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YUSHCHENKO POISONING INVESTIGATION NEARING CLIMAX

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During a February 15-16 visit to Lviv, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko optimistically predicted that the investigation into his near fatal poisoning in September 2004 would soon be finalized. "There is greater optimism now on this issue," he said. "I don't think it's a complicated case," Yushchenko told journalists two weeks earlier. "The circumstances are very specific, very obvious. The prosecutor-general said yesterday that they are narrowing the scope of the investigation" (*Moscow Times*, January 31).

While in Lviv Yushchenko revealed that the tapes secretly recorded by the Security Service in one of former prime minister Viktor Yanukovich's election headquarters contained incriminating evidence. One tape contains a conversation between a Russian Security Service (FSB) officer in Moscow and an informant in Kyiv (maidan.org.ua/static/news/1108574010.html). Russian "political technologist" Gleb Pavlovsky, who worked for Yanukovich's "dirty tricks" squad, features prominently in the conversation. This particular tape was passed to the Channel 5 investigative program "Zakryta Zona" (Closed Zone), which aired it on December 23 (5tv.com.ua/pr_archiv/136/). A transcript also has been posted on the Maidan website.

The Kyiv FSB agent tells his Moscow FSB controller that Pavlovsky is "the author of the idea. The author of the idea and its organizer" (maidan.org.ua, February 16). The Moscow FSB controller then asks surprisingly, "What? This bright spark thought up such an idea?" The Kyiv FSB agent replied, "Yes, absolutely." Next, the FSB controller asks if there are individuals who can confirm Pavlovsky's involvement. The Kyiv FSB agent responds, "Yes, there are those who can confirm this. Not in the media but through evidence in the Prosecutor-General's office" (maidan.org.ua, February 16).

Pavlovsky immediately denounced this new development. Channel 5, he argued, is a "miniscule untruthful television channel that operates in the regime of propaganda and counter-propaganda" (*Ukrayinska pravda*, February 16). He claimed that the audiotape had been manufactured to inflame anti-Russian opinion and to be used as a bargaining

chip with Russia over its accusations of corruption against Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko.

More information about the poisoning has slowly been released since Yushchenko's inauguration on January 23. One month earlier, the Viennese international clinic that had treated him concluded its tests and announced that the poison was dioxin. The internationally recognized British science magazine *Nature* had already pointed to dioxin as the likely toxin based on the damage done to Yushchenko's face (November 23, 2004).

Four other factors are also now known.

Source. Yushchenko revealed that the SBU knows the origins of the dioxin, which is produced in only four or five military laboratories in Russia, the United States, and other countries (CBS, January 31). Russia is known to be able to produce the enhanced type of dioxin that affected Yushchenko. The founder of the Russian Institute of Chemical and Biological Physics, Yendel Lippmaa, recalls colleagues' research into increasing the potency of dioxin by a thousand times. Their findings were published in April 1999 in the proceedings of the Russian Academy of Sciences (*FEBS Letters, Ukrayinska pravda*, February 1).

Although Yushchenko has been diplomatic and not directly pointed a finger at Russia, he clearly was not referring to the United States or other nuclear powers with chemical and biological weapons programs. The fact that Pavlovsky is now suspected of masterminding the poisoning does point to Russia and its executive, as Pavlovsky is close to President Vladimir Putin.

Transit. The SBU had already advised Yushchenko and the Prosecutor-General's office on how the dioxin had arrived in Ukraine (*Ukrayinska pravda*, January 31). The authorities are holding an "official" who allegedly brought the dioxin to Ukraine from Russia. The Ukrainian authorities are also holding two Russian nationals who were arrested with plastic explosives in November when attempting to bomb Yushchenko's headquarters.

Administration. Prosecutor-General Svyatoslav Piskun has not ruled out that the dioxin may have been mixed with Yushchenko's food during the dinner he had on September 5 with the chairman and deputy chairman of the SBU. Yushchenko himself has long held this view, as he became ill only hours after dinner. Yushchenko believes he is still alive only because he did not eat everything that was served to him and because he was sick on the way home.

Who Did It? When Yushchenko returned from his first visit to the Viennese clinic in late September 2004, he accused the "authorities" (*vlada*) of being behind his poisoning. Piskun has now confirmed, "There is no doubt, that this was a planned act, in which some individuals from the government were maybe involved" (*Ukrayinska pravda*, February 9). The government at that time was led by Yanukovich, Yushchenko's main rival for the presidency.

The authorities also know which parliamentary deputy masterminded the poisoning. Besides Pavlovsky, the audiotape also implicates Eduard Prutnik, an adviser to Yanukovych, and Andriy Kluyev, head of Yanukovych's shadow campaign.

The MP's name will not formally be released before the Prosecutor-General's office files charges and then officially requests parliament to lift the suspect's immunity as a prelude to his arrest. The prosecutor-general has only twice requested parliament to lift immunity. In early 1999 parliament lifted Pavlo Lazarenko's immunity, but he fled abroad before he could be arrested. The second request, regarding Yulia Tymoshenko, repeatedly failed between 2002 and 2004.

When the first charges are filed in this case, the issue will inevitably affect Russia's relations with Ukraine and with the West. It is difficult to see how Russia can present itself as an ally in the international campaign against terrorism when it itself exports such tactics.

