

Jamestown Blog

Monday, January 23, 2012

[Democratic Regression Continues in Ukraine](#)



By Taras Kuzio

In a speech commemorating Ukraine's January 22 declaration of independence in 1918, President Viktor Yanukovich said "Defense of human rights is an inalienable component of the democratic nature of a European country. We are definitely strengthening monitoring and control over every instance of the infringement of human rights and freedoms. And I have under my personal control defense of freedom of speech" (<http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2012/01/22/6925178/>).

Is Yanukovich president of Ukraine or another country?

Is he in charge of the same country as that in which the editor of *Segodnya*, a daily newspaper owned by Donetsk oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, was sacked after it published photographs of Yanukovich's *Mizhrya* palace? This was clear evidence of censorship in the print media (see interview with former *Segodnya* editor in <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2012/01/17/6915277>).

More to the point, is Yanukovich in charge of the same country as that written about by the human rights think tank Freedom House (www.freedomhouse.org)?

In January 2011, Freedom House downgraded Ukraine, only one year into Viktor Yanukovich's presidency, from 'Free,' a status the country received in 2005 following the Orange Revolution, to 'Partly Free.' Ukraine was "Partly Free" under authoritarian President Leonid Kuchma in his second term in office in 1999-2004.

In 2005-2010, Ukraine was the only country ranked 'Free' in the CIS.

In January 2012, Freedom House reported, "The steepest decline in the institutions of freedom has taken place in Ukraine, where a series of negative developments was punctuated by the conviction of opposition leader Yuliya Tymoshenko on dubious

charges. In the past two years, Ukraine has moved from a status of 'Free' to 'Partly Free' and suffered deterioration on most indicators measured by Freedom House."

Freedom House said, "Ukraine's political rights rating declined from 3 to 4 due to the authorities' efforts to crush the opposition, including the politicized use of the courts, a crackdown on media, and the use of force to break up demonstrations."

A 'Partly Free' country is one in which there is limited respect for political rights and civil liberties. 'Partly Free' states frequently suffer from an environment of corruption, weak rule of law, ethnic and religious strife, and a political landscape in which a single party enjoys dominance despite a certain degree of pluralism.

Ukraine in 2012 remains 'Partly Free' but for the first time Moldova is ranked better in its democracy scores. Georgia and Moldova are better reformers than Ukraine and negotiations for their Association Agreements with the EU are making more progress than with Ukraine, which are frozen (see European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries report at www.irf.ua/index.php). The EU will not sign or ratify an Association Agreement with Ukraine until opposition political leaders are released from prison.

The decline of freedom in Ukraine since 2010, the year Yanukovich came to power, will continue because of two factors.

The first factor is because opposition leaders such as Yulia Tymoshenko and Yuriy Lutsenko are unlikely to be released from imprisonment (see "Why Yulia Tymoshenko Will Remain Imprisoned," [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=38631](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=38631)).

The second factor is that imprisonment of opposition leaders during Ukraine's October 2012 parliamentary elections will mean the country will fail to meet democratic standards in the eyes of the European Union, US, Council of Europe, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). With election fraud highly possible by the Party of Regions, which plans to receive at least half of parliamentary seats, mass protests are inevitable and there could be violence from heavy-handed policing.

With the downward trajectory of Ukraine's democracy likely to continue falling, Ukraine will become 'Not Free' and a full authoritarian state some time following the 2012 elections, possibly in 2013 or 2014.