



Ukraine's departing Ambassador Victor Batiuk bids farewell

Excerpts from an interview with the Monitor in Ottawa

His Excellence Victor Batiuk was appointed Ambassador to Canada on January 6, 1994. Prior to his departure, Ambassador Batiuk reflected on his Canadian experiences.

During my two years in Canada, I have had the good fortune to witness the blossoming of Canadian-Ukrainian relations. Canada has been constantly drawing attention of the countries of the world to the relevance of Ukraine as an important player in the international community. This was best demonstrated in October 1994 when Canada volunteered to host the G-7 Conference on Partnership for Economic Transformation in Ukraine, to assist in the reform and strengthen Ukraine's economy. It is even said jokingly that the Conference in Winnipeg served as a dividing line in the modern history of Ukraine, by breaking it into a state "before" and "after Winnipeg". It was after the G-7 Conference that leading international lending institutions, such as the IMF, started to provide tangible financial support to Ukraine. As a member country to a number of international organizations where Ukraine is not represented, Canada was able to raise issues of importance to Ukraine, and Ukraine almost immediately established itself in the eyes of the world as an active and important international partner.

In the last two years, the Embassy has grown and matured. We have launched a Trade and Economic Mission in Toronto with a Consul General and two deputies. Here in Ottawa we have opened the office of the Military Attaché, with two assistants. Our Embassy has been transformed into a viable structure with much better conditions for working. Once the renovations of our new building are completed, we will be able to offer the Ukrainian community our premises for assemblies, lectures and meetings with visiting officials and celebrities from Ukraine.

In the area of trade between Canada and Ukraine, the years 1996 and 1997 may become turning points, should businesses sense the true importance of Ukraine for international markets. There is now a need for incentives at the government level. In the beginning Ukraine didn't have basic legislative provisions. Recently, we have approved new trading agreements, an agreement on avoidance of double taxation and the one on investment support. These regulations should be followed by the creation of an adequate and comprehensive

legal framework.

The important thing is to continue to cement relations between Canada and Ukraine. To that end, we have come forward with a number of draft agreements, and these are being considered now. There are agreements on direct air routes, on legal aid, and on visa control regulations. These are examples of the future cooperative activities targeted at consolidating linkages between our two countries.

Our top priority remains the strengthening of bilateral economic relations. In this respect, there is extensive planning for major political visits, such as the upcoming proposed visit of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to Ukraine. We all know that the visit of our President played an important role, and led to signing of a range of agreements; so preparations for the return visit are being planned. Also, a Joint Committee on Economic Problems headed by the Minister of Economy or the Minister of Resources is being worked out.

A number of Canadian provinces have taken the initiative to look to Ukraine. Saskatchewan's Premier Roy Romanov visited Ukraine last October with very positive results and hopefully Manitoba Premier Gary Filmon may be in Kyiv in the Autumn of 1996. Ontario and Alberta are expected to have Ukrainian partners in an oblast-province setup. In the

eastern Donetsk oblast, the Administration is looking for ways to strike a partnership deal with Ontario. If Canadian provinces can succeed in establishing business contacts with regions across Ukraine, this too would be a big step in the right direction.

The latest Canadian Ukrainian Congress assembly was correct in identifying the priority tasks facing the Ukrainian community as the need for preservation of its national integrity and provision of support to Ukraine in its efforts to get to its feet. We are not after support on a big scale. It is not feasible for the diaspora to accommodate the entire range of our needs, and my recommendation would be to continue with the most viable projects. I would also encourage the diaspora to continue keeping the media positively aware of Ukraine. They have the opportunities to influence western media sources and promote awareness of Ukrainian realities. I have very warm recollections of my many meetings with Ukrainian communities across Canada. I was always impressed by the readiness of Canadians to offer their assistance.

Ambassadors change, but the work of the Embassy continues. Before I came to Ottawa, I worked in New York as Ukraine's UN representative. It's hard to represent your country when you haven't lived there for 20 years. It is time to go home. I hope that the special relationship between Canada and Ukraine will continue to blossom into the future. Temporary fluctuations in the political climate should not affect the nature of our relations. We want to build a Ukraine for all Ukrainians to be proud of. It takes time to make dreams come true.



SGT. BERTRAND THIBEAULT, RIDEAU HALL

During the historic 1994 State Visit of President Leonid Kuchma to Canada, then Governor General Ramon Hnatyshyn greets Ambassador Victor Batiuk and Embassy staff along with Ministers accompanying the President (directly behind Hnatyshyn).