

END NOTE

UKRAINE'S ASPIRATIONS TO 'RE-JOIN EUROPE' STILL NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY

By Taras Kuzio

Ukraine and the European Union held a summit in Copenhagen on 4 July followed five days later by a visit by NATO Secretary-General Lord George Robertson to Kyiv on the fifth anniversary of the NATO-Ukraine charter. The outcome of both events reflects the skepticism with which Ukraine's strategic foreign policy goal of "returning to Europe" through integration into trans-Atlantic and European structures is still met in Brussels.

In his annual address to parliament in May, President Leonid Kuchma outlined a timetable for the creation of a free-trade area with the EU by 2004, a customs union in 2005-07, signing an associate agreement in 2007, and fulfilling all of the criteria laid out by the EU in order to join the union by 2011. On the eve of the Copenhagen summit, the Ukrainian parliament issued an appeal approved by 257 out of 450 deputies asking the summit to upgrade the 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which was ratified and put into effect only in 1998, "to a qualitatively new level of development" that would lead to EU membership. But the joint EU-Ukraine summit statement reaffirmed that only the PCA would be the basis "for developing our relations further" (PCAs do not recognize aspirant membership status and were signed only with CIS members, while the EU signed association agreements with other postcommunist states). The EU also refused at the Copenhagen summit to grant Ukraine the status of a "market economy."

Why has Ukraine again failed to convince Europe of its right to join the EU? Denmark, which took over the EU presidency in July, is the only EU member to have closed down its Ukrainian Embassy, itself a reflection of its lack of interest in that country. For the EU it is highly convenient that Ukraine's domestic policies simply reinforce the deeply held view in Brussels that Ukraine is not part of "Europe." Bertel Haarder, Danish Minister for Refugees, Immigration, and Integration, laughed off Kuchma's plan to gradually move into the folds of the EU by 2011 as reminiscent of Soviet-era announcements that communism was on the verge of being achieved, but never actually was. "Instead of statements and expectations for clear signals, the Ukrainian authorities should switch to fulfilling arrangements and fulfilling their declarations," Haarder advised.

A major obstacle to "returning to Europe" is the deeply ingrained Soviet political culture that eastern Ukrainian leaders, such as Kuchma and his oligarchic allies, are seemingly incapable of breaking with. The executive and its oligarchic allies fail to grasp that their unwillingness to resolve the murder of journalists such as

Heorhiy Gongadze undercuts their desire to switch from a PCA to an association agreement as the stepping stone to future EU membership. Only nine days after the Copenhagen summit, Our Ukraine member and anti-Kuchma campaigner Oleksandr Zhyr was removed, through a flagrant misuse of the legal system, from contesting repeat elections in Dnipropetrovsk he was set to win. His removal ensured a victory for the pro-Kuchma For a United Ukraine candidate.

The visit by NATO Secretary-General Robertson to Ukraine was more productive than that of the EU summit because the EU has a closed-door while NATO has an open-door policy on membership. Whereas the EU rules out moving from a PCA to an association agreement, NATO is willing to upgrade Ukraine from a charter to a Membership Action plan (MAP), which must be fulfilled for membership. But Ukraine is still at least 10 years away from NATO membership.

For the moment, NATO still doubts Kyiv's willingness to adopt the necessary all-round nonmilitary reforms that make up four of out five MAP sections. Robertson warned that Kyiv would have to display "a sustained commitment to the implementation of political, economic, and defense reforms" and uphold human rights, the rule of law, and freedom of the media.

NATO also remains concerned that Soviet-era ties between CIS intelligence services could compromise shared intelligence between Ukraine and NATO. Ukraine's annual expenditure of \$590 million on the military is abysmal and would require a six- to sevenfold increase. Hungary, with armed forces only one-seventh the size of Ukraine's, spends twice as much annually on the military (\$1.09 billion), while Poland, with a population only slightly less than Ukraine's, spends \$3.58 billion annually. Ukraine spends only \$2,900 per serviceman per year, compared to \$9,700 by Romania, one of the poorest NATO aspirants, or Poland's \$18,000.

The newspaper "Zerkalo nedeli/Dzerkalo tyzhnya" pointed to a lack of enthusiasm in NATO for Ukraine's membership and a Polish newspaper reported that only one-third of NATO members support Ukraine's membership. NATO is also tempering its enthusiasm so as not to damage its new strategic relationship with Russia.

The 23 May decision by Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) to seek NATO membership was transformed into a presidential decree during Robertson's visit. Nevertheless, NATO, like the EU, believes Kuchma issues declarations that go unfulfilled. The government has not, for example, made any attempt to mobilize public support for NATO membership or to create a consolidated position on NATO among the Ukrainian leadership, which presidential administration head and oligarchic Social Democratic Party-united leader Viktor Medvedchuk opposes. A July poll by the Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies found that the same proportion (32 percent) supported and opposed NATO membership, with 22 percent of Ukrainians undecided.

The EU still continues to rule out Ukraine's membership and it would be only forced to change this position if someone it has faith in to implement Ukraine's "Europeanization," such as former Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko, was elected president in 2004. If, on the other hand, Kuchma succeeds in engineering the election of a like-minded successor, Ukraine's aspirations for EU membership will

be again thwarted for five to 10 years. NATO's secretary-general believes that Ukraine's membership also remains "hypothetical" and "long-term," and that "membership is not on the agenda right now." Nevertheless, at least NATO has not fully ruled out Ukraine's membership, unlike the EU.

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