



Lawrence J. DeNardis, second from right, political science professor and president emeritus at the University of New Haven, gestures during a meeting recently in Ukraine as fellow election observers former U.S. Reps. James William Grant, R-Fla., right, and Peter Barka, D-Wisconsin, third from right, look on. At rear right is political consultant Paul Manafort, formerly of New Britain and a lobbyist with Black, Manafort, Stone & Kelly of Washington, D.C.

DeNardis optimistic after Ukraine visit

By Mary E. O'Leary
Register Topics Editor

University of New Haven President Emeritus Lawrence J. DeNardis, back from Ukraine this week, reported finding democracy alive and well after observing the complicated parliamentary elections that will lead to a coalition government.

As one of eight election observers from the United States, DeNardis also predicted that Yulia Tymoshenko, the former prime minister, will play a big role in the country's future.

"By all accounts, the elections were free and fair," DeNardis said, in sharp contrast to the first election for president in 2004, which was badly flawed and widely condemned by the international community.

"It is awfully nice to go back to a country where the political system was so corrupt and to see enormous changes for the better," DeNardis said.

DeNardis, who, on his eight-day trip, got to move freely about the country in the run-up to the elections and on election day Sunday, sees the vote as one of the best exam-

ples of a former Soviet bloc country able to move its political culture to one that was, by all appearances, very democratic.

In December 2004, protests forced a second presidential election and the opposition candidate, the reformer, Viktor A. Yushchenko, won in what was called the Orange Revolution.

Tymoshenko, who was dumped by Yushchenko as prime minister, is now "in the driver's seat," DeNardis said.

He said Tymoshenko, a striking blonde who "captured the imagination of a lot of people in the Ukraine," is an Orange Revolution leader key to the coalition government of the 450 members of parliament that will be formed by April 7.

"Democracy is working in Ukraine. It is working so well that the people rebuked their hero (Yushchenko), who they felt had not done enough in his one year," he said.

DeNardis predicted that Tymoshenko will be the next Evita, referring to Eva Peron, the charismatic former first lady in Argentina.

"She is a dynamic and magnetic person-

ality and is the big story of the election," he said.

DeNardis was one of eight former congressmen, four Democrats and four Republicans, who made up the delegation, a project underwritten by the U.S. Agency on International Development.

Another former Connecticut GOP political leader, Paul Manafort, who now heads the lobbying group Black, Manafort, Stone & Kelly in Washington, D.C., also was on the scene, DeNardis said.

Manafort was brought in to clean up the Party of Regions, whose candidate in 2002, Viktor Yanukovich, was widely seen as being controlled by his Russian allies and behind the first rigged elections that year.

"Those guys, who were bad dudes last time we were here, now looked smooth, well-dressed and well-spoken. They've rehabilitated themselves, and Manafort and his company were hired to do that," DeNardis said.

He said beyond appearances, they have also changed their position and are more open to joining the European Union and not as oriented toward Russia.