
The Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program

by Nataliya Salo, Artem Korochynskyy, Bohdana Nosova, Ivan Skrypka, Taras Stasiv, Halyna Tytysh, and Olha Voronova

In the spring of 2004 twenty-five students came to Canada as part of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program (CUPP) to observe and study the Canadian election and electoral system. In the fall of 2004 another twenty-seven students came to Canada to participate in the traditional CUPP program and complete an internship in the office of a Canadian Member of Parliament. This article looks at the development of the Canada Ukraine Parliamentary Program.

The story of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program (CUPP) begins in 1991 with the proclamation of Ukraine as a free and independent state. This freedom from the Soviet Empire brought new hopes and aspirations for a prosperous future. That year was also special in Canada, as Canadians of Ukrainian heritage celebrated the Centennial of Ukrainian group immigration to Canada.

To mark this Centennial, organizations planned programs and projects to celebrate this milestone. The Chair of the Ukrainian Studies Foundation of Toronto decided to establish a program for undergraduate university students from Ukraine. Its goal was to promote and assist the democratisation process in Ukraine.

The CUPP was established as a Parliamentary Democracy and Comparative Political Studies Internship Semester in the Canadian House of Commons. The internship now lasts on average 10 weeks and takes place

in the spring of each year in Canada's Parliament in Ottawa.

The CUPP aims to give university students from Ukraine and now from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, an opportunity to work with a Member of Parliament and his or her staff, attend Question Period, attend meetings of parliamentary committees, research and prepare questions for question period, work on the



**Speaker Peter Milliken met with interns
Nataliya Salo and Ivan Skrypka**

The authors were all participants in the 2004 Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program. Nataliya Salo and Taras Stasiv are students at Ivan Franko National University in Lviv; Artem Korochynskyy is a student at Taras Shevchenko National Pedagogical University in Luhansk; Bohdana Nosova at Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv; Ivan Skrypka at Kyiv National Linguistic University; Halyna Tytysh at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Kyiv; and Olha Voronova at Odesa State Economic University.

newsletter to the constituents, research questions and issues raised by the constituents and in the debates in the House, perform administrative functions, research government and party policies, attend meetings and conferences of educational organizations, become acquainted with and use the research facilities of the House of Commons and its library, and carry out general office duties.

The CUPP also gives us the chance to learn about and share Canadian culture, point of view and current trends in a country where both English and French are spoken, as well as Chinese, Italian, Indian, Pakistani, and so many other languages. CUPP gives us the opportunity to develop and practice certain diplomatic skills by acting as representatives of our universities, our society and our country. Coming to study and live in Canada broadens our horizons and gives many of us our first opportunity of living in a western society.

The first CUPP program brought only 3 students to Canada but after fourteen years there are now more than 300 alumni representing all regions of Ukraine. There are graduates currently studying and working in a variety of professional fields including political science, medicine, engineering, law and education. It is hard to imagine how fast-developing, multifaceted, and popular CUPP has become.

Candidates for CUPP are selected, based on academic excellence, volunteer work in the community, leadership potential, recommendations of their teachers, and fluency in English or French, and Ukrainian. However, most CUPP interns speak more than Ukrainian, English or French. In fact, among the students of 2004 Program, there is a number who also speak Arabic, Armenian, Byelorussian, German, Georgian, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Russian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, and Turkish.

Canada Live: A Report from the 2004 Interns

The 2004 Spring internship turned out to be very special for all participants. From May to June for the second time in our history, twenty-five students completed their internship during a Federal election campaign, thereby acquiring knowledge about how a democratic, fair, and transparent election process works.

The Fall 2004 group was the first one in fourteen years of the program's existence to witness and work under conditions of a Minority government, learning how to negotiate on controversial issues, search compromise, and how the government and the opposition can complement each other for the sake of working for the good of the country. These unique experiences were gained

through direct work in the offices of Members of Parliament. This is without a doubt the most important part of the CUPP internship.

Before they start interns attend an in-depth seminar, on the Canadian political system, to get first-hand knowledge of the theoretical background of how Canadian legislative and executive bodies function.

Next, each student is assigned to an MP's office with, three out of four parties represented in the House of Commons - Liberal, Conservative, and NDP. One student worked in the office of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Such diversity gives each participant a different view of the Canadian Parliament.

Each of us worked as a full-fledged member of our MP's team, assuming all the responsibilities and performing all the duties that came with it. This definitely gave us a wide scope for application of all our leadership, communication, language, computer, and analytical skills.

The intern's duties varied from office to office. Sometimes we acted as administrative assistants, answering the phone, picking up and sorting mail, helping the visitors, receiving and analysing feedback from the ridings.

Some of us had an excellent opportunity to put our language skills to a good use by doing translations at the request of the office staff or searching databases in the source language.

Conducting research was also one of the most important and interesting aspects of our regular duties. This challenging task allowed us to gain an understanding of current burning issues of Canadian society (e.g. BSE problem, same-sex marriages, sponsorship scandal, etc.) and the ways politicians are dealing with them.

The luckiest of us got a chance to contribute to Canadian policy-making. Can there be anything more exciting than to watch your MP asking a question during the Question Period or delivering a speech that you have been working on, and realizing that the whole country is watching!.

An important aspect of our multifaceted experience in Canada was visiting the riding of the MP. Some of us had a chance to make such a trip and meet the staff of the constituency offices to get an idea of the whole spectrum of Canadian governance.

We were learning about Canada not only in our offices, but also by following events on the Hill. The first such event was the Speech from the Throne. This left a deep impression on us. One observed the respect for a long standing tradition and its incorporation into the modern political life of the country. This created a special "Canadian" mood that lasted during our whole stay here.

The rigorous debate following the Speech from the Throne was for us, the next impressive aspect of a parliamentary democracy system. The debate on the Speech from the Throne resumed after Question Period, which fulfills the important function of imposing practical control, by a strong opposition over the stated intentions of the governing party.

For most generations of CUPP interns, Question Period, media scrums, and briefings exemplify the high degree of openness on the Canadian system – something we would like to see one day implemented in the Ukrainian parliament.

But openness of the Canadian parliament goes well beyond Question Period and media scrums. It is accessibility of the MPs that strikes us most. We were amazed how easily average Canadians can get hold of their MPs, come to their offices both in the ridings and here in Ottawa, talk to them about their problems and actually get help or least a receptive ear.

Accessibility is derivative from openness. Openness comes from people, and Canadians working on the Hill are definitely open, easy-going, and approachable.

“We like to keep it simple”, said Peter Stoffer, MP for Sackville-Musquodoboit Valley-Eastern Shore during the meeting with us. And truly most of the MPs here do not suffer from “star disease” but simply want to do their job well. In a situation where every vote counts, proper representation of their constituents here on the Hill is the biggest challenge and the primary task of every MP.

Every office is weighed down with work – preparing legislative reports, writing executive summaries, pursuing research projects, writing speeches for session days, communicating with the ridings by means of householders and “ten-per centers”, etc., but it all is being done in friendly relaxed atmosphere, which made us feel comfortable, from the first day of our internship. To make its own contribution to building an informal but productive atmosphere inside the House of Commons, even the parliamentary newspaper – *The Hill Times*, conducts an annual survey among political staffers to decide on the sexiest, stylish, entertaining, and so forth, MP on the Hill.

We came with a stereotype that all MPs are extremely serious people, who think only about politics, and any deviations from this norm are unacceptable. In Canada we witnessed the situation when politicians are not afraid to be made fun of. During this year’s annual Press Gallery Dinner Canada’s political elite demonstrated

that they have an excellent sense of humour. Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, for example, appeared in front of the public in sportswear with a backpack and a cap turned to the side, knocking our whole CUPP group from our chairs. We realized that only in a free and open country is there an opportunity for politicians to joke about themselves and not be taken too literally. Ukraine still has a long way to go to this level of freedom and camaraderie.

Openness and keeping things simple, by Canadian parliamentarians made our internship extremely informative and interactive. We had no problems arranging all sorts of meetings with MPs from different parties, senators, representatives of various government departments and agencies (including the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Canadian International Development Agency), embassies of the USA, Armenia, and Ukraine. Even the House of Commons Speaker Peter Milliken, MP for Kingston and the Islands, found time to meet with us. Every meeting with these tremendously interesting people cast a new light on how Canada’s Parliament and its people, function and live on a day-to-day basis.

We were very pleased to meet with MPs of Ukrainian descent including Walt Lastewka for St. Catherine’s, Borys Wrzesnewskij for Etobicoke Centre, and Senator A. Raynell Andreychuk of Saskatchewan. We are proud that they still care about maintaining Ukrainian roots in the Ukrainian-Canadian community that they remember Ukraine, and help to contribute to its democratic development. Even more important, they expressed the belief that the young generation of Ukrainians, to which we also belong, will be able to make the change in Ukraine and to create a new positive image of the country on the international arena.

But there was also another aspect of meeting politicians of Ukrainian heritage. We finally realized how important culture, history, and language are for understanding certain patterns inside a society, how different mentalities emerge based on historical memory and conditions. Learning about the Canadian governance system is necessary but not sufficient for understanding how Canadian society works. To get the full picture, one has to know more about Canadian history and culture, for these are the cornerstones of understanding Canada. For this reason we had a series of events that helped us to broaden our outlook and develop a better understanding of what was going on around us.

For us, the key words to define Canadian culture are diversity and multiculturalism, which is about realizing that all cultures interact and coexist in Canada but still maintain their Ukrainian, French, Chinese, Irish, Italian



Borys Wrzesnewskij MP with Ismayil Khayredinov (right) and Natalia Tserklevych

etc. roots and traditions. Canadians do not melt their people into a stew. Canada allows its people to maintain their traditions while building up their Canadian roots and identity. You can visit Ukrainian Mass with the Gospel read in both English and Ukrainian languages, or visit Montreal, which is both “European” and “North American”, or eat Chinese food in a Canadian restaurant and think of yourself as a discoverer of each of these cultures, and s enjoy and appreciate any or all of them. That’s because to be Canadian means to believe in tolerance, mutual understanding, and democracy.

Probably the best “cultural experience” for us was the visit to the Canadian Museum of Civilizations, which encompasses fragments of daily life of Canadians from different regions, showing them in historical retrospective – the Grand Hall exhibits the traditional culture of First Nations, the Canada Hall depicts scenes of European influence on Canada. You can get an idea of a Chinese hand laundry, a Ukrainian Booksellers Shop or walk into the St. Onuphrius Ukrainian Church. What we have noticed is that Canadians respect every culture and are open to accept its influence on what comes to be Canadian culture. Moreover, Canadians preserve their historical

markers and treat them with respect. This is an example worth following by every nation.

Other museums, which helped us to *understand* the country, were Canada and World Pavilion with the Spirit, Heart and Mind sections, and the National Gallery of Art with its exhibitions of paintings from all parts of the world. The First Nations in Canada were a whole new discovery for us. We were greatly impressed by the Inuit Art collection (traditional carvings, graphic works), which created in our minds a vivid image of how the people in northern circumpolar region live and what their hopes and beliefs are.

Still it is useful to remember that a country is about the people who live there. We are very grateful that we had a chance to share a lot of cultural experiences by interacting with average Canadians.

At first sight it seemed strange how confident and patriotic Canadians are. But Canada is the country, where the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is not just words on a paper. Therefore, there are equal rights for every Canadian regardless of race, national origin, colour, sex, age or mental abilities. Women in Canada are very involved in governance, business, cultural and social life of the country. Many of the Senators are female.

Every person in Canada is an individual, who is important to the whole country. We discovered that there is strong support for the homeless, the poor and disabled by means of social security provided by the state. Every individual is of great value. That is probably the best cultural experience: to gain the feeling of mutual respect, to believe in equality, freedom and justice.

Where are they Now

The experience and knowledge gained during the CUPP internship opens up new horizons for many alumni upon the program’s completion. Over the years former participants have been proving by their work and progress how effective the Program has been.

When looking at CUPP alumni profiles, one can readily see the great contribution CUPP has been making to the education of future leaders of Ukraine. Graduates of past programs are now diplomats in the Ukrainian Foreign Service, professors at universities, advisers to Ministers in Ukraine and abroad, to financial institutions and multinational corporations, assistants to members of the Ukrainian Parliament (the Verkhovna Rada), under contract to the World Health Organization, The Council of Europe, The United Nations, the World Bank, and the IMF. One graduate is a deputy mayor, and several are councillors in municipal governments.

Olga Makara (1994) has summarized the opinion of the majority of CUPP Alumni, "CUPP played a key role in my professional activity and education. This is the real course of democracy for Ukrainian students, which provides an understanding of what is crucial for Ukraine's future and prosperity."

The first step of a significant part of CUPP alumni after returning from Canada is continuation of their education. Many are pursuing Master's degree and/or PhD in Ukrainian or foreign institutions. Alumni have received scholarships for studies at Boston University, Duke University, Johns Hopkins University, Oxford University, University of Amsterdam, University of Toronto, University of Maastricht, Cambridge University, McGill University, Harvard University, Sorbonne University, York University, LSE, University of Edinburgh, University of Calgary, University of Warsaw and many more.

The quest to earn international degrees (International Relations, International Economics and Finance, International Development etc.) and LLM apparently can be explained by the influence of the Canadian experience. A lot of the alumni go through an internship at the Ukrainian Parliament where they work at various departments and committees.

Mykhailo Danylko (2000) completed an internship at the European Union Commission in Brussels, Belgium, and at the European Union Parliament in Strasbourg, France. Evhen Palenka (1995) was awarded Prize by the World Bank and Harvard University for his paper on the Ukrainian Taxation System. Actually, the topics of some thesis' are worthy mentioning since they demonstrate the positive reformative intentions of the graduates. For example: The Law on the Protection of Honour and Honesty, Ukrainian National Image in the World, and Legal Approaches to the Development of European Security.

The Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program experience encourages many alumni to start working at government and justice institutions. This raises hopes that the Rule of Law and democratic principles learned during the CUPP Program will soon be implemented in Ukrainian society. Here are some examples of this positive tendency.

- Nazar Bobitski (1994) held a post of Attaché at Embassy of Ukraine in Brussels, Belgium, and now he is working at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in Department of European Union.
- Luba Gribkova (1993) has been employed by Municipal Government of Yalta, as chief specialist and head of Foreign Development and Investment Policy Departments since 1999.

- Lawyer Lev Kozakov (1997) specializes in commercial litigation and advocacy work before governmental bodies.
- Volodymyr Omelyan (1999) was an Attaché of the NATO and European Security Division and currently he is Third Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organisations in Vienna, Austria.
- Mykhailo Danylko (2000) served four years as Municipal Government Councillor in Kyiv.
- Viktor Dovhan has been working at the Ukrainian-European Policy and Legal Advice Centre in Kyiv.
- Maksym Rayko and Nataliya Mykolska have joined the staff of the top Ukrainian law firms *Magister & Partners* and *Vasyl Kysil & Partners* correspondingly.
- Olga Kravchenko has been an employee at the Constitutional Court of Ukraine since 2002.

The board and sponsors of CUPP may be also proud of Oksana Rudiuk (1996), Olga Dmytrenko (1998), Hanna Kossiv (1998), Natalya Syedina (2000), and Tetyana Nedashkovska (2003). Oksana has been involved into anti-corruption Program "Partnership for a Transparent Society". Olga is now working at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. Hanna has been an active member of "Faith & Light", communities for mentally challenged individuals. President of Ukraine appointed Natalya to Ukrainian Students Council. And Tetyana was an organizer of the Annual Ecological Initiative "Cleanse Your City of Wasters".

Conclusion

The CUPP has given birth to some sparkling stars in the Ukrainian social and political universe, but lots of problems remain unsolved. We believe that the expertise, experience, and spirit of those who at least once have encountered true democracy will help to overcome all the difficulties on the way of building a free and democratic Ukrainian state.

The CUPP is an invaluable gift from Canada because it invests in Ukrainian, Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian youth. The CUPP Director stresses that "We want to see Ukraine as prosperous and free as Canada." Not only does he preach it, but from year to year he and his board work to organize a new CUPP program and welcome a fresh group of students to Canada. Everyone associated with the program is grateful to Canada for its hospitality and for sharing its knowledge with us. You have made new converts to the Canadian way! As we leave the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program we, will do our best to justify your faith and hope in our future.