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*Ukraine demands "respect" from Russia

UKRAINE ASKS RUSSIA TO BEGIN PREPARATIONS FOR WITHDRAWING BLACK SEA FLEET

-Taras Kuzio

After canceling her scheduled visit to Moscow last week, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko explained her reasons to the BBC (April 15). Not only was she infuriated at Russia's unwillingness to drop criminal charges against her, part of Moscow's interference in last year's Ukrainian presidential election, but also there were other, more important reasons of national pride.

These explanations go to the heart of Russian-Ukrainian relations, which are now understood by Moscow and Kyiv in totally contradictory ways. A journalist at *Kommersant* has again confirmed that Russian President Vladimir Putin actually did say that Russia and Ukraine were the equivalent of East and West Germany (*Ukrayinska pravda*, April 16, EDM April 15).

In other words, Russia sees the world not only divided into the former Soviet "near abroad" and the rest of the world, but the "near abroad" is also understood in two components: the not-foreign Eastern Slavs (Ukraine, Belarus) and the semi-foreign remainder of the CIS. Russia has traditionally looked upon Ukrainians and Belarusians as peasant bumpkins who did not possess the wherewithal to run effective states and would therefore return to Mother Russia sooner or later.

As Tymoshenko pointed out, Ukraine will no longer accept such a designation. In effect, Ukraine under President Viktor Yushchenko is demanding that Russia treat it as a "far abroad" state, like Poland, rather than as a not-foreign "near abroad" state such as Belarus. To Russia, this distinction is a radical threat to its national identity, as the proposition is coupled with a geopolitically perceived threat of Ukraine seeking to join NATO.

Tymoshenko told the BBC that it was time Russia stopped treating Ukraine as "inferior" and learned to respect Ukraine as an independent country. "I know the Russian political

elite got used to Ukraine suffering from an inferiority complex, but I want this to disappear from our relationship."

President Yushchenko has called for Ukraine-Russia relations to be "understandable, honest, and open" in the post-Kuchma era (Channel 5 TV, April 12). After having "achieved real sovereignty and freedom [only] a few months ago," Ukraine should not devalue its sovereignty by integrating into the CIS Single Economic Space, according to Yushchenko.

Not only have Ukrainians managed to preserve their state, but they even had the gall to successfully undertake a democratic revolution. Russia now looks bad in comparison to Ukraine, and some Russians feel embarrassed at how much better the "younger brothers" are doing.

In an ironic article, *gazeta.ru* argues that *khokhly*, the Russian derogatory name for Ukrainians, have become the catalysts of progress in Russian domestic and foreign policy (*gazeta.ru*, April 19). The article cites numerous examples, such as: Russian authorities granting Russian citizens the right to be present in the city of their temporary residence for 90 days without registering with militia, after this right was spontaneously awarded to Ukrainian citizens; Russian President Vladimir Putin copied Yushchenko's summit with Russian oligarchs earlier this year.

Ukraine's newfound national assertiveness and shedding of the inferiority complex that plagued the country under Kuchma is also due to support given to Ukraine by the United States. Diplomatic support from President Bill Clinton was crucial in helping Ukraine stand up to Russian territorial demands between 1994 and 1999.

Such demands persist. Rodina deputy Viktor Alksnis called for the Crimea to be returned to Russia during a recent visit to the peninsula (*Ukrayinska pravda*, April 19). Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov attended the November 28, 2004, separatist congress in Donetsk organized by defeated Ukrainian presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovych. In October 2003 Russia made territorial demands on the island of Tuzla off the western coast of the Crimea.

In recent weeks, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk startled Moscow with two statements related to the 1997 Black Sea Fleet agreement.

First, from now on Russia should abide by the agreement, infringements of which have become "systematic," Tarasyuk complained (*Ukrayinska pravda*, April 15). In March 2005 Russian Special Forces landed in the Crimea to undertake a military exercise, a step that was strictly illegal, as only Russian forces based in Ukraine have a right to undertake such exercises. Buildings and land in Crimea are rented and leased, activities that breach the 1997 Agreement and contribute to corruption. Safety of navigation is not ensured and the legal regime for entry and exit of ships is not followed. First Deputy Foreign Minister Volodymyr Ohryzko, who headed a working government group on implementing the

accord, agreed that Russia is regularly infringing the Agreement (*Ukrayinska pravda*, April 19).

Second, Tarasyuk gave advance notice that Ukraine will not be extending the 20-year agreement that expires in 2017. Ukraine wants Russia gone as soon as possible to facilitate its joining NATO, and Moscow seems to be anticipating relocation. Tarasyuk quoted Russian officials who stated their intention to build an alternative base in Novorossiysk where they would transfer the Fleet within three years (*Ukrayinska pravda*, April 15). National Security and Defense Council secretary Petro Poroshenko has emphasized the non-negotiability of any extension of the Fleet agreement beyond 2017 (ICTV, April 17). Ohryzko also backed Tarasyuk in hoping that Russia withdraws its Fleet out ahead of 2017.

As Ukraine's diplomatic self-assurance increases, Tarasyuk will likely add to his list of notices for Moscow.