

## Ukraine Looks West

Democratic reform would help the country qualify for closer integration with the European Union

By *per Concordiam* Staff

In its pursuit of a closer relationship with the European Union, Ukraine has often demonstrated a deft diplomatic touch. It's a country that sent forces to multinational peace missions in the Indian Ocean and Kosovo and demilitarized its post-Soviet nuclear stockpile. It successfully co-hosted the 2012 European Football Championships with Poland and assumed the 2013 chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.



Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, left, and EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso attend a press conference after talks in Kiev in December 2011. The EU warned Ukraine that jailing former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko had stalled the signing of an agreement for closer integration.

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But such achievements have only made the recent chill in Ukrainian-EU relations all the more conspicuous. After years of negotiations, Ukraine has seen its hopes of a free trade agreement with the EU become unhinged; a standoff exacerbated by questions about the fairness of late 2012 parliamentary elections during which the country's chief opposition leaders languished in prison.

For the EU, closer integration with its "eastern neighbors," including Ukraine, isn't just about coordinating markets but also about sharing democratic values. In that regard, Ukraine has yet to reassure a majority of EU member states that once seemed prepared to proclaim Europe's geographically largest nation a natural bridge between democratic Western Europe and post-Soviet Eurasia.

"The EU's policy of linking free trade with Ukraine's domestic politics essentially defers Ukraine's pathway to the common European market to the very long term, until Kiev lives up to its declared 'European choice,'" Matthew Rojansky of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace noted in a 2012 article published in the newsweekly *European Voice*.

"But this policy raises a serious problem: what to do about the millions of Ukrainians already resolved to be part of Europe and eager to live up to Europe's standards? Without tools for engaging and fostering this constituency, it may well disappear, together with Ukraine's best hope for European integration in the long term."

### EU-Ukraine relations

After emerging from the Soviet era with leaders who made their name under communist rule, Ukraine took what looked to be a lurch to the West. The "Orange Revolution," an anti-corruption movement that arose in late 2004/early 2005, brought President Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko to power under a pro-democracy platform. Infighting



A Ukrainian girl looks at a billboard of jailed opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko in Kiev in 2012. The EU has accused Ukraine's leaders of seeking politically motivated convictions against Tymoshenko, the country's former prime minister, putting a free trade and political association deal with Ukraine on hold.





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A Ukrainian border guard observes traffic at the Shegyni checkpoint on the Polish border in June 2012, two days before the start of the Euro 2012 football championships. Liberalized travel and trade between the EU and Ukraine await further Ukrainian progress on democratization.

between partisans of Yushchenko and Tymoshenko and resistance by authoritarian strains within the country helped weaken the pro-democratic movement. The election in 2010 of President Viktor Yanukovich – and the subsequent sentencing of Tymoshenko to seven years in prison on charges of corruption – has been viewed by many EU officials as a setback to greater integration.

As a key partner in the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, Ukraine has negotiated for years to finalize an EU-Ukraine Association Agreement that guarantees privileges shy of full EU membership. A key part of that association agreement is approval of what the EU calls a "deep and comprehensive free trade area" with Ukraine that goes beyond lower tariffs to include closer coordination of legal, economic and energy policy. Also coveted by Ukraine is visa-free travel for its citizens to the rest of Europe.

In pursuit of these deals, Ukraine has stressed contributions in the realm of security. After the

collapse of the Soviet Union, the country removed nuclear weapons from its territory and as recently as 2010 agreed to dispose of the last of its highly enriched uranium by converting it into power plant fuel. It supplied naval personnel to the EU's Operation Atalanta, the anti-piracy mission off the Horn of Africa, and joined with Poland in helping police a cease-fire in Kosovo. The EU has worked with Ukraine in policing its border with Moldova, considered to be a prime smuggling corridor.

"Kyiv works together with Warsaw and Vilnius to establish a joint multinational brigade of Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania. Together with our Polish friends, we work to ensure participation of Ukrainian Armed Forces units in one of the EU tactical battle groups," proclaimed Oleksander Motsyk, Ukrainian ambassador to the U.S., in a late 2011 speech in Washington.

The greatest stumbling block to sealing trade and visa deals has been what many view as a politically influenced prosecution, not just

of Tymoshenko, but also of former Ukrainian Interior Minister Yuri Lutsenko. European representatives have uttered the words “selective justice.” Encapsulating a common EU view, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, in a November 2012 meeting with Polish President Donald Tusk, downplayed chances that EU member states would ratify the association agreement with Ukraine anytime soon. “The requirements for the treaty to be signed currently do not exist,” the chancellor announced. On the other hand, Tusk expressed guarded optimism that the EU-Ukraine agreement could be ratified by the end of 2013.

### Polish partnerships

Poland has been among the bright spots in Ukrainian-European relations. In addition to military cooperation with its western neighbor, a member of NATO since 1999, Ukraine has advanced its case with greater economic cooperation. Although barred from visa-free travel in the EU, an agreement with Poland allows Ukrainians to cross the shared border to conduct business. Poland is among the leading western outlets for Ukrainian labor. “Over 100,000 Ukrainian citizens are usually reckoned to be working in Poland, mostly illegally,” *The Economist* wrote in 2012.

Poland hosts the greatest number of Ukrainian consulates and is that country’s fourth largest trading partner. The neighbors collaborated in staging Euro 2012, the continentwide football championships that attracted an estimated 1.4 million spectators and hundreds of millions of euros worth of revenue and investment. Along with Poland, Ukraine is investigating the potential of developing domestic sources of natural gas. It has invited energy companies to prospect for hydrocarbons in the Black Sea, a policy that could reduce reliance on fuel purchases from Russia and other former Soviet republics.

Despite such progress in trade and cooperation, the difficulties of doing business in Ukraine are reflected in its mediocre standing in the World Bank’s “Ease of Doing Business” rankings, in which it came in 152nd out of 183 economies in 2012. In fact, the country’s still-unsigned treaty with the EU includes clauses dedicated to commercial issues such as equal treatment under the law, corruption, judicial independence and protection of intellectual property.

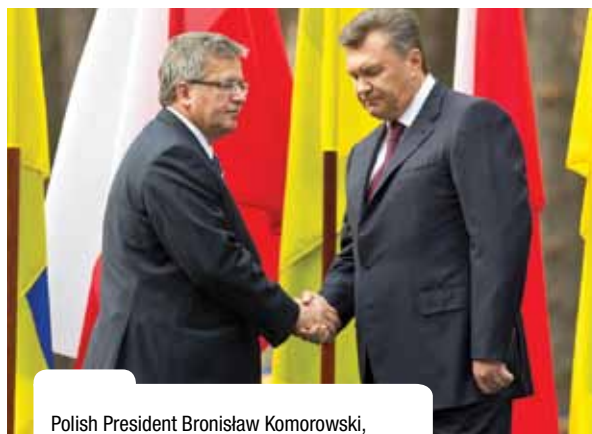
“There are grounds for optimism about Ukraine’s long-range perspectives,” Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Polish-born former U.S. national security advisor, said in a speech in late 2011. “I think the bottom line is that even if Ukraine is not right now evolving towards a really constitutional democratic state, it is

evolving into a state in which increasingly the majority of its people, and especially the young, think of Ukraine as their state. That, in itself, is important.”

### Future of integration

Often seen as a source of discord, Ukraine’s geographical and ethnic divide – its western regions historically oriented mainly toward Poland and its eastern regions dominated by Russian speakers – raises the country’s stature as a potential bridge between East and West. That division was reflected in recent electoral results. The more EU-oriented Yushchenko triumphed in western Ukraine while the Russian-speaking Yanukovych won in the east.

Russia has tried to entice Ukraine to join a Eurasian customs union along with Kazakhstan and Belarus, but even Yanukovych, who maintains better relations with Russia than did his predecessor, appears eager to complete an agreement that would lower tariffs and travel barriers with the massive EU trading bloc.



Polish President Bronisław Komorowski, left, and his Ukrainian counterpart Viktor Yanukovych help unveil a memorial in September 2012 at the burial site of thousands of Polish officers murdered in 1940 by Stalin’s secret police outside Kiev. Ukraine’s cooperation with Poland has been a relative bright spot in relations with EU member states.

In one of his first interviews as the EU’s new ambassador to Ukraine, Jan Tombinski struck an encouraging note in November 2012. But before doing so, he made an emphatic gesture by visiting Tymoshenko in a Kharkiv hospital where she was engaged in a hunger strike to protest her conviction. Observing how EU integration has been a “success story” for many countries, Tombinski held out hope that Ukraine could join the club. Said the ambassador: “Ukraine may also be a part of this story of European history.” □