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## Ukrainian Democracy Will Be Built By Deeds, Not Pronouncements

by Taras Kuzio

The public relations and lobbying campaign conducted in recent months by Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich looks pretty impressive on paper. Some big PR guns have been hired in Brussels to complement the long-established U.S. political consultants who have worked with Yanukovich's team since 2005.

But this promotional effort comes unstuck with a message that the EU-Ukraine summit beginning today in Brussels should note.

Take a November 15 op-ed in the "EU Observer" by Adrian Severin, a Romanian member of the European Parliament and vice president of its Socialist political group. A month earlier, the Socialist group signed a cooperation agreement with the Party of Regions that Yanukovich led from 2003-10.

The Party of Regions has never described itself as a social democratic party and includes billionaire tycoons. Many of its voters once backed the Communist Party. In the 1990s, a similar tycoon-owned political party, the Social Democratic United Party of Ukraine (SDPUo), was turned away by the Socialist group and the Socialist International.

But times have changed. Since the 1990s, the EU has enlarged to Eastern Europe and this has changed the membership and views of the Socialist group. The SDPUo should take advantage of the new opportunity and reapply.

In his op-ed, Severin seeks to convince the EU and European governments that the Yanukovich administration is committed to improving Ukraine's democracy. He wants to hoodwink Europeans into believing that with time -- and the "fraternal assistance" of the European Parliament's Socialist group -- the current authorities in Ukraine will become true democrats worthy of integration into Europe.

This argument ignores three factors.

### Orwellian Newspeak

First, the current authorities should actually have little to learn, since the 2004 Orange

Revolution and the presidency of former President Viktor Yushchenko already established genuine democracy in Ukraine. The 2004 events were provoked by massive election fraud in favor of then Prime Minister Yanukovich, and the ensuing democratic breakthrough gave the country free elections and free media. Those two achievements are now very much under threat.

Speaking two months ago in New York to the U.S. Atlantic Council, Yanukovich claimed that he had always supported the values of the Orange Revolution. "I recognize and respect the democratic achievements of the Orange Revolution and believe that these achievements should be continued," he said. But his administration's antidemocratic actions prove that this was merely diplomatic Orwellian newspeak designed to dupe Western audiences.

Over the last seven years, Ukraine has held four elections judged to be free by the international community. Indeed, the Party of Regions won two of them, and Yanukovich came to power in the last election held in February of this year.

The October 31 local elections conducted by the Yanukovich administration were a step backward, as they were condemned as failing to meet democratic standards by the same international organizations. The United States has only criticized election fraud in Ukraine twice -- in 2004 and last month.

To recap -- Ukraine held two elections in 2010: the February presidential election under Yushchenko and the October local elections under Yanukovich. The first was deemed free by international observers, while the second was not. One wonders what practical advice the Socialist group plans to give.

### **Problem? What Problem?**

Second, specialists who treat addictive behavior universally agree that the first step is for the patient to admit he or she has an addiction. Yanukovich has never recognized that there was election fraud in November 2004, during a vote that was widely condemned abroad and overturned by Ukraine's Supreme Court. Likewise, Yanukovich has denied that there was any fraud last month, despite the findings of international monitors.

The Socialist group cannot improve Ukraine's democracy if the authorities refuse to recognize there is a problem. Yanukovich must act on his promise to prosecute those guilty of election fraud.

Third, the Socialist group in the European Parliament is indirectly cooperating with Vladimir Putin's United Russia party, the party of power in Russia's authoritarian regime. United Russia was also the only party that the Party of Regions has worked with -- until it signed the cooperation agreement with Europe's Socialists.

Just this month, United Russia and the Party of Regions laid out plans for medium- and long-term cooperation that will include working out joint positions on foreign policy issues vis-a-vis Brussels, Strasbourg, and Washington. "Our interparty relations have not just been born, as the first contacts between our parties were established as early as in 2003. I can confidently assert

that today these are developed relations filled with concrete content,” Kostantin Kosachyov, deputy head of United Russia’s secretariat, confidently asserted on November 17.

### **Progressively Worsened**

The Orange Revolution and the “chaos” that is often referred to in describing the Yushchenko presidency brought freedom to Ukraine, including free elections and free media. They transformed Ukraine into the only democracy in the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Deep Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and the EU that is under negotiation was made possible by Ukraine’s accession to the WTO in 2008, when Yulia Tymoshenko was prime minister.

On the other hand, the “stability” that was initially welcomed by the EU and European governments and that Severin and others now applaud has nothing to do with democratic progress. Ukraine’s media and election environment has progressively worsened in Yanukovich’s first year in office, leading to concern among many Europeans about the future of Ukraine’s democracy.

I, therefore, have no compunction in choosing Orange democratic “chaos” over Eurasian authoritarian stability. Europe’s Socialists should rethink their relationship with a party that has a close working relationship with Putin’s United Russia.

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