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Monday, January 14, 2013

[Will Leonid Kozhara Change Ukrainian Foreign Policy?](#)



By Taras Kuzio

The appointment of Leonid Kozhara as Ukraine's foreign minister to replace Kostyantyn Hryshchenko was expected (<http://mfa.gov.ua/ua/about-mfa/minister/biography>). Although Kozhara and Hryshchenko are from two different influential groups (oligarch Rinat Akhmetov and the gas lobby, respectively) in the Party of Regions, they are both handicapped in their position by a Soviet mindset of provincialism and inferiority complexes vis-à-vis the West.

Washington and Brussels had come to view Hryshchenko as arrogant and a cynic. During a visit to Washington last year, Hryshchenko's performance was very poor, and he kept interrupting everybody, including his own ministers, during meetings with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and during a dinner organised by Party of Regions consultant Bruce Jackson.

In the mid to late 1990s, Kozhara was Congressional liaison officer at the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington and those who met him believed him to be patriotic and pro-European. But, as with many former officials from the Leonid Kuchma era, he changed following the Orange Revolution. During his recent BBC HARDtalk interview, Kozhara proudly said "My party did not support the Orange Revolution" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WvlR4NwNtE>).

The sources of Soviet provincialism lie in the fact that only a small minority of Ukrainian political elites and political experts speak English; and of this number, even fewer have been educated in the West and are intellectually integrated into European intellectual ideas.

In the last decade only four Ukrainians, all English speakers, have been interviewed by BBC HARDtalk—Hryhoriy Nemyria (now deputy leader of the Batkivshchina party), Zhenya Tymoshenko (Yulia Tymoshenko's daughter), then head of President Yushchenko's presidential secretariat Oleh Rybachyk and Kozhara (before he became

foreign minister). Of the four, only the first two had successful interviews because they were Western educated and intellectually understood the way in which the West worked. Rybachuk and Kozhara gave low quality answers and believed it was unnecessary to prepare for them. Kozhara, like his predecessor Hryshchenko, does not understand the need to discuss Western criticism of democratic failings and to occasionally admit that these criticisms are correct. This would be the way forward for those who sincerely desire to join Europe. Hryshchenko routinely wrote letters to Western newspapers rejecting such criticism.

The Party of Regions and its foreign ministers condemn every Western resolution, such as that issued in May 2012 by the US Senate, and most absurdly, demand that European integration be undertaken without any outside interference in Ukraine's domestic affairs. Integration into any international institution—whether the World Trade Organization, European Union or the Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan Customs Union, or even receiving an International Monetary Fund assistance program—will always require the giving up of some sovereignty.

In his BBC HARDtalk interview, Kozhara rejected former US Ambassador to Ukraine Steven Pifer's criticism of the 2012 elections as a "political statement." Similarly, Prosecutor Rinat Kuzmin claimed the US Senate resolution condemning the imprisonment of Yulia Tymoshenko was a product of lobbying by Tymoshenko supporters—which is not true (<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/ukraines-foreign-ministry-says-it-doubts-that-us-senate-resolution-reflects-opinion-of-all-senators-313463.html>).

On the BBC, Kozhara refused to discuss the criticism by the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) that the 2012 elections were a step backwards, said Tymoshenko was imprisoned by a judiciary that is politically independent, claimed Ukraine was closer to European integration than ever before, and the ruling authorities were committed to combating corruption. The BBC HARDtalk presenter replied that "This is just a fantasy."

Kozhara claimed that Ukraine was the best example of democratic progress in the former Soviet Union (excluding the Baltics). In reality, Georgia and Moldova are more advanced in their democratic progress and more committed to upholding European values, and both countries will sign their Association Agreements with the EU this year (see [EDM](#), June 26, 2012). The EU has frozen the signing of the Association Agreement with Ukraine until a selective use of justice is no longer state policy.

Although Hryshchenko was from the pro-Russian gas lobby, Kozhara will not represent any pro-European alternative. In 2006, then Party of Regions leader Viktor Yanukovich's foreign policy advisors Anatoliy Orel and Kozhara told US Ambassador William Taylor that Yanukovich would defer to "Russia's red lines" and "central Russian interests when defining its foreign policy priorities" (<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/03/06KIEV1036.html#>).

Yanukovich had always adopted a hard line against North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership as well as Ukraine receiving a NATO Membership Action Plan. Whereas in private conversations with Western audiences, Party of Regions foreign policy spokespersons Hryshchenko and Kozhara downplayed anti-

Americanism and opposition to NATO in a bout of typical deception, telling the audience what it wanted to hear. At a dinner sponsored by the US Embassy in Kyiv, Kozhara said, “Regions was not opposed to NATO membership [...] but preferred to cooperate with NATO to enhance mutual security” (<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09KYIV2054.html#>).

To not follow in the failed footsteps of his predecessor, Foreign Minister Kozhara will need to understand and follow four policies:

Firstly, Ukraine is not as geopolitically important to the West as Kyiv wrongly believes. The EU and the United States have other domestic and foreign priorities, and Ukraine will never be treated like nuclear weapons state or an energy superpower like Russia.

Secondly, the old Ukrainian game of milking two cows (Russia and the West) is over. Russia was correct in pointing out that Ukraine wanted the best of both worlds, and therefore President Yanukovich has to choose between integration into the Commonwealth of Independent States or into Europe.

Thirdly, Ukraine will be expected to sign a new IMF agreement and implement its demands to show that Ukraine is committed to reforms.

Fourthly, the West will demand that Ukraine release Tymoshenko, Yuriy Lutsenko and others, sentenced by the selective use of justice, and permit them to participate in politics and elections.

Ukraine is currently only being offered an Association Agreement (“EU enlargement-light”), and yet these limited demands from Brussels are too tough for Kyiv. If the above four policies are understood and followed, Ukraine could return to the European path. But if not, Kozhara will turn out to be as unsuccessful as his predecessor.