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## RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS REVEAL DEEPER PROBLEMS

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President Viktor Yushchenko's first meeting with newly elected Russian President Dmitry Medvedev failed to resolve the outstanding issues between Ukraine and Russia. Despite Yushchenko's optimism that all of these issues would be resolved, "the negotiations taking everything into account became very heated."

These issues cannot be easily dealt with, because the growing range of problem areas between Ukraine and Russia, Russia's assertive nationalism and the divergent transition paths of both countries that began during Vladimir Putin's first and Leonid Kuchma's second terms in office and accelerated following the 2004 Orange Revolution.

Eleven areas bedevil Ukrainian-Russian relations showing a close interconnection between domestic and international affairs.

First, energy. Ukraine has absorbed Russian gas price increases from \$50 to \$179.50 per 1,000 cubic meters over the last four years with a threat to double this price in 2009. Nevertheless, annual negotiations over gas contracts continue to be overshadowed by anger and accusations. The energy sector continues to be very corrupt, and this factor reduces the ability of Ukraine's elites to act in unison toward Moscow. Ukraine has three strategic advantages over Russia: pipelines carrying 80 percent of Russian gas to Europe, storage facilities and World Trade Organization (WTO) membership. The Yushchenko-Yulia Tymoshenko rivalry and corruption undermine Ukraine's leverages and leads to angry exchanges inside Ukraine and between Russia and Ukraine.

Second, CIS. The orange administration has continued and deepened Ukraine's lack of interest in CIS integration, including the Single Economic Space (SES). Yushchenko does not follow Kuchma's rhetorical lip service to the CIS SES and CIS integration. Interest in the CIS is overshadowed by a reorientation toward a Deep Free Trade Area with the EU. The Party of Regions proposes not CIS integration but "neutrality" as an alternative to NATO membership.

Third, Ukrainian exiles in Russia. High-level officials accused of abuse of office (Igor Bakaj, Ruslan Bodelan) or involvement in Yushchenko's poisoning

(Volodymyr Satsiuk) continue to remain in exile in Russia. Russia has a long record of harboring fugitives sought by countries such as Georgia.

Fourth, Russian oppositionists unable to work freely in Russia are increasingly settling in Ukraine or working from it. Exiled Russian oligarch Boris Berezovskiy not only gave financial assistance to the Orange Revolution but also financed the transcribing of the Mykola Melnychenko tapes. Russians were convinced the Orange Revolution was part of a “Western conspiracy” and could never believe that Ukrainians were capable of undertaking a revolution without a “guiding hand.”

Fifth, the nature of the two countries’ relationship. The Russian-Ukrainian relationship has always been bedeviled by Russia’s unwillingness to treat Ukraine (like Belarus) as a partner rather than a vassal. Russia’s unwillingness to treat Kuchma, elected in 1994 on a “pro-Russian platform,” with due respect turned him into an ardent supporter of NATO. Yushchenko’s demand for a change in the Russian-Ukrainian relationship to one between two independent states is even more demanding than that proposed by Kuchma. As seen by Putin’s comments made during the NATO-Russia Council at the Bucharest NATO summit, Russia is unable to treat Ukraine as a foreign, serious and coherent entity.

Sixth, borders. The 2003 territorial claim on the island of Tuzla showed to what degree border issues continue to remain unresolved. On June 3 the State Duma voted to seek the abrogation of the 1997 treaty if Ukraine got a NATO Membership Action Plan. The resolution followed Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov’s Crimean visit when he re-opened the Crimean-Sevastopol issue.

Ukraine has always had a cross-party consensus on protecting its territorial integrity, and Russia’s territorial demands merely push Ukraine toward NATO, whether under Kuchma or Yushchenko. Senior Party of Regions leader Andriy Kluyev warned, “Anti-Ukrainian statements by Russian politicians...are strategically very bad for the interests of both states,” because they pit both peoples against each other and give ammunition to “anti-Russian forces in Ukraine.”

Seventh, Black Sea Fleet. The Fleet pays a low rent of \$100 million per annum, its personnel take part in anti-NATO and anti-American protests and the Fleet illegally occupies numerous buildings (lighthouses) and land that are commercially used. The lack of respect for Ukraine is evidenced in recent naval troop exercises conducted on Crimean land without offering prior notification to the Ukrainian authorities. Based on Russia’s unwillingness to withdraw from Moldova and Georgia and Russian officials’ statements, Ukraine’s major concern is whether the Fleet will withdraw from Sevastopol in 2017.

Eighth, Church and language. During the Yushchenko-Medvedev meeting the Russian side raised the perennial issues of alleged “discrimination” against the Russian language in Ukraine and attempts at uniting the Ukrainian Autocephalous and Russian Orthodox Churches.

Ninth, NATO enlargement. Because of Russia’s unreformed world view and historically unchanged attitude toward Ukraine, it is unable to discuss Ukraine’s

drive to join NATO rationally but only in emotional and hysterical terms, using words such as “treason.” Such language was evident during Putin’s speech to the NATO-Russia Council, where he challenged Ukraine’s territorial integrity and right to exist.

Tenth, frustration. Russia has long been frustrated by its inability to influence domestic affairs in Ukraine. Attempts to use energy pressure have always failed, notably in January 2006, when the entire West backed Ukraine in the gas dispute. A February 2007 Ukrainian parliamentary vote to block privatization of the gas pipelines (i.e. transfer them to Russian or joint control) received 420 of 450 votes. Outside of Sevastopol Russian nationalist parties have never been able to establish Ukrainian bases of support.

Eleventh, history. Ukraine and Russia’s views of Soviet and pre-Soviet history radically changed under Kuchma, and this divergence has accelerated under Yushchenko. Whereas Ukraine has moved to a Ukrainian national historiography, Russia has maintained a Soviet Russophile interpretation of history. School textbooks in both countries give radically different perspectives on every aspect of Russian-Ukrainian history over the last two millennia.

Yushchenko’s campaign to obtain domestic and international recognition of the 1933 artificial famine as an act of “genocide,” as seen during his May 25 to 28 visit to Canada, has been heavily criticized by Russia’s President, Foreign Ministry and State Duma. A continuing exhibition in Kyiv of photographs from KGB files of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which fought Nazi and Soviet forces from 1942 to 1952, was countered by an anti-UPA exhibition in Russia and threats by Russian nationalists to attack the Kyiv exhibition. Russian nationalists destroyed a famine exhibition in Moscow last year.

In Kyiv there is a consensus among the elite and public alike that relations between Ukraine and Russia will likely continue to deteriorate (*Zerkalo Nedeli*, June 7-13; *Ukrayinska Pravda*, May 26-June 10).