

END NOTE

UKRAINIAN PARLIAMENT AND PUBLIC FAVOR NATO ACCESSION EFFORTS AS  
PRESIDENT WAVERS

By Taras Kuzio

In the same year that NATO is expected to offer invitations to five-seven countries to join the defense alliance at its summit in Prague this November, Ukraine's foreign policy is hostage to President Leonid Kuchma's isolation in the West and his lack of clear policies and vision. Ukraine is not a member of the group of Baltic, and Central and Southeastern European countries that are openly seeking NATO membership.

Under Foreign Ministers Hennadiy Udovenko and Borys Tarasyuk from 1994-2000, Ukraine's foreign policy was unambiguously in favor of integration into trans-Atlantic and European structures (i.e., NATO and the European Union). Udovenko and Tarasyuk are, not surprisingly, members of former Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko's Our Ukraine bloc, the only political force in the Ukrainian parliament that supports Ukraine applying now for membership of NATO. Other pro-presidential or oligarchic forces do not oppose NATO membership per se, but see it as a future possibility. Only the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) opposes NATO membership outright.

Since October 2000, Foreign Minister Anatoliy Zlenko has dropped any reference to integration into "trans-Atlantic" structures. According to him, Ukraine's goal is only to become an Associate Member of the European Union, a task far harder than joining NATO. However, to join NATO would be easier for Ukraine's executive and oligarchs, as NATO membership does not require the degree of democratization as the EU.

Ukraine's foreign policy increasingly lacks any clear vision, and its continual vacillation between East and West means it is not taken seriously at a time of likely NATO and EU expansion to the East. According to the respected weekly "Zerkalo nedeli/Dzerkalo tyzhniya," an unambiguous statement by Ukraine this year in support of membership of NATO would be therefore welcomed in Western Europe and the United States as a "bold move." If, as it seems likely, the executive blocks such a move, both Brussels and Washington will continue to be "skeptical about Ukrainian initiatives, as Kyiv cannot seem to make up its mind," the paper concluded.

Ukraine's foreign policy contradicts its stated goal of integration with Europe in four areas.

First, since the "Kuchmagate" scandal in the winter of 2000, the executive and its oligarchic allies have periodically launched anti-American and anti-Western campaigns. These have subsided since the parliamentary election campaign ended, but could be unleashed

again at any time. One wonders how anti-American campaigns can be reconciled with the United States being a "strategic partner" of Ukraine? The Ukrainian elites have yet to understand that following 11 September 2001, Ukraine is no longer a central strategic element of U.S. policy in Europe.

Second, at a trilateral meeting of the Russian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian presidents in Odesa in March, President Kuchma suggested that Ukraine might consider joining the Russian-led alternative to the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Community (EES). This has since been corrected by the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, which ruled in favor of the European Union, not the EES, much to the chagrin of Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Viktor Chernomyrdin who is still under the mistaken impression that one should assume that President Kuchma always means and acts upon what he says. Kuchma has now decided that Ukraine will join the EES as an Associate Member.

Third, since 1999-2000 Ukraine's centrist oligarchs and executive have increasingly adopted the slogan "To Europe with Russia." Volodymyr Lytvyn, head of the presidential administration and the For a United Ukraine election bloc, said in February that, "For a united Ukraine in a united Europe, including Russia, is not only our electoral slogan -- this is our deep conviction." The only problem is that since 11 September, Russia is no longer waiting for Ukraine to catch up as it rushes ahead to Europe and NATO.

Fourth, Ukraine is not a signatory of the CIS Collective Security Treaty, although it did join the CIS Antiterrorism Center and is an Associate Member of the CIS Air-Defense Agreement. In May, Ukraine attended CIS Collective Security Treaty military exercises only as an observer. Nevertheless, Ukrainian security forces did actually take part in the "South-Antiterror 2002" exercises of the CIS Collective Rapid-Reaction Forces under the aegis of the CIS Antiterrorism Center, which is based in Moscow and headed by Lieutenant General Boris Mylnikov. The blurring of the exercises conducted by the members of the Collective Security Treaty and the Antiterrorism Center is a useful ploy by Russia to involve those states which are not signatories of the Collective Security Treaty, such as Ukraine, in military exercises within the CIS under its control. British expert James Sherr noted that the Security Service and Internal Affairs Ministry (MVS), two institutions that were implicated in a variety of malpractices in the "Kuchmagate" scandal, are not oriented toward the West (unlike the Defense Ministry). Former MVS head Yuriy Kravchenko, who was sacked during "Kuchmagate," is the leading candidate to become the new head of the presidential administration.

At a NATO conference this month in Warsaw, former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Tarasyuk called upon Ukraine to apply for NATO membership at this year's summit. This week, former President Leonid Kravchuk, a member of the oligarchic Social Democratic Party of Ukraine-united, also argued in favor of Ukraine applying. Instead, it will probably be content to merely upgrade its 1997 Charter with NATO so that relations "will become even closer," Zlenko said. This disinterest in membership contradicts favorable international trends since 11 September that have reduced opposition to NATO expansion. National Security and Defense Council Secretary Yevhen Marchuk warned

in a recent interview in "Den" that after 11 September many West European and North American countries have revised their security policy strategies. "It is precisely for this reason that the 'Euro-Atlantic integration' formula has reappeared: the term has long existed in Ukraine, but Kyiv distanced itself from it then and has now returned to it again. So Ukraine has had to invigorate cooperation with NATO," Marchuk warned.

Support for NATO membership and ending Ukraine's self-declared, and internationally recognized, "non-bloc" status is higher in the current parliament than in any previous legislature. Since 11 September, the number of Ukrainians who see NATO as an aggressive alliance has declined and more people see it positively than negatively. There has also been a convergence in attitudes to NATO between eastern and western Ukraine. In a February poll the Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies found that 51 percent of Ukrainians support membership now or in the future while 30 percent oppose it. More Ukrainians support joining NATO than signing on to the Collective Security Treaty, which only the KPU in parliament and 15 percent of Ukrainians support.

The international and domestic climate in the Ukrainian parliament, National Security and Defense Council, and the public at large are favorably inclined to Ukraine applying for NATO membership this year. Why then will Ukraine not apply? Because the executive is opposed to such a move, as Kuchma believes that he would lose his only remaining international ally, Russian President Vladimir Putin. In addition, Ukraine's foreign policy is reactive and not proactive in defense of its national interests. During Kuchma's visit to Poland this April, he was asked if Ukraine would apply to join NATO this year. His answer was typical of his unwillingness to take the initiative: "Invite us in and we'll apply." Kuchma is apparently unaware that it usually works the other way around.

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