

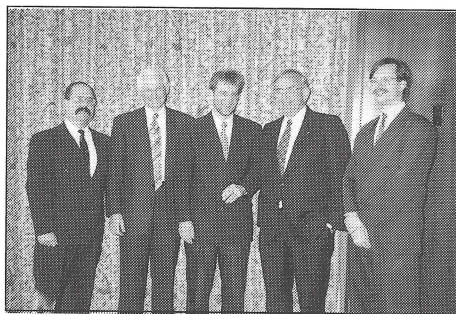
# "ON THE EDGE"

## AMBASSADOR WESTDAL

*Before he left for his posting in Kyiv, Ambassador Westdal visited numerous cities across Canada and spoke to Ukrainian business and community groups on the theme of Ukraine being "On the Edge." Following are excerpts from his address in Ottawa.*

I can understand the impatience and frustration of Ukrainians and Ukrainian-Canadians, given the slow pace at which the realization has been dawning that Ukraine, so long repressed, so long subject to unrelenting efforts to erase its distinct identity from international awareness, is a large, independent, vitally important country facing a unique challenge. To understand international, particularly European, security these days, one needs to understand the history and current situation of Ukraine. That country, "on the edge", is on centre stage in security terms. And the prospects for secure space have not been better for centuries than they are now. All Canadians have a profound interest in those prospects. A profound interest in Ukrainian freedom and success. We would have that interest even if our ranks did not include, as they do, a large active Ukrainian Canadian community. That fact is good news for Canadians of Ukrainian origin. It means that our commitment to Ukraine is founded on enduring, basic national interests....

Ukraine warrants our respect. It offers us enhanced security; it offers us understanding of the Slavic world; it offers us cooperation, markets, products and opportunities. It has a longer race to run than the neighbours with which it is often compared. It has had to start from scratch in building a sound national government in place of the agencies of foreign power of the past. And though the media, as usual, is obsessed with Ukraine's - and everyone else's - warts, we should give credit where it is due. Ukraine is making steady progress in reform. There have been elections and a democratic transfer of power. There has been respect for minorities. There has been nuclear disarmament and accession to the NPT. There has been skillful management of neighbourly relations, including those with Russia involving



*Meeting with members of the Quebec-Ukraine Business Council. L-r: Gary Grosko, Maurice Mack, Amb. Westdal, Bill Tretiak, Orest Hummeny.*

Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet. Give credit where it's due...

Turning to our relations with Ukraine more generally, I have been left in no doubt ... about the high priority our government accords these relations, and it is clear in the record to date... We were the first Western country to recognize Ukraine. We have worked hard to ensure that Ukraine is prominent on the multilateral agenda, particularly in the G-7, but elsewhere as well, as in the World Trade Organization, where we are active in the Working Party and we are giving Ukraine technical assistance in preparation for its accession. We hosted the international conference in Winnipeg on Ukraine's economic prospects and have otherwise tried to ensure high priority attention to Ukraine from the IMF and the World Bank.

There have been high-level visits - President Kuchma's, President Kravchuk's, Minister Ouellet's, the Rt. Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn's, and Premier Romanow's last month - and more such visits are in prospect. There have been regular ministerial consultations - in New York, at the UN, and in Brussels. Our relations are not made special by our labelling them so - they are made special by commitment, trust, hard work and active participation. On both sides, this clearly begins at the top.

You know much of the rest of the bilateral record. We have signed a Most-Favoured-Nation trade agreement, an investment protection agreement, an economic cooperation agreement and initialled a double-taxation agreement. We are now considering dates for the first meeting of the Joint Economic Commission. EDC has extended a \$50 million line of credit on sovereign account, another \$20 million is in the works - and notably, EDC and the Royal Bank are now looking closely at trade finance - on corporate account. Our trade is modest - in the tens of millions of dollars - and we are not destined to be major trading partners. But that trade has been growing despite the disincentives of structural anachronisms, policy, ambiguity and occasional administrative paralysis. There are obvious opportunities for further growth in agriculture and food products, oil and gas technologies and services, power equipment, construction and building products, medical and health care products and services, environment equipment and services and in telecommunications and information technologies...

Through our technical assistance program, which has been wide-ranging and experimental - and in which CIDA is now working to give a sharper focus and to link more closely to reform and to the fostering of commercial linkages - we've been active in democratic legislative and judicial reform, private sector development, public administration, economic policy, health, nuclear safety and support for institutions of civil society. I think it's generally agreed that our garden could use a little weeding - and that's happening - but, overall, the record of the last four years is impressive: close to \$100 million committed to some 50 projects, involving many hundreds of Canadians. Ukraine has enjoyed a healthy share of Canadian assistance to the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe - and the prospect is for some tens of millions of dollars a year in continued technical assistance - a far from inconsiderable sum...

I have as much faith - as I do in the stamina of the Ukrainian spirit - in the enduring commitment of Canadians of Ukrainian origin to the success of Ukraine. Of course, there have been some disappointments, and there has been some disillusionment. But disillusionment is necessary and healthy, however uncomfortable. If ever it was assumed that Ukraine would be able, in the course of but a few years, to overcome the tangled legacies of centuries of foreign domination and ruinously inept economic organization, and to emerge in a short while unto the highlands of free-market democracy, that was an illusion. If ever it was assumed that there would not be years to survive of political, policy and institutional frailty, with all its cost in paralysis and waste and corruption, that was an illusion. If ever it was assumed here that Ukrainian origin was a sufficient or even necessary condition for successful participation in Canada's relations with Ukraine, that was also an illusion. **We have learned that Ukrainian origin might open doors, but they do not close deals.** And if ever it was assumed that Canadians of Ukrainian origin would throw in the towel once it became clear that the going would be rough for a while, ever assumed that they would not be there for the long, hard haul, most definitely that was an illusion...

Though it is true that we can do more for Ukraine in material terms multilaterally than bilaterally, it is also true that directly, bilaterally, we can give Ukrainians something intangible that my reading of their hard history has already taught me they find precious: genuine respect, warmth, friendship and human solidarity.

