

Speech by UWC President Eugene Czolij

"The Ukrainian World Congress at Fifty – Reflecting on High-Water Mark Achievements"

Conference entitled "UWC at 50 and Beyond – The North American Vector"

16 September 2017 at Princeton Club, New York City

Your Eminences,

Reverend Fathers,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

November of this year will mark the 50th anniversary since the first Congress that was held in New York adopted the historic decision to create a coordinating body of Ukrainian community organizations – the World Congress of Free Ukrainians - now known as the Ukrainian World Congress, or the UWC.

This decision embodied the long-standing aspirations of the Ukrainian diaspora for the consolidation and promotion of the interests of the Ukrainian people worldwide.

The first World Congress of Free Ukrainians clearly identified its main priorities:

"With all our strengths and means, within the legal framework of our countries of residence, to help the Ukrainian people in their struggle for freedom and independence, for the restoration of an independent, unified, and democratically governed state of Ukraine", and

"[...] to preserve, cultivate, and develop our national, historical, and religious traditions, our language and culture, and through them to enrich the cultures of our countries of residence."

Therefore, during the First Congress in 1967, the UWC held mass demonstrations for the liberation of Ukraine and for the decolonization of the Soviet Union.

The UWC also organized large-scale campaigns to protect human and national rights and religious freedom in Ukraine, such as, for example, the International campaign marking the 1000th anniversary of Christianity in Ukraine.

The UWC also actively supported national democratic forces in Ukraine on their path to restoring Ukraine's independence.

In fact, the 50-year history of the UWC is very closely intertwined with the history of Ukraine, in that, during its first 25 years, the UWC actively supported the Ukrainian people on their long and difficult path toward restoring their independence, and the next 25 years, helped strengthen Ukraine's statehood.

The 1991 Proclamation of the Independence of Ukraine was our biggest shared gift from God that marked the culmination of the enormous efforts made by many generations of Ukrainians.

The Proclamation of Ukraine's Independence also became a significant event for the multimillion-strong Ukrainian diaspora, which the West began treating as an integral part of the Ukrainian nation with a state.

When I am asked today what is the greatest success story of the UWC in its 50-year history, I respond without any hesitation whatsoever that it is our contribution to the restoration of Ukraine's Independence in 1991.

Since then, the UWC has focused its activities on consolidating Ukrainian statehood.

First, the UWC launched a campaign for the diplomatic recognition of the independent state of Ukraine by the West and by the end of December 1991, 57 countries had declared such diplomatic recognition.

The UWC also called for our constituents to support the establishment of Ukrainian Missions in the world and the Ukrainian diaspora responded by acquiring the premises for Ukraine's Embassy in Canada, the residence of Ukraine's Ambassador to Canada, the premises for Ukraine's General Consulates in New York and Chicago, and the premises for the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations.

The UWC has also worked with our member organizations, including the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, toward the repeal of the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the Trade Act and the re-establishment of normal trade relations between the United States and Ukraine, which occurred on 8 March 2016.

The UWC also supported Ukraine's accession as the 152nd member of the World Trade Organization on 16 May 2008.

The UWC and our Ukrainian credit unions and cooperatives in Canada and the United States have facilitated the creation of a network of over 350 credit unions in Ukraine.

Moreover, the UWC has supported the creation of a network of almost 70 social services centres throughout Ukraine.

Since 1999, the UWC has been sending its international observer missions to Ukraine, both to support the fair and transparent conduct of elections, and to revive public trust in the voting process. Our observers participated in large numbers during such critical periods in Ukrainian history as the Orange Revolution, and the presidential and parliamentary elections after the EuroMaidan.

In 1984, the UWC initiated the creation of the International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932-33 Famine in Ukraine composed of seven prominent jurists from around the world. The attorney for the UWC was John Sopinka, who later was appointed as a judge to the Supreme Court of Canada. In the final report issued in 1990, still during Soviet times, the Commission majority, concluded that:

“the policies which were applied to the Ukrainian people and led to the famine of 1932-33 disregard the precepts of basic morality which are binding on Soviet as on all authorities, and that the Soviet authorities must in consequence be vigorously condemned.”

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This was the first major step towards the international recognition of the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people.

In 2008, the UWC also organized an international campaign which saw the “International Holodomor Remembrance Flame” travel through 33 countries of the world, uniting the international community in honouring the memory of the victims of the Holodomor.

Thanks to these and other campaigns, 17 countries of the world have now recognized the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people. However, there is still a great deal of work to be done, as there are 193 member countries in the UN.

In 2010, conscious of the real threat posed by the Russian Federation, particularly in light of the concept of “*Ruskiy mir*”, and the attempts to force Ukraine into the Customs and Eurasian unions, the UWC began actively promoting the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine at the international level. We actively petitioned the European Union to sign the *EU-Ukraine Association Agreement*, which is not only in the interests of Ukraine, but also of Europe, since Ukraine is a truly European state with huge potential.

At the end of November 2013, when the Ukrainian authorities turned away from the calls coming from the EuroMaidan for greater cooperation with the EU and secretly conducted a new round of anti-Ukrainian talks with the Russian Federation, the UWC assumed the historic role of acting as the voice of the Ukrainian people vis-à-vis the European Union. It was a great honor for me to address a Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Foreign Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union in the Parliament of Lithuania and to convey the strong call from the EuroMaidan to support the European aspirations of the Ukrainian people.

The Ukrainian diaspora, led by the UWC, actively joined the EuroMaidan in Kyiv and continuously promoted the European aspirations of the Ukrainian people in numerous other EuroMaidans held concurrently in 42 countries around the world in solidarity with the people in Ukraine.

And today we can be proud of the real contribution we have made to the signing and ratification of the historic *EU-Ukraine Association Agreement*, which came into full effect on 1 September of this year.

We also ardently campaigned for the introduction in Ukraine of a visa-free regime with the EU, which was realized on 11 June 2017, thus opening the door for Ukrainians to Europe.

Having successfully concluded these two important stages in the process of integrating Ukraine into Europe, we must now work with the same dedication towards Ukraine's acceptance into the EU as a full-fledged member by supporting the necessary reforms to achieve this.

We must also help protect and promote Ukraine's decision to pursue integration with Europe and, therefore, continue fighting and resisting the hybrid war which has been waged by the Russian Federation for more than three years now. That is why, the UWC has systematically taken measures to ensure that the international community supports Ukraine in the defence of its territorial integrity, and continues to underscore the message that by defending their own borders, the Ukrainian people are actually stopping the advance of Russian imperialism further westward.

Through our work during this time, we have supported the condemnation by the world community of the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation; the termination of Russian Federation membership

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in the G-8; the adoption and extension of economic sanctions against the Russian Federation; the provision of military and humanitarian assistance and economic aid packages to Ukraine; resolutions by the European Parliament in support of Ukraine; the declaration of the NATO Warsaw Summit defending the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine; and the signing by the United States of America of the "*Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act*".

However, to put an end to Russian aggression in Ukraine, we must do even more and call on the international community to exert greater pressure on the Russian Federation, including the termination of its membership in the SWIFT international payment system until the Kremlin withdraws its troops from Crimea and fully complies with the Minsk agreements.

In June 2017, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted, and in July 2017, the President of Ukraine signed, a law that designated Ukraine's path toward NATO membership as a priority of Ukraine's security policy. This very important strategic step will help Ukraine protect its territorial integrity from Russian aggression. Now our task is to convince NATO allies that this is the best way to truly ensure peace and stability in Europe.

Equally, we should continue encouraging the UN to deploy a peacekeeping Mission or the OSCE to send a police mission to Eastern Ukraine and an observer mission to Crimea.

As we all well know, the Russian Federation's hybrid war includes military action, destructive cyber-attacks on Ukraine's infrastructure, and a large-scale disinformation campaign aimed at presenting Ukraine as a failed state. Therefore, to counteract these Russian attacks, we are constantly communicating to the international community that Ukraine is actively reforming, modernizing, raising its economic level, and fighting corruption.

In order to strengthen its contribution to priority issues, in 2014, the UWC opened a Mission in Kyiv, and in early 2017, also opened a UWC Mission to International Organizations in Brussels.

The UWC also launched its Humanitarian Initiatives in Ukraine, which enhance the level of tactical medicine in Ukraine and facilitate the physical and psychological treatment, as well as surgery and prosthetics, for the wounded. Undoubtedly the most well-known humanitarian initiative is the "*Patriot Defense*" project, which was established in May 2014 under the auspices of the UWC by today's Acting Minister of Health of Ukraine, Dr. Ulana Suprun, in response to the illegal occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and its subsequent invasion of Eastern Ukraine.

The mission of the "*Patriot Defense*" project is to systematically develop tactical medicine and emerging medical care through training and perfection of skills in order to bring them up to the highest international standards.

The following humanitarian programs of "*Patriot Defense*" demonstrate how impressive and much-needed they are:

1. Combat Lifesaver Course

This program provides Ukrainian soldiers with training in Combat Lifesaver similar to that received by soldiers in the United States, Canada, Great Britain and other NATO member states, as well as enhanced individual first aid kits (IFAKs). As of August of this year, almost 9,000 soldiers and over 5,000 cadets have followed the Combat Lifesaver course; and more than 21,500 enhanced individual first aid kits have been remitted to Ukrainian soldiers at a cost of about \$100 U.S. per kit.

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2. Long Range Patrol Medic Program

This program is meant to prepare one patrol medic per each special unit to provide qualitative and timely preparation in case of emergency. Over 380 medics in special forces units have received this training and over 200 medical backpacks with equipment to save lives in emergency situations have been remitted.

3. Ukrainian Trauma Life Support Program

This program is designed to raise the medical support system in Ukraine to the highest world standards. Over 125 military doctors and over 215 civilian doctors have followed this program.

4. Training the Civilian in Emergency Medical Care Program

This program includes “*First Responder Courses*”; training the new police force in emergency care; and first aid courses for almost 600 students in Kyiv and for over 130 members of the Ukrainian Youth Association “*Plast*” in Ukraine.

5. International conferences

Two international conferences have been organized in Kyiv to develop and standardize tactical medicine in Ukraine and to bring it up to international standards.

These are concrete humanitarian initiatives that we can be proud of, as they have made a substantial impact in Ukraine.

Moreover, given the large number of political prisoners suffering behind bars in the Russian Federation and in the occupied territories of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, the UWC continues to assist Ukraine in securing their release, and to protect the human and national rights of Ukrainian communities in the Russian Federation by persistently raising these issues in various international forums.

In light of the current great challenges being faced by Ukraine, the UWC also feels that it is important to pay special attention to religious life. In particular, last year I met with the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, whom I urged to issue a Tomos of Autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate. And this year in the Vatican, I submitted the Resolutions of the 2016 UWC Annual General Meeting which include an appeal to recognize the Patriarchal status of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. We must continue these efforts until we succeed.

The UWC also continues to address the interests of the Ukrainian diaspora and maintains close contact with Ukrainian communities worldwide, supporting issues of importance to them vis-à-vis the authorities of their respective countries.

For this purpose, the UWC leadership has visited Ukrainians in more than 40 countries of the world.

One of the greatest successes of the UWC in this area was the return in 2011 of the Narodnyi Dim (Peoples’ Home) to the Ukrainian community in Przemyśl, Poland, which was confiscated as a result of the anti-Ukrainian Akcija “Wisla”.

In addition, the UWC has, among other things, helped address electoral issues of local governance with the Hungarian authorities; unfreeze assets of our member organization in Romania that threatened their continued existence; ensured the right of the Ukrainian community in Romania to have an elected

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member in the Romanian Parliament; and re-established a national umbrella organization for Ukrainians in Germany.

Also, the UWC has constantly raised with the international community the issue of persistent violations by the Russian authorities of the human and national rights of our Ukrainian national minority in the Russian Federation. For instance, in 2011, the UWC successfully decreased the harassment tactics against the Ukrainian Library in Moscow and its Director. However, the situation of our communities in the Russian Federation will require our continued steadfast vigilance and advocacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

We already have 50 years of work behind us.

And today I can say with conviction that, with its work, the UWC has delivered on the hopes of its founders and has built on the solid foundation of the organization as laid down by its leadership, specifically its past Presidents: Fr. Dr. Wasyl Kushnir, Joseph Lesawyer, Antin Melnyk, Mykola Plaviuk, Ivan Bazarko, Peter Savaryn, Yuri Shymko, Dr. Dmytro Cipywnyk and Dr. Askold Lozynskyj.

We have fully embraced the concept of the national unity of Ukrainians around the world and become a global power for advancing our common interests internationally.

Perhaps, the best proof of our success is the growth of the UWC network which, since the UWC inception in 1967 to date, has increased from 17 to 53 countries around the world.

However, the joy of this year's UWC golden anniversary has been overshadowed by Russian aggression against Ukraine, which needs us today more than ever before.

For this reason, at this critical juncture, the 20-million strong Ukrainian diaspora headed by the UWC must work, with even greater devotion, to help Ukraine overcome this Russian aggression and ensure the return to Ukrainian control of the illegally occupied Crimea and parts of the Donbas.

We must also continue to assist Ukraine in strengthening its statehood, fighting corruption, pursuing further important reforms, and integrating into the European and Euro-Atlantic communities.

Similarly, we must continue to support an economic package for Ukraine akin to the Marshall Plan so as to overcome the consequences of Russian aggression and continue with essential reforms.

Since the economic development of Ukraine is fundamental to the consolidation of its statehood, we must continue to further expand Ukrainian exports worldwide and attract foreign direct investment to Ukraine. To that end the UWC organized a very successful economic forum in Kyiv during its 2017 AGM with the participation of government officials, business people from Ukraine and the diaspora and our AGM delegates from over 30 countries in the world.

Such measures will help Ukraine become a stable and prosperous state, which is in the best interests not only of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, but the entire international community.

I therefore appeal to you to join us in this important work for the good of the Ukrainian people.

I also wish you a very productive conference today in order to help us establish a roadmap for our future work.

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