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20 December 2006

Georgia outshines Ukraine at recent NATO summit in Riga

Georgia's better performance compared to Ukraine has been in two areas where progress has been limited in Ukraine: improving the rule of law and battling corruption

NATO's summit in Riga was the first since 1999 for which no invitations were sent to aspirant countries. At NATO's 1999 and 2004 summits, the alliance enlarged by three, then an additional seven countries.

The Riga summit was to have been Ukraine's summit with an invitation to a Membership Action Plan (MAP), followed by an invitation to join in 2008 and membership in 2010. This fast-track strategy collapsed after President Viktor Yushchenko failed to support an Orange coalition following the March elections.

Personal conflict with former Orange ally Yulia Tymoshenko, and preventing her returning to head the government, prevailed over national interests. As former premier Yuriy Yekhanurov recently admitted in an interview in *Ukrayinska Pravda*, President Yushchenko instructed him following the March elections to conduct negotiations with the anti-Orange Party of Regions on the formation of a Grand Coalition. Yushchenko typically was indecisive and could not choose between an Orange and a Grand coalition. In the end, neither coalition came about, and Ukraine got the worst outcome, the Anti-Crisis coalition, which ended hopes that Riga would be 'Ukraine's summit.'

NATO's 2008 summit was set to be an enlargement summit, with invitations followed by membership in 2010. Optimistically, this timetable is now only possible for the three west Balkan states: Croatia, Albania and Macedonia, who are in NATO's MAP. Georgia and Ukraine were upgraded into Intensified Dialogue on Membership Issues in 2005-2006. When they will enter MAP is still unclear.

NATO's summit in Riga showed to what degree Georgia has rapidly moved ahead of Ukraine in its drive to join NATO, even though it joined Intensified Dialogue a year later than Ukraine. Both President George W. Bush and Senator Richard Lugar, chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, placed Georgia ahead of Ukraine in the drive to reach NATO membership.

President Bush said, "We will continue to support Georgia's desire to become a NATO ally." As to Ukraine, Bush said, "As democracy takes hold in Ukraine, and its leaders pursue vital reforms, NATO membership will be open to the Ukrainian people if they choose it." In other words, the Bush administration understands that Georgians want NATO membership, while Ukrainians are ambivalent.

Senator Lugar described Georgia as a “superb role model for the region.” Georgia should be invited into a MAP and invited to join NATO, Lugar said. Regarding Ukraine, Lugar acknowledged Ukraine’s desire to “move more slowly toward NATO membership” and only when ready, “for Ukraine to join NATO.” Senator Lugar’s comments took into account the creation of the Anti-Crisis Coalition and Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych’s statements on Ukraine not being ready for a MAP during Yanukovych’s September visit to NATO headquarters.

The Bush administration has been able to compare the Ukrainian and Georgian governments following their visits to Washington during the last few months. The Georgian delegation came out looking a lot better, a senior official told me. They all spoke English and with one voice. They knew what they wanted from the US (support for territorial integrity, NATO membership) and outlined detailed plans for their country’s energy security.

Georgian officials in Riga remain optimistic that they will receive a MAP in spring 2007. Whether one year in a MAP would be sufficient for Georgia to be included in NATO’s 2008 invitations to membership remains an open question.

Undoubtedly the Georgian leadership, both in government and in opposition, will attempt to reach this optimistic target. Discussions in Riga showed to what degree the Georgian leadership that emerged from the Rose Revolution of late 2003 has been more successful in breaking with the past and pursuing radical reform, when compared to Ukraine.

Both countries have pursued democratic reforms since their democratic revolutions. Georgia’s better performance compared to Ukraine has been in two areas where progress has been limited in Ukraine: improving the rule of law and battling corruption.

President Viktor Yushchenko recently wrote in the Washington Post that, “on my watch, the corruption that has historically emanated from the president’s office ceased.” Nevertheless, accusations of corruption surrounding the president’s close allies (the so-called Liubi Druzi or Dear Friends) have repeatedly surfaced since the September 2005 crisis when presidential secretariat head Oleksandr Zinchenko resigned. There are also unanswered questions surrounding corruption related to the president’s family, including the president’s brother, allegedly involved in the non-transparent gas transportation intermediary RosUkrenergo.

Yushchenko has repeatedly defended Ukraine’s dealings with RosUkrenergo, most recently in a September interview with Adrian Karatnycky, president of the Orange Circle, a US NGO. In an effort to balance against the Party of Regions’ Systems Capital Management, Yushchenko has also aligned himself with the Donbass Industrial Union (DIU) and with Viktor Pinchuk, thereby tying himself closer to oligarchs. The DIU and Pinchuk’s protege, Valeriy Khoroshkovsky, now control senior positions in the NSDC.

A US perception of more progress on reforms in Georgia, compared to in Ukraine, are because of four factors.

First, the political will to break with the past is greater at the presidential level in Georgia than in Ukraine.

Second, the Rose Revolution coalition has remained united. This is different to the Orange coalition, which Yushchenko himself dissolved in the September 2005 crisis, and after the March elections, when he chose a two-track negotiating strategy for a parliamentary coalition, rather than choosing to reunite Orange.

Third, Georgia as a nation is not divided in its foreign orientation. Ukraine as a nation is regionally divided in its foreign orientation between Ukrainophones and Russophones. The Party of Regions dominates Russophone Ukraine.

Fourth, Georgia's political leadership has united the country in the face of a credible Russian external threat and in pursuit of Euro-Atlantic integration. In Ukraine, support for NATO membership hovers at 20 percent, while NATO membership has 70 percent cross-party and regional support in Georgia.

In Ukraine, as the Razumkov Center's National Security and Defence (no.9, 2006) shows, support for NATO membership has declined from 32 percent in June 2002 to 17.2 percent in October 2006. Ironically, this decline in support took place after Ukraine declared its intention to seek NATO membership in July 2002.

The invasion of Iraq by a US-led coalition and anti-Americanism in the 2004 elections are to blame for this decline in support. From 38.3 to 47.3 percent of Ukrainians in two polls conducted by Freedom House in 2005-2006 believe wrongly that NATO started the war in Iraq. Ironically, it was the first Viktor Yanukovich government that sent troops to Iraq in 2003, and Viktor Yushchenko who brought them home in late 2005.

NATO therefore has two unpalatable choices. It can lower the barriers for Georgia by inviting it into membership after only a year in MAP (2007-2008). Or, it can keep the invitation to Georgia hanging on internal developments in Ukraine deciding when the country will be ready to be invited into MAP.

Georgia is more reliant on a successful Ukraine bid to enter MAP than the other way round. But, NATO is in a quandary, as it is unable to formulate a policy to Ukraine when the country de facto has no foreign policy. In addition, its relationship between domestic and foreign policy issues is contradictory.

Yushchenko pointed out in the Washington Post that the Ukrainian law on national security, "promotes participation and membership in pan-European and regional systems of collective security," referring to the EU and NATO. It is also the case that the reformed constitution gives the president exclusive competence over foreign and defense policy.

These two factors are derailed by three realities of Ukrainian politics. First, a commitment to NATO membership: Georgia sent nine individuals to the Riga summit, including the parliamentary speaker, National Bank chief, ambassadors and a deputy foreign minister. They

were present throughout the meetings organized by the German Marshall Fund around the NATO summit.

Ukraine sent only three. Ukraine's representatives included only one official, Oleh Rybachuk, former head of the presidential secretariat and now a presidential adviser. Not a single Ukrainian political leader attended the Riga summit. The only talk on Ukraine given in Riga was by me, a non-Ukrainian citizen.

Second, conflict among Ukraine's elite couples with mixed signals sent to the West. On the eve of Yanukovych's visit to the US on December 4-6, his Party of Regions supported the unconstitutional removal of the foreign minister. During the week prior to Yanukovych's US visit, the president cancelled the visit and then, after reaching agreement, approved it.

These signals followed on the heels of Yanukovych's remarks in NATO on the need to adopt a 'pragmatic' approach to NATO and EU membership, which were reminiscent of the Kuchma era. Following Brussels, a parliamentary resolution backed the prime minister's 'Euro-pragmatism.'

Third, the leadership of the National Security and Defense Council is dominated by Industrial Union of Donbass and individuals close to Pinchuk (Interpipe). Both of these business groups support Ukraine's membership in the WTO and EU – but not NATO (Pinchuk is head of the pro-EU, Yalta European Strategy). In a July opinion editorial in the International Herald Tribune, Pinchuk wrote, 'the majority of Ukrainians do not support Ukraine joining NATO. It would be more divisive than uniting: the benefits are not clear, but the risks are.'

Fourth, the domestic political environment is not conducive to moving forward on NATO membership. Until the next election cycle in 2009-2011, Ukraine has a weak president with little political will.

Following NATO's Riga summit, Georgia looks set to speed up its drive to join NATO, while Ukraine's position continues to be ambivalent. The US and NATO's support for Georgian membership is unequivocal, while they are having difficulty in formulating a clear strategy to Ukraine since Yankovych returned to government.

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