Ottawa Journal: standing with Ukrainians

At the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine, our Government was one of the first voices on the international stage to offer explicit support for the Ukrainian people in their struggle to restore democracy, freedom, and the rule of law. We expressed outrage at the use of military force against civilians and mourned the dozens of Ukrainians who lost their lives at the hands of their country's military.

As the home of over one million people of Ukrainian descent?the third largest Ukrainian population in the world?Canada continues to take a principled stand in the international community and help lead efforts to help restore stability and prosperity in the country.

John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs, was in Kyiv's Independence Square in February to reaffirm Canada's solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Prime Minister Stephen Harper was also the first G7 leader to meet with Ukraine's Acting President and Prime Minister.

For the Ukrainian democratic election, Canada sent hundreds of observers to help ensure that Ukrainians were able to exercise their most fundamental democratic right and help build a free, democratic, and sovereign Ukraine.

And following Ukraine's successful election, Prime Minister Harper attended the inauguration of Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine's new President. In fact ? after the ceremony ? President Poroshenko's first official meeting was with Prime Minister Harper, signifying the special relationship between our two countries.

At the same time, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and our Government have been steadfast in our condemnation of Russian action in Crimea.

We stand beside Ukrainians as they seek control over the destiny of their country. Russia's illegitimate referendum and illegal annexation of Crimea undermine those efforts and violate international law.

This is why our Government, along with our international partners, continues to take action to convince Russia to reverse their actions. Canada has imposed travel bans on top Russian officials and tough economic sanctions against certain Russian institutions. Prime Minister Stephen Harper's leadership within the G7 also helped ensure Russia's indefinite expulsion from the G8.

Canada's support for Ukraine and Ukrainians is unwavering. We will continue to work with our international partners to help ensure Ukraine's borders are respected and Ukrainians are able to determine the future of their country. As the Prime Minister noted, ?Canada is committed to helping Ukraine chart a new course in history, one that is underpinned by democratic principles, the rule of law, and a respect for human rights.?

Canadians can count on our Government to continue to stand by the people of Ukraine.

By David Tilson, M.P.