

New York, NY (UCCA) -- On June 17th, days before the Obama/Medvedev Summit, members of the UCCA's Executive Board, Tamara Olexy, President; Roksolana Lozynskyj, Chair of the External Affairs Committee; and Michael Sawkiw, Jr., Director of the Ukrainian National Information Service (UNIS), met with representatives of the U.S. Department of State, the White House, the United States Senate and the House of Representatives to discuss the new Administration's policy towards Ukraine.

According to UCCA President, Tamara Olexy, "it is important for the Ukrainian community to express its concerns to the new Administration, especially during this critical period of policy formation and we look forward to commencing such a dialogue."

In an effort to maintain high level contacts between the U.S. and Ukraine – defined by both parties as a Strategic Partnership – the UCCA relayed the support of the million strong Ukrainian American community for a visit by President Barack Obama to Ukraine during his upcoming trip to Europe in early July. The UCCA delegation also expressed concern about the current Administration's seeming lack of a clear policy towards Ukraine and suggestions that historic U.S. support for Ukraine may be waning despite increasing pressure exerted by Russia against Ukraine.

During a meeting with Robert Boehme, Director of the Office of Ukraine Moldova and Belarus Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, Mr. Boehme expressed the Administration's current frustration regarding the appearance of Ukraine's lack of political stability and economic management, particularly regarding the budget and banking system. He did, however, positively assess the reprieve from changes to Ukraine's Constitution.

Although Mr. Boehme defended the current policy of "resetting the button" with the hope of improving U.S relations with Russia, he reiterated the Obama Administration's commitment to it's relationship with Ukraine. He assured the UCCA that any decisions the Administration makes with regards to Russia will not be made at the expense of its neighbors, including Ukraine.

Heartened by these words, UNIS Director Michael Sawkiw, Jr. stated: "the bilateral charter on strategic partnership, signed under the Bush Administration in December 2008, is an effective framework for formulating future U.S-Ukraine relations and would be beneficial to implement to

strengthen bilateral relations.” Mr. Boehme assured the UCCA that the new Administration was taking the bilateral charter seriously. Moreover, he stated that the Obama Administration will continue to support the April 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit communiqué with regards to Ukraine, which states: "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agree today that these countries will become members of NATO," but emphasized that NATO membership is a process.

At the meeting with Kristina Kvien, Director of European Affairs, National Security Council, Roksolana Lozynskyj, Chair of the External Affairs Committee, expressed the Ukrainian American Community's concern that, "the Russian Federation is increasing it's pressure on Ukraine both internally and externally." Ms. Kvien sought to assure the UCCA delegation that although there is presently a sense of frustration with Ukraine, the Administration continues to be fully committed to maintaining and supplementing good relations. She assured the UCCA that there continues to be much interaction with Ukraine's government, citing the recent trips to Ukraine by such high level government officials as U.S. Special Envoy for Eurasian Energy, Richard Morningstar and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, James Steinberg.

Ms. Kvien expressed some concerns, referring in particular to the probable cancellation of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) exercises scheduled in 2009, due to the fact that the Verkhovna Rada refused to consider the bill approving President Yushchenko's decision to admit foreign military troops into Ukraine to participate in these multinational maneuvers.

Addressing the issue of the Bilateral Charter on Strategic Partnership, Ms. Kvien agreed that this is a good framework for future U.S. policy towards Ukraine. She continued that a U.S. outpost in Crimea is a viable possibility in the future. Furthermore, she expressed the U.S.' interest in continuing the Joint Consultative Group between the two countries with the hopes of strengthening its effectiveness in the future.

The UCCA reiterated its concerns in subsequent meetings held with Jonathan Katz, Senior Advisor to Congressman Robert Wexler (D-FL) and Staff Director of the Subcommittee on Europe in the House Committee on Foreign Affairs; and Jason Bruder, Professional Staff Member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. The UCCA delegation thanked the congressional friends of Ukraine for their continuous support and reiterated their desire the new Administration to engage Ukraine, as many Ukrainian Americans are concerned that Ukraine might get 'lost in the shuffle' with the Russia 're-set' button.

The UCCA's President, Tamara Olexy, assessed the meetings positively, stating that "it is important for the Ukrainian community to express its concerns to the new Administration, especially during this critical period of policy formation. The UCCA looks forward to continuing a dialogue with the new administration in an effort to enhance their understanding of our

community's concerns."