



Association Agreement Won't Help Ukraine on its Path to EU Integration

By *Taras Kuzio*

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[Adrian Karatnycky](#) [2] and [Alexander J. Motyl](#) [3] both believe that the EU should go ahead and move forward with the Association Agreement. They believe it would be imprudent to isolate Ukraine and to push it into the Russian-dominated CIS Customs Union. They also believe the Viktor Yanukovych administration would be forced to play by the rules inside the EU Association Agreement.

They are wrong.

Firstly, this month the EU may only go ahead and *initialize* the Association Agreement. Doubts about whether a summit would take place were caused by Yanukovych himself when there were leaks he would be in Moscow and miss the December 19 summit.

If the summit went ahead and the Association Agreement was initialled it would not move Ukraine's EU integration far as the next two stages (signing by the European Council in 2012 and ratification by the European Parliament and 27 EU members) are unlikely to take place. Next month Denmark becomes President of the European Council and will make human

rights a priority. The Danish Helsinki Committee has produced [three damning reports](#) [4] on political repression in Ukraine.

As for ratification, this was always an impossible feat because the European Peoples Party, to which Tymoshenko's Batkivshchina party belongs, has the largest political group and has allies on the right, left and center who also take a critical stand on democratic repression in Ukraine. The EPP congress in Marseilles on December 7 [called on the EU to initial the Association Agreement](#) [5] with Ukraine but to make the signing and ratification dependent on progress on human rights.

Secondly, the Association Agreement is not a "carrot" in the sense of a membership offer. As the December 1 European Parliament resolution points out, "Ukraine is committing itself to implement a large portion of the *acquis communautaire*." But, at the same time, Ukraine is not being offered membership.

This is the opposite of membership offered to Central Europe as the "carrot" for fulfilling the *acquis communautaire*. Former Soviet countries, such as Ukraine, suffered far worse communist legacies than Central Europe.

Thirdly, Karatnycky and Motyl's arguments fly in the face of policy recommendations that require many reforms to be undertaken *before* joining. Many EU members believe Bulgaria and Romania were let into the EU too early in 2007. The same could be said about letting Spain, Italy and Greece into the Euro.

There is an additional question of lack of trust. Andrew Wilson, a senior policy fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations, [said](#) [6], "One of the reasons the EU has reacted so harshly is they feel they've been hoodwinked twice by Yanukovych." In fact, the "EU is entirely right to have taken the tough line with Ukraine. And in many ways they can and should be even tougher. Yanukovych's biggest problem in dealing with the EU is his belief that the rest of the world is as cynical as he is."

President Yanukovych made countless promises to many EU and European leaders since Yulia Tymoshenko's August arrest which have *all* been broken. It was Yanukovych – not the EU – who proposed a way out by de-criminalising the (1962 Soviet) article in the criminal code used to sentence Tymoshenko in October. In November when the issue was put to a vote the Party of Regions voted it down.

It should be noted that Karatnycky and Motyl approach Ukrainian politics from different perspectives. Karatnycky has downplayed democratic repression in thirteen opinion articles since Yanukovych's election in February 2010 (see my "[Time for a Reality Check](#) [7]"). Meanwhile, Motyl is the Yanukovych regime's biggest Western critic.

Since Yanukovych's election there have been countless resolutions by international organisations, Western governments and international NGO's that have spoken with one voice about political repression, fraudulent elections, media censorship, and intimidation by the security forces in Ukraine.

Are they all really all wrong?

Karatnycky assures his readers that Yanukovich “is hardly building an authoritarian state.” But, how else do we classify a state that puts in jail its opposition leaders? Ukraine is far more down the authoritarian path today than it was under Leonid Kuchma.

Karatnycky also points to “extensive prosecution of current government officials on corruption charges.” And yet, corruption is growing, not decreasing, in Ukraine since Yanukovich came to power.

The country [dropped 18 places this year](#) [8] in Transparency International’s annual rankings, now standing below Russia and even Azerbaijan and in 152nd place alongside Congo, the Central African Republic and Tajikistan. Transparency International’s Ukraine office warned: “Ukraine in the year 2011 is on the way to corruption abyss.”

In contrast, Motyl raises an important point, “Last time I looked, it was Ukraine that wanted to join the European Union, and not—repeat not—the European Union that wanted to join Ukraine. If you want to join a club, then you have to play by the club’s rules.” Ukrainian leaders were warned a decade ago by Javier Solana to [play by the rules, not with the rules](#) [9], but they have still not come to understand this important point.

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