

## **POLITICAL BATTLE IN UKRAINE OVER THE CONDUCT OF FOREIGN POLICY**

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The governing Party of Regions and its leftist allies have launched a systematic offensive to wrest control of Ukraine's foreign policy from the president and his appointees. This offensive is forcing President Viktor Yushchenko to defend his positions more resolutely than has hitherto been the case, beginning with the issue of the Russian Fleet's basing in Ukraine's Crimea. Following Russian President Vladimir Putin's call to prolong that Fleet's 1997 basing agreements beyond 2017, Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich hinted that he is in favor while Yushchenko obliquely indicated that he is opposed (see EDM, October 30, November 1). However, amid the contest over the conduct of foreign policy, their respective positions have quickly polarized. Speaking on November 1 in the Party of Regions' stronghold Kharkiv, Yushchenko came out clearly against prolongation, citing the constitutional ban on foreign bases and the agreement's 2017 expiry deadline as definitive: "There is no point mulling over this issue anymore, let's put a full stop to it." Ukraine will fully observe the 1997 agreements, expects Russia to do the same, and meanwhile it seeks repossession of Russian-used lighthouses and other installations, Yushchenko declared. All differences will be discussed in the Putin-Yushchenko commission, "but let no one try to revise those agreements or do anything that would turn our relations into something other than good-neighborly" (Interfax-Ukraine, Itar-Tass, November 1). Equally clearly, Yanukovich is now speaking in favor of prolonging the stay of Russia's Fleet: "Ukraine has an interest in our partners operating some naval installations, as this will bring in revenue\*. A decision will depend on how beneficial and necessary this will be to both Ukraine and Russia," he told Kyiv journalists. "The [prolongation] issue will be considered in the framework of Ukraine's political and economic relations with Russia\*. Unquestionably, Ukraine is interested in good relations with Russia" (Interfax-Ukraine, Itar-Tass, November 2). On the institutional level, the Regions-led coalition seeks a transfer of prerogatives from the presidency and the presidentially controlled Foreign Affairs and Defense Ministries to the coalition-controlled parliament and government. A joint working group of the Party of Regions, Socialist, and Communist parties is well advanced in drafting a new law on the foundations of the state's domestic and foreign policies. Ever since this government's formation in August, Yanukovich and his allies have cited a constitutional stipulation that the parliament "determines the foundations of domestic and foreign policies" to question the president's authority over foreign policy. By now, they want to turn that vague stipulation into a clear-cut law not just questioning, but counterbalancing and even reducing the president's authority in that domain. According to Yanukovich, the new law will take account of the constitutional reform and the consequent redistribution of competencies from the presidency to the parliament and government (Interfax-Ukraine, October 30, November 3). On November 3, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a resolution to summon the presidentially appointed ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense, Borys Tarasyuk and Anatolii Hrytsenko, to report on their activities to a plenary session of parliament on November 15. The 241 votes of the Regions, Socialist, and Communist parties were sufficient to pass this resolution. Yushchenko has termed the planned sitting an "inquisition" (Channel Five TV, One Plus One TV [Kyiv], November 3). The Rada's

majority coalition took that step promptly on Yanukovich's cue. Yanukovich had declared on November 1 and 2 that he has differences over foreign policy with Tarasyuk; that the latter cannot remain a minister and the leader of an opposition party (Rukh, within the bloc Our Ukraine) at the same time; that "this situation must be resolved very soon;" and that, while the two ministers' appointment and dismissal is not within the government's competency, the parliament should take up that issue citing its authority to "determine the foundations" of policies (Interfax-Ukraine, November 1, 2). Major elements in the Party of Regions and allied parties deeply resent Tarasyuk as emblematic of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic orientation and Hrytsenko for his efficient implementation of NATO-assisted military reforms. Moscow almost certainly seeks the removal of these ministers. Meanwhile, Yanukovich is building up in the prime minister's office a strong professional staff on foreign and national security policy, mainly drawn from ex-president Leonid Kuchma's administration and governments (Interfax-Ukraine, November 3; Glavred, November 4). The goal is to duplicate and counterbalance the presidentially controlled structures (National Security and Defense Council, the Presidential Secretariat), encroaching on the president's constitutional authority on that front as well. On a symbolic level, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a statement of solidarity with Cuba's regime (referenced as "the people") on November 3, the same day as the summons to Tarasyuk and Hrytsenko. Out of 436 deputies registered for the sitting, 318 voted in favor of the statement on Cuba (Interfax-Ukraine, November 3). Russia's Duma also adopted a Cuba solidarity declaration that same day. Some of the protagonists of these efforts heralded their intentions in Moscow just before moving in Kyiv to take foreign policy under their control. Yanukovich announced those intentions in a wide-ranging interview with the governmental Rossiyskaya gazeta on October 30. Deputy Prime Minister Dmytro Tabachnyk, writing in the October 27 issue of the governmental Rossiyskiye vesti, charged that the European integration rhetoric of certain Ukrainian officials largely "covers up" the wish to join NATO. Ukrainian and Georgian membership in NATO "would allow Washington fully to control the energy transit to Europe and severely restrict Russia's political and economic leeway in the Black Sea region," Tabachnyk warned. Arguing that Western Europe does not want Ukraine in the European Union, partly in deference to Russia and partly due to the EU's own enlargement pause, Tabachnyk contends that "Ukraine's European vector must be substantially corrected." Following his mid-October visit to Moscow, Rada Chairman Oleksandr Moroz is also explicitly espousing a two-vector policy while becoming openly critical of NATO and the United States. In a speech to Kyiv students, Moroz claimed that "NATO is not coping with the post-9/11 challenges" and that "Ukraine's entry into NATO is being advocated by only one superpower, in pursuit of its own geopolitical interests. We must not become a bargaining chip in that regard" (Interfax-Ukraine, October 27). Thus, an effort to shift the source of authority over the conduct of Ukraine's foreign policy and change its orientation seems to be suddenly gathering force on several fronts simultaneously.