

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR
Volume 2, Issue 102 (May 25, 2005)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

U. S. SENATE, EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CONDEMN OCCUPATION OF BALTIC STATES

RUSSIA HAILS BORDER DEAL WITH CHINA DESPITE CRITICISM

MOSCOW SENDING MIXED MESSAGES ON IRANIAN NUCLEARIZATION

RUSSIA ASKS COUNCIL OF EUROPE TO INVESTIGATE "POLITICAL REPRESSION" IN UKRAINE

RUSSIA ASKS COUNCIL OF EUROPE TO INVESTIGATE "POLITICAL REPRESSION" IN UKRAINE

By Taras Kuzio

Russian President Vladimir Putin justified his policy of supporting Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections by stating that it was Russian policy to only work with the elected authorities, not with the opposition. Russia has also declared that the election-monitoring missions sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe are hopelessly biased. However, both statements run counter to the actual policies that Russia is pursuing towards Ukraine. This confusion reflects Russia's unwillingness to accept that Viktor Yushchenko is now president of Ukraine.

On May 20, the State Duma overwhelming voted to instruct the Russian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to call upon PACE to condemn, "negative tendencies in the internal processes of Ukraine which infringe OSCE principles" (Ukrayinska pravda, May 20). The Russian State Duma is, according to the statement, "deeply concerned at the numerous facts of repression of representatives of the political opposition in Ukraine by the new Ukrainian authorities."

That one country should take such a deep interest in alleged "political repression" in a neighboring country is unusual in international affairs. However, Moscow refuses to regard Ukraine as a truly foreign country. Russia's massive involvement in last year's presidential election, although condemned by the United States, has therefore never been seen as

"interference" by Moscow. To do so would be to acknowledge that Ukraine is part of the "Far Abroad." While Yushchenko wants Ukraine to be distanced from Russia, Moscow has difficulty even accepting that Ukraine is part of the "Near Abroad."

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry (MZS) issued a strongly worded rebuttal that reflects the newly assertive Ukrainian foreign policy under Yushchenko (mfa.gov.ua/information). The MZS classified the State Duma statement as an "unfriendly act" that calls into question Russia's sincerity in supporting democratization, institutionalizing the rule of law, and upholding human rights in Ukrainian society.

The MZS then turned the State Duma statement around by reminding that many of its members until recently ignored the "massive falsification" of election results by the regime of former Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma. Worse still, "They actively stood on the side of those in Ukraine who adopted anti-democratic practices as a norm in social life, but who today describe themselves as the 'opposition.'" The State Duma statement twists the facts and demonstratively supports these same political forces."

The Russian statement also condemned the alleged attempt in Ukraine at "establishing political and ideological control over the mass media" and "pressure against journalists who criticize representatives of the authorities." This allegation clearly reveals Russia's double standards. Media freedom in Russia is far worse now than under Yeltsin, whereas in Ukraine it has greatly expanded since Yushchenko's election.

Even hollower are Russia's complaints about alleged attempts to impose "ideological control over the mass media" in Ukraine. Russian political technologist Sergei Markov has admitted that, during the Kuchma era, Russia was directly involved in preparing secret instructions (temnyky) that the Ukrainian presidential administration, then headed by Viktor Medvedchuk, would send to media outlets. Ukraine's 1+1 television channel has revealed that the presidential administration threatened to shut them down if they did not follow these guidelines.

Yet Medvedchuk has now warned the OSCE that Yushchenko is turning Ukraine into an "authoritarian state" (Ukrayinska pravda, May 24). He also advised the OSCE that Yushchenko's new party of power, People's Union-Our Ukraine, would abuse its access to state-administrative resources in next year's parliamentary elections. This is quite rich coming from the man who was directly involved in the worst abuses of state-administrative resources in the 2004 elections.

The Ministry also expressed its surprise that the State Duma would appeal to PACE, which has often declared its dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in Russia. Since Yushchenko's election, Kyiv has distanced itself from the Kuchma regime's statements backing Russian criticism of the OSCE.

Ukraine, like Georgia and Moldova, has pulled out of the CIS Election Observation Mission (CIS EOM) because it was established to provide an alternative to the OSCE monitors by whitewashing election fraud in the CIS. The CIS observers did not see any election fraud in round two of Ukraine's 2004 election, a conclusion sharply at odds with the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the United States.

Putin has defended his support for Yanukovych by stating that it was Russia's policy to only deal with the authorities. Evidently, this policy did not carry over to the Yushchenko government. Russia has become the defender of the opposition while refusing to condemn the corruption and election fraud that these ousted leaders have committed. This selective memory was on view in January when Putin met Yanukovych in Moscow before Yushchenko's inauguration (*Ukrayinska pravda*, January 24). During his chat with Yanukovych, Putin agreed to support the opposition in Ukraine in the 2006 parliamentary elections.

Moscow's allegations of "political repression" are linked to Yushchenko's forthright statements that some 16,000-17,000 Ukrainian officials have been released because they supported the previous regime and were involved in corruption and election fraud. He has promised to continue this housecleaning by replacing the head of every rayon administration. Ukraine's political opposition has failed to convince the Western media and international organizations that this replacement of officials and the launching of criminal charges against some of them are tantamount to "political repression." Only Russia is convinced of this claim.

During a recent conference in Kyiv, the president of the European Court of Human Rights, Luzius Wildhaber, did not observe any human rights abuses in Ukraine. He stated, "Some areas need to change quickly, some require legislative changes, and one needs to give the authorities time if you really seriously want to see change" (*Ukrayinska pravda*, May 10).