



ATLANTIC COUNCIL

Published on *Atlantic Council* (<http://www.acus.org>)

Two Viktors and Two “Signals”

By *Taras Kuzio*

Created 09/20/2011 - 13:03



[1]

A Kyiv court was set to sentence opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko to a lengthy prison sentence last week but unexpectedly the trial was postponed to September 27 after the US and EU sent strong warnings

to the Viktor Yanukovich administration to halt these politically motivated trials. Not coincidentally the postponement is until only two days before the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw where the EU would have been embarrassed if Tymoshenko had by then received a lengthy prison sentence.

If the court only pardons her, the issue will not be resolved and negotiations will not be completed. The EU has demanded that Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka free and rehabilitate (i.e. give them no criminal record) political prisoners and the EU has the same demand in Ukraine.

Ukraine's negotiations for a Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) are dependent on Tymoshenko and other opposition leaders walking away from the court with no sentence and no criminal record so that ex-political prisoners (the same is true in both Ukraine and Belarus) can participate in future elections. If opposition leaders are not allowed to participate in Belarus and Ukraine, the EU has stated that it will not recognize these elections.

For the second time in five years Kyiv's domestic policies are again undermining Euro-Atlantic integration when Ukraine has received a "signal" of an open door from NATO or the EU.

At numerous international conferences in the last two decades I have heard Ukrainian politicians and officials plead "Give us a signal" to NATO and the EU and we will then do reforms. I have never understood why a country needs a "signal" to do reforms that are for the good of the country.

All post-communist countries began their reforms before they received "signals" from the EU. Poland, for example, launched its reforms in 1989-1990 and joined the EU in 2004 while Croatia began its reforms in 2000 and will join next year. Georgia has never received any "signals" from the EU and since the 2003 Rose Revolution has implemented countless reforms and largely eliminated corruption.

But, what Ukrainian politicians and officials ignore is that Ukraine has received two "signals" in the last five years from NATO and the EU – and on both occasions has failed to grasp these opportunities.

In 2006, Ukraine received a "signal" from the Bush administration and NATO that it could join a Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the Riga summit that year. This could have led to NATO membership by 2010, the last year of Yushchenko's first term in office. As in Eastern Europe, NATO membership would have put Ukraine on the path to EU membership.

In 2009-2011, Ukraine received a "signal" from the EU that it could receive a DCFTA as part of the Association Agreement. The DCFTA is not the equivalent of EU membership (which is not on offer to Ukraine) but it would integrate Ukraine into the EU.

Both Viktors (Yushchenko and Yanukovich) did not prioritize these two "signals." The question is why and what does show for policy makers?

Ukraine's elites on both sides of the country's major political fence do not prioritize national interests. In 2006 and 2010-2011 the most important objectives of both Viktors was personal conflict, revenge, and personal enrichment (that is, corruption especially in the energy sector).

In 2006, Yushchenko prioritized not blocking Tymoshenko returning to head the government over an important state visit by President Bush in June and entry into a NATO MAP in November. A rather easy requirement that Yushchenko had to accomplish after the March 2006 elections was to establish an "orange" government and coalition.

In 2010-2011, Yanukovich prioritized personal revenge against Tymoshenko, who was arrested on politically motivated charges and has been in prison since August 5, over the EU's DCFTA. Tymoshenko's 2007-2010 government removed the opaque RosUkrEnergo gas intermediary

from the 2009 gas contract. RUE was a major cash cow for the ‘gas lobby’ that received important positions in Yanukovych’s presidential administration and government.

The EU has warned Yanukovych that Tymoshenko's imprisonment will derail the DCFTA, particularly as after negotiations are completed it has then to be ratified by the European Parliament and all 27 member states. The European Peoples Party (EPP), which has been the most vocal critic of democratic regression in Ukraine and Tymoshenko's arrest (her Fatherland party is an associate member of the EPP) has elected leaders in 17 of the EU’s 27 member states.

A second factor is that Ukraine’s elites operate within a short term framework while major foreign policy decisions such as the NATO MAP or EU’s DCFTA are medium to long term state projects. Therefore, domestic policies are never integrated with declared foreign policy objectives.

As a consequence, the West has become exasperated by the empty foreign policy declarations of elites for “returning to Europe” which are never matched by domestic reforms and a real (not virtual) battle against corruption. This, in turn, has led to Ukraine fatigue in the West under both Viktors.

Under Yushchenko, the West became totally exasperated by the inability of “orange” elites to work together and in 2008-2009, the last two years of Yushchenko’s term in office, by constant quarrelling between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko and unstable “orange” governments and coalitions.

Under Yanukovych the West has become exasperated by the flawed attempt at uniting “Putinism” with European integration.

In Eastern Europe countries acted as “super-Europeans” on the way to EU membership, fulfilling every demand made by Brussels, and then only relaxed their reforms after they joined the EU. The Yanukovych administration apparently believes it should approach this issues in the opposite manner by showing that they are poor Europeans on the path to the DCFTA while consoling Brussels with the words “Don’t worry we will become “super-Europeans” once we are inside.

As every policy maker in international affairs knows, the greatest leverage any international organization has upon a country’s reforms is when that country remains outside that body. That is why the EU laments the fact they let in Bulgaria and Romania too early. Leverage is far less after country’s are inside international organization; neither the EU, NATO, or the Council of Europe has a mechanism to expel members if they become “bad Europeans.”

Therefore, the problem for Ukraine is not the need for a “signal” from the West to launch reforms but the quality of elites on both sides of the major political divide that Ukrainian voters elect. After two decades as an independent state, Ukrainian voters have yet to elect leaders who are genuinely committed to Euro-Atlantic integration. Both Viktors received “signals” and failed to use them for the good of their countries.

Taras Kuzio is an Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation Visiting Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, School of Advanced International Studies, John Hopkins University, in Washington D.C. He edits Ukraine Analyst. Photo credit: [ITAR-TASS](#) [2].

Related Content:

[Letter From a Kiev Jail](#) [3]

[Four lawmakers hospitalized after fight in Ukrainian Parliament](#) [4]

[Yanukovich Kills Ukraine's Bid to Join NATO](#) [5]

Trackback URL for this post:

<http://www.acus.org/trackback/48638>

- [EU](#)
- [Ukraine](#)
- [Viktor Yanukovich](#)
- [Viktor Yushchenko](#)
- [Yulia Tymoshenko](#)

Source URL: http://www.acus.org/new_atlanticist/two-viktors-and-two-signals

Links:

- [1] <http://www.acus.org/content/viktors-yanukovich-and-yushchenko>
- [2] <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1071397.html>
- [3] <http://www.acus.org/natosource/letter-kyiv-jail>
- [4] <http://www.acus.org/natosource/four-lawmakers-hospitalized-after-fight-ukrainian-parliament>
- [5] <http://www.acus.org/natosource/yanukovich-kills-ukraines-bid-join-nato>