

# Taras Kuzio: Yushchenko afraid to show his face

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Former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko speaks to journalists on Dec. 13. Taras Kuzio writes that Yushchenko's failed leadership from 2005-2010 is one reason for the rise of disgraced former President Viktor Yanukovich, who is wanted on murder and corruption charges. (Pavel Podufalov)

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Russia's invasion of the Crimea began not coincidentally a day after the formation of the new Ukrainian government led by Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk.

Since then we have had two rather pathetic press conferences by ex-President Viktor Yanukovich, who fled Ukraine overnight on Feb. 21-22, and no comments by former President Viktor Yushchenko. Both are in hiding, Yushchenko inside Ukraine and Yanukovich outside. And both share responsibility for the violent kleptocracy that befell Ukraine in 2010-2014.

Yushchenko spent most of his presidency in conflict with ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and ended up leaving office supporting Yanukovich's election to president. Yushchenko helped to bring Yanukovich to power and yet he undermined everything he allegedly stood for – democracy, Ukrainian identity and European integration.

Today, it is common to cite German Chancellor Angela Merkel that President Vladimir Putin is living in another world. But the same can be said about Yushchenko for whom one needs a psychologist – not a political scientist – to understand.

Ukraine, in nearly a quarter of a century of independence, has had only one chance to move to NATO membership and the president at the time, Yushchenko, blew it. He could not rise to the occasion to put aside his dislike for Tymoshenko and quickly agree to her becoming prime minister after the March 2006 elections.

U.S. President George W. Bush planned to visit Ukraine in June 2006 and give America's support to Ukraine entering a MAP (Membership Action Plan) at the November Riga summit of NATO. Ukraine could have joined NATO in 2010 or thereafter. This would have meant that Ukraine today could have called upon NATO to come to its defense in the face of Russian aggression. Instead, Ukraine is facing Russia alone.

Instead, Yushchenko's trusted allies (Petro Poroshenko and Yuriy Yekhanurov) negotiated for an Our Ukraine-Party of Regions coalition while Roman Besmertnyy negotiated for an Our Ukraine-Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko (BYuT) coalition. These negotiations stretched out over three months and in the end they proved to be a disaster. They prevented Bush from visiting Ukraine. The orange coalition collapsed over Poroshenko insisting that he – not Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz become parliamentary speaker – and the Party of Regions formed a parliamentary majority with the Socialist Party and Communist Party, electing Yanukovich to be prime minister.

This crisis, brought on by Yushchenko's political immaturity, dragged into the following year when he illegally dissolved parliament leading to pre-term elections in September 2007. By then Ukraine fatigue had set in throughout the West and the door was closed to a NATO MAP in Bucharest in April 2008. This track record of political immaturity was obviously insufficient for Yushchenko.

In the summer of 2008, the Security Services of Ukraine under chairman Valentyn Nalyvaychenko and Donetsk Prosecutor Oleksandr Medvedko (Yushchenko permitted the Donetsk clan to control the prosecutor's office throughout his presidency) launched a campaign of "treason" charges against Tymoshenko. The irrationality of accusing Tymoshenko of "treason": over Georgia could be seen when Yushchenko ignored the Party of Regions and Communist Party's votes in support of Russia's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Accusations of treason against Tymoshenko accelerated during the winter 2008 gas crisis. In December 2008, the Tymoshenko government negotiated a favorable price of \$240 per 1,000 cubic meters, but Yushchenko illegally undermined the deal and the result was a 17-day gas crisis. The final price Putin offered in the third week of January was much higher, for which Tymoshenko paid with imprisonment and Ukraine paid with massive debts.

Under the parliamentary constitution then in place, Yushchenko had no legal right to interfere in negotiations as the government came under the authority of parliament. When Yushchenko testified against Tymoshenko in court in the autumn of 2011, he perjured himself by claiming he had not intervened.

This was not true. US diplomatic cables from Kyiv and the testimony of Naftogaz Ukraine officials prove that Yushchenko misled the court and that he

intervened on behalf of the opaque gas intermediary RosUkrEnergo to scupper the December 2008 price when the firm had offered Russia \$280, fearful that Tymoshenko would remove them from gas supplies to Ukraine, which she did. RosUkrEnergo gas tycoon Dmytro Firtash, who bragged to U.S. Ambassador William Taylor that he was frequently in Yushchenko's office, is therefore as guilty as Yushchenko.

In the 2010 elections, Yushchenko openly called upon Ukrainians to not vote for Tymoshenko in the second round. His call hurt only Tymoshenko as only orange voters would heed it and she was defeated by barely three percentage points.

Regardless of what anyone might think of Tymoshenko, she would have not destroyed Ukrainian democracy, attacked Ukrainian language and culture, introduced gangster-style corporate raiding into business and robbed the treasury. Tymoshenko would not have ordered police and the SBU snipers to shoot unarmed protesters, killing more than 100 people.

Therefore, Yushchenko shares responsibility for the four years of Yanukovych's presidency by helping his successor come to power.

Now it's clear why Yushchenko never once showed his face during the EuroMaidan Revolution and has not said a word about Russia's invasion of the Crimea. While Yanukovych is in hiding in Russia, Yushchenko is in hiding in one of his many beloved Ukrainian palaces that were also paid for (like those Yanukovych had) by Ukrainian taxpayers' money.

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