



Taras Kuzio

Lies, damned lies and Yanukovich's statistics

Feb 7 at 13:11 | Taras Kuzio

In an interview with the Washington Post (Jan. 28, "[After The Revolution](#)") at Davos, President Viktor Yanukovich was attempting to put a positive spin on how his administration is "transforming" Ukraine. Once again the hapless head of state got himself in an awful muddle.

Knowing that nearly every recent independent international assessment of his stewardship of the country has been negative, Yanukovich sought solace in the findings of the 2010 United Nations Human Development Index.

"Yet another important fact, the United Nations has four categories for countries: the first group is the most developed nations, the second group is for countries with a medium level of development, the third group is the countries with prospects, and the fourth group is countries with a low level of development and all sorts of deficiencies.

"In 2004, Ukraine ranked 70th, and it was in group three. In the past five years, the country came down to the 85th position. That is how we were ranked in 2009.

"During the last year Ukraine climbed 16 positions up, so now we are ranked 69th. That was the highest leap in the world in the course of one year. Today Ukraine finds itself in group two. That's an international evaluation."

Well, it sounds plausible enough, but does it stand up to scrutiny?

Firstly, the data published for 2010 are estimates (Ukraine was ranked in 69th position), based upon historical data available on May 15. But this is historical data. For example, data published in 2009 is for the period up to 2007, whereas data published in 2008 covered the period up to 2006.

Similarly, data published in 2007 were for values in 2005 and data published in 2006 for values in 2004. Seeing that data provided in May 2010 were historical and Yanukovich did not come into office until Feb. 25, 2010, the 2010 findings hardly covered his period in office.

Is he then taking credit for other people's work?

Predictably, the figures for when Yanukovich was prime minister (2006-2007) are depressing. Data covering his period in office ranks Ukraine 85th place in 2007 (published in 2009) and 82nd place in 2006 (published in 2008).

The president also claims that Ukraine achieved "the highest leap in the world in the course of one year." That's simply not true. Many other countries performed better such as Jamaica and Algeria (up 20 places) and Azerbaijan (up 19 places).

Yanukovich also claims that in 2004 Ukraine was ranked 70th. Again, he appears to be in a muddle as 2004 ranking put Ukraine in 77th position.

Is the United Nations Human Development Index a good litmus test for how a nation is developing? It has attracted a fair amount of flak. It measures factors such as gross national income per capita, life expectancy at

birth and expected years of schooling but ignores a raft of human rights indicators and ecological considerations. Also, there have been formula changes by the United Nations Development Program which have resulted in accusations of misclassifications.

Of course, any statistical analysis is open to interpretation and therefore criticism. For example, it is odd how Georgia – widely credited as the top reformer in the former Soviet bloc – is in 74th place in the Human Development Index. Georgia has successfully tackled corruption and introduced sweeping economic, business and social reforms.

That Yanukovych might become muddled with his figures is not surprising. He is after all the same person who in the Washington Post interview responded to the journalist's question "One journalist disappeared, didn't he?" with the incredulous and cold reply "Many journalists disappear all over the world."

Enough said.

Taras Kuzio is the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation visiting fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations in the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University's campus in Washington, D.C.