



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Ukraine within Europe: Opportunities and Obstacles” conference held in Edmonton and Toronto

11 October 2013—In November 2013, representatives of the European Union (EU) and the Eastern Partnership countries, including Ukraine, will gather in Vilnius, Lithuania, for a summit to address such issues as free trade and visa liberalization. Summit participants will decide whether or not to sign an Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine—a decision that will have long-term consequences for the entire post-Soviet space. For Ukraine in particular, this summit represents a unique opportunity for a better, more prosperous future and offers an escape from the so-called “grey zone” between the EU and Russia.

On the eve of this important event, a group of scholars and political experts came together to discuss its possible implications for Ukraine and Europe. Yevhen Bystrytsky (International Renaissance Foundation, Kyiv), Valeriy Chalyi (Razumkov Centre, Kyiv), Joan DeBardeleben (Carleton University, Ottawa), Derek Fraser (University of Victoria, Canada’s former ambassador to Ukraine), Olexiy Haran (Kyiv-Mohyla Academy National University), Bohdan Harasymiw (CIUS), Taras Kuzio (CIUS), David R. Marples (University of Alberta, CIUS), Lori Thorlakson (University of Alberta), and Lyubov Zhyznomirska (St. Mary’s University, Halifax) spoke at the conference on “Ukraine within Europe: Opportunities and Obstacles,” which took place in Edmonton on 3 and 4 October. A round table on the same topic was held in Toronto on 7 October. The conference was organized by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies with assistance from the Kule Institute for Advanced Study (both at the University of Alberta) and the Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre at Grant MacEwan University in Edmonton.

The conference was a resounding success, with more than two hundred people attending the paper presentations, roundtable discussions, and lively and engaged question-and-answer sessions. The following is a summary of some of the topics discussed.

In his keynote address on 3 October, David R. Marples discussed “acceptable compromises and shared hypocrisies” involved in Ukraine’s probable Association Agreement with the EU. While corruption in Ukraine became deeper and endemic during President Viktor Yushchenko’s presidency, it has grown considerably worse under President Viktor Yanukovich. Paradoxically, however, Ukraine seems to stand a better chance of drawing closer to Europe under the rule of a politician who figured as the “chief villain” of Ukraine’s “Orange Revolution” (2004). The Yanukovich government just may take Ukraine into Europe, and the EU appears ready to make certain compromises. Marples suggested, however, that as the possible success of Yanukovich’s European policy enhances his chances of reelection in 2015, the monitoring of human rights in Ukraine must become a priority for the EU.

At the next day’s morning panel, chaired by Bohdan Harasymiw, presenters Olexiy Haran, Joan DeBardeleben, and Lyubov Zhyznomirska offered their analyses of several key issues related to the forthcoming summit. Their ideas were further examined and expanded upon by Lori Thorlakson, who served as discussant. The speakers considered such issues as regionalism and elite alignment in the

context of Ukraine's European integration from the rule of President Leonid Kuchma to that of President Yanukovich, pointing out the paradoxes involved in the process. It was in fact the notorious President Kuchma who identified Ukraine's membership in the EU as a top priority during his first term. The implications of Yulia Tymoshenko's imprisonment for the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement were also discussed. Another topic was the shift in Germany's attitude toward Ukraine's potential membership in the EU, with the presenters emphasizing that since 1993 Ukraine has enjoyed certain trade advantages in doing business with the EU countries, including Germany. On the other hand, the current economic crisis in the EU will probably limit the extent of financial assistance available to Ukraine, making economic reform quite painful for that country over the next several years.

The roundtable at the afternoon session featured Yevhen Bystrytsky, Valerii Chaly, Derek Fraser, and Taras Kuzio, with Lori Thorlakson again serving as moderator. The discussion concentrated on such issues as the need for substantial long-term EU political and economic support for Ukraine if it becomes an associate member. It was pointed out that the Russian government remains hostile to Ukraine's drift toward Europe, as shown by the ongoing "trade war" against Ukraine. Indeed, President Vladimir Putin remains vehemently opposed to Ukraine's potential EU membership, and Russia is "quite capable of creating legally ambiguous unrest in the Crimea, and possibly in other areas." In the past, Russia has massively interfered in some Ukrainian elections and applied economic pressure by manipulating gas prices. Perhaps "the only way to put an end to Russia's claims on Ukraine may be the further stepwise integration of Russia into the Euro-Atlantic world in return for an abandonment of its imperial visions and an adoption of democracy." Among other debated issues were the resolve and objectives of the Ukrainian government and opposition in their declared support for association with Europe and divided sympathies for the EU and the Russian-led Customs Union in Ukrainian society. The closing remarks at the conference were delivered by Professor Volodymyr Kravchenko, director of CIUS.

On 7 October a roundtable was held at the Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto. It was sponsored by CIUS, the Petro Jacyk Program for the Study of Ukraine, and the Centre for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at the University of Toronto. A number of issues pertaining to the proposed Ukraine-EU Association Agreement were examined by a panel of experts—Yevhen Bystrytsky, Valerii Chaly, and Olexiy Haran—with Oleh Havrylyshyn (University of Toronto) and Taras Kuzio serving as discussants. Lucan Way (University of Toronto) served as moderator for this event.

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Photo: (1) Bohdan Harasymiw opening the conference (r) and David Marples (l); (2) Participants and guests of the conference (l-r): Peter Savaryn, Bohdan Harasymiw, Roman Shiyan, Valeriy Chalyi, Yuri Konkin, Derek Fraser, Taras Kuzio, Lyubov Zhyznomirska, Roman Petryshyn, Yevhen Bystrytsky, and Volodymyr Kravchenko; (3) Olexiy Haran; (4) At the round table (l-r): Taras Kuzio and Yevhen Bystrytsky; and (5) At the round table (l-r): Yevhen Bystrytsky, Valeriy Chalyi, and Derek Fraser.

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