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European Boycott of Yalta 2012 Summit Sparks Germanophobia in Ukraine



By Taras Kuzio

In November 2002, President Leonid Kuchma was advised not to attend NATO's Prague summit, but he ignored the advice and went. NATO changed the language used to allocate seats for countries, using French not English, and thereby ensured Kuchma would not sit next to UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W. Bush. Kuchma had become an international pariah following the Kuchmagate and Kolchugagate scandals that revealed his alleged involvement in the disappearance and murder of journalist Georgi Gongadze and the sale of military equipment to Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

In May 2012 the 18th summit of Central European leaders in Yalta was cancelled – to be rescheduled for a future date – after 13 of 20 invited leaders planned to boycott it. The 17th summit held in Warsaw in May 2011 had been attended by twenty heads of state and US President Barack Obama.

Poland's leaders opposed the boycott although the opposition supported it (<http://www.kyivpost.com/news/politics/detail/127101/>; <http://www.kyivpost.com/news/nation/detail/126986/>). Warsaw was unable to encourage other Central European countries to attend except for Lithuania. Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Moldova and Serbia also planned to attend, making a total of only seven countries.

Thirteen other countries boycotted the summit planned for the Livadia Palace in Yalta where three allied leaders met in 1945 to carve up post-Nazi Europe. Of the thirteen, the country now leading the rhetoric in Europe against the Yanukovych regime is Germany (see below). The remaining twelve included Austria, Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Hungary and the Czech Republic (which has granted two Ukrainian oppositionists asylum, including Tymoshenko's husband Oleksandr).

The cancellation of the Central European leaders summit is the biggest diplomatic embarrassment for Ukraine since Kuchma's snub at the 2002 NATO summit. A similar European boycott is crystallizing around the Euro 2012 soccer championship co-hosted by Poland and Ukraine, which is set to begin next month. A growing number of European and EU leaders have stated their intention to only attend soccer games played in Poland and to boycott games played in Kyiv, Donetsk and especially Kharkiv, the city where opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko is incarcerated.

The momentum for the double boycotts of the Yalta summit and Euro-2012 began to gain ground following an international outcry over the use of force by prison guards against Tymoshenko, the authorities' refusal to permit her to travel abroad for medical treatment and additional criminal charges launched against her, including murder. Photographs of bruises on Tymoshenko's body received widespread international coverage as did the launch of her 19 day hunger strike (<http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2012/04/27/6963597/>).

Germany's leadership of the European boycott of Yalta and Euro 2012 has fomented xenophobia in the insecure and paranoid Yanukovich administration. In 2000-2005, Kuchma's and Yanukovich's xenophobia was directed against the US, which was accused of being behind the illicit taping of Kuchma's office, orchestrating the Kuchmagate crisis, and conspiring in the organization of the Orange Revolution to install Viktor Yushchenko to power. In 2004, the Yanukovich election campaign fomented the biggest anti-American campaign in Ukraine since the pre-détente Cold War (see *EDM*, October 7, 2004).

Kyiv policy makers have long complained of German opposition to Ukraine's admission into NATO and the EU. Yushchenko blamed Berlin for opposing NATO membership while Yanukovich has blamed Germany for blocking the EU from giving Ukraine a future membership perspective. In 2009, former National Security and Defense Council Secretary Volodymyr Horbulin, who was then Director of the Institute of National Security Issues, told US Ambassador William Taylor, "there are two Russian embassies in Kyiv; only one speaks German" (<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/03/09KYIV465.html>).

Political consultant Kost Bondarenko, who worked closely with Deputy Prime Minister Serhiy Tihipko's Strong Ukraine party until it merged in March with the Party of Regions, has been a leading articulator of officially sanctioned Germanophobia. Writing in the *Kyiv Post*, Bondarenko believes there is a German conspiracy against Ukraine and that Germans see Ukraine as an "American creation" (http://www.kyivpost.com/news/opinion/op_ed/detail/118004/). Bondarenko and the Party of Regions hold a neo-Soviet conspiratorial mind-set that is coupled with traditional eastern Slavic inferiority complexes vis-à-vis the West (see my reply to Bondarenko at http://www.kyivpost.com/news/opinion/op_ed/detail/118912/).

Segodnya, one of Ukraine's best-selling newspapers owned by Donetsk oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, who has been close to Yanukovich since the mid 1990s, published a scathing editorial of Germany last Friday (<http://www.segodnya.ua/blogs/korotkovblog/14371476.html>). "Germany again wants to dictate its will over Europe," Segodnya wrote and, "They have taken off their

masks and it really is the case that the Berlin of 2012 is in no way different from the Berlin of the 1940s." "Germany has not changed in the past 70 years, and we are not just talking about the geopolitical ambitions of [Chancellor Angela] Merkel and [Foreign Minister Guido] Westerwelle."

"In 1941," the Segodnya editorial continued, "the German administration forced naked Ukrainian girls into goods wagons bound for Germany. In the 21st century, German customs officials strip Ukrainian workers naked and take their things away." "Then, they destroyed countries with armies, and now they ruin their economy. The calls for a boycott are a call to leave hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians without work," adding, "1945 taught them nothing."

"Germany wants to establish its rules and dictate its will on today's Ukraine. Even the European Union counts for nothing if we are to be seen as sub-humans, as in the New Europe of [Adolf] Hitler." "We did not vote for independence [from the Soviet Union] in 1991 to be under Merkel's heel," Segodnya proclaimed.

Germany was always lukewarm toward the Eastern Partnership (EaP). The program's main supporters were Poland, Sweden, Great Britain and the three Baltic states, who saw the Association Agreements (and enlargement-lite) as eventually leading to EU membership for at least some of the EaP's member countries (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan). EU members opposed to European enlargement for Turkey or Ukraine – such as Germany – now lead Europe's rhetoric on human rights abuses in Ukraine. The icy rhetoric has frozen the signing and ratification of the EU's Association Agreement with Ukraine. But, the primary responsibility lies with Yanukovich (not Germany) for rolling back democracy and giving enlargement-lite critics such as Germany ammunition to derail Ukraine's Association Agreement. Chancellor Merkel personally distrusts Yanukovich who did not fulfill two promises he made to her that he would back decriminalization of articles used to sentence Tymoshenko.

Ukraine's international position is the weakest it has ever been since it achieved independence in 1991. It took Kuchma eight years into his second term in office for Ukraine to become internationally isolated while Yanukovich has accomplished this in only two years. The country's international isolation will grow further if the October parliamentary elections are not recognized as "democratic" by the OSCE and the Council of Europe. But the elections will not be judged as "democratic" if Ukrainian opposition leaders remain in jail, which is highly likely (see [EDM](#), November 4, 2011).

Europe's "Ukraine problem" will grow in 2013 when there will be growing vocal US and European demands for punishment against Ukraine's authorities in the form of further boycotts, sanctions and visa denials. These will ironically take place during the same year that Ukraine holds the rotating chairmanship of the OSCE.