

KYIV CONTINUES TO REDEFINE RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

By [Taras Kuzio](#)

While Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko cancelled her visit to Russia this month, Defense Minister Anatoliy Grytsenko and National Security and Defense Council Secretary Petro Poroshenko did make it to Moscow (Ukrayinska pravda, April 23). Despite the exchange of diplomatic pleasantries, Ukraine is attempting to re-negotiate the parameters of Russian-Ukrainian relations in seven areas.

Perceptions. First, exactly what are "anti-Russian" policies? Poroshenko was at pains in Moscow to persuade his hosts that Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration and the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) group are not "anti-Russian." Poroshenko explained, "Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration can in no way carry an anti-Russian component" (AP, April 21).

But Russia is unlikely to believe such explanations, as it views Ukraine's movement toward the EU and NATO as leading to a severe national-identity crisis and a threat to its security. Moscow fears that "Russian national sacred places" and "its national roots" in Ukraine will be "torn away" (RIA-Novosti, April 19).

The leaders of Russia and Ukraine base their respective statehoods on two clashing ideological views. As Russian President Vladimir Putin declared in his March 25, 2005, state-of-the-nation address, the disintegration of the multi-national Soviet Union was a "geopolitical catastrophe." Meanwhile, Ukraine's statehood, as outlined in its 1996 constitution, is a major beneficiary of the collapse of the USSR.

Russia is also insensitive to Ukraine's perspective on Soviet history. While a new Stalin cult is being revived in Russia, Ukraine blames Stalinism for the 1933 famine that led to millions of deaths (Guardian, April 20). Russia's Ambassador to Ukraine, Viktor Chernomyrdin, suggested that perhaps Ukrainians should instead blame Georgia, Stalin's birthplace. (MosNews, April 20).

Belarus. Ukraine and Russia are increasingly at odds over U.S. and Western policy toward Belarus and over OSCE election-monitoring missions. In his April 19 state of the nation address, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenka described the post-Soviet democratic revolutions as "sheer banditry disguised as democracy." Visibly angered by this claim, Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk praised his country's non-violent protests and added Ukraine's concerns to those of the international community over human rights abuses in Belarus (Interfax-Ukraine, April 21). During the Yushchenko-Bush White House press conference in early April, Belarus was mentioned as a country ripe for democratic revolution.

On April 20 U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with seven Belarusian oppositionists at the NATO summit in Vilnius, where she described Belarus as "the last dictatorship in Europe" (Washington Post, April 21). Ukraine's views on Belarus thus resemble those of the United States and the EU. Russia, however, criticized Rice and backed Lukashenka's regime.

CIS Rivals. Ukraine offers CIS members an alternative to Russian leadership. It was not coincidental that on the heels of the NATO summit, Ukraine took the lead at the GUAM summit in Chisinau while Lukashenka joined Putin in Moscow (see EDM, April 25).

"Lost" Ukraine. The Yushchenko-Tymoshenko team is not naïve enough to believe that Russia will accept the "loss" of Ukraine, as Moscow interprets Yushchenko's presidential victory. The editor of Russia's Profil magazine pointed out, "For the Kremlin, the hohol [a derogatory name for Ukrainians] state has become, if not the biggest nightmare out there, then definitely an obsessive one" (gazetu.ru, April 20).

Ukraine now has Russia on the defensive, and Moscow does not know how to respond to Kyiv's desire to join NATO. "The possibility of Ukraine eventually joining NATO is of great concern to Russia," observed Viktor Kremeniuk of the USA and Canada Institute, as "that would spell the end of Russian dominance in the post-Soviet sphere" (Christian Science Monitor, April 21). According to Sergei Markov, one of the Russian advisors to Yushchenko's rival in the Ukrainian presidential race, Russia may now resort to underhanded techniques such as promoting anti-NATO sentiments (e.g. "This issue could bring Yushchenko down!") or resorting to KGB-style disinformation. Already Ukrainians suspect that the political "black lists" of officials allegedly about to be arrested are fakes drawn up by Russia (Christian Science Monitor, April 21; Ukrayinska pravda, April 22).

Harboring Criminals. Fourth, as long as Russia is seen as a haven for indicted Ukrainian officials, Kyiv is less than willing to play by Russia's rules in the CIS. At the summit of CIS interior ministers, Ukrainian Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko and his delegation -- all decked out in orange ties -- refused to sign any documents.

The reason is Russia's official refusal to search for Ihor Bakay, former head of the Directorate on State Affairs, attached to the executive, who is wanted in Ukraine on multiple criminal charges and the theft of over a quarter of a million dollars. Chernomyrdin has confirmed that Bakay has Russian citizenship (Ukrayinska pravda, April 26). As Ukraine does not recognize dual citizenship, Kuchma's promotion of Bakay to a senior position within the executive was a major breach of Ukrainian legislation.

Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine is applying the rule of law both domestically and in its relations with Russia. Tarasyuk is demanding that corrupt activities by the Black Sea Fleet end, that the Fleet abides by previous agreements, returns property, and allows Ukrainian officials access to all regions of Sevastopol. When Ukraine points to violations of agreements, Russia complains about "unfriendly acts" by Kyiv, Tarasyuk lamented. But, he warned, "agreements must be observed. This rule applies to the Russian side also"

(Zerkalo nedeli, April 23-May 6).

Free Trade. What Russia portrays as a "free-trade zone" in the CIS Single Economic Space is, according to Kyiv, actually a customs union. Ukraine is interested in a free-trade zone but rules out joining any customs union other than the EU.

Sevastopol. Russia is returning to its 1990s rhetoric to support territorial claims on the Crimean port of Sevastopol. Again, the issue relates to whether Sevastopol was transferred to the Ukrainian SSR along with the Crimea in 1954.

Tarasyuk warned that any Russian citizen agitating for separatism in Ukraine or acting as political agents in the 2006 elections could be declared persona non grata. "Any official must keep within certain limits while visiting other countries," Tarasyuk said. He went on to remind Moscow "about the limits of hospitality and the norms of international law" (Zerkalo nedeli, April 23-May 6).

For this to happen, Moscow would have to first treat Ukraine as an independent state, which is unlikely to happen under Putin