



Presidential Election  
Observation Mission,  
April 21, 2019  
Committee on Democracy  
Odesa, Ukraine

**The Ukrainian presidential election is finally over** and the most that can be said about it is that it was free and fair. For the first time in Ukraine's election history it was not clear who the front runners would be. Volodymyr Zelensky is a popular comedian and TV star who plays the president on a TV satire, "Servant of the People". Most viewed his candidacy as a stunt early on and he ran a not-too-serious campaign with no platform or policy details. He was taken seriously when he captured 30+% of the vote in the first round and knocked out long time politician Yulia Tymoshenko, leaving the incumbent Petro Poroshenko as a second round opponent. Experts were all over the board with predictions but Zelensky's support actually grew and he took 72% of the vote. I cannot ever recall a free election with that wide a margin. Still, no one seems to know what Zelensky will do? He says he will stay the course toward Europe and fight domestic corruption, but again, no details yet. Oh, well, he still has four weeks to figure it out....

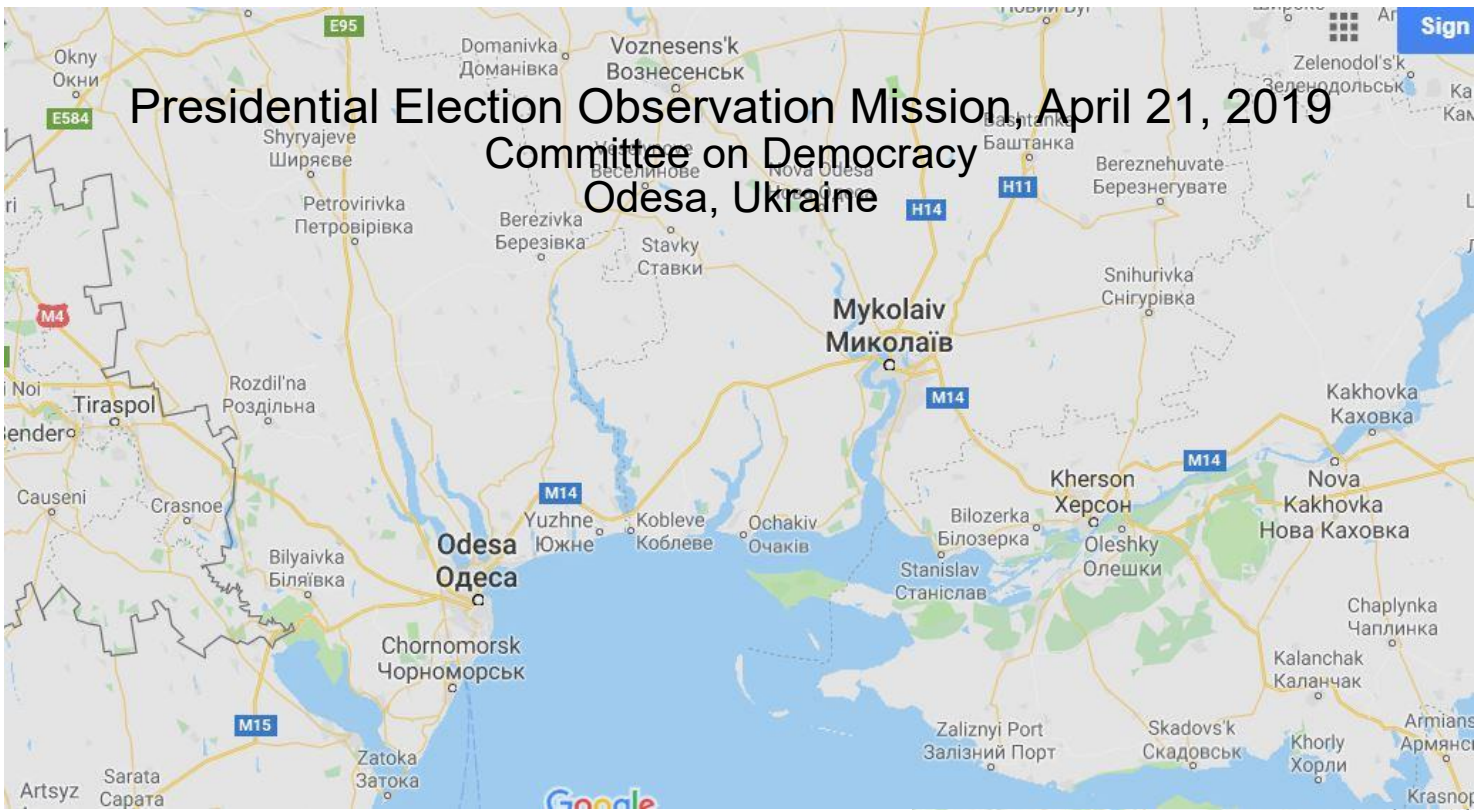
The trip to Odesa was quite nice. It is a beautiful city with a more European feel - it is relatively young and was commissioned to French developers by Catherine the Great. We were met with enthusiasm and warm receptions at all the polling stations. There were very few problems and some of the old-timers were almost bored as they remembered the wild west days of 10 years ago. Ukraine is growing up and heading west. There is still a major challenge coming in the October parliamentary elections. Zelensky does not have a formal party to speak of and will have to curry favor with different factions in the Rada (parliament). These seasoned politicians (aka: crooks) will be out to claim as much power as possible since loosing the opportunity for the presidency. These smaller contests make cheating much more feasible, lucrative, and probable. It is going to be an interesting summer and fall. Stay tuned!

Jim Waite

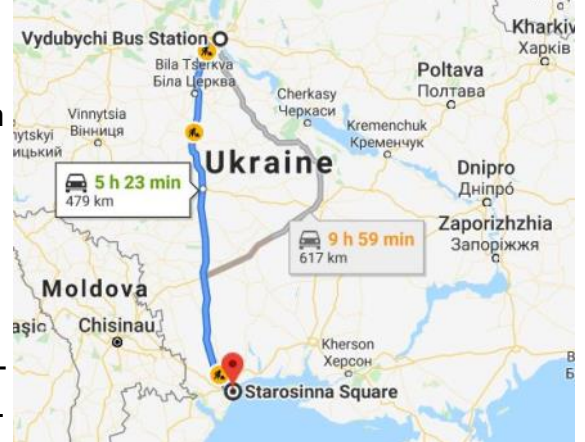
Velika Dobron

Ukraine

# Presidential Election Observation Mission, April 21, 2019 Committee on Democracy Odessa, Ukraine



**Odessa** was founded by Catherine the great in 1794 as a Black Sea port. It has a population of about 900,000. The French were commissioned to layout the city so it has a very European design and feel. It is a six hour bus trip from Kyiv. My companion, Bob, is a former underground courier with the Polish Solidarity union and served as Lech Walesa's translator in meetings with Ronald Reagan. Yuriy Polakiwsky, a Canadian writer living in Kyiv, is behind us. The trip to Odessa crosses the black earth steppes - famous as the "breadbasket." It is unconscionable that 6 million people were starved to death here in 1932-33.



## Around the Town....



**Gambrinus** is an Odesa landmark having been a traditional sailor hangout and bar for over 100 years. The vaulted cellar provides the atmosphere and they pile on the food course after course. The beginning of the salad course is shown. Vegetables, sausages, chicken, and fish are to follow plus wine, beer, cherry juice, and vodka. Dinner lasts about three hours. I am enjoying the company of veteran Canadian observers, all of whom speak Ukrainian.



One of the main streets, Derbasivska, is named after a French general who was one of the founders. The street is pedestrian only (horse rides are optional) and has a great variety of shops, restaurants, and parks. There is an assortment of restaurants and bars in a sort of outdoor food court that caters to the tourists and passersby. The donner kebab is a Turkish shaved beef sandwich with garnish. A real treat for about \$2.50.





**Brian Mefford**, head of Committee on Democracy directed a walking tour of sites in central Odesa. Odesa has an ancient and modern Greek heritage. This is the building (L) from which the Greek Revolution against the Ottoman Empire was financed. A favorite Russian story is the “12 Chairs” featuring Osip Bender, a fictional master con man reported born in Odesa. A family hides the family jewels in a dining room chair to avoid confiscation by the Bolsheviks.

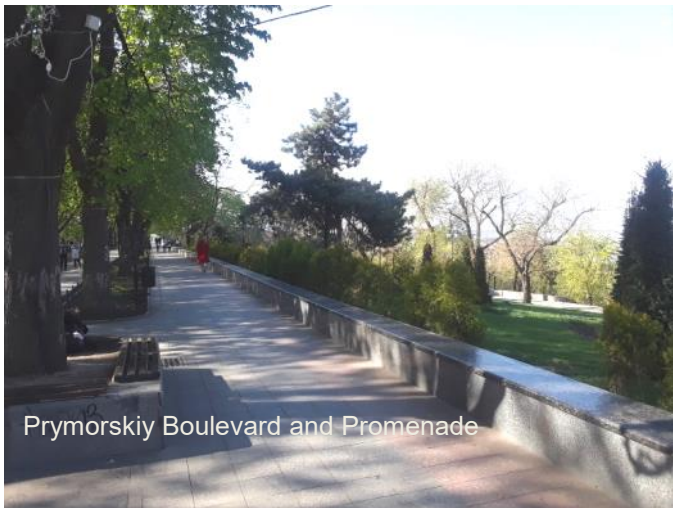
The chairs are sold off and the quest to find the special chair begins. It is especially ironic this story was published and popularized during the Soviet times. A famous line that is sarcastically used still: “Stay strong! The West will help us.”



This elaborate glass enclosed passage way was designed and constructed in the late 1800's by Faberge, continuing the French influence.



An opulent palace once owned by the Shah of Iran (L). A bronze plaque of Lady Justice (R) at the base of a statue of city founder, Duc de Richilieu. She is not blind, the scales are even, and she cannot bear to look at the courthouse across the street. A long promenade, Prymorskiy Boulevard, runs along the hill crest above the Black Sea



Prymorskiy Boulevard and Promenade



Odesa Archeological Museum



Odesa National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet



Destroyed by Stalin, restored 1808 Spaso-Preobrazhensky Orthodox Cathedral.



"Go and proclaim the Gospel."



Famous Potemkin Steps leading to the Black Sea shore.



City Garden on Derbasivska Street.

Committee on Democracy



**The Committee on Democracy** mission team was comprised of volunteers from Ukraine, Canada, Lithuania, Moldova, and the US. After 25 observations in 10 years many are veterans yet there were still many newcomers. Volunteers pay their way to Ukraine and COD picks up expenses from there with generous support from donors.

Procedures were the same as for the first round: present your ID, sign the register, sign the counterfoil, mark your ballot in the booth, and deposit it in the transparent box. The voter roles were cleaned up after the first round and there were few discrepancies of address or dead voters. Our precinct had no shut-in "mobile" voters where the box is taken to the voter's home. We had instead a 102 year old voter who came to the poll on his own!

I was fortunate to head an outstanding team of Canadian first-timer Prem Singh, veteran translator and photographer Anna Kudelia, and all-star driver Boryat. Hopefully we will re-unite the team for the October, 2019, parliamentary elections.

