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**YULIA TYMOSHENKO TO VISIT WASHINGTON, NEW YORK**

*--Taras Kuzio*

Yulia Tymoshenko, leader of the eponymous political bloc and head of the Ukrainian opposition, arrives in the United States on Sunday, February 25, for a six-day visit that will take her to New York and Washington. It is her first visit to the U.S. as a politician. Her visit follows that of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich on December 4-6, 2006, and President Viktor Yushchenko in April 2005 (see EDM, April 4, 7, 2005).

Tymoshenko's visit has been organized differently from that of Yanukovich. His tour was highly choreographed by his Washington public relations firm in such a way that he refrained from open discussions and refused to meet the Ukrainian diaspora. In this case, Tymoshenko's team in the U.S. is taking a more open, inclusive position, ensuring that diaspora are included and that both sides of the aisle in American politics are being addressed in a more substantive manner.

In New York, Tymoshenko will speak at the Council on Foreign Relations, Columbia University, and will be hosted at a luncheon by J.P. Morgan investment bank. In Washington, Tymoshenko is set to speak at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the National Press Club, as well as holding high-level meetings with the U.S. government and Congress. She will meet with the diaspora in both locations and also will receive an award at the annual Ronald Reagan banquet. Press interviews are scheduled with the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*.

The Tymoshenko bloc finished second during the 2006 parliamentary elections with 22.2%, a three-fold increase over her 2002 results. Most national democratic parties, which had aligned with business centrists to create Our Ukraine in 2002, deserted Our Ukraine and Yushchenko in the 2006 elections. Our Ukraine received 10% fewer votes in 2006 under Yushchenko than four years earlier under president Leonid Kuchma. Political parties, such as Reforms and Order, have moved from Our Ukraine to the Tymoshenko bloc. Rukh, led by ousted foreign minister Borys Tarasyuk, is reportedly holding negotiations to follow suit.

Two factors explain why a large proportion of orange voters defected to the Tymoshenko bloc. First, shock at her dismissal as prime minister in September 2005 only two weeks after Yushchenko had described the Tymoshenko government as the “best in Europe.”

Second, the bloc’s consistent opposition to any deals with the Party of Regions. Tymoshenko stated unequivocally, “We believe that establishing a coalition with the mafia is treason to Ukraine.” This opposition reflects the bloc’s long-standing position during the four years of anti-Kuchma protests that preceded the Orange Revolution when it refused to negotiate with the Kuchma regime and called for his impeachment.

Yushchenko and Our Ukraine never supported impeachment proceedings and defended Kuchma from allegations arising from the Mykola Melnychenko tapes, on which the president is overheard ordering the kidnapping of journalist Heorhiy Gongadze. Just last week Prosecutor Mykhailo Potebenko, who presided over the Gongadze cover up, was awarded a state medal for his “contribution to the building of a law-based state.” Former Polish president Alexander Kwasniewski, who brokered the December 2004 roundtable negotiations, has confided that Kuchma was given immunity during the talks.

Yushchenko and Our Ukraine have always been noted for their flexibility. In 2002-2003 and in 2005-2006, they wavered between negotiating deals with the authorities and Party of Regions or working with Tymoshenko. After the 2006 elections, Our Ukraine’s political council head Roman Bezsmertny negotiated an “orange coalition” of democratic forces, while Our Ukraine leader and prime minister Yuriy Yekhanurov negotiated a grand coalition with the Party of Regions. Both coalitions were sidelined by the Anti-Crisis coalition.

Yushchenko’s preference for broad roundtables could be seen in the Orange Revolution and in August 2006. The Tymoshenko bloc opposed both roundtables, and they were the only parliamentary force that refused to sign the Universal agreement. Tymoshenko bloc deputy Hryhoriy Nemirya explained, “They saw no reason to sign a document where Our Ukraine’s participation is window dressing for the Party of Regions to run the government or be present at the birth of a Molotov cocktail coalition that could explode in the hands of the people trying to build it.” The Tymoshenko bloc and the Pora party condemned the signing of the Universal agreement as a “betrayal” of the Orange Revolution.

A February poll by the Razumkov Center gave Tymoshenko 18.9% popular appeal with Yanukovich at 23.7%. Yushchenko’s support has plummeted to 11%. The Tymoshenko bloc and Party of Regions control 70% of deputies in parliament and both forces are likely to gain more seats in the event of elections ahead of 2011.

Based on polling trends in the last two years, Tymoshenko and Yanukovich are likely to be the frontrunner candidates in the 2009 presidential elections. Tymoshenko has admitted, “And I want to say that from childhood I knew that I would be leader of this country. And I am not even joking here.”

In February, Our Ukraine and the Tymoshenko bloc signed an agreement establishing a united opposition of 204 deputies. Our Ukraine leader Vyacheslav Kyrylenko said it would “counteract the revenge of anti-democratic forces.” Yushchenko, who has finally agreed to head Our Ukraine, has understood that the Tymoshenko bloc is the key to preventing the Yanukovich government from infringing on the democratic gains of the Orange Revolution. The *New York Times* magazine (January 1, 2006) wrote, “Tymoshenko is a compelling

mixture of ruthless calculation, iron will, and sincere passion.”

Tymoshenko and her political bloc face four key issues in the coming months.

First, the opposition alliance is opposed by the business wing of Our Ukraine that harbors what has been described as a “Yuliaphobia.”

Second, establishing a more clearly defined ideological profile for the Tymoshenko bloc. Currently, “The charisma of Tymoshenko the leader will act as the bloc’s ideology and its program.” The Tymoshenko bloc unites the liberal-center-left ground and the Fatherland Party has a social democratic profile giving it the ability to absorb disillusioned Socialist voters.

Third, in the 2006 elections the Tymoshenko bloc finished second place in six of eastern and southern Ukraine’s ten regions. This strength could grow and challenge the Party of Regions outside its strongholds of Donetsk and the Crimea.

Fourth, balancing between being head of the opposition and the 2009 Orange front-runner presidential candidate.

Tymoshenko’s visit to the United States follows her two successful visits to Western Europe in 2005 as prime minister and last year as opposition leader. Her U.S. visit next week is set to change U.S. perceptions of Ukraine’s politics and reinforce her image as playing a central role in defending the democratic gains of the Orange Revolution.

(*Ukrayinska pravda*, April 17, 2006, February 2; obozrevatel.com, January 10; glavred.info, December 9, 2005; (president.gov.ua/documents/5745.html, *Kyiv Post*, August 11, 2006)