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YUSHCHENKO VISIT TO U.S. HERALDS RETURN TO "GOLDEN ERA"

-Taras Kuzio

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko's official visit to the United States on April 4-6 is set to radically transform U.S.-Ukrainian relations and return them to the "golden era" under President Bill Clinton. U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine John Herbst predicted, "We expect not only the revival of the friendly ties that existed between our states seven to nine years ago, but the establishment of a qualitatively new level of relations" (*Kievskiy Telegraf*, March 25-31).

Orest Deychakiwsky, staff advisor at the U.S. governmental Helsinki Commission, believes, "Despite the typical past rhetoric about visits leading to a qualitatively new relationship between the United States and Ukraine, this one really does." This is, "because for the first time you have a Ukrainian leadership truly devoted to democracy and the rule of law and determined to integrate with the Euro-Atlantic community. In short, it's the first time you have a relationship based on shared values." Deychakiwsky continued, "This will become clear throughout the visit and cannot help but to influence U.S.-Ukraine relations in a positive way, including building meaningful, substantive relationships in the security, democracy, and trade and economic spheres."

Trust in Yushchenko's integrity and sympathy for the poisoning he endured last year is very high in Washington. Senator Harry Reid (D-NV), who visited Kyiv last month as part of a U.S. Congressional delegation, declared that Yushchenko is "an international hero" (*Ukrayinska pravda*, March 26).

Yushchenko's visit is not likely to see any major policy issues resolved, but it will serve to break the ice after four frosty years of U.S.-Ukrainian relations. The latest State Department report on human rights outlines how the United States assisted Ukraine in its election year (state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41715.htm). U.S. support included assistance for the rule of law, independent media, civil society, and human rights organizations. The report also highlights numerous Congressional visits to Ukraine during the presidential campaign, including one by Bush's special representative, Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), during the second round. These visits repeatedly underscored Washington's insistence that Kuchma hold free and fair elections.

A Senate Republican policy committee paper entitled "Promoting a Robust U.S.-Ukraine Agenda: Securing the Orange Revolution in Ukraine" was released on the eve of Yushchenko's visit and distributed to the legislative assistants, legislative directors, policy advisors, and counsels in all Republican Senate offices (rpc.senate.gov).

The policy paper argues that it is in the interest of the United States for the Bush Administration and Congress to strongly back Yushchenko. Among the recommendations are to repeal the Jackson-Vanik amendment, support Ukraine's membership in the WTO, and include Ukraine within the Millennium Challenge Account. The policy paper also looks at ways to improve U.S.-Ukrainian cooperation and transparency to block trafficking in weapons, narcotics, and humans. The paper also calls for ensuring "a legitimate and stable venue [for Ukraine] to meet its security concerns. Membership in NATO provides such a platform."

Yushchenko's visit also represents a break with Kuchma's security policy toward the United States, according to Oleksandr Potekhin. During the Orange Revolution, Potekhin led a rebellion among Ukrainian diplomats while he was based at the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington (foreignpolicy.org.ua). The Kuchma administration believed it would gain Washington's blessing by supplying troops to Coalition forces in Iraq but was willing to turn to Moscow if Washington failed to meet its expectations.

Yushchenko's three-day visit starts off with a meeting and lunch with President George W. Bush followed by a meeting with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Later that day Yushchenko is set to speak at Georgetown University, where Katya Chumachenko, Yushchenko's American-born wife, earned a bachelor's degree in 1982.

On April 4-5, the Yushchenkos will visit Chicago. Chumachenko was born in Chicago and received an MBA from the University of Chicago in 1986. Yushchenko will speak at the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. Between 1986 and 1991 Chumachenko worked in the State Department's Bureau for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, the White House Office of Public Liaison, the Treasury Department's Office of Policy Management, and the Joint Economic Committee of Congress. The Kuchma team seized on these U.S. government positions to depict Yushchenko as a lackey of the United States.

In 1991, Chumachenko relocated to Ukraine as a founder and representative of the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation, an NGO providing U.S. democracy assistance programs in Ukraine. In 1993 she became the resident advisor for the USAID-financed Bank Training Program managed by KPMG Barents Group, and she worked as the company's country manager until 2000.

On the last day of Yushchenko's visit, he will address a joint session of the U.S. Congress, a rare honor previously accorded to other U.S.-recognized "freedom fighters" Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel, Nelson Mandela, and Boris Yeltsin. Yushchenko may use this occasion to return an original copy of the 1776 Declaration of Independence recently found in Ukraine's archives.

That same day he will lay a wreath at Washington's monument to Ukraine's national bard, Taras Shevchenko, which had been unveiled by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1964. Yushchenko, whose father spent most of World War II in Nazi concentration camps as a German POW, will also visit Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Yushchenko's final evening in the United States will be crowned first by a joint reception organized by the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute. IRI and NDI Chairs Senator John McCain and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, respectively, are strong supporters of recent democratic changes in Ukraine. The reception will be followed by a banquet in Yushchenko's honor organized by Ukrainian diaspora organizations.