There are 11 parties together in this committee opposing dictatorship, which demonstrates to our supporters—the majority of the electorate in Ukraine—that we are capable of carrying out our responsibility before the nation. Fortunately, we are doing this quite well. We are planning to win the forthcoming parliamentary elections in October 2012. One objective is to nominate one candidate for each majority district, one candidate from the opposition. The rest will be regarded as the representatives of the authorities.

Another objective is to prepare one single party list. The elections are going to be mixed: 50% on the party list and another 50% on the majority district. Our objective is to get a united party list. Already four parties have signed agreements, including my party, Rukh, the People's Movement of Ukraine, to run on one single party list based on Batkivshchyna, the party of Yulia Tymoshenko. We hope the others will join us, and thus we will present a single list of candidates. For our followers and supporters, which is the majority, it will be easier to identify who to vote for.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm sorry, sir, that's your five minutes.

I asked the committee. It has been suggested that we come back again at a quarter after. I think we'll do that. We have all come so far that we need to make the best use of our time.

Mr. Hawn, you have five minutes. We'll finish off, and then we'll start back afterwards.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): *Dobry den moj Ukrainski druze.*

For my Polish friends, *dzien dobry przyjaciel* .

For my Russian friends, *zdravstvujte!*

Mr. Sherr, I wonder if you could provide the committee with your recommendations in writing—the actions you thought Canada could take, and so on. Could you expand on those a little?

Mr. James Sherr: I've provided the total testimony, including what I have omitted.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That's terrific. That would be great.

Mr. Piontkovsky, as a Russian, how far do you think Vladimir Putin would go? Do you think he would do something akin to what he did in Georgia?

Mr. Andrei Piontkovsky: Well, if you believe his rhetoric, he may go very far.

He made his so-called victory speech on the evening of March 1, and he was almost hysterical, with tears in his eyes. He did not speak about his victory over Zyuganov, Zhirinovsky, and the others. He spoke about his victory over “them”, that “they” wanted to destroy motherland Russia. They included the United States, particularly.

He sincerely hates the west, maybe first of all as an example of another political and economic model, and certainly he especially hates Georgia, whose successes are becoming more and more appealing to Russian people. He hates Ukraine because of the Orange Revolution and what it generated.

My personal opinion is that he will not dare do any aerial military operation, and I'll explain to you why. You in the west have enormous leverage on him. This leverage, not only on him but on all the Putin kleptocracy, are the multi-billion dollar accounts, assets, and real estate holdings in the west, in the United States, and so on. All of them are known, well known, not only to the special services of western countries but to all journalists. It's known in Russia.

I recommended several times to my western colleagues just to arrest, or to freeze, the accounts of two gentlemen—the multi-billionaire Abramovich, who lives in London, and the multi-billionaire Timchenko, who lives in Switzerland. Everybody in this world knows that these two gentlemen are Putin puppets and they are managing his financial empire. You have legislation against laundering capital gained through criminal activity. Only the political will from western leaders is needed to inflict a very serious blow on Putin's financial empire and consequently on his political empire and his political ambitions.

● (1650)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

Go ahead.

Mr. Valentyn Nalyvaichenko: Perhaps I can add just a little bit.

Mr. Putin has already started with the invasion. In Crimea, the Russian Black Sea Fleet is deployed up to 2042. Russian FSB officers, up to 100 people, are back to Sevastopol, again, in Ukraine. Up to 70% of our banking system is dependent on Russia. Up to 75% of Ukrainian media, TV and others, are Russian media.

That's my little contribution to what Mr. Piontkovsky just said.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Very quickly, Mr. Tarasyuk, you're talking about wanting a free and fair election, obviously. Are your election laws favourable to that, or do you need to do something with them? Are your election laws in shape to demand a free election, or to run one?

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: Thank you for your question.

I am of the opinion that the current authorities in Ukraine did their best in order to modify, to tailor, the legislation on elections to their expectations and political will. They diminished the possibilities of the opposition, of democratic forces, through unfavourable conditions. For example, they prohibited parties from running by party blocs. They elevated the threshold from 3% to 5%.

Another point is that they in fact created the conditions, through the constitutional appeal, to remove the provision that allowed, according to the law approved by majority and the opposition, for a candidate to run in two formats—that is, on the majority district and on the proportional system. Most probably, they will modify this provision through the constitutional court, which is in their pocket.

I do not exclude that they will go further in modifying the law closer to the elections. They did it in the 2010 local elections. They modified the law two months before the elections in order to put democrats into a most unfavourable position.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, you have five minutes before the vote takes place, so I am going to suspend the meeting again.

We will be back at quarter after five, I hope, so we will see you shortly.

● (1650)

(Pause)

● (1715)

The Chair: Welcome back. I guess you never left. It's good to be back.

We're going to continue with questioning. The way it stands is that we won't have bells until 6:40 p.m., so if it's possible to go over time a few minutes we could maybe get a couple of rounds of questions in. I think that would probably work out.

We won't keep you here all night. I promise that.

We're going to move back over to the opposition side.

Madame Latendresse, the floor is yours, for five minutes. Thanks.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: My question is for Mr. Swiecicki. At the start of your presentation, you mentioned the Promethean theory, which dates back to the restoration of the Polish state in the early 20th century. It's pretty incredible to note to what point this old idea is still valid today in the context of the European Union and democracy.

I'd like to know generally what measures Poland has taken to help democracy in Ukraine. Also, would it be possible and desirable for Canada to coordinate its current efforts with Poland's?

[*English*]

Mr. Marcin Swiecicki: If I correctly understood your question, you asked about the measures taken in Poland to assist Ukraine.

First of all, there were a lot of observers—a great number of observers, for example, during the Orange Revolution—and also the great support of the political class in Poland for democratization. Also, as I said, President Kaczynski was invited and took part in the international committee, or round table, trying to find the solution during the crisis of the Orange Revolution.

There are hundreds of Polish universities, institutes, and foundations that find it fashionable to have a program and cooperation with Ukrainian associations, federations, and foundations to invite Ukrainian students and offer them scholarships. Of course, Poland is still a relatively poor country among European Union countries, so therefore we are initiating various actions in the European Union—a fund for endowment for democracy.

It's a partnership. The Erasmus Mundus program is to increase the role of the European Union in assisting civil society in Ukraine, because as I said, the capacity of Poland is too small in comparison to....

Therefore, I think that Canada can also advocate on the global scale in various other institutions to support the Ukraine. It can also increase exchange programs, scholarship programs, and fellowship programs. It can cooperate with financing, and support universities, independent think tanks, and foundations in the Ukraine, and invite people, for instance, just to increase raising human capacity on how democracy works, or how the economy works in free countries.

Of course, Canada could also very strongly support a monitored election process that is right now being started.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Do you think that opening the doors, facilitating access to western countries—Canada in particular—for young Ukrainians, Belarusians and Moldovans would pull the rug out from under dictators and ensure that the situation becomes more democratic? We know that a lot of things change when young people get involved.

● (1720)

[*English*]

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: May I add to what Mr. Swiecicki said? There is a Ukrainian-Polish interparliamentary assembly. There is also a Ukrainian-Polish-Lithuanian interparliamentary assembly. Why not a Ukrainian-Polish-Lithuanian-Canadian interparliamentary assembly? This is one of the options.

As to the access of young people to Canada, I think this is a very important issue. This is the crux of change for the better in all countries—that young people get the possibility to travel easily to other democracies, and Canada in particular.

In this regard, let me tell you a story. While being the foreign minister two times, in 2005 and 2007, I initiated a non-visa regime for all citizens of all EU member states, Canada, and the United States. Now all Canadian citizens enjoy the right to travel to Ukraine without a visa.

For me to travel to testify before this committee took quite a lot of effort to get a Canadian visa. The one who granted all Canadian citizens a non-visa regime received a visa for just one entry—a single-entry visa. I don't think this is an adequate attitude on the part of Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all the time we have. We'll move back to the government side.

Mr. Bezan, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all our witnesses for your presentations today. I know you've travelled a great distance to be here. As someone who's proud of his Ukrainian heritage, it's great to see that we have people from Ukraine, Poland, Britain, and Russia advocating for more democracy and freedoms within Ukraine.

I know that my baba and gido left Ukraine almost 100 years ago and never had the chance to feel democracy within Ukraine. They came to Canada to get that. My family is quite proud that one of the family is in the Parliament in Canada today.

I've been in Ukraine as an observer in the election process, and I have great concerns about the laws—whether or not they're even constitutional, and whether or not there's independent jurisprudence within the court systems. You talk about the influence that the government has, that Yanukovych has within the constitutional courts, and how that's going to slant the electoral outcome. You talk about having more election observation.

I was there with a lot of my friends, who are joining us here today, as election observers in the last presidential election. There's only so much we can do, and if they're going to continue to change the laws, how are we going to ensure a fair and open process?

I've always been opposed to the amount of money that's spent on elections in Ukraine. There's no cap. There was as much money spent in Ukraine on the presidential election this last go-round, just between Yulia Tymoshenko and Viktor Yanukovych, as there was in the last U.S. presidential election. It was $1 billion. It's atrocious that they're spending that type of money that could have been spent in better ways to stimulate the economy and create jobs and economic opportunities in Ukraine.

How do we change those laws? How do we provide that influence as Canadians? I know there should be increased monitoring and increased long-term overview and oversight of the electoral process and the electoral commission system, which is extremely partisan. In my opinion it should become a government agency that's completely unbiased.

I'm going to ask Mr. Tarasyuk and Mr. Nalyvaichenko to speak to that.

Dr. Sherr, I appreciated your very candid comments about how we can engage with the Russian influence within Ukraine. Perhaps you can talk about the whole role that civil societies may play in influencing what's happening on the ground within Ukraine.

The Chair: Why don't we start with Mr. Sherr?

Mr. James Sherr: Thank you very much.

I think anything we can do to develop relationships and institutionalized relationships with the class of small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs in Ukraine will be an immense investment in the future. Those people are best placed to have a direct tangible interest in seeing European standards advance in that country.

We all know many representatives from that group who sincerely would give up 40% or 50% of their income to not live in a country where every single week they are being intimidated, pressured, and harassed by somebody. That combination is needed. I think the efforts that will be most rewarding are those that respond to the direct interests of people in the country and are not purely ecumenical. Sadly, there's very little being done in this area. These people as yet have very little political self-awareness, and I think that is where a new generation of leaders might emerge.

Thank you.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry, we won't have time for both of you, so who wants to speak?

Mr. Nalyvaichenko.

Mr. Valentyn Nalyvaichenko: Thank you.

Talking about laws, I think the best position now is to be united, as Mr. Tarasyuk mentioned several times, and be in touch and in cooperation with NGOs that would like to support democratic, fair elections. This year for sure, 100%, we know if we support them they'll support us during the elections. I think for the international community to support such NGOs in Ukraine is the best way to invest—if I may use that word—in Ukrainian democracy.

Ukraine needs changes in our legislation—and as many amendments as we can make—in a future Parliament, in a new Parliament, concerning anti-corruption legislation. Fighting corruption in all laws and legislation should be done. That's a priority for a new position in the new Parliament.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That completes the second round. We're going to have to keep moving here. I apologize, Mr. Tarasyuk.

We're going to start the third round. Mr. Opitz, please.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you very much.

Mr. Nalyvaichenko, you talked about the opposition. I'm going to fire questions fairly quickly because there's a lot I'd like to get on the record in five minutes.

You talked about the opposition being united. In the elections coming up, that's going to be a critical feature. If your opposition is obviously divided, then you're not going to be very effective.

By the way, we support a lot of the NGOs. The NGOs here in Canada are exceptionally strong. The diaspora here is exceptionally strong.

It was in this country that Mr. Bezan's bill recognized the Holodomor as a genocide. The League of Ukrainian Canadians pushed very hard, and that's why you're sitting here today, because they had a pivotal role in that.

You also have a very active youth. Through the CUP program recently, we had Ukrainian interns, and they were top-notch. I had one myself and she was brilliant. They're very engaged young people. They're in tune with what's going on in their country. They're active, they're interested, and they are looking for direction. They are looking for leadership. They are young and they need that.

How are you, sir, going to bring together a credible opposition, and in fact, one that now has to compensate for the absence of Yulia Tymoshenko?

Mr. Valentyn Nalyvaichenko: First of all, thank you very much. Let me express our appreciation, on behalf of all Ukrainians, for supporting us during the investigation of the genocide against Ukrainians that was conducted by Bolsheviks, by Communists, in 1932 and 1933 in Ukraine.

Now the Ukrainian court, the Kiev court, ruled on this crime and the verdict is a part of our legislation. Everybody in the world knows what actually happened to our country, to our nation.

On the political points of your question—in Ukraine, I think it is not only for us to say how important it is that the politicians of the opposition unite, but also we must do that and create the mechanisms to become united. First and very efficiently, the declaration was signed. Then we signed an agreement of mutual support, and joint dates and measures during the elections. The next step should be the united, combined opposition, both in majoritarian districts and proportional partial system from the united opposition.

● (1730)

Mr. Ted Opitz: I'm going to turn to Mr. Tarasyuk very quickly. On the trip to Lviv in 2010, the Prime Minister was at the Ukrainian Catholic University and the Lontsky prison. It was reported after his visit that both the director of the university and the director of the museum were subjected to government harassment and intimidation.

Can you briefly comment on that, sir?

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: Well, there is nothing to comment on except for expressing concern over this activity of Ukrainian authorities. This attempt to impose control over the NGO and different institutions was condemned by the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

This is not admissible in a democracy.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Sherr, in your opinion, for the next election, how many observers should Canada deploy?

Mr. James Sherr: That is a question beyond my expertise. I would simply say, as sincerely as possible, as many as possible.

I would say also—and the point is now fully understood by the OSCE—more important than effective monitoring of an election on election day is monitoring the pre-election period, and understanding the rules and the twisting of rules that take place in that critical period.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Swiecicki—and I will get back to you at the end, sir, if I have a moment—the Euro Cup that's being run between Canada and Poland this summer, how is—did I steal your question?

Mr. James Bezan: No.

Mr. Ted Opitz: What is the benefit of that between the two countries? How do you see that particular joint enterprise benefiting Ukraine and perhaps helping to promote democracy?

Mr. Marcin Swiecicki: I am not convinced that it can contribute a lot to the promotion of democracy, but certainly it can promote Ukraine and the beauties of various cities still undiscovered by many Europeans. I hope that Ukraine has more visits from tourists and has more contacts after the Euro Cup.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Tarasyuk, you wanted to comment on election observers.

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: I would like to remind you that in 2004, at the most dramatic presidential elections, Canadian NGOs and parliamentarians were represented in the largest group of foreign observers, which numbered 1,500. Our expectation is that this time Canada will provide no less than 1,500 of the international observers.

Voices: Oh, oh.

The Chair: We're going to turn it over to Madam Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you all for your presentations and comments, which were very interesting. This again highlights that, ahead of election day, well before the actual election day, well before the electoral observation work, there is a whole lot of preparation work that needs to be done. This work is often very crucial, if not more crucial than the preparatory work for the elections.

Another topic has been mentioned a few times today, the matter of an active, healthy and organized civil society that has its own comments on state matters.

We have heard many comments on working with local NGOs in the area of preparing for elections. We have discussed focus groups, foundations, young people and the fact that the media is, for the most part, controlled abroad.

In short, my very broad question is for all of you. If we want to support Ukrainian civil society, which areas do you think would be the most crucial and should be the focus of our energy?

● (1735)

[*English*]

The Chair: Who would like to take that?

Mr. Valentyn Nalyvaichenko: Let me start with the NGOs. We support Euro-Atlantic integration. There are many in Ukraine, in different parts of Ukraine from east to west, who believe in this. It's the most popular idea among young people in Ukraine.

All methods and all support should be provided to those NGOs that are fighting corruption, gathering information in the local communities, working on the ground, and demanding that the authorities act to stop corruption at the district level. We must also support those NGOs and youth organizations involved in election activity, in observation activity, and in any legal activity explaining to the common people the law, how to vote, how not to let falsification happen, and all this kind of stuff.

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: For many years, Ukrainian civil society was fragmented. A lot of NGOs worked separately without coordinating their activities. Recently, Ukrainian NGOs united under the national platform of the Eastern Partnership. Dozens of different Ukrainian NGOs are acting on this single, national platform.

The Chair: Mr. Sherr.

Mr. James Sherr: There are Ukrainian NGOs that are expert at monitoring the implementation, or lack of implementation, of Ukraine's own commitments, the commitments of the authorities, in the country. Anything that can be done to strengthen those people, including the important points that Borys Tarasyuk made about visa liberalization, will be extremely important.

Canada is uniquely equipped to help Ukraine counter Russia's aggressive identity politics, including the so-called rewriting and distortion of history. Canada should be strengthening the efforts of objective Ukrainian historians to expand awareness of the country's actual history, and generate unpolitical discussions about historical controversies. Canada can play an absolutely instrumental role there, because of the experience and knowledge that exists in this country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move over to the Conservatives.

Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to ask some follow-up questions.

I know we have been talking about, and concentrating a lot, on the upcoming elections. One of the things that the committee has also seized on here is the concern surrounding the current situation of human rights, whether or not there are independent court processes, and the oppression of the political opposition and of the media. There were some earlier comments about making sure we take sanctions against those who are wrongfully influencing Ukraine. Whether it's individual sanctions against those in Russia—as we've said, the puppets of Putin—or whether or not we're talking about the main players within the Yanukovych regime, and those who are bending the rules to suit their own political and personal needs.

Should Canada be taking stronger action on individuals and also sending strong messages as to the overall agreements we have in place with Ukraine and those we're negotiating, such as a Canadian free trade agreement with Ukraine?

Mr. Valentyn Nalyvaichenko: Both ways, of course, if you want my opinion.

The most effective and strongest message from Canada and the United States toward our officials—especially those in the government, since they are under really close monitoring by international societies of law enforcement—is fighting money laundering internationally. This may be the crucial contribution from Canadian law enforcement and the Canadian government, and at the same time, of course, from the G-7 and the Canadian perspectives, ask the Ukrainian government for their international obligations on all international agreements.

● (1740)

Mr. James Bezan: Does anybody else want to comment on that?

When I was doing election observation as part of the Canada Ukraine Foundation observation mission—Bohdan Onyschuk was here—we presented a report in Kiev, and we noticed the amount of money that is used to influence Ukrainian politics. Not just in advertising and promoting the political leadership, but in buying your way onto the partisan lists. Only the first five or six names are ever published. You never know who has purchased their way to be a deputy. They are buying their way in to be a candidate.

I was hoping that by going to direct representation, by giving each oblast a chance to directly elect their people, that we would be able to remove some of that corruption. You are saying the way the rules are set—I've read the rules and questioned the constitutionality of how those rules are brought into play. Can we go back in time to when the first elections were held where we had direct electoral systems for Parliament and possibly have that as a way to bring back a more western-style democratic system? In the early part of Ukraine's democratic history after independence, there were direct elections of deputies.

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: Through our history of 20 years of independence, we used all possible systems of elections. We first used purely the majoritarian system, which was spoiled by the so-called administrative resource, when the local authorities influenced the results of the elections. Parliament then decided to create a mixed system first, that is 50% proportionate and 50% majoritarian. There was a lot of abuse of power in these elections, so then we switched to a purely proportional system. Now the current authorities have decided, for their benefit, it would be better to go back to the mixed system, which is 50-50.

In the Ukrainian realities, whatever system you suggest will be discredited, especially because of the low level of political culture. I would like to be objective, but it seems to me that the representatives of the current authorities, who are in the majority, are the bearers of that bad political culture and practices.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to let Mr. Lamoureux ask a couple of quick questions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): I just have one very short one, and let me just kind of start by saying that I'm hoping to make it out to the Ukraine sometime this year, wanting to be able to get a good experience myself. Winnipeg North is, in essence, built by our Ukrainian community, and it's great to see you here today.

You made reference to 1,500 people from Canada who went to the Ukraine for the last election. I'm sure I could generate enough interest among 1,500 in Winnipeg North.

Are there other ways you would suggest, especially for those from the Ukrainian community, where there's this interest in what's happening in their homeland and they want to be able to participate in some fashion? Are there other ways you would suggest? Maybe it's through the churches, the very strong Ukrainian churches throughout Canada. Are there other ways in which you would suggest members of the Ukrainian community and others might be able to show their support as Ukraine goes through this year of having another election? Could you recommend any for us?

● (1745)

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk: I dare say that the Ukrainian community in Canada—and not only in Canada, but throughout the world—is well aware of the necessity of trying to help the motherland to be democratic. That's why we can say that because of this factor we witnessed a lot of Ukrainian representatives during the presidential campaign in 2004.

I think it needed the third round to understand in different countries, Canada included, that indeed the elections of 2004 were very dramatic and required a massive presence of those capable of monitoring and who know the language, and this is the Ukrainian diaspora. I dare say that the forthcoming parliamentary elections are going to be of no less significance for the future of Ukraine than the presidential elections of 2004. That's why we need as many international observers, as many representatives of Canadian civil society, as many representatives of the Ukrainian community in Canada, as possible to participate.

Mr. Marcin Swiecicki: If I can add to this, what I think is very important is to organize the monitoring of this process before the election, and organize it in such a way that those organizations that are monitoring can report all kinds of abuses on the spot, immediately, and make them public, so they are not left alone with their observations, and then nobody cares about what they found out during the election process or during the campaign.

The system must be organized in such in a way that all kinds of abuses from all over the country are reported immediately, they are aired, they are made public, and governments are asking questions—what is happening in this oblast, in another oblast?—immediately, not waiting until after the election.

So the organizing of this system is very important right now as a kind of support to those organizations in the Ukraine that can and want to be involved in monitoring elections.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank our witnesses and also our guests here today for your patience as we worked through a few votes, and to all our colleagues.

Those are all the questions, and once again, I want to thank you very much, all of you, for taking time out of your schedules to be here today.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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