

Ukraine's Elections and Their Implications for Ukraine's Future
The Honorable Alcee Hastings
Chairman, U.S. Helsinki Commission
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Welcome to today's briefing on Ukraine's elections and their implications for Ukraine's future. I would particularly like to thank the members of our distinguished panel for taking the time to share their perspectives and insights with us.

I'm pleased that Ambassador Oleh Shamshur, Ukraine's Ambassador to the United States, has joined us today. I'm also pleased to have with us Ambassador William Miller, former US Ambassador to Ukraine who was in Ukraine for the elections as an observer with the National Democratic Institute, and Stephen Nix, who is Director of the Eurasian Division at the International Republican Institute and was also in Ukraine for the elections. If you have not yet done so, please pick up a copy of our speakers' biographies on the corridor table.

A few weeks ago, I introduced a bipartisan resolution congratulating the Ukrainian people for the holding of free, fair and transparent parliamentary elections on September 30, 2007. This resolution was based on the findings of the OSCE-led international observation mission, which concluded that the elections were "mostly in line with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections." The OSCE observers -- including OSCE Parliamentarians and Helsinki Commission staff -- assessed both the voting and counting process as good or very good in nearly all of the 3,000 polling stations visited.

These pre-term elections stemmed from a dispute rooted in weak constitutional delineations of the powers of the president and prime minister. Now that they are over, it is my hope that Ukraine's political leaders will form a government reflecting the will of the Ukrainian people as expressed by the results of the elections -- a government that advances political stability and democratic development and will further undertake the hard work of strengthening the rule of law and an independent judiciary, and fight corruption and increase transparency, especially in the gas sector.

This past July, I led a delegation of Members of Congress to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Kyiv, where we met with President Yushchenko, who assured us that Ukraine would keep moving forward on the path to political reforms and good governance. I hope that a coalition and government will soon be formed which furthers these goals.

The conduct of these elections is a testament to the Ukrainian people's determined path towards the consolidation of democracy as Ukraine advances its integration with the Euro-Atlantic community. As such, Ukraine serves as a model for the post-Soviet countries, too many of which have sadly retreated to heavy-handed authoritarianism.

These elections represent a golden opportunity for Ukraine to regain the momentum from the Orange Revolution and continue to build on the democratic, economic and security progress that has already been made. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished speakers. As the House is in session, I apologize that I will have to leave early. Ambassador Shamshur, you have the floor.