

Megaphone transparency is not the right kind of transparency

■ Taras Kuzio

By arguing that Ukraine has too much transparency, I am not completely stark raving bonkers. What I am arguing is that megaphone diplomacy and washing one's dirty laundry in public, as undertaken by President Viktor Yushchenko and his chief of staff Viktor Baloha in their daily demands, threats and denunciations of the Yulia Tymoshenko government, are tantamount to megaphone negative transparency

There can be no debate surrounding the fact that Ukraine desperately needs greater transparency in its political and economic dealings. The Tymoshenko government has recognised this and has placed transparency at the centre of its policies. The new government will face much opposition: one of the depressing aspects of President Viktor Yushchenko's inability to fulfil the promises of the Orange Revolution that swept him to power is the lack of change in the Byzantine nature of how Ukrainian politics and business continues to be undertaken.

At the centre of this continuing Byzantine intrigue is presidential chief of staff Baloha whose management training was undertaken by the most Byzantine of all Ukrainian political parties, the Social Democratic United Party (SDPU(o)) under former President Kuchma's last chief of staff and SDPU(o) leader Viktor Medvedchuk. Baloha was supported by the SDPU(o) until 2002 in its Trans-Carpathian stronghold, which has since become known in political circles as "Balohastan".

■ Energy as the Achilles Heel

The lack of transparency in the manner in which the Yushchenko-Baloha team undertake politics and business can be clearly seen in the energy sector. Energy, the most corrupt sector in Ukraine where the oligarchs amassed their greatest capital in the 1990s, is the one in need of the most transparency.

The manner in which the January 2006 gas agreement with Russia was negotiated in Moscow was so lacking in transparency that even members of the Ukrainian government had no inkling of what was going on. Then-Defence Minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko, well respected both in Ukraine and the West, demanded to see the secret government contracts. He was given three and told there were no more. His wife Yulia Mostovaya, who is editor of the respected weekly newspaper *Zerkalo Nedeli/Tyzhnia*, brought him another six secret documents she had obtained direct from Gazprom.

■ Undermining the transparency drive

The Tymoshenko bloc campaigned in last

year's elections on a platform of increased energy transparency and the removal of opaque intermediaries such as RosUkrEnergo, which was included in the 2006 gas deal by the Yuriy Yekhanurov government. Yekhanurov was then head of the pro-presidential People's Union-Our Ukraine party. Since the 2007 election, Tymoshenko's initiatives developed with a view to tackling corruption, removing allegedly corrupt middlemen and increasing transparency in the negotiating process, should have been readily supported by the President.

Instead, the Yushchenko-Baloha duo has sought to undermine Tymoshenko at every opportunity. Tymoshenko's energy policies meanwhile, are gaining her popularity and support in Brussels and Washington because of Ukraine's centrality to European energy security. For the foreseeable future 80% of Russian gas will flow through

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Ukraine's state-owned pipelines to EU markets which remain highly dependent on this supply.

Yushchenko-Baloha's negative megaphone transparency against the Tymoshenko government has led to three outcomes. Firstly, it has continued to undermine Yushchenko's ratings while Tymoshenko's personal ratings and those of her BYUT allies continue to blossom. Opinion polls now routinely place both Tymoshenko and her party comfortably in first place nationally, the first time this has happened.

Secondly, they have undermined Ukraine's ability to coherently negotiate with Russia on energy. Any negotiating strategy on such an important topic as energy requires that the elites unite, at least in public. Internal quarrels should be left for backrooms in Kyiv far away from the media.

Thirdly, it has undermined Ukraine's integration into NATO, commonly seen as an important step towards EU membership. With the Yushchenko-Baloha duo having been on the offensive against Tymoshenko from day one of her government, coupled with rumours of the *de facto* creation of a grand coalition outside parliament in the Presidential Secretariat and National Security and Defence Council, it is little wonder that Tymoshenko has been cautious on NATO as she is unsure as to whether she will stand in the next presidential elections. A stable Orange alliance, without Baloha's intrigues in cahoots with Regions campaign leader Borys Kolesnikov, could have worked out a joint Yushchenko-Tymoshenko strategy for the presidential elections based on the successful formula last used in 2004. With Tymoshenko now forced to look to the presidential elections it is little wonder that she has been cautious in dealing with NATO due to its unpopularity in eastern Ukraine.

■ The cost of Yuliaphobia

President Yushchenko's inability to place Ukraine's national interests above his Yuliaphobia is working against his dreams of a second term and against energy transparency as well as undermining Ukraine's bid for NATO membership. Yushchenko has blocked visits by Tymoshenko to Moscow in January and to Brussels this month.

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BYUT's 36% support (up 5% on the elections) puts it in first place with Regions trailing at 29% and Our Ukraine-People's Self Defence at a new low of 9%. BYUT's ratings are growing throughout Ukraine, including in Party of Regions strongholds in the east where support for Yanukovich's party has declined from 55% to 36%. Tymoshenko is in first place among political leaders with a growing number of voters taking a negative view of Yanukovich's actions.

BYUT ratings are currently four times those of Our Ukraine-Peoples Self Defence while Tymoshenko's personal ratings are 2.5-3 times higher than those of Yushchenko. Any political strategist or President with an ounce of savvy would take these figures into account by courting Tymoshenko and BYUT rather than attacking and hampering them on every occasion. The results of Yushchenko's refusal to do so are clear to all: His low ratings are a product of the general view in Ukraine that he is being obstructive and offering no leadership.

■ Public rows only benefit Russia

Megaphone negative transparency in the energy sector has prevented any successful negotiating strategy towards Russia. Russia ►►

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►► has been handed a great opportunity to play off Yushchenko against Tymoshenko while undermining any little support there was in Russia for the Orange Revolution by discrediting it.

Again, let's look at Ukrainian polls. Some 43% of Ukrainians believe Russia won the gas crisis while only 18% believed Ukraine came out on top. 57% of Ukrainians were concerned at Ukraine's continued dependency on Russian gas while only 17% were not concerned at this dependency. 59% of Ukrainians also reached the conclusion that Russia's gas pricing was based on political motives, with 25% reaching a different view that it was based on economic factors.

Ukrainians who believe that Ukraine again lost a gas crisis showdown with

Since 2006, President Yushchenko's inability to place Ukraine's national interest over and above his Yuliaphobia prevented Ukraine's progress towards NATO membership. The President's personal dislike is thought to be based on his inferiority complex towards those with stronger personalities and higher popularity coupled with a traditional Soviet male chauvinist view of women and a sense of being threatened by the Tymoshenko government's anti-corruption policies

Russia are unlikely to thank the President for his habit of indulging in megaphone negative transparency as the confrontation played itself out. With 80% of Russian gas exported through Ukraine a united negotiating strategy based on defending national interests, rather than one apparently protecting corrupt practices and framed by Yuliaphobia, would have forced Russia to compromise.

■ **Infighting compromises NATO bid**

For a second time in two years Ukraine is unlikely to receive a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) as was hoped at the coming April NATO Summit. In January President Yushchenko, parliamentary speaker Arseniy Yatseniuk and Prime Minister Tymoshenko sent a letter to NATO requesting that Ukraine be considered for a MAP at its April summit in Bucharest. This strategy too has been undermined by Yuliaphobia.

Ukraine's path to NATO membership is far more complicated than any of the earlier or imminent NATO enlargement cycles in 1999, 2004 and 2010. The strategy would require three important policies from President Yushchenko that he has failed to pursue.

Firstly, the President has failed to put aside personal conflicts with his Orange colleagues and focus on Ukraine's national interests. Personal quarrels among politicians are not a peculiarly Ukrainian phenomenon, as seen in the cases of Tony Blair-Gordon Brown and John McCain-George Bush. But, in more mature democracies these conflicts are kept behind closed doors in the interests of party unity and national interests. In Ukraine megaphone negative transparency rules the day.

Yushchenko should be trying to maintain the Orange coalition in place to show to NATO and the EU that a pro-reform, pro-Euro-Atlantic integration coalition is united in its strategic aims of domestic reform and Western integration. In 2006 and 2007 this meant that Tymoshenko had the right to receive the Prime Ministership as BYUT received 9% and 17% respectively more votes than Our Ukraine in these two elections.

■ **No commitment to fight corruption**

Thirdly, there should be a clearly recognised effort by the President to show political will in battling corruption and overhauling the rule of law. Instead, as senior Western officials advising Ukraine in these two areas complained to me in Kyiv last month, Ukraine has stagnated in both areas since the Orange Revolution. The President has often not abided by the law, does not understand the importance of equality of all citizens before the law,

and blocks prosecution of members of the elite. Prime Minister Tymoshenko openly stated at a March 1 press conference that non-transparent energy schemes in Ukraine, such as RosUkrEnergo, continue to be protected by senior Ukrainian officials, her broadest hint yet that energy sector corruption is connected to the very highest positions in the country.

■ **Fear and loathing block reform drive**

Since 2006, President Yushchenko's inability to place Ukraine's national interest over and above his own Yuliaphobia prevented Ukraine's progress towards NATO membership. The President's personal dislike is thought to be based on his inferiority complex towards those with stronger personalities and higher popularity coupled with a traditional Soviet male chauvinist view of women and a sense of being threatened by the Tymoshenko government's anti-corruption policies.

Following the 2006 elections, Ukraine had a far better chance of receiving a MAP from NATO than in 2008. The arguments of Western European countries against giving Ukraine a NATO MAP received less recognition ahead of the November 2006 Riga summit than they are receiving today ahead of the April 2008 Bucharest summit of NATO. In both June 2006 and in April 2008, Bush was ready to visit Ukraine ahead of the NATO summits to show his support for Ukraine's Orange government and Washington's support for Ukraine's NATO membership.

Instead, President Yushchenko's ostensible support for Ukraine's NATO membership has been, and continues to be, completely undermined by his inability to contain his deep Yuliaphobia. In 2006 and 2007-2008 the president has wavered over supporting Orange or grand, or both, coalitions.

Ukraine needs transparency and an evolution from the Kuchma-Yushchenko virtual struggle against corruption to a real policy of dealing with this issue alongside the Tymoshenko government. Megaphone anti-Tymoshenko negative transparency undermines Yushchenko's chances of re-election while blocking attempts towards an economically sound and transparent gas contract and stifling Ukraine's NATO membership bid. ■

Selective history, forgotten victories

■ Paul Johnson Business Ukraine

President Yushchenko last week announced plans to mark next year's 350th anniversary of the Cossack victory at the Battle of Konotop with a string of commemorative events. This latest example of the President's passion for Ukraine's forgotten history is particularly poignant as the victory in question came against a huge invading Russian army and yet remains a largely unknown event, highlighting the role played over the centuries by Kremlin censorship in preventing Ukrainians from exploring their own history

In the summer of 1659 a massive Russian army was cut to pieces by Cossack forces close to the Ukrainian town of Konotop, located in today's Sumy Oblast. The battle came as Russia sought to exert its influence over the restive and independent-minded Hetman rulers of the Ukrainian steppe following the death of the great Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky. Even during Khmelnytsky's inspirational reign there had been no real unity among the Cossack bands of Ukraine and his demise brought internal divisions to the surface. Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich moved to capitalise on this by sending support to rival local chieftains and employing a strategy of divide and conquer towards Ukraine which has changed little in the succeeding 350 years.

■ Fleeting dreams of independence

The Russian invasion force of 1659 had been ordered to suppress the regime of Khmelnytsky's successor Hetman Ivan Vyhorskiy, but a combination of strategic brilliance and Cossack courage at Konotop allowed Vyhorskiy to record what should

have been an historic victory.

When news of the disaster reached the Russian capital the sense of panic in the Kremlin was such that all the citizens of Moscow were ordered to participate in digging trenches to defend the city and stave off the anticipated invasion force of Ukrainian Cossacks. For a few brief months it looked like the dream of establishing an independent Cossack state was within touching distance.

This illusion was quickly shattered and the victorious Hetman Vyhorskiy was to find himself exiled within a year, with the gains of Konotop a distant memory and plans for



the first Ukrainian state of modern times in tatters. Vyhorskiy was ultimately the victim of internal intrigues and power-games among Ukraine's rival Cossack leaders whose betrayals and internecine fighting brought lasting devastation to the country and ushered in a period known to Ukrainian history as, "The Ruin."

■ Rewriting history or righting wrongs?

Ukraine's Orange political parties have often been accused of rewriting history as they struggle to familiarise the population with key events from the past that have been removed for political purposes. Russian officials and a considerable majority of Ukrainian have objected to what they regard as the rehabilitation of former enemies and the use of history to fight modern-day political battles. Those who support a reappraisal of Ukrainian history have responded by pointing to the damage done to the national psyche by centuries of heavily doctored histories which portrayed the country as a contented component part of a larger Russian world.

The truth of the matter is that for many decades the teaching of history was a deeply politicised sphere of both the Tsarist and Soviet regimes. Any staunchly nationalist or anti-Russian sentiment was routinely airbrushed out of history by Soviet and Tsarist academics in a bid to protect the myth of Eastern Slavic unity and justify Russian colonial policy in Ukraine. The gradual suppression of a separate Ukrainian national identity was typically portrayed as a process of unification rather than an act of outside aggression, leaving modern generations baffled and often indignant when confronted with an altogether different version of events.

■ Alienating the Soviet generation

Attempts to portray events such as the 1930s Soviet terror famine as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people have met with a storm of protest from those sympathetic to ties with Russia and the Soviet past. Critics argue that exposing children to the often grim details of Ukraine's historical relationship with Russia risks creating a huge generational divide between the youth of today and those whose historical perspective dates from the Soviet era. ■