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NGOS AND CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER ATTACK IN UKRAINE

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Valeriy Mishura, Communist parliamentary deputy and head of the Temporary Investigative Parliamentary Commission, has issued his first report to Parliament on the implications of foreign financing of NGOs (Ukrayinska Pravda, May 21). The Commission has always understood its remit to investigate only Western funding of NGO's. Mishura's report concluded that the major aim of Western-financed NGOs was to influence this year's elections by bringing to power Viktor Yushchenko, the pro-Western leader of Our Ukraine. The majority of Western assistance to NGOs and civil society has reached only the national democratic opposition Our Ukraine and Yulia Tymoshenko bloc and, to a lesser extent, the Socialists (SPU).

The report also indicates that the two largest providers of assistance are the U.S., followed by Germany. The report lists well-known U.S. foundations, such as the National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, Freedom House, Eurasia Fund, National Democratic Institute, George Soros Foundation, as well as German institutions, including the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which provide the bulk of Western assistance in support of civil society activity in Ukraine. On the basis of the report, Mishura and fellow Communist Deputy Yuriy Solomatin called for Western-funded NGOs to be closed. Communist Party (KPU) leader Petro Symonenko insisted that Western-financed NGOs should at least be temporarily suspended during this year's elections (Ukrayinska Pravda, May 21).

In December 2003, 289 deputies voted to create the Commission. This large majority was reached because the KPU and pro-presidential factions both voted in support of its creation. Our Ukraine and the SPU fully voted against the motion, while the populist Tymoshenko bloc split, with 5 of its 19 deputies supporting the Commission. The campaign against NGOs, and by implication civil society, is the product of four factors.

First, there is an ingrained Soviet political culture that leads to "spy mania." KPU leader Symonenko is convinced that, "In the majority of cases, these structures (NGOs) are simply "roofs" for the activities of foreign secret services" (Ukrayinska Pravda, December 4, 2003). This view has widespread support in the pro-presidential camp. In an SDPU-o financed and vehemently anti-American newspaper, Yuriy Smeshko, chairman of the Security Service (SBU), stated that the SDPU-o believes that NGOs and Western assistance are potential avenues for the overt collection of

intelligence data (2000, April 30).

Second, conspiracy theories are imported from Russia. Gleb Pavlovsky's Fund for Effective Politics, which worked closely with the SDPU-o in the 2002 Ukrainian parliamentary elections, developed the "(Zbigniew) Brzezinski Conspiracy," which has since obtained wide support within the KPU and the pro-presidential camp. Kuchma is allegedly convinced that the CIA was behind Mykola Melnychenko, the presidential guard who recorded proceedings in his office between 1999-2000. The tapes were first made public in November 2000 and led to the Kuchmagate crisis. Ukrainian and Russian adherents of the "Brzezinski Conspiracy" believe that the U.S., through its funding of NGOs, was behind the October 2000 Serbian and November 2003 Georgian democratic revolutions. Kuchma deliberately snubbed Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, refusing to meet him at the airport as protocol demands. This was the first time this has happened to a foreign state leader on an official visit to Ukraine (Ukrayina Moloda, April 28).

Pro-presidential groups and the KPU have repeatedly stated their fear that the U.S. is preparing a "Kashtan revolution" (Wall Street Journal, February 11) in this year's elections, with the aim of bringing Yushchenko to power. This would be followed by Ukraine becoming a "U.S. and NATO protectorate", Symonenko maintains (Ukrayinska Pravda, April 7). Mishura's report to Parliament alleges that the British Westminster Fund for Democracy has financed "secret training seminars" for young members of national democratic groups. The seminars had been taught by Serbian OTPOR and Belarusian ZUBR activists who trained their Ukrainian colleagues in how to undertake mass civic disturbances and oppose law enforcement agencies, as well as how to avoid arrest and, if arrested, how to act (www.temnik.com.ua, May 23).

A leaked March 18, presidential administration temnik (secret instruction) instructed television channels to describe philanthropist George Soros's visit to Ukraine as espionage activity and an attempt to repeat the Serbian and Georgian revolutions in Ukraine. Three television channels controlled by Medvedchuk (State Television 1, 1+1, Inter) faithfully followed these guidelines, as did SDPU-o newspapers (Kiyevskiye Vedomosti, March 29 and 30, and 2000, April 2-8). KPU, SDPU-o and Russian media alleged that Soros's visit to the Crimea was aimed at training Crimean Tatars in the storming of the Ukrainian Parliament in a repeat of that which took place in Serbia and Georgia. Such a view on foreign funding for Crimean Tatars leading to instability was supported by Kuchma and Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Viktor Chernomyrdin (Ukrayinska Pravda, April 3, ITAR-TASS, March 29).

Third, the Soviet legacy claims that pro-Western political groups do not possess genuine domestic

roots but are implanted only due to financing by Western structures. Yushchenko and Our Ukraine are regularly assailed as a Western-financed political bloc. This view is shared by the KPU and its, de facto pro-presidential allies. President Kuchma has openly claimed that Our Ukraine obtained its instructions from abroad as to how to relate to proposed constitutional changes (Ukrayinska Pravda, March 2). Symonenko similarly believes that, "the political ruling bodies of the US Embassy sit on the parliamentary balcony and control Our Ukraine," particularly as to how and when it should vote (Ukrayinska Pravda, April 8).

Fourth, Western criticism of Ukraine's poor record of democratization is side-stepped by condemning it as "interference" in Ukraine's internal affairs. The sole purpose of such "interference" is to bring the opposition to power by criticizing the authorities, Stepan Havrysh, pro-presidential parliamentary coordinator, said. Freedom House's 2004 annual world survey on media freedom, which severely criticized Ukraine, is, "merely a public relations campaign for certain political groups (such as Yushchenko) which are struggling for power in Ukraine", Havrysh alleged (Interfax-Ukraine, May 25).

Kuchma is unlikely to authorize closure of Ukraine's NGOs, as the KPU and SDOU-o demand, as such a step would severely damage Ukraine's relations with the U.S. At the same time, the activities of NGOs are being restricted and curtailed in more covert ways.