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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

H. Res. 447
Supporting the Democratic Aspirations of the Ukrainian People
Rep. Chris Smith
February 10, 2014

I'd like to thank my good friend Rep. Engel for introducing this bipartisan resolution supporting the democratic aspirations of the Ukrainian people.

It is a timely appeal to the government of Ukraine to stand down – to avoid all further violence, to exercise the utmost restraint and avoid confrontation. It calls on the government to bring to justice those responsible for violence against peaceful protesters, and to release and drop any criminal charges against those detained for peacefully exercising their democratic rights.

At this point, the government's crackdown has led to the deaths of at least 4 protestors, and throughout Ukraine to numerous beatings, arrests, detentions, abductions – including some from hospitals – the harassment of activists, journalists, medics, lawyers and pro-democracy NGOs. On the Kyiv Maidan alone, more than 1,800 individuals, mostly protestors but also some riot police, have been injured. 36 persons are confirmed missing. 49 people remain in detention with 26 under house arrest. At least 30 medics, working to aid the injured on the Maidan, have been attacked. 136 journalists have been attacked on the Maidan, including investigative journalist Tatyana Chornovol brutally beaten on Christmas Day and who investigators now rather incredibly claim was a victim of road rage. One of the most outrageous examples has been the case of activist Dmitry Bulatov who was abducted for 8 days before being left in a forest outside of Kyiv, during which time he was tortured by his captors who tried to force him to say he was an American spy.

The heroism of the Ukrainian people, persistently demonstrating, struggling, risking themselves for justice and dignity, is deeply inspiring. The witness of so many clergy on the Maidan is a powerful reminder of the spiritual

values at stake. Just last Thursday, I met in my office with Patriarch Filaret of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Sviatoslav of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. They are deeply concerned for the faithful, and for the whole Ukrainian nation, and alarmed about the potential for even worse violence, perhaps even civil conflict. Patriarch Filaret said recently, “I appeal to both the power and opposition to stop violence and come to the table of negotiations. All of you are responsible before the God for your earthly doings.”

And at the Vatican, Pope Francis called for an end to the violence and said: “I am close to Ukraine in prayer, in particular to those who have lost their lives in recent days and to their families. I hope that a constructive dialogue between the institutions and civil society can take place, that any resort to violence is avoided and that the spirit of peace and a search for the common good is in the hearts of all.”

Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York expressed strong support for anti-government protestors in Ukraine. Writing on his blog he summarized the conflict as “government thugs relishing the chance to bludgeon and harass the hundreds of thousands of patriotic Ukrainians,” and described the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church as “a Church that had been starved, jackbooted, imprisoned, tortured, persecuted and martyred by Hitler, Stalin, and company.”

That said, Mr. Speaker, there is a paradox here. I know there are many outstanding people working in and for the Ukrainian government – people who love their country and have its best interests at heart. Last year I met many times with Ukrainian ministers, high-level officials and the ambassador, including meetings in Kyiv. This was because in 2013 Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kozhara chaired the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and made the fight against trafficking a top priority for the whole organization. In June it held a high level conference in Kyiv to investigate best practices and ways that the 57 OSCE countries can better coordinate anti-trafficking efforts—including through training transportation and hospitality industry employees in victim identification. The Kyiv call to action was serious and successful—I know, I was there. And what came out of the Ukrainian government’s efforts was a new OSCE Action Plan to fight human trafficking.

I want to point out that this resolution does not take any position on whether Ukraine should sign an Association Agreement with the European Union. That is a decision for Ukrainians to make. At committee markup, we decided to make that point clear, and the message should be clear: this is not about politics, but human rights. Congress is supporting the Ukrainian people in

their defense of universal human values, and not inserting itself in the question of how Ukraine shapes its policy toward the EU and Russia.

Mr. Speaker, the Ukrainian people have endured horrific suffering over the course of the last century – and this is what gives their peaceful resistance on the Maidan such power. Two world wars were fought on their soil, in the 1930s Stalin inflicted a genocidal famine on them, which resulted in the deaths of millions of men, women and children, to say nothing of 70 years as a captive nation in the Soviet Union. In the 1980s many of us in this chamber and on the Helsinki Commission spoke out on behalf of Ukrainian human rights activists imprisoned in the Gulag, called for the legalization of the then-banned and repressed Ukrainian Greek-Catholic church, and held hearings on the Chernobyl disaster.

With Ukraine's long-awaited independence in 1991 came new-found freedoms. But since 2010, with the election of Viktor Yanukovich, human rights, rule of law and democracy have been under attack – symbolized by the continued unjust imprisonment of former Prime Minister and opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko, whose daughter, Yevhenia, testified at a Helsinki Commission hearing I chaired in May of 2012 and on whose behalf I introduced a resolution in the previous Congress.

It is the Ukrainian people's dissatisfaction with Yanukovich's roll-back of democracy that drives the protest movement. The long-suffering Ukrainian people deserve a government that treats them with dignity and respect. I'm confident they will prevail in their struggle for this. I strongly support this resolution.