

YUSHCHENKO RE-AFFIRMS UKRAINE'S EURO-ATLANTIC GOALS

By Taras Kuzio

Last week President Viktor Yushchenko took steps to re-affirm Ukraine's desire for Euro-Atlantic integration. "Ukraine is a European country. I will never accept the idea that it is not," he told London's Royal Institute for International Affairs on October 17 (UPI, October 17).

Western governments and international organizations heard these claims many times under former president Leonid Kuchma. But by his second term, they were seen as little more than empty rhetoric.

Ironically, some West European governments now fear that Yushchenko is actually serious in his endeavor to bring Ukraine into Euro-Atlantic structures. This fear is especially acute within "old Europe," where EU enlargement fatigue set in after last year's expansion.

The failure of referenda on a new EU constitution in France and the Netherlands, coupled with stalling over accession talks with Turkey, are products of this fatigue, and Ukraine's Orange Revolution did not ease this pre-existing condition.

The United States and Poland continue to be Ukraine's strongest supporters. The recent rightward shift in Poland's elections will only increase Warsaw's support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration (see EDM, September 30). Ukraine is set to create a joint battalion with Poland and Lithuania (UkrPolLitBat) based on the Ukrainian-Polish battalion (UkrPolBat) performing peacekeeping operations in Kosovo.

In London at the Royal Institute and in Kyiv at a joint Ukraine-NATO commission, Yushchenko outlined three phases for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic program.

First, Yushchenko hopes that the EU would grant Ukraine market economic status while Britain holds the rotating presidency. According to British Ambassador to Ukraine Robert Brinkley, London hopes that the EU will grant this status before the December EU-Ukraine summit in Kyiv (Interfax-Ukraine, October 13).

Securing WTO membership should facilitate relations with the EU. Yushchenko predicted that market-economy status and WTO membership would lead to the signing of a Ukraine-EU free-trade agreement in 2006 (Ukrayinska pravda, October 20). Such a free-trade agreement would reinforce the limited nature of Ukraine's involvement in the CIS Single Economic Space.

Nevertheless, WTO Director-General Pascual Lami is pessimistic about Ukraine achieving WTO membership in December (Ukrayinska pravda, October 17). If Ukraine fails in its WTO drive this year, it will be because Yushchenko and his government did not sufficiently ensure that parliament adopted all WTO-required legislation before the summer recess on July 8 (see EDM, June 15, July 13).

Clouding the issue further is National Security and Defense Council Secretary Anatoly Kinakh's statement supporting a synchronized Russian-Ukrainian WTO membership drive (Ukrayinska pravda, October 10).

Second, Yushchenko plans to move from a NATO Intensified Dialogue on Membership Issues to a Membership Action Plan (MAP) in May 2006. Speaking at the Ukraine-NATO commission, Yushchenko was equivocal, "Arising from the fact that NATO is an active guarantor of stability in Europe, Ukraine is preparing for full membership in this organization" (Ukrayinska pravda, October 19).

NATO has reiterated its open door policy, which has always distinguished that institution from the EU. NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer outlined Ukraine's membership in NATO as a stepping-stone to EU membership, as it traditionally has been for past aspirants. "NATO is ready to assist in providing all manner of assistance and support to this state [Ukraine] in this area," de Hoop Scheffer declared (Ukrayinska Pravda, October 19).

Scheffer and the chairman of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Pierre Lellouche, both said that Ukraine had every chance of joining NATO in the future. But receiving a MAP in 2006 does not provide a membership date. Such a date is more realistically situated in Yushchenko's second term (2009-14), rather than the over-optimistic 2008 or 2009 put forward by Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk and the Ukrainian media.

NATO has emphasized that it wants concrete action, not empty rhetoric. NATO specified three areas for Kyiv to target in addition to holding free and fair elections in 2006. Ukraine should also take more resolute action against corruption, improve the rule of law, and raise public support for NATO membership (Reuters, October 7). According to surveys by the Democratic Initiatives foundation, only one in ten Ukrainians know what NATO is and why Ukraine should join it (Ukrayinska pravda, October 19). One-third of

Ukrainians support membership, one-third are opposed, while and the final third are unsure.

Third, EU membership remains the most difficult component of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration process. After a firm closed-door policy under Kuchma, the EU has slightly warmed toward Kyiv. EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso told visiting Prime Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov, "Our door remains open" (Financial Times, October 9).

In the same manner as NATO, Barroso reiterated the importance of "action" to back up membership goals. Specifically, Ukraine should "show its commitments to European values and standards," Barroso advised (AP, October 6).

Yushchenko is also hoping that the EU takes three steps: market economic status in 2005, a free trade regime in 2006, and an association agreement in 2008.

The September cabinet crisis has not altered Yushchenko's support for closing the gap between Ukraine's domestic policies and its foreign policy goals (see EDM, October 5). This determination makes Yushchenko different from Kuchma, who allowed a gulf to form between his pro-Eurasian domestic policies and his rhetoric in support of Euro-Atlantic integration.

Three concrete steps that might satisfy both the EU Commission President and the NATO Secretary-General would be for Kyiv to move urgently to appoint Ambassadors to the United States, Britain, and France, three key Euro-Atlantic countries.