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Another Ukrainian Opposition Leader Jailed on Trumped Up Charges



By Taras Kuzio

Yuriy Lutsenko, former Interior Minister in two governments led by Yulia Tymoshenko in 2005 and 2007-2010, was sentenced on February 27 to four years imprisonment and a three year ban from public office (<http://www.kyivpost.com/news/politics/detail/123206/>). The EU, European governments, US, Canada and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) immediately condemned the sentence. In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the Lutsenko and Tymoshenko cases raise, “serious concerns about the government of Ukraine’s commitment to democracy and the rule of law” (<http://www.kyivpost.com/news/politics/detail/123246/>).

The sentence prevents Lutsenko from participating in the 2015 presidential elections where President Viktor Yanukovich will seek a second term. In October 2011, Yulia Tymoshenko received a seven year sentence and a three year ban from public office that removed her from the next two presidential and three parliamentary elections. Thus, with these two imprisonments the Ukrainian authorities have removed two of the main opposition threats to Yanukovich in the 2015 elections.

Lutsenko, the scourge of the nexus of Yanukovich, the Party of Regions and organised crime, was jailed by what Luke Harding, former Guardian correspondent in Moscow, describes as the *Mafia State* (London: Guardian books, 2011), which Lutsenko sought to dismantle as Interior Minister. *Eurasia Daily Monitor* (February 17) has written and US diplomatic cables have reported on the Mafia State ([http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=39024](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=39024)).

Marieluise Beck of Germany, a rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), said, “As a reformist interior minister who – among other things – dismantled the criminal hit squad within the ministry responsible for such

high-profile crimes as the murder of journalist Georgiy Gongadze, he angered some persons who are now back in power” (<http://www.kyivpost.com/news/politics/detail/123221/>).

Beck pointed out that, “The trial against him was unfair, as shown in detail by the observers of the Danish Helsinki Committee. Furthermore, the ‘crimes’ for which he was convicted could not possibly justify a term of imprisonment even if the prosecution had been able to prove all the allegations against him” (see Mikael Lyngbo, *Legal Monitoring in Ukraine I*. Preliminary Report on the trials against former Minister of Interior Yuriy Lutsenko and former First Minister of Justice Yevhen Korniychuk [Copenhagen: The Danish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, 2011] <http://helsinki-komiteen.dk/Helsinki-gammel/downloads/LM-Ukraine.pdf>).

Lutsenko was charged with illegally granting an apartment to his lawyer, increasing the pension of his driver and financial irregularities relating to celebrations marking National Police Day. The amount paid for the celebrations (\$35,000) was miniscule compared to the size of corruption in Ukraine and did not go into Lutsenko’s pocket but to the state-owned Palac Ukrayiny where the National Police Day held its celebration.

In comparison, on the same day as the sentencing of Lutsenko, *Ukrayinska Pravda* reported that table lamps in Yanukovych’s new office in his palatial Mezhyhirya are handmade and each cost \$10,000 (<http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2012/02/27/6959508/>). Last year, news reports revealed that fittings for a bathroom in the Mezhyhirya palace cost 300,000 Euros and a chandelier was purchased for \$45,000. In 2010, two companies working on the estate imported luxury goods worth \$20 million (<http://www.kyivpost.com/news/nation/detail/99514/>).

Obviously, these figures are far larger than the official salary of the President, who has been a state employee since 1997.

The Lutsenko, and earlier Tymoshenko case, are blatant cases of selective application of justice by the Yanukovych administration. Lutsenko’s sentence shows he has totally ignored Western criticism of the Tymoshenko trial and that his administration does not listen to the West. Incredibly, many Western policymakers and seasoned ex-Ambassadors believed otherwise until last summer.

It is time to acknowledge that it is impossible to reset relations with politicians such as Yanukovych who speak a different language, are a product of a completely alien political culture to European and American values, and who never fulfill promises made to European and American leaders.