



Taras Kuzio

## **Time for a reality check**

May 11 2011 | Taras Kuzio

With 11 opinion pieces over 15 months, by far the most prolific Western author of eulogies for President Viktor Yanukovich has been [Adrian Karatnycky](#). Let us take a look at the claims that Yanukovich is a different man and assertions about his policies by running them through a reality check.

All of Karatnycky's seven main claims have been wrong.

First, all of Karatnycky's seven main claims have been wrong.

These have included that Sergei Tigipko would become prime minister, that a government of well-educated and professional reformers would be formed and that the Yanukovich administration consists of reformers and retrogrades. Where are the reformers?

Other predictions have included that he has heard "whispers" Education Minister Dmytro Tabachnyk, unpopular for his Russophile attitudes, is about to be fired.

The administration's policies on the 1932-33 Holodomor are imported directly from Moscow. The Yanukovich policy dishonors the memories of millions of murdered Ukrainians. The administration ignores the 1939-41 Soviet-Nazi Pact by reverting to calling World War II the Soviet-favored Great Patriotic War. It permits Communists to erect billboards, carry portraits and build monuments to Josef Stalin.

Another wrong claim has been that the administration is committed to forging a national consensus. Ukraine is the most divided today than at any time in its 20-year history, divisions

deepened by Tabachnyk and the flying of the Soviet flag in World War II victory celebrations this month.

To prove its commitment to overcoming national disunity, the administration would have to take two steps. First, halt its suspected financing of the nationalist Svoboda Party, which was involved in a shootout on Victory Day in Lviv. Through repressing the Bloc of ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and thereby reducing its vote, Svoboda was permitted to win control over Galicia in the October 2010 local elections. Secondly, the administration should no longer draw on divisive issues to mobilize its core of ex-communist voters during elections.

It is easy to rebut claims that Yanukovich “has undergone a transformation,” that he is “comfortable with the give-and-take of pluralistic politics” and is supportive of democracy. The Yanukovich administration, 15 months into power, has proven beyond any doubt that these claims have no substance.

The administration has set a trap for itself.

If the Yanukovich administration holds free elections in 2012 and 2015, the Party of Regions and Yanukovich will lose them and risk opening themselves to criminal charges. Their actions show they understand that Tymoshenko is not ex-President Viktor Yushchenko, whose 2004 election promise of “Bandits To Jail!” was never acted upon.

On the other hand, if they falsify both elections or thwart Tymoshenko, Ukraine will be seen as a new Belarus and it will be the end of Ukraine’s European integration. The use of mass election fraud is likely to produce a popular rebellion greater in scope than the 2004 Orange Revolution that led to Yushchenko’s election over Yanukovich.

Yanukovich and the Party of Regions have always sought political and economic monopolization.

Other claims by Karatnycky include the adoption of transparent and “contract-enforcing” business practices and recognition that Ukraine’s future prosperity is linked to reducing corruption. None of these changes is taking place. Cronyism and insider privatization have continued (Ukrtelecom), elite greed is rapacious and insatiable, corporate raiding by Donetsk thugs is growing and Transparency International and other bodies see corruption spiraling.

Unfounded assertions by Karatnycky are too numerous to mention.

Unfounded assertions by Karatnycky are too numerous to mention but some of them follow.

The most promising aspect of the administration is allegedly its approach to the economy, Karatnycky believes. In contrast, U.S.-Ukraine Business Council president Morgan Williams and Institute for International Economics senior fellow Anders Aslund see nothing positive on the

economic front. Williams believes Ukraine is moving in the wrong direction in agriculture, tax, privatization and business.

Grain quotas, which Williams calls the “Great Grain Robbery” and the Chamber of Commerce in Ukraine calls a regression from market principles, were introduced by the 2006-7 government of Prime Minister Yanukovich and since his 2010 election. A new opaque state structure Khlib Investbud has received the lion’s share of quotas. Khlib Invstbud is 51 percent controlled by the private Kolossar firm which has close ties to Agricultural Minister Mykola Prisyazhnyuk, from Yanukovich’s home town of Yenakieve, and manages to drive a \$260,000 Maserati on a \$2,000 monthly salary. Another from Yenakieve, parliamentarian Yuriy Ivanyushchenko, is also reportedly behind Khlib Investbud.

Importantly, difficult economic and social reforms require three factors that are lacking under Yanukovich: public support for painful reforms, cross-elite cooperation and consensus as well as a shared vision for the country’s future. As Vadym Karasiiov writes in the newspaper Zerkalo Nedeli, the administration does not know what kind of capitalism it is building.

Karatnycky disagrees: “Under Yanukovich serious efforts at privatization have once again begun.” Could he show us where? As to the corrupt privatization of Ukrtelecom, he retorts that “this is better than no privatization at all.”

Another assertion is that the 2010 local election results gave a fairly accurate reflection of how Ukrainians voted. This downplays international criticism that they did not meet democratic standards because they excluded Tymoshenko’s Fatherland Party in Kyiv and Lviv, included widespread fraud in the Kharkiv and Odesa mayoral elections and deliberately thwarted the opposition.

Countering allegations of reduced media freedom is commonplace in Karatnycky’s defense.

Countering allegations of reduced media freedom is commonplace in Karatnycky’s defense.

He writes that television “networks are free of partisan bias,” a claim disputed by media monitoring organizations and independent journalists. The May report of the Institute of Mass Information and Kyiv Independent Media Trade Union of Journalists awarded Yanukovich and Prime Minister Mykola Azarov with the title “Enemy Number One and Two” of the Ukrainian media. Freedom House also downgraded Ukraine’s media situation in 2010 from “free” to “partly free.”

Meanwhile, Karatnycky also points out that talk shows invite opposition politicians, a claim that ignores the fact that television news is totally slanted. Would it be acceptable to Karatnycky if the Republican Party could only appear on CNN’s Larry King live but was ignored by CNN news, which gave 100 percent slanted positive coverage to the Obama administration?

His next assertion that claims about censorship are exaggerated ignores post-Soviet reality in a way that is duplicitous. There were no censorship laws under President Leonid Kuchma, but nevertheless “temnyky” (instructions sent by the Presidential Administration to TV channels) existed. Karatnycky knows perfectly well that informal ways of doing politics (such as

“temnyky” and telephone orders) are central aspects of how post-Soviet elites operate.

Another assertion difficult to accept is Karatnycky’s dismissing of political repression. Investigations of tax code protesters, we are told, “do not constitute wide-ranging reprisals against protest leaders.” Nine anti-tax code protesters are in jail on the ludicrous charge of damaging Independence Square tiles.

Together with nationalists imprisoned for beheading the Josef Stalin monument and members of the Tymoshenko government in jail, Ukraine today has nearly as many political prisoners as Belarus. The fact that those in Ukraine are charged not with political offenses, but hooliganism, terrorism, corruption and other alleged crimes, is merely a throwback to the Soviet era when political charges were also camouflaged.

Where is the thaw, Karatnycky?

Furthermore, selective justice against opposition leaders such as Tymoshenko is either downplayed or justified by Karatnycky. Last year’s international audit of the 2007-10 Tymoshenko government, Karatnycky believes, uncovered evidence of fraud.

One would have to live in a world resembling the Lord of the Rings to believe that only one in 14 Ukrainian governments has been corrupt, while the remaining 13, six parliaments and four presidents are squeaky clean.

Karatnycky is of the opinion that Ukrainian legislation is being brought into conformity with European legislation. At the same time, the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission condemned Ukraine’s summer 2010 judicial reforms and 2010 annulling of the 2004 constitutional reforms.

Yanukovich, we are told by Mr. Karatnycky, cannot hijack institutions like Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has in Russia. Yet, Ukraine’s parliament is a rubber stamp institution for the first time in the nation’s 20 years. The Constitutional Court was pressured to change parliamentary regulations to permit individuals to join factions, opening the way to massive political corruption. Parliament has been marginalized by the return to the 1996 presidential constitution.

“Piano voting” (i.e. voting on behalf of others) has turned the Ukrainian parliament into a laughing stock. Violence against the opposition, as seen on Dec. 16 of last year, has gone unpunished.

Four important votes were adopted by “piano voting” – the Kharkiv accords (extension of the Russian Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol to 2042), fundamentals of domestic and foreign policy, postponement of elections to 2012 and last month’s new bill on corruption (277 “voted” for it when only 158 deputies were registered).

None of these developments has been criticized by Karatnycky.

Karatnycky writes about Yanukovich’s first year in office as a “measurable though modest decline in democracy.” Nevertheless, he states confidently: “Ukraine is on the path to stable

democracy.” Such claims are remarkably similar to Yanukovich, who said this month that “Ukraine is confidently moving forward on the path of creating a democratic society and developing an independent mass media.”

As to foreign policy, Karatnycky is convinced that claims the administration is pro-Russian are exaggerated because they are “normal political leaders seeking to build a European state.” And yet their domestic policies give a different picture.

Russian influence has never been greater in Ukraine’s presidency.

Russian influence has never been greater in Ukraine’s presidency, as seen in the successful lobbying by Moscow of seven positions in the Yanukovich administration:

1. Dmytro Tabachnyk as minister of education, lobbied by Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kyrill;
2. Valeriy Khoroshkovsky as Security Services of Ukraine chairman, lobbied by business interests in Russia with strong ties to the Federal Security Service, Russia’s KGB successor;
3. Kostyantyn Gryshchenko as foreign minister, lobbied by Moscow;
4. Mykhailo Yezhel as minister of defense; his daughter is married to an admiral in the Russian Pacific Fleet;
5. Igor Shuvalov as Russian political technologist; he heads media policy in the Presidential Administration and implemented temnyky in 2002-2004;
6. Viacheslav Zanevskiy, a Russian citizen, as head of Yanukovich’s bodyguards; and
7. Dmitriy Salamatyn, a Russian citizen as head of state-owned Ukrspetsexport.

In addition, the administration’s commitment to fulfilling European Union criteria is miserable. A report by five Ukrainian think tanks reported that only 8 of 70 priorities had been fulfilled.

It is difficult to understand how Karatnycky evolved from being president of Freedom House and head of the Orange Circle to becoming the main Western defender of the authoritarian Yanukovich administration.

Suffice to say, each prediction, claim and affirmation he has made over 11 articles in the last 15 months have been shown to be incorrect and tendentious.

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