



Statement by the Honorable Alcee L. Hastings
Co-Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Hearing on “Ukraine: Beyond Stalemate?”
March 16, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important and timely hearing. I had the privilege to serve as the Deputy Head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly election mission to Ukraine during the first round, January 17th elections. Judging by my personal experience and those of my OSCE colleagues in both rounds, these elections were largely free and democratic. This does not mean they were perfect. There were some problems stemming largely from the inadequate and confusing electoral framework. So there is no doubt that these laws need fixing before the next elections.

The ultimate victors in this election are the Ukrainian people. This is not something we should take for granted – regardless of whether or not one liked the outcome. To some Western observers, this may seem odd, but the fact these election results were not preordained is a success in itself. The fact that voters do not know who will win a race is a new and rare concept in the region and puts Ukraine in stark contrast with some of its neighbors.

The world was enamored with the 2004 Orange Revolution, which brought millions of Ukrainians into the streets to peacefully protest election fraud, corruption and lack of rule of law. Since then, Ukraine has developed an open and pluralistic political system and media freedoms have expanded. Although Ukraine has had good elections now for the last five years – and I’ve had the opportunity to lead or otherwise contribute to three OSCE election missions to Ukraine during that time – I can tell you that you need more than good elections to make a functioning democracy.

Unfortunately, despite the progress, Ukraine has also witnessed poor governance, destructive infighting and political instability -- in part due to no clear delineation of powers between the offices of prime minister and president. President Yanukovich, along with the just-appointed Prime Minister, Mykola Azarov, will need to seriously address long-standing problems that undermine Ukraine’s potential, including corruption and the lack of an independent judiciary, which is a key underpinning for the rule of law.

Ukraine's leadership also needs to reform and make more transparent the troubled energy sector as well as a plethora of issues involving Crimea, be it the Black Sea Fleet, Russian influence, or inter-ethnic challenges, especially the plight of the Crimean Tatars. Ukraine must vigorously fight hate crimes. Ukraine has been especially hard-hit by the global financial crisis. Unfulfilled promises of the Orange Revolution led to disappointment and cynicism in Ukraine, as well as frustration among Ukraine's supporters in the United States and Europe. Obviously, the Ukrainian leadership's work is cut out for them.

President Yanukovich desires to improve relations with Russia and is certainly more oriented in that direction than his predecessor, but I don't believe would cede Ukraine back to a bygone era, and judging from his initial statements and visits, he clearly sees integration into the European Union as a priority. At the same time, he appears to value the benefits of a continued, strong relationship with the United States.

The United States has a solid record of standing with the Ukrainian people over the decades in support of their struggle for freedom and democracy. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses as to how we can maintain and strengthen our partnership with Ukraine.