

I am pleased to have this opportunity to tell you personally just how important Ukraine is in the view of Canada's new government.

The Executive Development course that brings us together speaks of trust, friendship, and a willingness to learn from each other, attributes that were unimaginable only a few short years ago.

Our host, the Quebec-Ukraine Business Council, represents the breadth and potential of our contacts. Our relationship is much more than Ottawa-Kiev. It draws on the entrepreneurial spirit of each and every citizen. The thousands of people-to-people connections that link our two countries today helped Canadians understand, sooner than most, the significance of your declaration of independence August 24, 1991.

We can be proud of the fact that Canada was the first Western country to recognize Ukraine. However, we must also be ready to admit that more must be done to build the special relationship that we all want.

We want a real partnership, with stronger ties in every sphere: political, economic, social and trade. This was what I told Foreign Minister Zlenko during our recent conversations in Rome.

Government can take the initiative in this partnership by setting out the framework. We are ready to negotiate and sign an umbrella treaty, affirming our common values and covering the whole range of our political relations with Ukraine.

We share a respect for diverse cultures. With intolerance and ethnic cleansing being the main threats to peace and stability, Ukraine's generous national minority policies help to make Europe a safer place and are a model for other states.

Our troops are serving together as UN peacekeepers in former Yugoslavia. We both have sustained casualties in this terrible conflict. This is a new mission for Ukraine's army. Canada's armed forces are the world's most experienced peacekeepers and could provide valuable training as part of the program of military exchanges that we will soon be launching.

Ukraine is key to stability in Eastern Europe and a major regional player in its own right, alongside such neighbours as Poland, Turkey and Russia.

Canada recognizes that Ukraine has real security interests that should be respected and valid concerns that must be addressed. Last Sunday's elections in Russia add to these worries. Security in Eastern and Central Europe requires co-operation, not renewed confrontation. We have joined Ukraine in expressing the hope that President Yeltsin will maintain Russia's commitment to reform and good relations with neighbours and the West.