



# Optimism in the Shadow of Crisis

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As I reflect on the recent historical developments in Ukraine, I empathize with the individuals who directed the course of political events that have now become an enigmatic chapter in the textbook on a new nation.

In December, 1991, RUKH — the Popular Movement of Ukraine — consisted of all active social and political organizations in the country. At that time, during the first Presidential elections in Ukraine, RUKH was still fighting against the candidacy of Leonid Kravchuk, a Presidential candidate who only yesterday had been Chairman of the Communist party of Ukraine.

By the summer of 1994 and the second Presidential elections, RUKH split into larger and smaller parties and became a party itself. Leonid Kravchuk, who used to be an ardent communist foe of the Movement, its Biblical Saul, in 1988-1990, became its Paul — an associate, an ally. He stretched his Presidential hand to Rukh at its 3rd Congress in 1992. Democratic forces then organized into the "Democratic association Ukraina" and elected Levko Lukianenko (Ukraine's first Ambassador to Canada) its Chairman. The association realized the need to support Leonid Kravchuk against Leonid Kuchma in the second Presidential elections. Why so?

Running for President, Kuchma inspired a loud opposition making almost openly anti-independence declarations. Moscow supported him with all its might and political will. Yet, after he won, not long after his inauguration, the President dramatically changed his course. He began to promote enthusiastically the national interests of his country, both in domestic and international policies. This came as another test of flexibility, realism and common sense for the patriotic opposition, and Kuchma succeeded in firmly rooting Ukrainian statehood.

In the recent confrontation between President Kuchma and Parliament's still-serving leftist majority, almost all national-democratic parties and associations supported the President, including the Congress of Ukrainian Intelligentsia. Kuchma pushed through the recent constitutional process through Parliament and accomplished the adoption of Ukraine's new Constitution. But the victory was not a victory for the parties. It was not a victory for the President. It was Ukraine's victory.

These political events and my personal experiences have made me step into the ranks



*A special session of the World Ukrainian Coordination Council was held in Kyiv on the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ukraine's Independence, chaired by Ivan Drach (third from left), with Canadian Dr. Dmytro Cipywnyk, President of the World Congress of Ukrainians on the far left.*

of optimists for Ukraine's future. From the start, Ukraine's sovereignty and economics were challenged in every possible way, within the country and outside its borders. What many daily experiences we had over the past five years of independence! Supplies of Russian oil and gas were cut off, sending Ukrainian towns and villages into the cold darkness; and while prices were being kept inflated, charges for pipeline transport through Ukraine's territory continued to be given almost freely by the Ukrainian government.

At the same time, former communist directors of Ukrainian industrial plants continued to meet their production at low prices, while cursing independence and demanding budget subsidies to support this production. This same picture could be seen in the factories and collective farms.

And there were other legacies of the former Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. While assuming its share of debts, Ukraine is still waiting to receive its share of assets. Ukraine has also given up its nuclear tactical weapons, but has not benefited economically.

The world community, led by the United Nations and the G-7 group of leading industrialized countries, was largely preoccu-

pied by conflicts in other parts of the world, and took its time to react. In this picture Ukraine's independence was only a temporary phenomenon. Such an initial attitude of the West towards Ukraine was remindful of the period of 1918-1920 when the first independent Ukrainian Popular Republic failed. Fortunately, the political and economic support from the West began to have an impact. Nobody managed to break Ukraine's back and the young country withstood the challenges. It won its first battle by overcoming the harsh effects of its reforms. Reforms were necessary for Ukraine, but not at any speed or any cost.

Today Ukraine has begun to better establish and control its strong economic program. The Ukrainian currency was stabilized and is gradually gaining the trust of the international monetary realists. The yoke of debts for oil and gas supplies is no longer considered a sign of total bankruptcy by the world community. Though there is yet no calm in the Crimea or with the Black Sea Fleet, there is no "Chechnya" situation either.

Many of us who participated in the developments in Ukraine since 1991 and who observed its achievements agree that the positive changes in Ukraine today can be