

MOSCOW CONTINUES TO UNDERMINE DEMOCRACY IN INDEPENDENT UKRAINE

By [Taras Kuzio](#)

Russian President Vladimir Putin's plans to purchase Leonid Brezhnev's residence in the Crimea have collapsed. USSR Dacha No.1, "Hlitsyniya," is among the Ukrainian properties excluded from privatization. Nevertheless, Putin attempted to acquire it from Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma as a token of gratitude for supporting Kuchma's designated successor, Viktor Yanukovich, in the 2004 presidential elections. The dacha is an apt symbol for Moscow's apparent need to maintain a presence in Ukraine.

Subsequently, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko said that Kyiv is considering an alternative residence for Putin. This comment is itself unusual, as world leaders normally do not have official residences in foreign countries. Yushchenko bluntly ruled out Hlitsyniya and warned against constructing relations with Russia through shady privatization deals, apparently a practice used under Kuchma (Ukrayinska pravda, May 4).

On October 21, 2004, just 10 days before the first round of the 2004 presidential election, Ihor Bakay, then head of the Directorate on State Affairs (DSA) attached to the executive branch, deeded Hlitsyniya to the International Children's Center "Artek" in the Crimea. The director of Artek then sold Hlitsyniya to Vneshtorgbank, which was acting on behalf of the Russian Directorate for State Affairs attached to the Russian executive. Russia had already paid 30% of the cost (estimated at 78 million hryvnia or \$15.5 million) to Artek.

The scandal surrounding Hlitsyniya follows another one in the Crimea. Kuchma had lobbied for 350 hectares of prime land near Yalta to be given to Russia to build a hunting lodge for Putin (Ukrayinska pravda, January 31).

Hlitsyniya was sold around the same time other prime Ukrainian assets were transferred to Russia. Bakay transferred the Dnipro, one of Kyiv's premier hotels, on December 28 (four days after he was dismissed as head of the DSA) at the cost of 92 million hryvnia (\$18 million). The Dnipro Hotel had also appeared on a list of state properties unavailable for privatization.

The Dnipro-Elit company that "purchased" the Dnipro Hotel is headed by Russian businessman Maxim Kurochkin. At the time he was deputy head of the Russian Club, headquarters to the Russian "political advisors" brought in to help Yanukovich win the presidential election. Kurochkin is reportedly linked to organized crime and is wanted in Ukraine on numerous counts of corruption and fraud. He now lives in Moscow.

Many Russian and Ukrainian citizens fleeing criminal charges in Ukraine have moved to Moscow. Besides Kurochkin and Bakay, former Central Election Commission chairman Serhiy Kivalov, former interior minister Mykola Bilokin, former Sumy governor Volodymyr Shcherban, and former Odessa mayor Ruslan Bodelan now live in the Russian capital (Ukrayinska pravda, May 4). Bilokin is reportedly "often seen together with Kurochkin and with Bakay" in Moscow (Ukrayinska pravda, May 5).

Russia has long provided citizenship to nationals living in separatist enclaves such as Transnistria and Abkhazia. Now it is giving Russian citizenship to individuals fleeing from criminal justice. Moscow regards these people as a "persecuted opposition." Russia has even placed a draft resolution condemning "repression" against the opposition in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. According to the head of the State Duma's Committee on International Affairs, Konstantin Kosachev, "We are concerned by the decisions of the Ukrainian authorities directed towards pressuring the opposition that lost the elections and their attempts at taking revenge upon them" (Ukrayinska pravda, May 3).

Following this line of reasoning, Yanukovych recognizes the newly elected authorities in Kyiv but does not accept his defeat in 2004. He believes that the Ukrainian constitution and legislation were violated in December 2004, when the run-off election was repeated and Yushchenko won. Despite massive evidence to the contrary, Yanukovych denies that he himself was involved in any election fraud (Ukrayinska pravda, April 26).

Russia's support for the "opposition" in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan is no coincidence, as all three have experienced revolutions that removed pro-Russia centrists. Russia, like the CIS Election Observation Missions (EOM), supports and intervenes on behalf of fraudulent elections and authoritarian regimes. In return, Moscow expects to be rewarded with property rights.

In an interview in *Strategiya Rosii* Russian Security Council secretary Igor Ivanov picks up Yanukovych's theme of not recognizing the defeat of pro-Russia centrists through democratic revolutions. Nevertheless, he, like Yanukovych, realizes that Moscow must deal with the newly elected authorities. Ivanov describes all three revolutions from a legal viewpoint as having been undertaken in an "unconstitutional and non-democratic manner" (Ukrayinska pravda, May 4). He remains "skeptical" that these three revolutions can be described as the "victory of democracy." Specifically, he asks, "Please explain how is it possible that democracy has triumphed if the basic principles of democracy have been infringed in the attainment of this victory?" (Ukrayinska pravda, May 4).

Free elections, according to Yanukovych, Ivanov, and the CIS observer missions, are evaluated on whether or not pro-Russian centrists or neo-Soviet forces win, regardless of the means used to attain these ends. Consequently, they believe that protests against electoral fraud are illegitimate and should be dealt with by the use of force.

Former Polish President Lech Walesa recently revealed to *The Observer* (May 1) that Yanukovych had ordered Interior Ministry troops to advance against the Orange

Revolution last November and December. Violence and a civil war were only averted when the Ukrainian military intervened in defense of protestors.

So long as Moscow insists that suspect elections were conducted in a "free and fair manner," Russia and the West will remain at odds over this fundamental issue.