

## Ukrainian delegation to study judicial system during week-long visit to Ohio

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On Monday morning, a delegation of Ukrainian dignitaries began their week-long visit to the state of Ohio to learn more about the judicial system in the United States.

The delegation of five Ukrainian judges and three court officials was greeted with a ceremonious offering of bread and salt, a traditional Ukrainian custom that symbolizes hospitality and eternal friendship, respectively.

"The Supreme Court of Ohio, the Supreme Court of Ukraine and the Supreme Rada of Ukraine have partnered for nearly 15 years for the purpose of exchanging ideas and furthering the ideals of democracy in both countries," said Chief Justice Thomas J. Moyer, in a prepared statement.

Steven C. Hollon, administrative director for the court, presented the offering to the delegates in the Ohio Judicial Center, marking the first of several events scheduled for the court's Ukrainian guests.

Later in the week, the delegates will view a common pleas trial at the Montgomery County Courthouse, participate in a discussion on the relationship between courts and the media, and attend a presentation on the interdependency of the courts and legislative branches.

On Monday afternoon, the delegates participated in a discussion about the importance of judicial independence, which was led by Judge Judith French of the 10th District Court of Appeals.

French met with the delegation in Washington D.C., prior to their arrival in Columbus, for a brief orientation on the American judicial system during meetings with federal officials, as well as judges from varying jurisdictions in the United States.

Their visit to Ohio is part of a 10-day visit to America, organized through the congressionally sponsored Open World Leadership Center and the Russian American Rule of Law Consortium.

The consortium is a group of legal communities working together to develop the rule of law in Russia and Eastern European nations through the development of legal institutions such as bar associations and judicial and lawyer education programs.

The group also assists in the adoption of alternative dispute resolution methods, and provides training in the use of technology.

Pavlo Oleksandrovych Gvozdyk, head of the Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast Court of Appeal, said that in part he chose to participate in the program in order to learn more about the technology implemented by U.S. courts.

Gvozdyk said his court was the first in Ukraine to implement an intranet system, and that while the program has proven to be very fruitful, its system is not quite as advanced as those used commonly within U.S. courts.

"We are working toward working in a palace like this," he said, jokingly.

Tetyana Mykhaylivna Trakalo, a judge of the Appellate Court of Kyiv Region and lecturer at the Ukrainian Academy of Judges, said she wanted to participate because it was important for her to learn how judges are selected in the U.S. and how they are trained afterward.

French said delegates are highly educated and eager to apply the knowledge they have gained from studying the American judicial system. She also said they are not afraid to challenge certain U.S. practices, noting that they found the election process for judges in Ohio to be "very foreign."

"I am very positively impressed with the judges and their frank discussions with us," Trakalo said. "I will be able to take many good points back with me."

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Chief Justice Moyer worked with judicial leaders of Ukraine to develop an independent judiciary.

According to the Supreme Court, the Ohio Ukraine Rule of Law Project involved numerous exchange trips by Ohio Judges and lawyers to introduce Ukraine to concepts related to the rule of law.

"We are honored to host this Ukrainian delegation and again provide a forum for the sharing of ideas about the rule of law and the democratic electoral processes," Moyer said.

In addition to judges of varying jurisdictions, an assistant professor at the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv and a specialist for the Ministry of Economy and European Integration of Ukraine are among the Ukrainian dignitaries visiting the courts this week.

"We are very grateful to our American colleagues for such a warm welcome," said Gvozdyk. "We believe that the courts from all countries should work towards unification."