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A Survey of Developments in Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine by the

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DOES UKRAINE RETURN TO YOUNGER-BROTHER STATUS?

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The well-known

American Sovietologist John Armstrong wrote that in the post-Stalin

era Ukrainians became Russia's "younger brothers" (John A.

Armstrong, *The Soviet Bureaucratic Elite. A Case Study of the*

*Ukrainian Apparatus*, New York, Praeger, 1959.) As "younger brothers,"

Ukrainians would migrate and follow Russians into different regions

of the USSR, such as Kazakhstan, Moldova, Estonia, and Latvia, where

they would help entrench Soviet power. Soviet historiography had

promoted the view that Kyiv Rus was the common "cradle of the three fraternal Slavs." The ultimate goal of the new Homo Sovieticus was understood as a return to this once mythical unity in Kyiv Rus.

Ukrainian-Russian relations are now returning to many of these ideological positions, as encapsulated in the slogan "To Europe With Russia!" The newly opened Year of Russia in Ukraine website is captioned: "From common origins to common goals."

Events last week at the hastily organized and poorly attended CIS summit in Kyiv confirms that the Soviet-era mindset of a "younger brother" is still entrenched in Ukraine's ruling elites. On 29 January, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma was elected head of the Council of CIS Heads of States, the first non-Russian to hold this position. Although the position is supposed to be rotated between CIS leaders each year according to the Russian alphabet, it has always been held by Russia.

On the eve of the CIS summit, Ukrainian Ambassador to Russia Mykola Biloblotsky said in an interview in "Nezavisimaya gazeta" that the Year of Russia in Ukraine should be used by both countries to "strengthen their cooperation in the international arena in the political, economic, and humanities spheres." Biloblotsky added that, "We are moving together in one direction; true, one of us quicker and the other slower."

This ignores the fact that Ukraine and Russia have

incompatible goals towards NATO -- only Ukraine seeks membership.

Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Viktor Chernomyrdin was perplexed as to why Ukraine desires NATO membership: "What does it [Ukraine] want to receive in exchange? We have no idea." Ukraine and Russia are obviously not moving together towards NATO in tandem.

Acceptance of a "younger-brother" status was only forthcoming after Russia finally recognized Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the CIS summit, Ukraine and Russia signed a treaty on the state border between the states. According to Kuchma, this should end all speculation about "Russia's imperial ambitions."

The treaty only refers to their 2,063 kilometer land border as both sides still disagree about the Sea of Azov. Ukraine demands that the shelf and water be divided while Russia believes it should remain as a joint "internal lake." Delimitation of the border has been taking place since 1998 but Russia has remained opposed to its eventual demarcation.

Besides the border treaty, the sides signed other documents on cooperation between their Border Troops, culture ministries, youth groups, and information agencies. Russian Minister of Culture Mikhail Shvydkoi said in Kyiv that the Year of Russia in Ukraine will "preserve and enrich" the "close cultural cooperation between our peoples," adding that, "There is a great need for Russian actors,

films, and music in Ukraine, and for Ukrainian ones in Russia."

Ukraine already has no shortage of imported Russian folk and pop culture, books, and media publications. In Russia no such Ukrainian equivalents are to be found, even after the Year of Ukraine in Russia has ended.

Ukraine is ready, Kuchma said, to "open its doors to representatives of Russian culture, science, and business." This reflects the growing support from Kuchma and pro-presidential oligarchs of Russian investment in Ukraine's economy. Putin and Kuchma referred to their joint transitions from the same state as a reason for close cooperation. "We are strengthening institutions of democracy and civil society," Putin said. In reality, Russia's influence on democratization processes in Ukraine and other CIS states is negative, a reflection of authoritarian trends evident inside Russia.

Legal niceties did not prevent Kuchma from becoming the head of the CIS. Ukraine is not legally a member of the CIS because it never ratified the CIS Charter. Ukraine is only a "participant country" of the CIS.

What factors, other than returning to the status of a "younger brother," are behind Kuchma's election? According to Our Ukraine Deputy Mykola Tomenko, Kuchma sees the new CIS position as an escape mechanism in case he calls early presidential elections.

Heading the CIS would provide Kuchma with psychological, moral, and financial support after he steps down and seeks immunity from prosecution.

Russia has given up the position of head of the CIS for the first time with a view to cementing expanding ties, such as those between Gazprom and Naftohaz Ukrayiny through the Russian-Ukrainian gas consortium. The consortium provides unprecedented access to funds that can be laundered abroad and then rechanneled back to Ukraine and Russia for use as election slush funds.

Russia continues to pressure Ukraine to join the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) that brings together six CIS states. According to Putin, Ukraine's membership would allow the creation of the long held Ukrainian goal of a free-trade regime with Russia. As Putin argued, with Ukraine a member of the EEC, "We shall then be able to eliminate a number of obstacles and problems."

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