

Jamestown Foundation blog

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[Yanukovych's New Best Friend – Hugo Chavez](#)



By Taras Kuzio

Venezuela's eccentric President Hugo Chavez visited Ukraine on October 18 to cement an economic, political and security relationship. As the director of Kyiv's Institute of World Policy, Alyona Hetmanchuk, [noted](#), the new alliance was given a name by Ariel Cohen of Washington's Heritage Foundation: VIRUS – which brings together Venezuela, India, Russia and Syria. Perhaps Ukraine, Hetmanchuk muses, is planned to be the 'U' in the new strategic alliance of VIRUS?

Chavez travelled to Ukraine after visiting Russia and Belarus. From Kyiv, he visited Iran, Syria, Libya and Portugal. "I was very pleased to hear about your victory, about your return, which was secured by the Ukrainian public. That very day I said to myself that I cannot waste time anymore, I must go to Ukraine and shake Viktor Yanukovych's hand, I have to embrace [the president] and convey the warmest greetings to the Ukrainian people," [Chavez said](#).

Kyiv's relationship with Venezuela harms Ukraine's relationship with Georgia. During the same week that Chavez visited Ukraine, the prosecutor's office re-opened the case of alleged "illegal" arms sales to Georgia during President Viktor Yushchenko's rule.

Venezuela and Nicaragua are two of the four entities that recognize the independence of Georgia's occupied provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (the others being Nauru and Moldova's Trans-Dniestr). In September 2008, the Party of Regions and Communist Party of Ukraine supported a resolution in the Ukrainian parliament that recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia – but it failed to be adopted. A similar resolution in the Crimean

parliament succeeded after it was supported by the Yanukovich bloc, which unites the Party of Regions and Russian nationalists with the Communists.

Yanukovich has not acted upon this step since becoming Ukraine's president and now claims he supports the territorial integrity of states such as Moldova. Yanukovich claimed that "this was because we always stand for territorial integrity."

However, it seems as though the Party of Regions has one rule when in the opposition position and another when in power.

Besides the inevitable arms exports to Venezuela, both sides discussed economic projects. These included Ukraine's development of oil and gas fields in Venezuela, the transportation of 10 million tons of Venezuelan oil through Ukraine to Belarus, the opening of embassies in both countries, and [the purchase of An-74 planes](#) for transport and marine patrol operations. Venezuela currently uses 15 An-140 and An-74 Antonov planes.

Venezuela is interested in cooperation in the fields of energy, petrochemicals, agriculture, industry and education. The widely criticized minister of education, Dmytro Tabachnyk, could very well become a "senior adviser" to the Venezuelan Ministry of Education.

Both sides discussed the issues of democracy and freedom of speech, a discussion during which it would have been fascinating to have been a fly on the wall. One can only muse at the thought of Chavez and Yanukovich discussing their unique contributions to building democracies and upholding free media in Venezuela and Ukraine.

Both, after all, have similar habits of saying one thing and doing another. Yanukovich has promised to punish those who will undertake election fraud in the October 31 local elections, while at the same time [his political force is preparing](#) to undertake massive election fraud. Is Yanukovich really unaware that the party that he led for seven years, and which is now led by loyalist prime minister Nikolai Azarov, controls a majority of officials in each election commission?

Yanukovich had strong words of advice for Western journalists, [saying](#), "I think that you will have to undertake great effort to obtain truthful information about what is taking place in Latin America and Venezuela, especially, because there has been such a massive campaign of falsification and lies that it has become difficult to understand where is the real truth."

No doubt Chavez will repay the compliment to Yanukovich when the West condemns the election fraud committed on October 31 in Ukraine and declares them to have not been free or fair.

Following the creation of a Ukrainian-Venezuelan working group, the first meeting of which will take place next month and the second in December in Caracas, [Yanukovich is expected to visit Venezuela](#) in the early part of 2011.

[Chavez told Yanukovich](#) that his country's foreign policy was one of "friendship with all

peoples and that “we do not want anybody to rule over us.” Perhaps Yanukovich did not understand the significance of this comment in the light of Ukraine’s reduced sovereignty to Russia since his election (see EDM, October 18).

[Hetmanchuk concludes her blog](#) by ridiculing the claim that Ukraine has a multifaceted foreign policy that balances different strategic partners, a claim made by Yanukovich during an official visit to Lithuania this month, as Chavez’s visit to Ukraine will only serve to undermine Ukraine’s strategic partnerships with the West. “In other words, it leaves us with only the option of greeting ourselves with the fact that Ukraine’s multivectorism is transforming itself in a banal way into diplomatic chaos.”

In the meantime, Ukraine’s new alliance with Venezuela could very well end up losing a lot more than it would gain economically,” energy [expert Bohdan Sokolovsky told Hazeta po-Ukrainski](#).