

Russian State TV Broadcasts a Parody of Ukraine's President

By Taras Kuzio

It did not take long for Russia to poke fun at Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in a seven minute comical parody aired on Russia's State channel 1 in the "Bolshaya Raznytsia" (Great Differences) program on October 31, the same day as Ukraine's local elections. The [timing was obviously not coincidental](#).

"Bolshaya Raznytsia" is retransmitted by Ukraine's ICTV channel, owned by oligarch Viktor Pinchuk, a darling of Western leaders such as President Bill Clinton. However, ICTV censored the video clip parodying Yanukovich.

In May, Ukrainian television also censored a similarly embarrassing clip of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Yanukovich laying wreaths to commemorate the end of World War II (or the "Great Patriotic War" as it is now called) with Yanukovich's wreath falling back on to him. The wreath incident became a [sensational hit on Youtube](#).

Over the summer Russian television lambasted Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenko in documentaries entitled "The Godfather," that depicted him in an unflattering light with ties to exiled Russian oligarch Boris Berezovskiy. "The Godfather" re-opened the sensitive issue of a presidential-run death squad that operated in the late 1990s that murdered the regime's opponents and a Russian journalist.

The question now is why Moscow is parodying Yanukovich, who has this year become more pro-Russian than Lukashenka. In fact, latter has fallen out with Moscow and is fighting the December 18 Belarusian elections without Russian support.

Russian political technologist [Stanislav Belkovsky told the BBC](#) that Moscow has become disenchanted with Yanukovich. The television skit plus Western criticism of him over election fraud last Sunday could be a double whammy for Yanukovich. At this rate, Ukraine could soon have a “no vector” foreign policy.

Belkovsky pointed out that such a parody would not have appeared on Russian state television without the Kremlin’s approval. He also claimed that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin preferred Yulia Tymoshenko in Ukraine’s 2010 presidential election, which could have influenced his decision to approve the airing of the parody. Russian President Medvedev has developed closer relations with Yanukovich than has Putin.

More importantly, Yanukovich has not agreed to various Russian economic proposals for the takeover of Ukrainian companies or joint ventures, Belkovsky argues. Putin has, according to sources in Kyiv that confided in the Jamestown Foundation, set aside \$20 billion of his funds for the purchase of strategic areas of Ukraine’s economy, such as the metallurgical industry which accounts for forty percent of export earnings.

Kyiv’s rejection of Putin’s offer to merge the two state-run gas companies Naftohaz Ukrainy and Gazprom was especially galling. Equally infuriating is Yanukovich’s close ties with Lukashenka over energy issues by reversing the Odesa-Brody pipeline from north-south to south-north so that Minsk can import Venezuelan oil. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez recently visited Russia, Belarus and Ukraine (see JF blog, October 21).

Russia's State TV parody shows former president Viktor Yushchenko asking Yanukovich how many years it will be before Ukraine pays for its imported gas. The camera pans in on Yanukovich's hands behind his back which show him giving a "dulia" to this question (meaning never). The correct answer should have been "two years."

The Kremlin-inspired parody of Yanukovich resembles earlier ones aimed against Lukashenka. The difference, however, is that this recent parody was far less revealing and critical. There was no mention, for example, of Yanukovich's two prison terms, while the Godfather skit based on Lukashenka raised the issue of [officially sanctioned murders in Belarus of opposition politicians](#).

Most amusingly, when Party of Regions deputy Vladislav Lukianov was asked what he thought of the parody [he replied](#), "Russia is a democratic country... This is a sign of democracy, a sign of political tolerance."

Presumably, following Lukianov's "logic", if Russia is "democratic" for showing the parody then Ukraine, by his admission, is not democratic, as ICTV cut out the parody from its retransmission of "Bolshaya Raznytsia." Lukianov should be asked if it is then the case that Ukraine will only be considered democratic if its state TV channel aired a similar parody of President Medvedev?

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