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Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (left) and Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in Moscow on March 5. Yanukovich dropped predecessor Viktor Yushchenko's pro-Western rhetoric, but resisted Putin's request for Ukraine to join a customs union (AP)

## **Yanukovich's radical march to Moscow**

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Taras Kuzio

Taras Kuzio writes: This article is, therefore, a reminder for those optimists and wishful thinkers about that for which Yanukovich stands. Western media and diplomats routinely dismissed the notion that, upon his election, Viktor Yanukovich would implement domestic and foreign policies that were far more pro-Russian than Leonid Kuchma's in the 1994 election. Wishful thinking led many to argue that Ukrainian politicians say one thing during election campaigns and then do another after them.

It was as though Westerners hoped that Yanukovich would continue to cheat his voters. The period since his Feb. 25 inauguration shows he is set to become a revisionist Ukrainian president, breaking with the domestic and foreign policies put in place under Ukraine's first three presidents.

Yanukovich has stuck to the ideological tenets of his pro-Russian election platform. This article is, therefore, a reminder for those optimists and wishful thinkers about what Yanukovich stands for.

An important point for Western governments and international institutions to take into account is the deep level of duplicity in Yanukovich's homo sovieticus mindset. He has, and will continue to, change his mind on numerous occasions, will flip flop on policies. This was clearly seen through his attitude towards NATO (see below).

## **Nation-building**

Yanukovich will no longer prioritize nation-building. This will include a neglect of historical memory,

such as the 1933 artificial famine. The Party of Regions and Communist Party did not vote for a November 2006 law on the famine. Russia will also welcome Yanukovich's more critical treatment of Ukrainian nationalist heroes and has promised to rescind Victor Yushchenko's Jan. 22 decree honoring Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists leader Stepan Bandera. Yanukovich could go so far as to undertake a revision of history school textbooks, especially if a Communist or Dmytro Tabachnyk is appointed education minister or vice premier in charge of pedagogy, a step that was undertaken by Alexander Lukashenko after he was first elected in Belarus in 1994.

Yanukovich, unlike three previous presidents, does not support an autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In summer 2009, Yanukovich accompanied Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill around Ukraine and the patriarch blessed him ahead of his inauguration in parliament on Feb. 25. Yanukovich did not invite Ukrainian Orthodox or Greek Catholic churches to the inauguration. Yanukovich supports Russian as a second state language which, if implemented, would mean Ukraine would follow the path undertaken by Belarus and Kyrgyzstan.

### **Sevastopol**

Changing the Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol, where it is "temporarily" stationed until 2017, into a permanent naval base. Changing Sevastopol into a permanent base would require a change in Ukraine's Constitution for which Yanukovich would be unable to find 300 votes in parliament. The Ukrainian constitution bans foreign military bases. Making Sevastopol into a permanent Russian base would de facto transfer sovereignty over the port to Russia and destabilize the situation on the peninsula. The move would contradict Yanukovich's election platform calling for Ukraine to be a non-bloc, neutral state. If Russia can have a military base on Ukrainian territory then why not the U.S., NATO or anybody else?

### **CIS customs union**

Joining the CIS single economic customs union with Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus. These three countries are not members of the World Trade Organization, complicating Ukraine's attempt to join a customs union. Yanukovich has said Ukraine can join the customs union after the three existing members join the WTO. A second problem is that Ukraine is negotiating a free trade zone with the European Union.

### **Energy**

Revival of an idea of Ukraine's gas pipelines that transport 80 percent of Russian gas becoming part of a consortium with other nations. Although Russia would not obtain more than 50 percent ownership, Moscow could obtain a commanding control through adding its share with a Western European consortium partner such as Germany. Yanukovich's aim is to return to subsidized gas for which he is willing to give Russia a share of the pipelines, an aim that has overtures of Belarus, where Russia obtained control of 50 percent of its pipelines. Yanukovich has stated his desire to therefore renegotiate Yulia Tymoshenko government's gas contract which envisaged a move to market prices by 2011. Yanukovich will have to overturn a February law banning the lease, rent or selling of the pipelines for which 430 deputies voted, including the Party of Regions.

A return to the use of an opaque gas intermediary between Ukraine and Russia, such as RosUkrEnergo, which was part of the gas contracts between 2006-2009, but removed by the Tymoshenko government. The newly appointed head of the presidential administration, Serhiy Levochkin, is a business partner of RosUkrEnergo and represents the gas lobby in the Party of Regions. His appointment signals the influence of RosUkrEnergo co-owner Dmytro Firtash, who has staked out his claim to a share of any gas consortium in exchange for RosUkrEnergo gas unilaterally confiscated by Naftogaz Ukraine and Gazprom.

### **Russian security**

Yanukovych has supported President Dmitri Medvedev's proposals for a European security treaty that is an alternative to NATO and the goal of removing the U.S. from Europe. Yanukovych believes that Sevastopol as a permanent Russian naval base could be a part of such a treaty. The European Union and NATO have not warmed to Medvedev's proposals.

## **GUAM**

Yanukovych has a more pro-Russian stance inside the Commonwealth of Independent States. He believes that the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) regional group is irrelevant, an organization that Leonid Kuchma established in 1997 to group together like-minded pro-Western countries to balance against Russia in the CIS and to support their territorial integrities (three GUAM members had frozen conflicts). The Party of Regions has distanced itself from Kuchma's support for Georgia and adopted a completely pro-Russian line on the 2008 war.

## **Separatism**

The Party of Regions initiated support for Ukraine to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia with a resolution to this effect being adopted in the Crimean parliament but failing in the national. The Party of Regions broke with the policy of Ukraine's three former presidents of supporting the territorial status quo of all countries, including Georgia's territorial integrity. Yanukovych's move away from Ukraine's long-held position towards that of Russia's showed to what degree Yanukovych is far more pro-Russian than Kuchma had been, who strongly backed Georgia's, Azerbaijan's and Moldova's territorial integrity. Ukraine understood under Kuchma that defense of Georgia's territorial integrity was indirectly also the defense of Ukraine's. If South Ossetia and Abkhazia could be independent, then why not the Crimea and if Ukraine can recognize South Ossetia's independence then why cannot Georgia recognize the Crimea's?

## **National security**

Yanukovych and senior Party of Regions officials differ from all three previous presidents in being unable to see Russia as a potential threat to Ukraine's national security and territorial integrity. Kuchma had professional advisers running the National Security and Defense Council such as Volodymyr Horbulin and Yevhen Marchuk who have continued to be critics of Russia's more assertive behavior in the post-Soviet space. No such advisers exist in the Yanukovych administration.

## **NATO**

Yanukovych supported Kuchma's request for a NATO Membership Action Plan in 2002 and 2004 in Prague and Istanbul. Kuchma and the Yanukovych government sent the third largest military contingent to Iraq in 2003 as a "sweetener" to improve Ukraine's relations with the United States. In 2003, parliament voted for legislation on national security, supported by the Party of Regions, outlining Ukraine's goal of NATO membership. A government strategy to 2015 released in 2004, outlined Ukraine's objective of receiving a MAP in 2006 and NATO membership in 2008.

While Ukrainian troops were in Iraq and Ukraine's president and government sought NATO membership, the Yanukovych 2004 election campaign unfurled an unprecedented anti-American and anti-NATO campaign against Yushchenko. This was a sign of Yanukovych's pending flip flop after Kuchma left office.

Divested of Kuchma, Yanukovych switched to a staunchly pro-Russian position after Yushchenko was elected. In 2006 and 2009, the Party of Regions and its Russian nationalist allies disrupted joint military exercises in the Crimea under NATO's Partnership for Peace program. Yanukovych, as prime minister, told

NATO in September 2006 that Ukraine had no interest in a Membership Action Plan, which scuttled such a possibility two months later in Riga.

NATO membership, which was a central aspect of Ukrainian foreign policy until 2004, will no longer be a foreign policy goal of Yanukovich. Yanukovich's first foreign visit to Brussels in March 2010 included the EU but not NATO. It is doubtful that Yanukovich will continue with the high level of Ukraine's cooperation with NATO that existed under Kuchma and Yushchenko since January 1994.

### **European Union**

Yanukovich continues to use the same rhetoric as all Ukrainian presidents in support of EU membership. But it remains unclear if he would support the democratic and free-market changes that would spur integration, such as reducing corruption and improving the rule of law. Critics of EU enlargement in Brussels will welcome Yanukovich's election because it will reduce pressure upon the EU to offer Ukraine membership.

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