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YUSHCHENKO OUTLINES UKRAINE'S DESIRE TO "RETURN TO EUROPE"

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This week the EU finally came round to the conclusion that Viktor's Yushchenko's support for Ukraine "returning to Europe" is no hollow rhetoric. Former president Leonid Kuchma also spoke of "returning to Europe" in 1998, when he first outlined plans for Ukraine to join the EU; four years later he added NATO membership to this goal. Unfortunately, neither the EU nor NATO ever took his declarations seriously. Yushchenko's support for the same policies is noteworthy because he, unlike Kuchma, is believable. Speaking to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Yushchenko claimed that Ukraine's future lies inside Europe because, "We, along with the people of Europe, belong to one civilization" (Financial Times, January 25).

Yushchenko told PACE, "The realization of the strategy of our foreign policy aim is membership in the European Union." Domestic reforms in Ukraine to assist integration will "become a real, and not a declarative, reality," a clear jab at the empty rhetoric of the Kuchma era (Ukrayinska pravda, January 25). To applause and laughter Yushchenko told PACE that, after his reforms, Ukraine will have changed so much that the EU itself will ask, "Why are you, such a fantastic place, not yet in the European Union?" (Ukrayinska pravda, January 25).

The seriousness of Yushchenko's plans was detailed by his deputy prime minister for European integration, Oleh Rybachuk, who threatened to "undertake an orange revolution in Brussels" if the EU continued to ignore Ukraine (Ukrayinska pravda, January 18). Rybachuk, with strong Polish backing, is eager to launch a two-year drive to fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria required for EU membership. "I can understand Ukraine's entry into Europe as my life's aim," Rybachuk admitted (Ukrayinska pravda, January 18).

Yet, Yushchenko's focus on the EU is causing consternation in Brussels, as the EU already has a full agenda: absorbing ten new members, adopting a constitution, and bringing in Turkey. As The Times (January 25) wrote, "Whether Ukraine should be allowed to set foot on the path that leads to membership is a question diplomats try hard to avoid." But now that the EU has agreed to admit Turkey, it has a more difficult time rejecting Ukraine.

Britain, a key supporter of Turkish membership, is now in a quandary. An EU that is "widened" to the borders of Iran, Iraq, and Syria is one that is never likely to be "deepened" in the manner that France and Germany desire. A "wider," as opposed to a "deeper," EU could never become a superpower rivaling the United States. This would mean that Europe would continue to

delegate security issues to NATO, rather than build up its own independent force. While this explains why France and Germany were always lukewarm about Turkey, it does not explain Britain's position. Under the logic of "deepening" versus "widening," Britain should promote Ukraine after Turkey. Yet, London isn't, and Britain's policy is contradictory. The Times (January 25) explains this paradox in three ways.

First, there is greater support for Ukraine joining the EU than there is for Turkey. Agreeing to let Ukraine in might therefore upset plans for Turkey.

Second, many EU members believe there should be a period to "digest" the ten new members. After the latest expansion, there is little appetite for new members.

Third, "At the same time, Britain does not want to be seen to undermine Yushchenko's heroic bid to lead his country in a different direction," said The Times. The Orange Revolution fundamentally changed Ukraine's international image in a positive direction. There is a widespread view in the West, as echoed in the media and among government ministers, that Ukraine has now "earned" its place in Europe.

As EU External Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner admitted, "We have to recognize this new political reality in Ukraine" (Financial Times, January 25). On January 13, the European Parliament issued an appeal to the European Commission and EU Council calling upon the EU to review the EU-Ukraine Action Plan, which currently does not provide for Ukraine's future membership.

Ukraine's allies in the EU include all eight of the new post-communist members, led by Poland. Austria, Finland, and Sweden also support Ukraine's EU membership. Poland, which had backed Turkish membership, has broken ranks with London by lobbying for Ukraine to be invited to join at the same time as Turkey. Poland sees a Ukraine inside the EU and NATO as the best way to secure stability on its eastern flank and provide a buffer between itself and Russia.

France, which always was cool to Turkish membership, is even colder towards Ukraine, because it fears harming relations with Russia. France and Germany, whose leaders have very warm relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, continue to look at Ukraine through Russian eyes. They also continue to see Russia as a useful counter-balance to an American hyper-power.

Yushchenko is keen to quickly follow through on both the momentum of the Orange Revolution and his plans for Ukraine to "return to Europe." Ukraine is to formally apply for EU membership this year, a step that Kuchma never undertook. "The new president and government of Ukraine will do everything

in its power" towards this aim, Rybachuk declared (Ukrayinska pravda, January 22).

The EU founding treaty states unequivocally that any country geographically situated in Europe can join the EU. The EU will be therefore in an extremely uncomfortable position if it formally turns down Ukraine's application.

Thus far, Yushchenko has not discussed Ukraine's plans for NATO, because it is a more sensitive issue inside Ukraine and regarding Russia. But, if the EU snubs Ukraine's membership application, Kyiv will have greater incentive to focus on NATO membership, which is far easier to achieve, has broad U.S. support, and is a step where Russian concerns are less likely to be taken into account.