



SOROS VISIT MARKS 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION

*with files from Natalia Olyneć,
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The International Renaissance Foundation (IRF) celebrated its fifth anniversary in Kyiv May 2 with a visit from its founder and Ukraine's friend, renowned financier and philanthropist George Soros.

The foundation plans to spend more than US\$15 million in 1995 on programs that promote an open society in Ukraine.

"It's always more difficult to judge the performance of a foundation than a business," Soros said. "My judgment is that what the foundation is doing is very worthwhile. The work of the foundation is almost universally appreciated."

The IRF is an independent, non-profit, civic grant organization. It was founded by the All Ukrainian Society Prosvita, the Ukrainian Peace Council, the Ukrainian Ecological Association Zeleniy Svit (Green World).

According to IRF chairman Bohdan Hawrylyshyn, the IRF is a "convergence of the aspirations of the people of Ukraine for a renaissance - national, state, cultural - and the vision and the will of George Soros, who has been devoting his energy and financial means to help the countries of the former Soviet bloc transform themselves into democratic societies."

Soros said he hopes the foundation will become more focused on education this year. Among the IRF programs are the Soros Centre for Contemporary Arts, military retraining, library science training, student scholarships abroad, English language education and public economic education.

Soros said he is encouraged by the development of "semi-independent institutions surrounding the foundation," which prevents excessive bureaucracy. The IRF has branch offices in Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Lviv, Odessa and Simferopol. The foundation plans to expand its regional network this year.

An investment fund is being planned by Soros, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Finance Corporation to perpetuate the work of the IRF.

SOROS SUCCESSES OPEN SOCIETY IN UKRAINE

by Marta Kolomayetz

On the wall above Ulana Trylowsky's desk at the International Renaissance Foundation's office hangs a photograph of a crew of handicapped individuals in a wooded area near Kyiv, Ukraine's capital city. "This is one of my favourite groups," said Trylowsky, a 31-year-old administrator from Canada who heads the Civil Society Department at the foundation.

"Volodymyr Azin, a 28-year-old sailor, is the force behind the group," she continued. "He had an accident in the service and he's paralyzed from the waist down. He's a young, married, very charming, charismatic, personable guy who suddenly ends up in a wheelchair."

Under the old Soviet system, Azin would have been destined to sit and rot alone in his apartment. Handicapped people in the Soviet Union were often considered a menace to society, to be stashed away and forgotten, except perhaps by family members. The state made little provision for their care and well-being.

But Azin's fighter mentality coupled with funds from the International Renaissance Foundation enabled him to take matters into his own hands. He organized a group that trains the handicapped, giving them the means to get on with their lives, teaching them, among other things, how to use a wheelchair, what kinds of food to eat, and how to avoid the sores associated with immobility.

"He's working to change attitudes about the handicapped, proving that they are not a burden on society, but people who have something worthwhile to contribute," said Trylowsky.

Azin's group is one of many success stories at the International Renaissance Foundation, which expended funds totalling over \$10 million between 1990 and 1993 to support roughly 450 separate projects.

"International Renaissance Foundation programs help ideas become reality. The foundation provides start-up funds and gives people the confidence in themselves to take control of their own lives," said Toronto-born Professor Marta Dyczok, a visiting lecturer at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy, Kyiv's first private university.

CHAOS AND POSITIVE ENERGY

Ukraine, a country with a population of 53 million, declared independence in August of 1991. Initially, the country experienced a kind of euphoria as people found themselves free from soviet control for the first time in seven decades. That euphoria faded quickly, however, as the end of the Soviet system also brought with it a disintegration of the country's social infrastructure, which had guaranteed housing, food, health care, education and even employment.

"This place was full of chaos and energy after the collapse of the Soviet Union," observed Professor Dyczok, who has been in Ukraine since 1993 with the Civic Education Project, another Soros-sponsored program. "The Kyiv Mohyla Academy took advantage of the positive energy, and began looking for bright students, leaders for Ukraine's future."

A SLIDING ECONOMY

Despite the fact that Ukraine's economy has been on the verge of collapse since 1992 with inflation rising to an annual rate of 7000 percent last year, the country is attempting to transform its command economy to a market-based system. While a healthy shadow economy is prospering in the big cities, the majority of Ukraine's citizens still work in the state sector where the average wage is a little more than \$12 per month.

Some segments of the population have had a more difficult time adjusting to life after communism than others. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian state found itself with a military force