



May 10, 2010—Volume 7, Issue 90

IN THIS ISSUE

- *Medvedev strikes conciliatory tone, condemning Stalin
- *Landmines continue to pose grave danger to “post-war” Chechnya
- *Yanukovych invites Russian soldiers to Ukrainian Victory Day parades

**Visit the Jamestown blog on Russia and Eurasia (<http://www.jamestown.org/blog>):

- *Lukashenka and Bakiyev: Friends in Need?*
 - *Pro-Russian Forces and a Religious ‘Militia’ in Georgia*
-

Shift to Soviet-Russian National Identity in Ukraine

The Viktor Yanukovych administration is undertaking a radical overhaul of Ukraine’s national identity that turns its back not only on the Yushchenko era, but also on two earlier presidents. All three presidents promoted Ukrainophile national identity that was based on the doyen of Ukrainian historiography, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, president of the 1918 Ukrainian independent state and murdered by the Soviet authorities in 1934. President Yanukovych and Minister of Education, Dimitry Tabachnyk, have outlined policies to re-write school textbooks, in some cases together with Russia (Ukrayinska Pravda, April 27). These would no longer be based on the Hrushevsky framework, while also permitting Soviet-Russian national identity to influence Ukraine’s education system.

The Yanukovych administration is unashamedly moving Ukraine to a neo-Sovietophile and Russophile view of Ukrainian history and national identity. This step will be even more divisive than that pursued by Yushchenko. The shift from a Ukrainian to a Soviet-Russian national identity is reflected in four ways.

Firstly, as Ukraine celebrates the 65th anniversary of World War II, billboards and posters throughout Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities reflect the Yanukovych shift in Ukraine’s national identity to one more acceptable to Moscow. Parades in four Ukrainian cities for the first time, included 1,000 Russian troops (Ukrayinska Pravda, April 8). Tabachnyk ordered that school textbooks no longer refer to “World War II” but to the Great Patriotic War. In his view, there were heroes from the Great Patriotic War and “collaborators,” within which he includes Ukrainian nationalists (Ukrayinska Pravda, April 12).

Secondly, Tabachnyk has returned to the Soviet era ideological views of Ukrainian nationalists as Nazi hirelings. Attacks on nationalists returned during the 2002 and 2004 elections as a way of portraying Our Ukraine and Viktor Yushchenko as “nationalists.” In the 2004 elections, fake “nationalists” were registered as technical candidates and SS-style street parades were organized in Kyiv, voicing support for Yushchenko. These views were then given widespread media coverage aimed at reducing support for him in Eastern Ukraine.

Today, Ukrainian television, which is under the control of oligarchs and since Yanukovych was elected has

returned to self censorship, is again exaggerating the influence and support of the nationalist Svoboda (Freedom) party as a way of mobilizing Russian-speakers to remain loyal to the Yanukovich administration. The moderate opposition is largely ignored on Ukrainian television; Yulia Tymoshenko has not been invited to hold interviews since the elections.

Thirdly, the rehabilitation of the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, whose ideology the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) placed on an equal par with Nazism in a resolution last year. A Stalin bust was unveiled in Zaporizhzhia on May 5 and further busts are planned in Odessa and other Russian-speaking cities. Billboards greeting Stalin were erected earlier in Luhansk and Donetsk.

As the PACE representative from Luxembourg asked President Yanukovich: “It seems that in Ukraine, a process of the heroization of Stalin, and increasingly, a return to the Soviet interpretation of the Second World War, is taking place. Could this trend be supported by your government too, and particularly by the Minister of Education? What are you doing, Mr. President, to stop this most disturbing process?” (<http://assembly.coe.int>).

Yanukovich’s response was to say that there should be a local referendum to determine whether the city’s inhabitants support a Stalin bust (UNIAN, April 26). He could not openly condemn the bust as the Communist Party (KPU), in whose grounds the bust was unveiled, is a member of the Stability and Reforms coalition. The 2006-2007 Anti-Crisis coalition also included the KPU many of whose voters have re-aligned with the Party of Regions.

Party of Regions deputies defended the Stalin bust by countering that there are statues of the “Nazi” nationalist leader, Stepan Bandera, in Western Ukraine. This is a false comparison as Western Ukrainians support Bandera monuments whilst Eastern Ukrainians do not support Stalin statues. An April opinion poll found that 57 percent of Ukrainians opposed Stalin monuments and only 10 percent supported this step. Those opposed ranged between 76 percent in Western and 57 percent in Eastern Ukraine (www.uceps.com.ua).

Fourthly, as in Russia, a rehabilitation of Stalin comes with a downplaying of Stalinist crimes. President Yanukovich said to PACE that the famine was a tragedy for all Soviet peoples, not only Ukrainians, denying that it was “genocide.” The new Yanukovich position is the same as the old Russian stance on the issue. It was, “like pouring oil on an already simmering fire in Ukraine’s polarized politics,” the former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, David Kramer, wrote in the Kyiv Post (April 28).

On the day of his inauguration the section on www.president.gov.ua established by Yushchenko on the 1933 famine was removed. The Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) Chairman, Valeriy Khoroshovsky, closed the agency’s archives department which had released documents on Soviet crimes against Ukrainians and the famine.

The Party of Regions and KPU did not vote for the November 2006 law on the famine which, together with a January 2010 Higher Appeals Court ruling, defines the famine as “genocide” against Ukrainians. Yushchenko condemned Yanukovich’s “cynicism” for infringing both at PACE (www.razom.org.ua, April 27). The Stability and Reforms coalition plan to overturn the famine law (Ukrayinska Pravda, April 29).

This four-step shift to a Soviet-Russian identity has ramifications for both Ukraine’s domestic and foreign policy. Domestically, it undermines Yanukovich’s claim that he will bring stability to Ukraine which was believed in Western countries that largely welcomed his election. As the April 27 riot in the Ukrainian parliament has shown, a radical shift in Ukraine’s national identity towards a Soviet-Russian framework will bring turmoil and conflict while deepening its regional polarization.

Moreover, Ukrainian foreign policy will be affected by the shift in national identity, as revealed by the Black Sea Fleet long-term base agreement until 2042-2047 and further pro-Russian policies. These have not only

closed Ukraine's path to NATO membership but also damaged EU membership aspirations. Perception is everything in international affairs and the Yanukovich administration is not perceived in Brussels as "European." Brussels and Washington may gradually realize that Yanukovich will not bring either stability or reforms, in the name of the pro-government parliamentary coalition.

--Taras Kuzio
