



Taras Kuzio

## Charm offensive will not play well abroad for these 'sovki'

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Taras Kuzio writes: no matter how much Viktor Yanukovich spends on PR and lobbying, he will be judged by his actions - and they're not good.

The Viktor Yanukovich administration is actively integrating domestic and foreign PR, as well as lobbying, a new development for Ukraine that should be welcomed – up to a point.

It is indeed ironic that the Orange Revolution forces of ex-President Viktor Yushchenko and ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko could never accomplish such a strategy because of infighting that undermined the unity of democratic forces. Yushchenko still believes his main mistake was working with Tymoshenko.

In the West, only the Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko (BYuT) sought to use PR and lobbying to advance her case in Washington, the United Kingdom and Brussels. Yushchenko's Our Ukraine was nowhere to be seen while the ex-president restricted himself to occasional op-eds in Western newspapers and the Kyiv Post. This though, was not a state strategy and cannot be compared to what is currently being undertaken by the Yanukovich administration.

The Oct. 31 local elections gave the Yanukovich administration the opportunity to crank up their PR-lobbying strategy. Prior to the elections, the Party of Regions managed to prevent the European Parliament from adopting a highly critical resolution by signing a cooperation agreement with the Socialist group in the European Parliament.

Following the elections, and the international opprobrium that Ukraine received, a six-point charm offensive was launched as damage control.

The first were three obviously coordinated op-eds in the Kyiv Post, downplaying election fraud by Western expert Adrian Karatnycky, Party of Regions parliamentarian Leonid Kozhara and BYuT defector Oleksandr Feldman, also a member of the Verkhovna Rada.

The second was presidential administration deputy head Hanna Herman's attempt to reach out to nongovernmental organizations in the third of her "letters in defense of democracy" in the influential weekly Zerkalo Nedeli newspaper. This was obviously an attempt to co-opt the OPORA election monitors, who have an excellent international reputation.

The third was the formation of a presidential commission on 'The Strengthening of Democracy and Affirmation of the Rule of Law' headed by Serhiy Holovatiy, who defected from Our Ukraine in 2007 and entered parliament that year in the Party of Regions. Only two months after coming to power, Yanukovich abolished a presidential body with a similar name, the National Commission for the Strengthening of Democracy and Affirmation of the Rule of Law. The commission is blatantly cynical response to international criticism of the local elections.

The fourth was the public offer made by the Foreign Minister Kostyantyn Hryshchenko to Hryhoriy Nemyria, BYuT's foreign policy spokesman, to be an "unpaid adviser."

The fifth was to invite Western experts and the Vienna Commission to join a working group that would assist the

authorities in improving Ukraine's election legislation.

The sixth, and smoothest, was Security Service of Ukraine head Valery Khoroshkovsky's charm offensive in Brussels, where he invited 15 members of the European Parliament – not known for meager expense accounts – to the city's most expensive restaurant, Maison du Cygne.

Khoroshkovsky's PR work is obviously political. The fact that he does not understand how the West perceives his conflicts of interests as SBU head, with his ownership of Inter TV channel and membership of the Higher Council of Justice that hires and fires judges, dents his ability to charm his guests.

The value of such a coordinated charm offensive is undermined by three factors which harm Ukraine's ability to be taken seriously in its declared intentions of seeking European integration.

First, deception in the promise to hold free elections, in the promise to criminally indict election fraudsters, and the SBU's outright lies when it first denies it is undertaking political surveillance of academics, journalists and political activists and then a month or so later admits to taking these steps. Such Soviet-style deception fools nobody, either in Ukraine or abroad.

Yanukovych has monopolized power to a greater extent than ex-President Leonid Kuchma, who ruled from 1994-2005, but who also faced a parliament where half of the deputies were in opposition. And yet a "stable" current presidential regime finds it impossible to hold a free election while the "chaotic," as the authorities always like to describe the former Orange Revolution regime, proved able to organize three free elections, including one that permitted Yanukovych to come to power.

Second, the authorities have focused on imperfections in the election law that they blame for problems in the local elections while at the same time falling back on Soviet-style conspiracy theories that seek to belittle the significance of Western criticism. Herman believes critical Western news stories are "jeanzy"; that is, paid for articles as in Ukraine.

Two free pieces of advice. If you want to be taken seriously in the West, do not resort to Homo Sovieticus (Sovok - literally dustpan, but slang for Soviet person; plural - sovki) rationale. And, do not therefore expect us to seriously believe your attempts in 2004 and 2010 to sidestep election fraud by saying such accusations are a "Western conspiracy."

The administration's "multi-vectorism" amounts to rolling back the democratic gains made under Yushchenko while at the same time still believing that Ukraine can integrate into, and one day join, the European Union.

This will never happen and Ukraine's leaders have to be politically mature enough to make a choice between either moving towards a Putinist authoritarian Russia, with its non-European political system, or signing a free trade agreement with the European Union.

At the upcoming EU-Ukraine summit in Brussels on Nov. 22, EU leaders should impress upon Ukrainian leaders that there is a close connection between domestic and foreign policies. EU leaders should also impress on Ukraine's oligarchs, who sponsored Yanukovych's election campaign, that if they want free trade they should use their influence and power on the administration before the door of European integration is closed.

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