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Reduce the size of the Presidential Secretariat

by Taras Kuzio, Special to Kyiv Post

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The sensationalist claims emanating from the presidential secretariat these days have echoes of not only the darkest days of Viktor Medvedchuk's rule of the presidential administration, but also that of Soviet ideological tirades of the Brezhnevite era of stagnation.

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I have yet to receive a single comment from anybody who believes in the spurious and baseless claims of Yulia Tymoshenko's alleged secret negotiations with Russia for support during the 2010 elections in exchange for her silence on the Georgian crisis. For one thing, the government's special envoy on the crisis, Deputy Prime Minister Hrhoriy Nemirya, has been far more active than the Foreign Ministry both at home and abroad.

A strong supporter of Yushchenko called me a few days ago to wonder what was behind these bizarre claims against Tymoshenko of "treason?" This is already a warning sign that the secretariats campaign is only backfiring as it is harming (not improving) the presidents popularity in the Orange heartland of western-central Ukraine.

The answer to dealing with such Soviet-style orchestrated campaigns is to remove the cancer. The problem has to lie in there being too many people employed by the presidential secretariat with too little to do.

When Yushchenko changed the presidential administration to a secretariat in his first year in office, he promised to reduce it in size. In fact, it has grown and now numbers 600 people.

Compare this to the United States where the president's Executive Office (which incorporates the National Security Council) has 1,800 staff. Ukraine's secretariat of 600 staff does not include the large numbers of staff of the National Security and Defense Council that also participates in the secretariat's conspiracies.

The U.S. has six times the population of Ukraine and it is steadily growing. Based proportionately compared to Ukraine's secretariat, the U.S. Executive Office should have 3,600 staff. This comparison is in reality even worse for Ukraine because the U.S. Executive Office's 1,800 staff includes the National Security Council.

This comparison also looks worse for Ukraine when we compare Ukraine's and the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), which stands at \$364 billion and \$13 trillion respectively. The U.S. GDP is therefore 39 times in size to Ukraine's and yet its executive office is only 3 times larger than Ukraine's secretariat.

Maybe the way to reduce the number of conspiracy theories emanating from the secretariat that contribute greatly to Ukraine's political instability is for the secretariat be at least cut in half from 600 to 300 staff to make it proportionately similar to that of the US Executive Office's 1,800 staff.

The savings from these cuts should be given to the Ukrainian military to increase the abysmal 1 percent of GDP currently spent on them. Such a step would be a true sign of President Yushchenko's patriotism following Russia's invasion of Georgia.