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"ORANGE REVOLUTION" EXPOSES EU'S DEFICIENT UKRAINE POLICY

By Taras Kuzio

One of the biggest ironies of Ukraine's democratic "Orange Revolution" is that it will cause difficulties in the European Union, an organization that claims to embody "European values." Had former Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich won the presidential election, it would have resolved the EU's dilemma: Brussels and Strasbourg could still use the excuse given earlier to Presidential Leonid Kuchma, namely that Ukraine has shown itself to not be part of "Europe."

The EU's dilemma over Ukraine may dominate the EU's Brussels summit on December 16-17, less than two weeks before Ukraine repeats the second round of the disputed presidential election.

Challenger Viktor Yushchenko, who is set to win the new runoff, told his supporters, "I am convinced that the world will recognize us as a civilized European nation. I am deeply convinced that after the events of the last 17 days Ukraine will never be the world's backwater" (Channel 5, December 8).

Yushchenko is being too optimistic, as the EU is unable and unwilling to accept how the Orange Revolution represents a break with the Kuchma era. Ukraine's democratic revolution, the likely Yushchenko victory, and constitutional reforms that will transform Ukraine into a parliamentary republic all testify to the need for the EU to re-formulate a clear policy toward Ukraine.

The post-communist states that joined the EU this year are not accepting the EU's continued complacency over Ukraine. Poland and Lithuania encouraged the apathetic EU to host round-table negotiations between the authorities and Yushchenko to break the political deadlock. Former Czech President Vaclav Havel sent two statements of support to Yushchenko and former Solidarity leader and Polish President Lech Walesa traveled to Kyiv and addressed the orange-clad crowds.

The crisis has caused post-communist EU members to take a harsher attitude toward Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has confirmed their suspicion that Russian imperialism and neo-Soviet attitudes remain alive and well. They are also dismayed at the continued Russophilia expressed by "old Europe," namely France, Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

Yet it would be an over-simplification to state that the EU's unwillingness to treat Ukraine as a "European" state lies solely with its "old European" members. Both British Prime Minister Tony Blair and U.S. President George W. Bush have forged close personal relations with Putin.

But Ukraine's future could pose problems for the four "old European" EU members. French and German leaders have built up personal relationships with Putin that are now coming under strain. France, in particular, seeks a closer alliance with Russia against the Bush administration's "unilateralism."

The EU's decision to dangle membership in front of the western Balkans -- and possibly Turkey -- while denying it to Ukraine is now untenable. Romania is set to join the EU in 2007 and yet its recent presidential elections were also undemocratic. The difference lies in the fact that only Ukrainians -- not Romanians -- launched a popular revolution to overturn their election fraud.

Yushchenko has challenged the EU to embrace the new Ukraine that he is set to lead. In Yushchenko's eyes, the EU should take four concrete steps. First, it should recognize Ukraine as a "market economy," a political step long over due after Russia's status was upgraded in 2002. Second, the EU should support Ukraine's membership in the WTO, a step that would allow Ukraine to create a free trade zone with the EU. Third, the EU should sign an associate member agreement with Ukraine. Finally, Brussels should offer Ukraine EU membership sometime in the future (Financial Times, December 10).

These four steps could be only undertaken if the EU moved towards NATO's "open door" position on membership, which depends on fulfilling criteria. This would be the Copenhagen criteria for the EU and a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for NATO.

Currently, Ukraine has only an Action Plan with NATO, not a MAP. NATO refused to consider a MAP for Ukraine due to Kuchma's poor reputation after the Kolchuga radar scandal. But the grounds for this refusal will evaporate under Yushchenko, and the post-communist members of NATO will again be clamoring for NATO to offer Ukraine a MAP. Such a step would strain the Bush administration's delicate attempts to both criticize Putin for interfering in Ukraine's elections while maintaining a cooperative relationship with Russia for the international struggle against terrorism.

Washington's attempts to not be too critical of Russia will only grow after Condoleezza Rice replaces Colin Powell as Secretary of State. Yet in reality, as Stanford's Michael

McFaul has pointed out, "The Russian president is not much of an asset in fighting the global war on terror" (The Weekly Standard, December 13).

The EU continues to only offer Ukraine a three year "Action Plan" as part of its Neighborhood Policy, a "Plan" that does not depend on the outcome of the Ukrainian elections. The inadequacy of these steps were already evident when the policy was unveiled in 2003, as it placed Ukraine on the same level as northern Africa and Israel, which are not part of Europe and therefore have no right to join the EU, and Russia, which has never declared its intention to seek EU membership.

Luxembourg's Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker, who takes up the EU's rotating presidency in January, said, "I can only warn against offering Ukraine the prospect of full membership" (The Times, December 10). In reality, the EU has been doing its best to avoid the issue, which will no longer be tenable if the EU allows in Turkey while refusing to consider a Ukraine led by Yushchenko (Wall Street Journal, December 8).

As the Polish Gazeta Wyborcza (December 9) pointed out, when Ukraine is discussed in Paris they state, "And don't forget about Russia's sensitivity." Yet, ironically Putin is ahead of "old Europe" on this question. Anticipating a Yushchenko victory as likely to lead to Ukraine's westward orientation, Putin has stated his lack of opposition to Ukraine's membership in the EU. For Putin the only "nyet" is to Ukraine's membership in NATO (Financial Times, December 10).