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## UKRAINE

**UNDERSTANDING MYKOLA MELNYCHENKO.** At the age of 18, Mykola Melnychenko enlisted in the Soviet Army and was later accepted for officer training, which he successfully completed. He joined the **KGB** and was sent to work in the Ninth Directorate in Moscow and Kyiv, the unit responsible for the security of high-level officials analogous to the U.S. Secret Service.

In 1992, the **KGB's** Ninth Directorate was removed from the jurisdiction of the Security Service of Ukraine (**SBU**), and renamed the Directorate of State Protection (**UDO**). Melnychenko continued to work in the **UDO** where he rose to be a senior officer with the rank of a major in the **SBU** reserve.

In 1999-2000, Melnychenko secretly taped hundreds of hours of conversations in President Leonid Kuchma's office. Some of these recordings, which were subsequently transcribed and published on the Internet, suggested that Kuchma and other high-ranking Ukrainian officials might have been involved in the kidnapping and murder of journalist Heorhiy Gongadze or in illegal arms sales to Iraq (see "RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report," 1 October 2002). In November 2000 he fled Ukraine and obtained asylum the following April in the U.S., where he now lives in Washington.

The sensitivity of the authorities to Melnychenko is high. To the Ukrainian authorities Melnychenko is a "traitor." President

Kuchma blames him -- not his own policies -- for Ukraine's failure to be a candidate for EU membership. "One had to not love Ukraine to take such steps," Kuchma said in a BBC interview on 18 April.

The two questions continually asked about Melnychenko are who is behind him (as most people do not believe he acted alone) and are the tapes genuine? It is not surprising that those who are in opposition to the executive believe in the authenticity of the tapes (Melnychenko attempted to run as a Socialist Party candidate in the 2002 elections but he was refused registration). Yuliya Mostovaya wrote in the 28 September-5 October 2002 edition of the influential weekly newspaper "Zerkalo nedeli," which she edits, that the tapes are real and "now people not only know about them, they also believe them." Hesitant oppositionist Our Ukraine leader Viktor Yushchenko told "Ukrayinska pravda" on 10 September that he believe in the authenticity of most of the tapes. Melnychenko himself has passed a lie-detector test and suggested that Kuchma should submit himself to one as well. Portions of the tapes have also been authenticated by former FBI employees at BEK TEK and in the world's best testing laboratory in the FBI.

Not surprisingly, the executive disputes their authenticity. If it did not it would have to hold an investigation and possibly face the consequences, as happened after the Peru tape scandal in 2000 when President Alberto Fujimori fled to Japan.

The actions of the authorities since the tapes were first revealed in parliament by Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz in November 2000 contradict their claims of innocence. At first the authorities denied Melnychenko had even been employed in the UDO (in a statement dated 31 March in response to an article in "RFE/RL Newline" on the same day the SBU continued to deny that Melnychenko had ever worked for them). They also initially denied that the tapes

existed, then changing to the argument that the tapes were "doctored" to incriminate Kuchma.

Melnychenko has been warned on three separate occasions by the FBI that his life was in danger from unknown individuals who were trailing him, which is odd if he is a fraud. He has been offered sums ranging from \$3 million-\$7 million for the tapes by emissaries from the Social Democratic Party-United (SDPU-o) who wished to ingratiate themselves with Kuchma so their leader, Viktor Medvedchuk, would be chosen as Kuchma's successor in the 2004 elections. Again, why bother if the tapes are doctored? The Dnipropetrovsk-based Labor Ukraine clan paid Kroll Associates \$1.5 million to prepare a report whose only aim was to discredit Melnychenko.

Melnychenko conjures a wide mixture of emotions among all sides attached to, involved in, or writing about contemporary Ukraine. Late last year the Canadian government refused him a visa, claiming he might remain, which is unlikely as Melnychenko has U.S. refugee status. The decision is also at odds with the policy of the U.K. and Belgium, both of whom have granted him visas.

Recent arrivals from Ukraine in the West often disbelieve that anybody, such as Melnychenko, could be "patriotic" in the SBU or similar structures. This is a reflection of crisis levels of distrust towards state institutions, where 31.4 percent of Ukrainians, according to an April poll, do not trust either the authorities or the opposition. Melnychenko claims that other people, such as himself, do exist in the SBU and UDO.

Within the Ukrainian diaspora there are also mixed feelings towards Melnychenko. Some prefer to keep their distance because they are suspicious he is part of a Russian plot to undermine Ukrainian independence (Kuchma and his allies say the opposite; namely, that Melnychenko was part of a U.S. plot to replace Kuchma with Yushchenko). Others in the diaspora are more interested in the

intrigue of who is behind Melnychenko, rather than what is on the tapes.

Ultimately, the main problem for many in the diaspora is that the image of Ukraine found on the tapes is too difficult to accept, after waiting and agitating over many decades for Ukrainian independence. The same is true of its unwillingness to believe that Rukh leader Vyacheslav Chornovil's "car accident" in March 1999 was not an accident (Melnychenko is 99 percent certain it was not an accident). To the younger generation of the diaspora in the media, think tanks, and policy making, Melnychenko provides proof of what they had long suspected about Ukraine. Indeed, some of them may even have assisted in Melnychenko's departure from Ukraine.

Although Melnychenko has been criticized for releasing only fragments of his hundreds of hours of tapes, he is transcribing them with a grant from Russian oligarch Boris Berezovskii, exiled in London. He is also currently working with another recent defector from Ukraine, Oleksandr Yelyashkevych, to thwart the ability of the authorities to falsify the 2004 elections. Both Melnychenko's tapes and Yelyashkevych, who checked voting in the 1999 election and 2000 referendum on behalf of parliament, claim there were falsifications on both occasions.

This report was written by Dr. Taras Kuzio, resident fellow, Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto.