

MORE PROBLEMS FOR YUSHCHENKO GOVERNMENT AS JUSTICE MINISTER CAUGHT EXAGGERATING HIS ACADEMIC RECORD

By **Taras Kuzio**

Two weeks after *Ukrayinska pravda* (April 14) published an expose on Roman Zvarych, the Minister of Justice finally admitted in the *Ukrainian Weekly* (May 1) that he did not have the academic credentials that he claimed. Zvarych admitted that he had misled the *Ukrainian Weekly* in 1998, when he was first elected to the Ukrainian parliament, by stating that he had a PhD from Columbia University. His confession came 11 days after Columbia University confirmed he had not earned any degree there.

Writing in *Ukrayinska pravda* (April 25), two authors described Zvarych as having secured the "record for producing scandals." In addition to the diploma flap, Zvarych was involved in a scandal surrounding his wife's business interests, and he made an enemy of the youth group PORA! when he refused to register it as a political party.

Zvarych moved to Ukraine in 1992 to help establish the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (KUN) political party, the overt arm of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists—Stepan Bandera wing. A year later he renounced his U.S. citizenship and was naturalized in Ukraine in 1995. He claims to have done this to resolve "an internal contradiction that would lead to various psychological problems" (*Ukrainian Weekly*, April 24).

The original *Ukrayinska pravda* article by Washington-based correspondent Luba Shara was entitled "Minister Zvarych—yet another professor?" The deliberate spelling error referred to her investigation during the 2004 presidential, in which she revealed that prime minister Viktor Yanukovych had submitted a resume to the Central Election Commission full of spelling and grammatical mistakes, one of which was to sign himself as "Proffessor."

Students and youth groups seized on Yanukovych's apparent illiteracy and his dramatic collapse when hit by an egg thrown by a student in Ivano-Frankivsk to mock him. A 13-part Internet film ("Operation ProFFessor"), consisting of excerpts of popular Soviet comedies with voices performed by impersonators of well-known politicians dubbed over the characters, was a massive hit (ham.com.ua, eggs.net.ua).

Shara's article was the first to expose the fact that Zvarych, like Yanukovych, had padded his resume. After checking at Columbia, she found that he had registered to work toward an MA, but he did not complete it and had no qualifications from that university.

Zvarych told journalists in Kyiv that he had lost his academic documents when he moved to Ukraine in 1992 (*Ukrayinska pravda*, April 29). However, Zvarych promised that he would soon travel to the United States and "After my return I will be ready to show what I have." Apparently this is only a BA from Manhattan College (in Rochester, New York), as he admitted to the *Ukrainian Weekly* (May 1).

Nevertheless, his official CV on the Ukrainian government website (gov.ua/control/en/) continues to state: "In 1981 graduated from Columbia University

(New York), philosophy faculty. Ph.D. thesis "Ontological bases of Plato ethics" (1981). 1981-1983 – Assistant Professor of Philosophy in Columbia University." When asked, Zvarych admitted that the "Ph.D. thesis" was in fact only a paper written for a "colloquium."

After the original article appeared in *Ukrayinska pravda* (April 14), Zvarych had hoped that the scandal, by now dubbed "Zvarychgate," would go away, but it has only worsened as the web of untruths continues to unravel. Until the April 28 interview with *Ukrainian Weekly*, Zvarych still maintained that all of the qualifications listed in his official government biography actually existed. He condemned the media inquiries as "information killers" assailing his personal character (*Ukrayinska pravda*, April 18).

The *Ukrayinska pravda* investigation also pointed to a discrepancy in his claim to have legal training, an important requirement for any Minister of Justice. In an interview given to *Fakty i Komentarii* (March 25), Zvarych claimed to have finished, "Philosophy, law, and international affairs. I received a Master of Philosophy diploma. But, in the USA I was not a practicing lawyer, only in Ukraine." His CV does not provide details of having worked at any U.S. or Ukrainian law firm.

The only legal experience Ukrainian and American media have been able to find is his work on parliamentary committees dealing with legal issues since 1998. Since his re-election in 2002, Zvarych has been a member of the parliamentary committee on European integration and considers himself to be "an expert in European law." Zvarych believes that his work in parliament "gives me the foundation to say that...I'm not only a lawyer, but not a bad lawyer" (*Ukrainian Weekly*, May 1).

That Zvarych has managed until now to stay in office reflects the support he receives from National Security and Defense Council Secretary Petro Poroshenko. Poroshenko is still unable to come to terms with not being appointed prime minister, as demonstrated on his Moscow visit last month when he made the Freudian slip of calling himself "Premier."

All sides deny any conflict between Poroshenko and Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, but this is the main fault line running through the Yushchenko camp. Tymoshenko suggested that the way out of the Zvarych crisis was for ministers to publicly reveal their diplomas. Two ministers—Defense and Family and Youth—followed this suggestion, but not Zvarych.

Zvarychgate has not go unnoticed in Washington. It has been raised at U.S. government meetings on Ukraine, where officials privately have expressed their astonishment at how such a scandal could have been allowed to happen. Their concern is how Ukraine's international image will be affected if a minister of justice, who is central to implementing the rule of law, is possibly dishonest himself.

After 100 days in office, Yushchenko's weak points are his personnel policy and his papering over divisions in his government. This is especially true for key government positions, such as the minister of justice, that will play a crucial role in Ukraine's efforts to achieve Euro-Atlantic integration.