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*Keynote Address by Dr. Nadia Diuk:*  
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**UKRAINE'S SCORECARD AT TWENTY**



Thank you very much for inviting me to address this conference: I am very happy to be here. Since we are in the land of the Mayans and seven is a number they considered both mystical and sacred, I decided to try to group my own thinking on the occasion of Ukraine's twentieth anniversary into seven points.

**My First Point** relates to the fact that in 34 years of holding these conferences, this is the first time—so I am informed—that the UABA has invited a woman to be keynote speaker!

**It's high time to make room for women in the upper reaches of the political, decision-making elite, and to promote their full participation in politics and government.**

Many studies have shown that where women are present in government and politics the level of corruption tends to go down. It is not that women are necessarily more honest than their male counterparts, although I do believe that in general women are more open and fair, but studies have shown that corruption operates through specific social and political networks to which women do not usually have access—at least not when they are newcomers to positions of power in political, social or economic institutions. This year's Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to three women—two from Liberia and one from Yemen (who is, incidentally, a grantee of the foundation I work for)—to make just this point.

Looking at Ukraine today, we see no women in the Cabinet of Ministers and a very retrograde attitude of Ukraine's leading officials to the notion of women in government. Ukraine would do well to take note of general trends in the world and start to promote women's participation. As for the UABA...I think I made my point.

**Second Point**

**Should we expect changes in twenty years?**

There is a view that Ukraine is a young democracy and that it cannot compare with the United States, whose democracy has been a work in progress for over two hundred years. But when you consider that the period from the end of World War I to the beginning of World War II was just twenty years, then you can see that sovereignty can be won and lost in that period. Twenty years is an entire generation and we should expect more in the way of positive changes.

**Third Point**

**What would have happened if Ukraine had not become independent twenty years ago?**

Russia would still be an empire and even though I believe Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia would have struggled to independence, their situation today would have been the same as Georgia's: they would have been targets for invasion and occupation by Russia. Poland, Czechoslovakia (no it would not have separated into two states) and Hungary would not be in NATO nor would they be in the European Union. Europe itself would be a very different kind of place. Russia would still be supporting Cuba, which would be in close alliance with Hugo Chavez of Venezuela with the result of destabilizing the entire southern hemisphere to the extent that we might not actually have been able to hold this conference here in Mexico!

And Ukraine and the Ukrainian language would be fading away, just like the Mayans and their culture did after being taken over by the Aztecs and the Spaniards.

#### ***Fourth Point***

##### **So we have what we have, Ukraine is independent, but what kind of Ukraine is it?**

What kind of country is Ukraine after twenty years? How close is it to being a democracy? Even the worst dictators of the world pretend to support elements of a democratic system to make themselves more acceptable to the international community. We see that Ukraine is backsliding and is getting failing marks from institutions that monitor freedom, democracy, press freedom and corruption—Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, Transparency International and many others.

Separation of powers is at the root of all democracies and these elements in Ukraine are moving in the wrong direction. The president seems set on centralizing all the power of the state and has supported revisions in the constitution to reflect this trend. The Verkhovna Rada, which used to be a unique institution in the post-Soviet space as a parliament where genuine debate took place and where decisions were voted upon, is becoming a rubber-stamp instrument of the executive. The judiciary's independence—and I don't need to tell this group—has dissipated as the powers of the executive have come to dominate.

Political parties are based on financial groups that do not represent the people, so they are not actually political parties in the classical understanding of that term; corruption is not only pervasive, but has become the way things are run in many areas; SBU interference is growing; independent press is suffering restrictions and worse, the trivialization that comes from self-censorship and a turn towards sensationalist news and subjects.

Recent public opinion polls conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) show 72 percent of Ukrainians believing that Ukraine is going in the wrong direction and only 18 percent that it is on the right track.

According to the eminent observer of social and political development, Francis Fukuyama, to have a thriving polity three components need to work together and as counterweights to each other: the state, rule of law, and accountability of government. I would add a fourth broad area that goes beyond the institutional arrangements of a state—the habits of heart and mind that form the daily fabric of interactions between people. In Ukraine, there is a state that has functioned more or less well for twenty years, but it suffers from being little changed in structure and operations from its Soviet antecedent inherited from the Soviet Union, which was meant to function in conjunction with the Communist Party as its administrative arm. Rule of law is not yet sufficiently developed and there is very little accountability of government.

Another problematic factor that prevents Ukraine advancing toward democracy is its ruling elite that does not perceive the purpose of being in government and of acquiring political power in terms of public service and furthering the common good and the welfare of the people. The members of this elite often use their power and the institutions of the state to further their own interests.

#### ***Fifth Point***

##### **Diaspora Disillusion: why has the Diaspora been so disappointed and disillusioned with Ukraine?**

After many years of struggling for an independent Ukraine, when it finally happened in 1991, we in the Diaspora expected the country to become a normal, democratic state fairly quickly. What we didn't at first understand were the many institutional issues and the huge psychological problems of a population that had been traumatized by the Soviet system.

The stark difference between the reality and our expectations was compounded by the fact that we had created a mythical Ukraine in our collective Diaspora imagination. In this mythical Ukraine, the answers to all moral questions were black and white, there was no ambiguity—our long suffering compatriots were good, honest, hard-working, and oppressed by the evil Communists. Everything to do with our vision of Ukraine was elevated onto a higher plane—one where nobility and courage were virtues possessed by the nation. This highly unrealistic vision of Ukraine, developed

over many years when most Diaspora Ukrainians had no contact with the country, collided with the reality when independence finally made it possible for us to meet our compatriots and travel to a free and independent Ukraine.

In retrospect, it should not have been surprising that we developed completely unrealistic expectations. With no ability to engage with the real Ukraine—and indeed such a state did not actually exist all those years—the Diaspora whose exodus had been forced through political circumstance could not but superimpose high ideals and standards on the elusive object of their strivings. We can see similar trends happening today with Tibet, where an oppressed nation is slowly fading away while its leader the exiled Dalai Lama has become a high moral authority with no ability to travel or maintain a relationship with the people still on the territory of Tibet.

### ***Sixth Point***

#### **What could bring about change for the better in Ukraine?**

Good leadership could bring about positive change in Ukraine but unfortunately, the quality of leadership is getting worse with each presidential administration. There has been no Ukrainian Vaclav Havel or Lech Walesa. But, on the positive side, after the Orange Revolution, Ukrainians began to understand that no single leader would be able to make things right for them without some effort from the society and citizens.

What about the next generation—the youth of Ukraine? Could they finally steer Ukraine in the direction it needs to go? In the twenty years of Ukraine's independence an entire generation has grown up; the first time voters in the 2012 parliamentary election will have been born in 1994. But what are these young people like? Public opinion polling among youth conducted in 2010 turns up some surprises showing that bilingualism is on the rise among this generation. This is a generation that is not proud to be Ukrainian—when asked “are you proud of your country” only 27 percent of the young Ukrainians responded “yes” compared with 62 percent of young Russians and 83 percent of young Azerbaijanis of the same age who were asked the same question about their own country. Clearly, the government needs to undertake some positive nation building education with the youth and with the citizens in general.

### ***Seventh Point***

#### **Positive change may not happen on its own**

Ukraine is an extraordinary country. The past twenty years have confirmed the potential the country holds. The Orange Revolution showed that Ukraine's citizens can push back against an authoritarian regime in a peaceful way and that Ukraine can have a good image around the world. Ukraine's Diaspora is also extraordinary: in each country in the Western world where there is a Ukrainian Diaspora it is the envy of other ethnic groups for its sense of purpose, for its tremendous energy and for its vigorous efforts on behalf of its homeland.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that the changes that Ukraine still needs to undertake to become a normal and democratic state need the joint efforts of both the people in Ukraine and the Diaspora, which can still contribute a great deal to Ukraine's development. These changes will not happen on their own, however, and will need work from many sources. And in the Diaspora, despite our disillusion, we should not give up or become complacent, we should work with our compatriots to identify where our help is needed and work with them to help Ukraine realize its potential to become a country where all of its citizens will live in freedom and prosperity—a country that we can be proud of.

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