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## **U.S.-UKRAINE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP RECEIVES BOOST**

*--Taras Kuzio*

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko's three-day official visit to the United States cemented a new strategic partnership. On April 4 Yushchenko attended meetings with President George W. Bush and two days later gave a well-received speech to a joint session of Congress. His last evening in Washington was crowned by a reception jointly sponsored by the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute followed by a banquet in his honor. Yushchenko also visited Chicago and Boston.

President Bush praised Yushchenko as a "friend to our country" and "an inspiration to all who love liberty" ([whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov)). During speech at Georgetown University, where his American-born wife, Katia Chumachenko, obtained a BA in 1982, Yushchenko received the University's President's medal.

In Boston Senator Edward M. Kennedy presented him with the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award because, "He took a strong and courageous stand for what he knew was right." American media described him in glowing terms as "Democracy's Hero in Ukraine" and a "Man With a Mission" (UPI, April 4; AP, *Boston Globe* April 5).

For Bush, Ukraine's Orange Revolution confirmed that his program to help spread democracy around the world was working, because "freedom is spreading." The Orange Revolution, Bush insisted, is "an example of democracy for people around the world." Bush repeatedly stated his view that the United States and Ukraine "share a goal to spread freedom to other nations."

The difficult question is where should the revolution be spread? Bush singled out cases where the Orange Revolution had already appeared (Lebanon and Kyrgyzstan) and pointed to Iraq and Afghanistan as countries where democracy was being built. Three countries in Bush's spotlight for the spread of democratic revolution are Moldova, Belarus, and Cuba, but, curiously, not Russia.

Throughout Yushchenko's visit he continued his refrain from two earlier visits to Western Europe. Namely, Ukraine is part of "Europe" and, in order to stress that Ukraine has values similar to the United States, a part of "Western civilization." Yushchenko does not locate Ukraine in Eurasia. During his address to Congress he said, "The Orange

Revolution provided evidence that Ukraine is an advanced European nation sharing the great values of Euro-Atlantic civilization." On the eve of Yushchenko's visit, Ukraine dropped visa requirements for Americans, a step it had already undertaken for citizens of EU member-states.

The most far-reaching ramifications of the visit are the moves by the United States and NATO to embrace Yushchenko's Ukraine as a potential member. For the first time Bush stated that he is a "supporter of the idea of Ukraine becoming a member of NATO" and that NATO membership should not contradict Ukraine's integration into the EU. "And so we want to help your government make the difficult decisions and difficult choices necessary to become available for membership in NATO," Bush declared (whitehouse.gov).

The Bush-Yushchenko meeting concluded with the signing of "A New Century Agenda for the Ukrainian-American Strategic Partnership" that focused on economic, trade, energy, and social challenges.

The Agenda also outlines U.S. support for "Ukraine's NATO aspirations." Towards this end, Washington backs an "Intensified Dialogue on Questions Related to NATO Membership" at the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Vilnius later this month. RAND analyst Jennifer Moroney explained, "The Intensified Dialogue is intended to build mutual understanding and facilitate dialogue, as well as to provide a mechanism to demonstrate tangible results." An "Intensified Dialogue" is the precursor to the creation of an individually tailored Membership Action Plan (MAP), which Ukraine is seeking an upgrade from the yearly Action Plans instituted in 2003.

Yushchenko's speech to Congress received many standing ovations (see c-span.org for video footage). Yushchenko praised the United States for supporting Ukraine's drive to democracy and condemning election fraud. He also declared that both countries "today are linked by a shared community of democratic values."

Yushchenko's decision to withdraw Ukrainian troops from Iraq has not dampened Washington's support. During the Bush-Yushchenko meeting, the Ukrainian leader reiterated his pledge to withdraw "some troops," as some will remain to train Iraqi National Guardsmen.

However, four factors may complicate U.S.-Ukraine relations.

First, as the *Washington Post* (April 5) pointed out, actions speak louder than words. Although Bush said that he has requested \$60 million to support Ukraine's reforms, the House of Representatives cut this to \$37 million. The Bush Administration has also slashed funding for democracy in the CIS by 46%.

Second, NATO General Secretary Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has declared that NATO's door is now fully open to Ukraine (*Ukrayinska pravda*, April 4). The EU may also open slightly after the three-year Action Plan and the ten-year Partnership and Cooperation Agreement are completed in 2008. But the onus is now on Yushchenko to follow through

with domestic reforms that require determined political will. Already *The Guardian* (April 6), like Ukrainian opposition politicians, have begun to suggest that there may not be the political will to fully resolve the murder of opposition journalist Heorhiy Gongadze. Yushchenko told Congress that he would bring to justice not only the perpetrators, who have already confessed, but also "those who contracted this crime."

Third, Ukrainians support EU membership far more than NATO membership. This is one reason why the Yushchenko camp is reluctant to publicize this aim until after the 2006 parliamentary elections. Based on current polls, the Yushchenko- Tymoshenko-Lytvyn alliance could control two-thirds of parliament after next year's elections and move ahead with plans to join NATO.

Finally, Yushchenko's speech to Congress outlined key issues that the United States needs to act upon to follow through on the revived strategic partnership. These include repealing the Soviet-era Jackson-Vanik Amendment, granting Ukraine "market economy" status, and supporting its WTO membership. Yushchenko promised in return to support two key issues in Bush's foreign policy agenda: battling international terrorism and promoting democracy.