NEW FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY IN INDEPENDENT STATES OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

HON. MARCY KAPTUR

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 2, 2000

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, functioning democracy in the newly emerging independent states of the former Soviet Union requires setting up new political institutions and developing the means of conducting the people's business. As we have seen in many of these countries, this is proving to be a challenge beyond the patience and political will of their leaders, particularly given the harsh economic conditions throughout the region. More often than not, responsible economic policies represent, in the short term, even greater hardships for the people whose support is essential if democracy and market economy are to be sustained in these countries.

In Ukraine this challenge was put to test earlier this year when the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, was confronted with a serious political crisis over the selection of the Speaker and other leadership positions. The Leftist forces, though in the minority, have managed to control the parliament for the past 18 months, thwarting the majority's efforts to implement President Kuchma's legislative agenda.

A vivid description of how the leftist speaker, Oleksandr Tkachenko, thwarted the majority and the subsequent developments that lead to his ouster are provided in a report by the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation. In Update on Ukraine, February 24, 2000, Markian Bilynskj writes.

Until January 21, the final day of the fourth parliamentary session, the Rada was presided over by a chairman whose political ambitions and sense of indispensability were matched only by his limitations. Oleksandr Tkachenko had been elected essentially by default 18 months earlier as elements within the Rada and beyond fought to prevent the chairmanship from falling into the hands of anyone harboring presidential ambitions. His eventual, somewhat surprise decision to run brought about a further politicization of the legislative process and was the principal reason behind the Rada's growing ineffectiveness. Tkanchenko's final unabashed identification with the communist candidate—a fitting conclusion to what can only be described as a parody of an election campaign—represented an abandonment of any pretense at impartiality and irreversibly undermined his credibility as Rada chairman. At the same time, President Leonid Kuchma's re-election altered the broader political context within which the Rada had to operate to such an extent that Tkachenko was transformed from a largely compromise figure into an anachronism.

After the December election, President Kuchma's administration joined with the pro-reform majority to challenge Speaker Oleksandr Tkachenko and his Communist-Left forces and succeeded in electing a new Speaker and many of the leadership positions in the Rada. The result is a newly constituted parliament with a majority now occupying key positions that is capable of responding to President Kuchma and Prime Minister Yuschenko's reform agendas.

I would like to submit for the record and bring to the attention of my colleagues an interview with Griority Surkis, a prominent, businessman and member of the Rada.

IT'S TIME FOR TRANSPARENCY

(By Grigoriy Surkis)

It would be desirable if our Parliament did not have deep divisions between the majority and minority factions; however this is not possible due to deep-rooted ideological divisions in the country.

Former Speaker Tkachenko, leader of the Communists in the Rada, demonstrated his inability to work out a compromise even when the majority announced a willingness to work cooperatively with Communist leaders on a legislative program.

By the way, leaders of the Ukraine Communists should learn a lesson from their Russian counterparts, who recently made a deal with the pro-government factions in organizing the Duma and distributing assignments among party leaders. They have a difficult time understanding that Communist authoritarianism does not exist in post-Soviet societies, nor is it as strong after eight years of democracy.

However, it remains to be seen how the pro-government block in Russia will get the Communist Speaker of the Duma to act on progressive legislation and actually achieve results. I sincerely wish that this arrangement will work so that the people of Russia benefit from progressive changes that will improve living standards that make for a better society.

In my opinion, Ukraine has chosen the right path. In parliament, we formed a majority bloc by uniting the ''healthy'' forces who were committed to reform legislation. This is necessary to ensure speedy action on a range of progressive proposals to deal with the problems of our pension system, taxes, and the criminal and civil code. This will help us to clean house in the Rada and institute badly needed changes that, in the past, impeded our efforts to confront these needs.

Is compromise possible? Let's think about it. We want our people to live in a new environment but there are some who want to pull us back to the old Soviet system. To go back is to lose hope and confidence in our ability to improve our situation. The reformers want a government that will enable people to own property while the Communists want people to be the property of the state. We believe that the Constitution is the basic law, but they still believe the ''Party'' is the supreme authority.

Finally, in a democracy it is acceptable to have a compromise, which is how people work out their differences. But the old guard distrusts working with what they see as the ''bourgeois'' and reject efforts to resolve differences amicably. So we are not talking about compromise in terms of confronting the issues and resolving differences, but the Communists see any negotiations with reformers as selling out or imposing a kompromat on us. I am reminded of the words of the great Golda Meir, who was born in Kiev, who once said: ''We want to live. Our neighbors want to see us dead. I am afraid that this does not leave any space for compromise''.

The problem would not be so serious if we were talking only about Parliament. However, we are talking about society as a whole. The Leftists seem committed to destroying the Rada, the one institution that ensures representation of the people in government decision making. Perhaps they do not know about Abraham Lincoln's statement that a house divided cannot succeed and that their intransigence will prevent democracy from taking root in Ukraine. Everyone knows what happens to the person if his right leg makes two steps forward and the left remains rooted in the same spot.

I want to stress again that after the 1999 presidential election, it became obvious that a divided parliament with a Communist as Speaker would prove unacceptable and only serve to obstruct the reform agenda of the government. Had the Communists prevailed, they would have taken the country down the back road of political fatalism. Yet there are some who worry that the unfairness of winners hides the guilt of losers. I can only say that if the Leftists had won the election, we would not be asking these questions.

I am afraid that if the majority had allowed a Communist to remain as Speaker, it would have proved to be a temporary solution, similar to what will happen with the Duma. In the United States, it is possible for the Republicans to control the Congress and the other party to have the Presidency. This is possible because America has 200 years of experience working within democratic system.

Our country does not have time to wait. For us, every day without enacting and implementing laws is a huge setback for a country that must accomplish so much in a critically short time. The majority knows that it is impossible to form a parliament without the opposition, and it is our intention to treat proposals from the opposition seriously. We have assumed political responsibility that gives us an opportunity to cooperate with the newly re-elected president who bears the main responsibility for society as a whole.

We recognize that it is the president who must provide the leadership and direct the institutions of government. Throughout the years of Ukraine's independence, there is not a single case when the three branches of power simultaneously worked together on behalf of Ukrainian citizens. Today we must take responsibility and are ready to be accountable for our actions.

Once again, we do not have time. The majority of Ukrainian citizens spoke very clearly in the recent election of giving President Kuchma a new four-year term. By this vote, they rejected the Communist Party and the idea of turning back to the old system where freedom and human rights did not exist.

The Communists, of course, feel threatened by the new democratic forces and their reform agenda. They do not want to relinquish power and recognize that a new generation of intelligent and resourceful leaders is taking charge. That is the promise of democracy and, if given a chance to succeed, the future of Ukraine in the new millennium.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 2, 2000

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, due to flu, I unavoidably missed 8 votes on April 13th. If I had been present, I would have voted as follows:

''Yes'' on the Journal (rollcall No. 123).

''No'' on the Rule to the Budget Resolution (No. 124).

''No'' on the Budget Resolution because it sets up unworkable appropriations caps and cuts vital domestic spending too deeply (No. 125).

''Yes'' on the Rangel motion to recommit the Date Certain Tax Code Replacement Act (No. 126).