

# Assassination Phobia Spreads in Ukraine

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June 28, 2010 By: [Taras Kuzio](#)

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich

In an interview given last fall by the then-Party of Regions defector Taras Chornovil, the Ukrainian politician pointed to current Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's fear of assassination, saying, "Yanukovich liked to repeatedly talk about how there were attempts on his life" (Ukrayinska Pravda, November 16, 2009). On September 24, 2004 then-Prime Minister Yanukovich had an egg thrown at him in Ivano-Frankivsk, believing it to be an assassin's bullet (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fP0vWkqOQT8>). Chornovil continued, "I do not know how much of this is true, but he talked a lot about threats. For example, it seems there was one attempt in Donetsk, which is why near Yanukovich's house there stood an armored personnel carrier (APC) so that he could flee from his Donetsk home. If there was an attempt (on his life) the APC would be able to drive through a back fence and reach the main highway leading to Russia. From Donetsk it is not very far to the Russian border" (Ukrayinska Pravda, November 16, 2009). The president's phobia has led to the death of a taxi driver and two others being badly injured as his cortege sped through Kyiv when he traveled to and from Mizhirya, an illegally privatized former Soviet residence outside Kyiv. The accident was caused by an ambulance traveling at high speed with the motorcade tasked with taking care of Yanukovich if he were to have been wounded in an assassination attempt. Public fury at the closing of roads and traffic problems, as well as the death and injuries, are making Yanukovich unpopular in Kyiv. After leaving work at 3:00 pm and blocking traffic, one Kyiv resident shouted "How much further can you put down the people by closing the roads like this?" (Ukrayinska Pravda, June 15). Security Service (SBU) Chairman, Valeriy Khoroshkovsky, when asked about the threats to the president and the additional security measures, replied "Yes, there was a threat to the president's life. We have taken quite a lot of measures. We have not yet eliminated the threat. It was not a simple phone call" (Interfax-Ukraine, June 15). Yanukovich when asked at his "100 day" anniversary press

conference about the threats replied, "There are serious documented facts, serious. There are implications to which the UDO (Directorate on State Protection, the former 9th Directorate of the Soviet KGB) has to react" (Ukrayinska Pravda, June 4). Nevertheless, UDO commander, Ihor Kalinin, played down the additional security measures and accused journalists of sensationalism (www.gazeta.ua, June 7). Segodnya (June 17), citing anonymous sources in the SBU, revealed an alleged "terrorist plot" linked to an opposition leader. The informant claimed "this leader's friends include one Russian oligarch who has long-established ties to Caucasian fighters who could undertake an assassination in Kyiv," a possible reference to Yulia Tymoshenko and London émigré, Boris Berezovsky. Information about "preparations for an assassination" came from the Federal Security Service (FSB), a reflection of the closer intelligence cooperation signed with the SBU in Odessa on May 19 (EDM, May 24). This revealed two possible assassination methods: a suicide bomber in a vehicle seeking to hit the president's car, and a parked vehicle exploding as the presidential car passed by. Following the discovery of this information, a large UDO and SBU meeting discussed ways to counteract the threats. The motorcade's route was re-routed to roads where there are fewer buildings that could be used by snipers. Fake corteges, without Yanukovich, are also increasingly being used (Segodnya, June 11). Under Leonid Kuchma, the UDO (responsible for presidential protection) numbered around 40, and grew to 100 under Viktor Yushchenko. Today, it has reached 170 under Yanukovich (Ukrayinska Pravda, June 13). An additional step was taken to remove all parked cars on the route. UDO security and Interior Ministry (MVS) vehicles drive in front, behind and alongside. One vehicle provides permanent communications and blocks mobile phones in the vicinity of the cortege, while two further vehicles transport heavy and light weaponry (Segodnya, June 17). Four reasons have been advanced to justify the rise of this assassination phobia: 1. The former MVS Minister, Yuriy Lutsenko, echoing Chornovil, believes it is the result of Yanukovich's weak personality exploited by his entourage in order to control him (UNIAN, June 10). His entourage is keeping him in a state of "psychological stress," Crimean Communist leader, Leonid Grach, suggested (Ukrayinska Pravda, June 13). Tymoshenko bloc deputy, Andriy Senchenko, described the new

charged atmosphere as an artificially induced “schizophrenia” ([www.gazeta.ua](http://www.gazeta.ua), June 17). 2. Wherever Yanukovich visits in Ukraine he only sees extra security and Party of Regions supporters providing a comfort zone for him. Yanukovich was governor of Donetsk from 1997-2002, the only Ukrainian region dominated by one party that unites the local state, business and political elite. 3. The fear of opposition or nationalist violence against him in reaction to his counter-revolution in Ukrainian politics, particularly in the areas of national identity and single vector pro-Russian foreign policy. 4. The Putinization of the Ukrainian security forces (EDM, June 22). Volodymyr Yavorskyi, head of the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, claimed in an interview with Radio Svoboda (June 20) that the MVS is adopting Russian practices when dealing with the opposition. Meanwhile, he alleged that “what is now being undertaken by the SBU is that of an investigative organ; it is a de facto FSB.” The June 18 edition of *Ukrayinsky Tyzhden* featured a picture of SBU Chairman Khoroshkovsky, MVS Minister, Anatoliy Mogiliov, and Prime Minister, Nikolai Azarov, with the caption “The gathering of more than three is not permitted.” This was a reference to draft legislation that severely restricts public protests. Kyiv Mohyla Academy Professor, Olexiy Haran, pointed to the hyping up of threats as a way to limit the democratic freedom of the opposition ([www.gazeta.ua](http://www.gazeta.ua), June 11). On June 3 and 15, UDO officers attacked a *Ukrayinska Pravda* journalist and STB camera journalist, Serhiy Andrushko, in the latter case forcing him to the ground. The Stop Censorship! NGO demanded full investigations on both occasions and raised these incidents with Khoroshkovsky in their June 15 meeting (<http://www.telekritika.ua/media-suspilstvo/events/2010-06-17/53707>). Both Khoroshkovsky and Mogiliov have claimed they are not placing journalists under surveillance, which contradicts footage of such surveillance of TVi channel journalists ([www.pravda.com](http://www.pravda.com), June 15). Yanukovich’s assassination phobia has led to widespread discussion in the Ukrainian media about the causes of the phobia as well as possible explanations of the unusually high levels of security for the president. The close links emerging between Ukrainian and Russian security forces are leading to the re-introduction of (Soviet) Russian-style methods into the UDO, SBU and MVS, along with the return of Russian-style legislation limiting the

## rights of the opposition. **Assassination Phobia Spreads in Ukraine**

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