

UKRAINE MOVES A STEP CLOSER TO EUROPE

By Taras Kuzio

During President Viktor Yushchenko's first month in office, he visited Europe twice, appearing at the European Parliament, EU, Council of Europe, and NATO. After a month of such visits and meetings there can be no doubt that Yushchenko is serious when he spoke of "the end of multi-vectorism" (Ukrayinska pravda, February 22). Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk said that Ukraine's foreign policy will now be "consistent and predictable" and move away from the previous policy of "sending contradictory measures depending on which country he [former president Leonid Kuchma] was visiting" (Reuters, February 1).

Much has changed under Yushchenko, but not everything. The West does view Yushchenko as genuinely committed to the domestic policies required for Euro-Atlantic integration. Kuchma had always demanded a signal of future membership from the EU before launching reforms.

However, most Western governments did not expect a Yushchenko victory or an Orange Revolution, much less greater Ukrainian interest in joining NATO and the EU. The strains caused by his ascendancy were evident during Yushchenko's meetings in Western Europe this week. Ukraine's allies in its quest for Euro-Atlantic integration are the United States, Canada, the post-communist new members of the EU, and Scandinavia.

Of these countries, the United States is key to Ukraine's NATO membership, but Washington can only indirectly lobby for its inclusion in the EU. President George W. Bush mentioned Ukraine twice in his State of the Union address, and Ukraine's democratic revolution certainly fits his announced plans to support democracy around the world.

Bush and Yushchenko met at NATO headquarters shortly before Bush's summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin. During their encounter, Bush compared Yushchenko to George Washington, praising him as somebody who had just led a "peaceful revolution based upon the same values that we hold dear" (Ukrainian News, nato.int, February 22).

Bush invited Yushchenko to visit the United States in the first week of April. Their talks contrast sharply with U.S.-Ukraine relations under Kuchma. Bush refused to meet Kuchma until the June 2004 NATO summit in Istanbul when they briefly met as part of a U.S. "thank you" for Ukraine's military contribution to Iraq.

Nevertheless, the Bush administration continues the difficult task of ideologically supporting Ukraine's democratic revolution while remaining geopolitically committed to cooperating with Russia. Since the Orange Revolution, the balance has tipped in Ukraine's favor, leaving Russia increasingly seen as autocratic, imperialist, and of little further use in the campaign against international terrorism. Advocates of supporting Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration are now emerging in the U.S. Congress, leaving Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her purported russophilism in the minority (Washington Post, December 14, 2004, February 16, 2005; Financial Times, December 27, 2004).

The "Old Europe" countries of France, Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg continue to remain apathetic towards Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. French President Jacques Chirac's early departure from the Ukraine-NATO Commission was seen by many as a diplomatic snub (International Herald Tribune, February 24). France, a non-military member of NATO, was always lukewarm towards EU enlargement in general, while Great Britain has been more enthusiastic. However, London remains apathetic toward Ukraine. Britain's position is likely to gradually become more positive, particularly with U.S. prodding.

Moscow seeks to block Ukraine's westward orientation through the "Old Europe" bloc. Although Russia's official position is that Ukraine's membership in the EU is "OK" (while NATO is "nyet"), Moscow cannot truly wish Yushchenko success. But the more it lobbies "old Europe" to block Ukraine's EU aspirations, the more it will drive Ukraine into the hands of NATO, where the United States dominates and membership is easier to attain.

Russia now has a much less pliant government in Kyiv. Yushchenko and the government of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko are looking for the right diplomatic formula to reject the CIS Single Economic Space. They also want Russia to treat Ukraine as part of the "Far Abroad," not the CIS "Near Abroad."

For the first time, Ukraine's foreign policy will be coordinated by a united group ideologically committed to Euro-Atlantic integration. These include Foreign Minister Tarasyuk (returning to the post after Putin successfully lobbied for his removal in October 2000), Defense Minister Anatoliy Grytsenko, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Oleh Rybachuk, and Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council Petro Poroshenko. Tymoshenko will focus on domestic affairs.

Ukraine's emerging new foreign policy will be judged on its success in having Ukraine designated a market economy this year and receiving WTO membership before the March 2006 parliamentary elections. Kyiv is committed to fulfilling the just-signed three-year Action Plan (with an additional 11 action points drawn up to provide additional support to Yushchenko) and completing the ten-year Partnership and Cooperation Agreement by 2007. Yushchenko believes these accomplishments will lead to an accession treaty with the EU in 2007-2008 (Ukrayinska pravda, February 23).

The situation with NATO is more complex. Attaining NATO membership is easier and quicker than that for the EU. Grytsenko has predicted that Ukraine would be a NATO member by 2009 (Ukrayinska pravda, February 21). However, there will be some domestic opposition from the Communist Party and former Kuchma loyalists, as well as opposition from Russia. Consequently, Tymoshenko's government program omits any mention of NATO and does not plan to accelerate the application process until after the 2006 elections. Nevertheless, after the NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting, Yushchenko confirmed that he is seeking Ukraine's integration into both NATO and the EU (Ukrayinska pravda, February 22).

Poroshenko left the NATO-Ukraine Commission with greater optimism about NATO's readiness to provide "very strong and powerful support" (UNIAN, February 22). Both Bush and NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer emphasized NATO's "open-door" policy that would admit Ukraine if its reformist policies are successful. Yushchenko hopes that the EU will also move to an "open-door" policy after 2007.