



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Steny H. Hoyer

Ranking Member - Helsinki Commission

I commend chairman Campbell for holding this important and timely hearing. Ukraine has been receiving considerable attention lately as a result of the ongoing political turmoil. The scandal, sparked by tape recordings produced by a former presidential bodyguard that suggest president Kuchma's involvement in the disappearance of investigative journalist Georgiy Gongadze, has called into question Ukraine's relatively positive track record with respect to human rights and democracy. Frankly, we are increasingly troubled by developments in Ukraine, including pervasive corruption, governmental interference in the news media, and the scandal surrounding the disappearance and murder of Gongadze, which has fueled growing opposition in Ukraine.

It is because of this commission's long-standing interest and support for the Ukrainian people that we find these developments so distressing. I remember well during the late 1980's when I served as chairman, the Helsinki commission championed human rights in Ukraine when it was still part of the soviet union – raising cases of Helsinki monitors, and speaking out against the repression of the Ukrainian churches and the suppression of human rights and freedoms.

High hopes were raised for Ukraine when it became independent. Some were realized, and Ukraine received high marks for dismantling its nuclear arsenal, its treatment of minorities, and its constructive relations with its neighbors. But I must say I am concerned about recent developments – by the direction in which Ukraine may be heading. My concerns were only amplified by last week's dismissal of prime minister Yushchenko, a reformer who was not only the most trusted politician in Ukraine, but under whose stewardship Ukraine was enjoying economic growth for the first time in over a decade.

Several weeks ago I attended a leadership meeting of the OSCE parliamentary assembly during which the representatives of the Ukrainian Rada expressed great concern about the ongoing political crisis in their country and asked the parliamentary assembly to assist in any way it can. Also during that meeting, Georgiy Gongadze was selected to receive the annual journalism prize along with Mr. Lopez de Lacalle, who was killed last year in northern Spain for his writings against the use of violence for political ends. Mr. Gongadze, who disappeared in September of last year, was a courageous investigative journalist who tried to further the values of the OSCE, especially media freedom for which he fought and, as such, he stands as a symbol of the ongoing struggle to achieve full-fledged democracy in Ukraine and the other countries of the former soviet empire.

Mr. Chairman, I believe it is even more important today that, bilaterally and through the OSCE and other international fora, we continue to encourage Ukraine in its democratic development.