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END NOTE

NATO MEMBERSHIP FOR UKRAINE NOT LIKELY BEFORE 2012

By Taras Kuzio

On 22 January, Ukraine and NATO jointly released the NATO-Ukraine Plan of Action that was adopted at the NATO summit in Prague in November. Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma had been diplomatically advised to stay away from the summit because of U.S. allegations two months earlier that Ukraine had supplied a Kolchuga radar system to Iraq in 2000. A meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Committee on the sidelines of the summit was downgraded to the level of foreign ministers. Nevertheless, Kuchma turned up at the summit, thereby demonstrating, according to deputy head of the presidential administration Anatoliy Oryol, his "public success, authority, and prestige."

Although Ukraine was only offered an Action Plan -- not participation in a Membership Action Plan (MAP) -- many Ukrainian officials, including Defense Minister Volodymyr Shkidchenko, have confidently predicted that Ukraine will be invited to join NATO at

its next summit in 2007. In reality, NATO membership for Ukraine is impossible before the 2012 summit, U.S. officials told "Financial Times Deutschland" in October. If that prognosis proves correct, in 2012 NATO will for the first time expand onto the territory of the CIS.

The April 1999 NATO summit unveiled MAPs for nine countries -- Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia -- and Croatia was added last year. Of these 10 countries, all but three -- Albania, Croatia, Macedonia -- were invited during the November NATO summit to begin accession talks. Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia have a good possibility of being invited at NATO's 2007 summit to begin accession talks. The enlargement of NATO to incorporate these three states will mean that all of Central-Eastern Europe outside the CIS -- except for Bosnia and Serbia-Montenegro -- will have joined the alliance.

What then of Ukraine's timetable for membership? Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO and the EU have been totally confusing, making many Western states and international organizations reluctant to take seriously the declarations and rhetoric emanating from Kyiv. Under both Foreign Ministers Hennadiy Udoenko and Borys Tarasiuk (1994-2000), Ukraine's main foreign policy goal was defined as integration into "Euro-Atlantic" structures. However until 2001, Ukraine officially declared only its desire to join the European

Union. Last May, Kyiv stated that it will ALSO seek NATO membership.

The NATO-Ukraine Action Plan released last month mentions "the long-term goal of membership" only once. Adopting a MAP for Ukraine between May and November 2002 would have been unlikely because the United States had already begun analyzing portions of tapes purportedly made in Kuchma's office that deal with the Kolchuga sales to Iraq, and the results of that analysis were made public in September.

Kuchma's very poor reputation in the West -- he has yet to be invited to meet with the U.S. president -- will ensure that Ukraine will not be able to "upgrade" from its Action Plan to a MAP as long as Kuchma remains president. It seems evident that NATO and the West will not reinvigorate their relationships with Ukraine until after the November 2004 presidential election there. Consequently, Ukraine could only enter the MAP process in 2005. In contrast, other NATO aspirant members such as the three Baltic states began participation in MAPs in 1999.

In the cases of these countries, however, their commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration was heartily backed by virtually the entire domestic political spectrum. Moreover, Ukraine's participation in a MAP in 2005 is contingent on the results of the 2004 presidential poll. Neither of the two likely pro-Kuchma candidates -- presidential administration head Viktor Medvedchuk and Prime Minister Viktor

Yanukovich -- supports a NATO-membership bid. In addition, Donbasite Mykola Azarov, who is deputy prime minister with responsibility for Euro-Atlantic integration and the organizer of the European Choice parliamentary faction, "has never been an active Euro-integrator, defense reformer or NATO peacekeeper," "Zerkalo Nedeli" commented earlier this month.

Given Yanukovich's Donbas origins, he is unlikely to show much enthusiasm for the idea of converting the Russian-Ukrainian border into a NATO-Russia one. The establishment of NATO bases in Ukraine would also be problematic, given that Russia has a naval base in Sevastopol until 2017. Joining NATO would create a clear break with Russia, which would be psychologically problematic for eastern Ukrainian oligarchs who support a "Toward Europe with Russia" foreign policy. Russia has never expressed interest in joining NATO, and Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Viktor Chernomyrdin claims to be unable to comprehend why Ukraine should even need to join NATO.

Meanwhile, official Ukrainian declarations in support of joining NATO remain at the level of mere rhetoric. Razumkov Center President Anatoliy Hrytsenko wrote in "Zerkalo Nedeli" in January that the Action Plan was purely declarative. Jennifer Moroney, a Washington-based expert on NATO-Ukrainian relations, adds that Ukraine was lucky to obtain even the Action Plan in the light of the Kolchuga scandal and that the plan does not fundamentally alter

Ukraine's relationship to NATO. Hrytsenko agrees that there is little new in the plan, which includes a "list of declarations" similar to those found in the constitution, laws, decrees, government resolutions, and existing programs. "Yet, none of the above have been duly enforced so far." Why, then, should one expect the Action Plan to be fulfilled?

On 30 January, Kuchma issued a decree establishing a State Council for Euro-Atlantic Integration headed by his longtime ally Volodymyr Horbulin. The purpose of this council is not entirely clear, as it duplicates the National Security and Defense Council whose secretary, Yevhen Marchuk, was absent from the State Council's first meeting. Few believe the new State Council will accelerate Ukraine's "Euro-Atlantic" drive.

No state information campaign is under way to increase public support for NATO membership, which is at an all time low. A February poll by the Razumkov Center registered only 21.9 percent in favor of membership and 37.7 percent opposed. Section 1 of the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan is devoted to internal political, economic, and informational issues. In all three areas, Ukraine has severely regressed since the late 1990s, a regression that accelerated after the March 2002 parliamentary election. Western governments and NATO are therefore no longer convinced by mere declarations in support of democratization, such as those made by Kuchma after the Prague summit

when he committed Ukraine to "continue market transformations, strengthen democratic principles within the authorities and society, and ensure European standards in the sphere of human rights."

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