

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Presidential Meeting with Ukrainian-Americans

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Edward J. Derwinski, Secretary of Veterans Affairs
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Ed A. Hewett, Senior Director for Soviet Affairs, NSC Staff

Taras G. Szmagala, Supreme Comptroller, Ukrainian National Association
Bogdan Futey, Federal Judge
Ulana Diachuk, President, Ukrainian American Coordinating Council
Walter Dudycz, Illinois State Senator
Roman Rakowsky, National Commander, Ukrainian American Veterans
Arnold Lozynskyj, Executive Vice President, Ukrainian Congress Committee of America
Bishop Basil Losten, Ukrainian Catholic Church, Diocese of Stamford, Connecticut
Archbishop Anthony, Ukrainian Orthodox Church Washington Diocese
Walter Baranetsky, President Ukrainian Institute of America
Joseph Lesawyer, Board Member
Robert McConnell, Ukraine 2000
Bodgan Burachinsky, President of Coordinating Committee to Aid the Ukraine
Eugene M. Iwanciw, Director, Washington Office of the Ukrainian National Association
Natalia Kormeluk, Director, The Ukrainian National Information Service
Maria Savchak, President of the Ukrainian National Womens League of North America

DATE, TIME November 27, 1991, 10:32 - 11:00am
AND PLACE: Roosevelt Room

The President: I'm just delighted you're here. This is a very exciting time. We want to handle all of this correctly. We have a good team working the problem -- not just the problem in the

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Ukraine, but the general issue of how to respond to the transformation in the USSR and Eastern Europe. I am very happy with the way it is working out. (U)

There is, of course, a scarcity of resources which makes it difficult where resources are involved. But much of the change under way does not require resources. The spirit of the times takes over. (U)

Many of you here worked your entire lives for this. You never gave up on freedom. That's all I wanted to say, and now I'd like to hear from you. Taras, I understand you will start off. (U)

Mr. Szmagala: Mr. President, you have in this room a representative group from the Ukrainian-American community: a judge, a state senator from Illinois. (U)

Our group met last night and developed a position paper, which I will give to you now (gives paper to the President). I am sure the staff will go over it with you. (U)

Let me read the first paragraph which, I feel, sums it all up:

"Ukrainian-Americans are united in their support for recognition of an independent Ukraine. As Americans, we believe recognition of Ukraine is in the best interests of the United States and consistent with our traditions of individual freedom and self-determination."

The goals of freedom and independence for Ukraine, along with the cultural ties, are the foundations of our community. Our "gut issue" is freedom for Ukraine. (U)

We've all worked for this, and in the past you have supported us. In 1974 you spoke to us as Chairman of the Republican Committee, and in 1982 as Vice President. You encouraged us to work for freedom and self-determination. (U)

Now that freedom is four days away. This Sunday the people of Ukraine will vote in a referendum for independence. The independence of Ukraine is inevitable. Ukraine is developing into a true democracy. (U)

You gave me the opportunity in October as part of a delegation to Babi Yar to see first hand how Ukraine is developing as a true democracy. I saw how the Ukrainian government has reached out to minorities -- and only by doing that can we be reassured that the situation will not revert back to the authoritarianism of the past. The government is working hard now at the legal basis of democracy, at institutionalizing the rule of law. (U)

The Ukrainian people look to us to aid the development of true democracy. If we are to influence an independent Ukraine we have to be a player. If we recognize Ukrainian independence soon as possible after December 1, we will be a player. (U)

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This is the largest new democracy of the 1990's. We hope we can count on your leadership. Words cannot articulate how deeply our community feels on this issue. (U)

The President: I do understand, and we are not out of sync. We will watch the referendum; we hope we can say that the election is free and fair (I think we will be able to); we'll salute independence; and then we will start to take the steps leading to recognition. (U)

Ukraine has so far said the right things. Nuclear weapons are a major concern. I have a passionate commitment to avoid nuclear proliferation. But so far, so good. I've met Kravchuk twice in recent months, and he is saying the right things. (U)

I also must emphasize that we want to see a peaceful evolution. We must take care not to do anything that inadvertently exacerbates the situation, creating conflict. (U)

Ukraine seems committed to CSCE, and to implementing existing treaties. We will approach this as we approached the Baltics: saluting independence, and then working out the details. We don't want to send a signal of reluctance. But we want to be sure on nuclear issues, and on the commitments of the new leadership. (U)

I presume Kravchuk will be the new leader. He is a nice example of someone who can change. As you all know he was a part of the old system. But in talking to him I realize the tremendous pressures he was under from the center. (U)

I guess he will prevail, although it is not my place to predict an outcome, or to pick winners. We will deal with whoever is elected. That is the wonderful thing: the Ukrainian people are choosing their leader. (U)

We will move forward. If not, Roman will kill me. (U)

Some say we should recognize Ukrainian independence as soon as the election results are in. But what we will do is salute the independence referendum, make sure the treaties will be implemented, and work with our allies. It won't take long. (U)

I understand the emotion. I've been in meetings with Ukrainian-Americans. And I've been in other meetings with Ed Derwinsky. I am most sensitive to the concerns of the ethnic community. (U)

If you have any technical or practical problems, bring them up with Ed Hewett. (U)

Let me shift to the Soviet Union for a moment now. This is not easy now. We are engaged in a very big balancing act. Every time I make a call to Gorbachev, I have to call Yel'tsin. We must make sure that we do not inadvertently complicate matters.

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Russia has strong links with the Ukraine. We must make sure what happens is peaceful. If we inadvertently do something to result in a military confrontation between the two, that would be the worst possible thing. You know the complicated nature of the Russian-Ukrainian relationship better than I. (Ø)

I had a long talk with a high Russian official yesterday about where we are on this. There are hardliners on all sides. The U.S. must try to help to see moderation prevail. We want to try to avoid hardliners trying to deny the aspirations of the Ukrainian people. (Ø)

I'm not suggesting we can "wave a wand" and tell Boris Yel'tsin to do this or that. But we have a certain responsibility to try to manage the problem. We have a standing in the world now -- when you think, for example, of what we have done to bring disparate sides together in the Middle East. (Ø)

We just want to be sure that we do it right. The people will have spoken, and Ukraine is entitled to its independence. The only question now is how the Ukrainian people can peacefully get what they want. (Ø)

We will weigh in on the economic side. The Ukraine is in a better position than most to conduct itself as a participant in the global economic system.... not for oil, but in general it is miles ahead of others. (Ø)

We are being as responsive as we can be to the aspirations of the Ukrainian people, and to those of Russia. There are pockets of resistance in Russia. We will try hard to be helpful. (Ø)

Mr. Szmagala: The Ukrainian Government has said most of the right things, and is operating in a truly democratic fashion. Our concerns are important, particularly those involving restrictions on defense. (Ø)

The President: I want to thank you for coming by. If you have any questions ask Ed Hewett. He has the biggest portfolio of anyone here. When he came here from academic and business pursuits, I doubt that he had any idea what a big job this would be. (U)

We are working to get this one right. I see this as a legacy we can leave to our children, and to yours. The considerations I have discussed are not meant to be a stumbling block. I simply want to manage the situation to fulfill the aspirations of the Ukrainian people, and of Russians. This does not mean, however, that there is a link between Russia and what we do in Ukraine. (Ø)

Mr. Szmagala: One other thing. You mentioned that the world looks to us for leadership. Rukh sent a letter by E-Mail to Bob McConnell for you. They had a meeting this morning and transmitted it to us. (U)

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Judge Futey: Are you monitoring the elections? (U)

The President: I don't think we are sending anyone in from the outside, but we are monitoring them, aren't we Ed? (U)

Dr. Hewett: Yes, we have eleven or twelve officers from Moscow and Kiev who will spread throughout the republic and following the election process. (U)

The President: It is important that this process be perceived as free and fair. (U)

Mr. Burachinsky: Mr. President, you should also know that it appears a two-party system is emerging in Ukraine, which will give stability to the system by providing a balance between competing forces. (U)

The President: It is exciting. I can't think of a better Thanksgiving gift for your community. Thank you all for coming. (U)

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