

Bush School Capstone Project Focuses on NATO

Written by student intern reporter, Julia Paslavska, April 28, 2009

Last fall, a group of eight Bush School students worked on a capstone project regarding Ukraine's possible accession into NATO and its implications for the security of the region. Dr. Roman Popadiuk, Director of the Bush Library Foundation and the first U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine and Dr. Gabriela Thornton, Professor at the George Bush School headed the project which resulted in a written report and a presentation for the Atlantic Council, a Washington D.C. based think tank that promotes transatlantic relations.

Over the course of the semester long project, students examined Ukraine's current domestic situation and how the country's military, political and economic divisions can either benefit or hinder its accession. Evaluating the abilities of NATO's current members, more specifically those which belong to the European Union, the group devised recommendations for Ukrainian leaders to undertake with the purpose of aligning Ukraine's political and economic abilities to more closely reflect those of its European neighbors.

Aside from studying Ukraine's internal situation, the group spent much time discussing the security implications of Ukraine's accession for the region. In the past, European countries such as France have expressed their strong disapproval for Ukraine's membership into the Alliance. However, many scholars and policy makers today believe that NATO membership for Ukraine is the door to EU membership in the future.

As part of the project, the class traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with the Atlantic Council and experts with whom they discussed their developing views on NATO expansion, and specifically the possible membership for Ukraine. They met with Ambassador William J. Burns, undersecretary for political affairs at the State Department; Oleh Shamshur, the Ukrainian ambassador to the U.S.; Admiral Edmund Giambastiani, NATO's first supreme allied commander transformation (SACT); and Brent Scowcroft, former national security advisor under Presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush. According to the group, most of the experts with whom they met agree that Ukraine's accession into NATO is inevitable and will help Ukraine's path toward a possible future in the EU.

After a semester of researching and interviewing field experts, the group composed a report which outlines the challenges that Ukraine faces in its accession into NATO, providing reform recommendations for the country's military, political and economic sectors. The students agree that if Ukraine can improve in the recommended areas, it can successfully affect the probability of its accession into NATO and begin on its path toward EU membership.

An initial presentation of the final report was given in November to Bush School students and faculty, who offered comments and suggestions. The final version of the report was presented to the Atlantic Council in mid-April after the nearly 100 page report was printed in early April. Participating students in the capstone were Andi Allen, Brooke Biddle, Jonathan Bungo, Kathleen Grout, Jim Harbridge, L.B. Lockley, Julia Paslavska, and J.R. Starch.