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INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL

UKRAINE-EU

EU: Association agreement with Ukraine depends on Cox-Kwasniewski mission results

On 21 March 2013, the head of the EU Delegation to Ukraine, **Jan Tombinski**, said that the signing of the association agreement between Ukraine and the EU would largely depend on the conclusions to be made by European Parliament ex-President **Pat Cox** and Polish ex-President **Aleksander Kwasniewski** upon completion of their mission.

Cox and Kwasniewski are expected to deliver a report on the use of selective justice in Ukraine in mid-April.

The EU ambassador to Ukraine said that it was very important for Kiev to demonstrate progress as soon as in May. This is due to the EU's internal regulations: the European Commission must receive EU member states' authorization to sign the association agreement in November 2013.

Tombinski earlier said that if the agreement was not signed in November, the EU would not be able to revisit the issue before the summer 2015, according to the news and analysis website Lb.ua.

Ukraine reports on implementation of Euro-integration action plan

On 20 March 2013, a spokesman for the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, **Yevhen Perebyynis**, said that Ukraine had completed six priority tasks out of the 71 mapped by Ukraine's European integration plan.

He was talking about the signing of an agreement on macrofinancial assistance with the EU, development of a bill on advanced financial control, and a blueprint of the State Penal Service of Ukraine.

On 21 March, the EU Delegation head to Ukraine, **Jan Tombinski**, said that the EU expects the Ukrainian parliament to adopt the bills requisite for the signing of the association agreement in November.

As the European Commission said in a report published on 20 March, Ukraine in 2012 failed to meet the majority of key recommendations mentioned in the European Commission's annual progress report on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood policy.

According to the European Commission, Ukraine's most obvious problems are politically motivated prosecution, courts' dependence on the authorities, corruption, non-transparent state procurement and problems during the latest parliamentary election.

EU-Ukraine parliamentary committee meeting cancelled over Kiev's position

On 21 March 2013, the European Parliament officially notified Ukraine about the cancellation of the meeting of the EU-Ukraine parliamentary cooperation committee scheduled for 3-5 April. The decision was taken after the Ukrainian parliament had failed to nominate the relevant half of the committee.

The Kommersant Ukraina business daily said that the Ukrainian part of the committee was not formed due to the position of the pro-government Party of Regions. In particular, the Party of Regions demanded that representation quotas be revised to give it a broader presence. The opposition insists on a parity principle.

According to the news and analysis website Lb.ua, the Party of Regions also wants the parliamentary committee for European integration to include one more of its members. This would secure the Party of Regions' majority in the committee.

EU calls on Ukraine to drop special car duties

On 19 March 2013, the EU Delegation to Ukraine called on the government to cancel the introduction of special import duties on new passenger cars. Such actions of the Ukrainian authorities negatively affect the EU's economic interests, the delegation said.

The decision of the interdepartmental commission to impose special car duties comes into force on 13 April.

Parliament ratifies agreement to simplify visa regulations with EU

On 22 March 2013, the Ukrainian parliament ratified an agreement between Ukraine and the EU to amend the Ukraine-EU agreement on simplified visa issuance.

The agreement expands the categories of Ukrainian citizens eligible for free and multiple-entry visas.

Poland supports European integration of Ukraine

On 20 March 2013, Polish Foreign Minister **Radoslaw Sikorski** said in his address to the Sejm that Poland would support granting Ukraine a "European prospective" at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in November.

Azarov: the creation of a trilateral gas consortium depends on EU

On 19 March 2013, Ukrainian Prime Minister **Mykola Azarov** said that the creation of a trilateral consortium for the management of Ukraine's gas transport system (GTS) depends on European partners.

EU Ambassador to Ukraine **Jan Tombinski** in his turn said Kiev should invite Brussels to participate in a possible gas transport consortium and it should specify its proposals.

UKRAINE-CIS

Russia calls on Ukraine to leave Energy Community

On 21 March 2013, Russian Prime Minister **Dmitriy Medvedev** said that Russia was prepared to set up a consortium with Ukraine to manage the latter's gas transport system on condition that Ukraine leaves the European Energy Community.

According to the Kommersant Ukraina business daily, Ukraine and Russia are currently negotiating a bilateral consortium which would lease the Ukrainian gas transport system. Gazprom insists that Ukraine amend the law to allow the lease of its

gas transport system. If Ukraine manages to change the law accordingly by 1 June, the price of gas can be decreased retrospectively down to 260 dollars per 1,000 cu.m. as of 1 January 2013, the paper said.

The same day, 21 March, the European Commission said that Ukraine's membership of the Energy Community ensures its energy security, in particular thanks to reverse gas supplies from the EU to Ukraine, and called on Kiev to respect its commitments to the Energy Community.

Ukraine did not officially comment on Medvedev's statement.

According to the Lb.ua news and analysis website, Ukraine in January imported 46.715m c. m. of natural gas from Germany at a total cost of 18.219m dollars. The average price of natural gas imported from Germany was 390 dollars per 1,000 cu.m.

The average price of Russian natural gas imported to Ukraine in January was 408.6 dollars per 1,000 c. m. Ukraine in January imported 2.448bn c. m. of natural gas worth 1.133bn from Russia.

Azarov: Ukraine seeks observer status in Customs Union

On 19 March 2013, Ukrainian Prime Minister **Mykola Azarov** said that Ukraine was in talks about the status of observer in the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia.

This format, according to Azarov, would allow Ukraine to express its position without taking direct part in decision-making.

Russian Prime Minister **Dmitriy Medvedev** responded by saying that the status of observer does not allow a country to influence the decisions made by the Customs Union member states.

Yevhen Kurmashov, political programme director of the Gorshenin Institute, suggested that Ukraine's accession to the Customs Union is one the main conditions to revising the price of Russian gas for Ukraine. He shared this view during a panel discussion at the National Expert Forum.

Ukrainian foreign minister to visit Russia

Ukrainian Foreign Minister **Leonid Kozhara** will visit Russia on 28-29 March 2013.

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said on 20 March that in Moscow he would discuss Ukraine's most topical agenda during the OSCE chairmanship and a range of issues on Ukrainian-Russian relations.

UKRAINE-USA

US under secretary of state visits Ukraine

On 19 March 2013, US Under Secretary for Political Affairs **Wendy Sherman** paid a two-day visit to Ukraine.

During the visit, she met the leaders of the Ukrainian government and opposition.

In an interview with the Svoboda radio on 20 March, Sherman said that the USA

supported Ukraine's EU bid. She also noted that the Ukrainian authorities had to resolve the issue with what the USA saw as selective justice. The USA and the EU believe that there was no fairness in the criminal cases against former Prime Minister **Yuliya Tymoshenko** and former Interior Minister **Yuriy Lutsenko**, she added.

Commenting on the decision of the US Senate and Congress to impose sanctions on a score of Ukrainian officials, Sherman said that these proposals were just recommendations.

UKRAINE-UN

UN urges Ukraine to free Tajik ex-premier

On 20 March 2013, the UN urged Ukraine to release arrested former Tajik Prime Minister **Abdumalik Abdullajanov**.

The UN noted that he was granted political asylum and that his extradition would violate the norms of international law.

Abdullajanov was detained at Kiev airport Boryspil on 5 February. On 18 February, the Tajik authorities officially asked the Ukrainian government to extradite their former prime minister. Currently, he is in custody in Ukraine awaiting the extradition decision. Back in Tajikistan, Abdullajanov is accused of attempting to kill President **Emomali Rakhmon** in 1996 and of organizing a coup.

Ukraine to dispatch additional peacekeeping contingent to UN mission in Liberia

Ukraine will send a group of peacekeepers represented by employees of law-enforcement agencies to Liberia, Ukrainian Interior Minister **Vitaliy Zakharchenko** said on 19 March 2013.

The Interior Ministry specified that 140 peacekeepers would be dispatched to Liberia in May-June. They will arrive there with small arms and armored personnel carriers.

Currently, there are 279 Ukrainian peacekeepers in Liberia.

DOMESTIC POLITICAL

AUTHORITIES

Yanukovych urged to disband parliament

On 19 March 2013, the Kharkiv-based NGOs comprising the Single Social Network urged Ukrainian President **Viktor Yanukovych** to disband parliament and schedule a snap election.

They insist that the election should be held under the first-past-the-post system, the number of MPs be cut to 300 and the second chamber of parliament be set up. Deputies' immunity must be cancelled, they say.

Vadym Omelchenko, president of the Gorshenin Institute, suggested that the initiative may be both a reaction to the opposition protests and a real plan of the authorities.

“When decoded, the so-called Kharkiv initiatives mean: parliament should be disbanded, deputies' immunity cancelled, and, what is most important, a bicameral parliament set up,” Omelchenko said. “One of the chambers is expected to consist of regional representatives who are in fact appointed by the authorities. The second is made of deputies elected exclusively under the first-past-the-post system. The number of deputies will reduce significantly resulting in constituencies growing bigger and consecutively in the southeast building a broader presence in parliament due to its high population. Let me recall that after this scenario was implemented in Russia, opposition parties lost their chance to be present in the legislative and thus in the executive,” he said.

He added that Kharkiv was chosen as the birthplace of this “bottom-up” initiative because the scheme “authorities-manageable public institutions-mass media” has been tested here to the utmost.

Omelchenko shared this commentary at a panel discussion of the National Expert Forum.

Parliament tentatively schedules Kiev mayoral election

On 21 March 2013, parliament adopted in the first reading a draft resolution scheduling the elections of the Kiev mayor and the Kiev city council for 2 June 2013. The resolution will have its second reading in two weeks.

The opposition promised they would nominate their candidate for Kiev mayor once the election is scheduled.

On 19 March, Party of Regions members requested the Constitutional Court to explain whether the Kiev election being scheduled for 2 June 2013 is in line with the new constitution.

According to the law, all regular local elections shall be held on the same day once in five years. Therefore, the next election should have been held in the autumn 2015, however the authority of Kiev city councillors elected during the snap election in May 2008 expires this June. The term of office of the Kiev mayor expired in May 2012.

The opposition fears that having a court ruling at their disposal and understanding that a pro-government candidate will not succeed, the authorities will seek to postpone the election in Kiev until 2015.

According to the Dzerkalo Tyzhnya weekly, the presidential administration is considering two options: to hold no elections in Kiev until 2015, or to hold the mayoral election without electing the Kiev city council. While doing this, the presidential administration is not going to transfer all the executive functions from the city administration head appointed by the president to an elected mayor.

Ukrainian constitutional assembly preparing to release new constitutional draft

The Constitutional Assembly of Ukraine is finishing its work on a new draft of the constitution, its secretary **Maryna Stavnychuk** said on 21 March 2013.

The constitutional assembly was set up on 17 May 2012 as a special agency controlled by President **Viktor Yanukovich**.

The assembly is headed by Ukraine's first President **Leonid Kravchuk**.

Parliament committee calls for anti-corruption verification of bills

On 20 March 2013, members of the committee for fighting organized crime and corruption suggested that parliament introduce an anti-corruption expertise for each and all draft laws. The corresponding bill was prepared by representatives of the authorities and opposition.

The committee noted that the parliament has received a large number of bills with signs of corruption that might be lobbying for private interests.

President subordinates tax and customs services to revenue ministry

President **Viktor Yanukovych** on 18 March 2013 approved a regulation that establishes the Ministry of Revenues and Taxes. According to the presidential decree, the Ministry of Revenues and Taxes is the successor of the State Tax Service and State Customs Service that are currently undergoing reorganization.

Financial police to emerge under interior ministry – media reports

Forbes magazine on 22 March 2013 reported that Prime Minister **Mykola Azarov** instructed the Interior Ministry to develop a concept for the creation of a special unit within the Ministry of Interior that would combat economic crimes against the state.

According to Azarov's order, the special unit should be created on the basis of the Security Service, Interior Ministry, Financial Supervision Authority, Tax and Customs Services.

Yanukovych orders to speed up privatization of print media

On 21 March 2013 Ukrainian President **Viktor Yanukovych** instructed Prime Minister **Mykola Azarov** to speed up the completion of the bill on the privatization of the state-owned and municipal print media and submit it by 5 April.

OPPOSITION

Ukraine's top election agency registers two new MPs instead of expelled lawmakers

On 18 March 2013, the Central Election Commission of Ukraine (CEC) registered **Roman Stadniychuk** from the opposition Fatherland party and **Oleksandr Kozub** from the pro-government Party of Regions as MPs instead of **Serhiy Vlasenko** and **Andriy Verevskyy**, respectively.

Such a decision was taken after the Supreme Administrative Court of Ukraine stripped Vlasenko and Verevskyy of their parliamentary seats due to combining their legislative responsibilities with other kinds of professional activity.

The Fatherland party appealed against the CEC's registration of a new MP instead of Vlasenko with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

Earlier, the opposition challenged the ruling of the Supreme Administrative Court in the Constitutional Court of Ukraine.

On 19 March, Stadniychuk was sworn in in parliament.

The head of the Party of Regions parliamentary faction, **Oleksandr Yefremov**, said that after the swearing in of the new Fatherland MP, the opposition had no legal grounds for challenging the expulsion of Vlasenko from parliament.

An MP of the Fatherland party, **Anatoliy Hrytsenko**, said that the head of the parliamentary faction, **Arseniy Yatsenyuk**, could prevent Vlasenko's replacement with the new MP, but did not want to do it.

On 21 March, parliament set up a commission for investigating the circumstances under which the Supreme Administrative Court had expelled Vlasenko, **Pavlo Baloha and Oleksandr Dombrovskyy** from parliament.

Ukrainian opposition says chief defender of jailed ex-premier might be arrested

Serhiy Vlasenko, who is the chief defender and close associate of jailed former Prime Minister **Yuliya Tymoshenko**, might be arrested in the nearest future, the deputy head of the opposition Fatherland party, **Serhiy Pashynskyy**, said on 20 March.

Pashynskyy added that the first deputy prosecutor-general, **Renat Kuzmin**, admitted that a score of criminal cases had been launched against Vlasenko, based on statements from his former wife.

On 6 March, the Supreme Administrative Court stripped Vlasenko of his parliamentary seat for combining his legislative duties with the professional activity of a lawyer.

Ukrainian prosecutor's office prolongs investigation into businessman's murder

On 19 March 2013, the Prosecutor-General's Office of Ukraine (PGO) said that the investigation into the murder of politician and businessman **Yevhen Shcherban** in 1996 had been prolonged.

The PGO suspects the jailed former Prime Minister **Yuliya Tymoshenko** and the former prime minister, who served time in the USA on charges of money laundering, **Pavlo Lazarenko**, of the organization of the crime.

The PGO explained that more time was needed for the investigation because of Tymoshenko's actions, who was allegedly dragging it out.

At the same time, the defence team of the former prime minister believes that the prolongation of the investigation shows that the PGO has no evidence of Tymoshenko's alleged involvement in Shcherban's killing.

Ukrainian court again postpones hearing of case over jailed ex-premier's corporation

On 22 March 2013, a Ukrainian court ruled to postpone a hearing of the case launched against jailed former Prime Minister **Yuliya Tymoshenko**, who is accused of exceeding her authority when she headed the corporation United Energy Systems of Ukraine back in the 1990s. The decision was taken due to the absence of the defendant in the court chamber.

Tymoshenko refused to participate in the court hearing. She is currently undergoing medical treatment in a Kharkiv hospital.

Ukraine's former top prosecutor forced to testify against jailed ex-premier - mass media

Former Ukrainian Prosecutor-General **Svyatoslav Piskun** and his family have fled Ukraine, the Internet publication Forbes.ua reported on 22 March 2013.

According to the website, Piskun was forced to testify against jailed former Prime Minister **Yuliya Tymoshenko** and the corporation United Energy Systems of Ukraine which she ran in the 1990s. The authorities allegedly threatened to launch a criminal case against Piskun.

The same day, 22 March, the Prosecutor-General's Office denied opening any criminal cases against the former prosecutor-general.

Chief prosecutor in case against Ukraine's jailed ex-premier promoted to deputy prosecutor-general

On 22 March 2013, the Prosecutor-General's Office of Ukraine said that **Liliya Frolova** had been promoted to the post of deputy prosecutor-general.

As the Lb.ua news and analysis website reported, Frolova served as chief prosecutor in the case against jailed former Prime Minister **Yuliya Tymoshenko**, who was accused of exceeding her authority when she signed the 2009 gas contracts with Russia.

Frolova is also a state prosecutor in the case of the murder of politician and businessman **Yevhen Shcherban** in 1996.

Ukrainian opposition candidate detained in Italy

On 22 March 2013, Italian law enforcers arrested Ukrainian opposition figure **Viktor Romanyuk**, who ran in electoral district 94 in Kiev Region during the 2012 parliamentary election.

The Ukrainian news and analysis website Ukrayinska Pravda reported that the court decided to detain Romanyuk at the beginning of February, but he found out about it only during the detention.

Earlier, the mass media reported that Romanyuk was forced to flee Ukraine due to the pressure exerted on him and his company by the tax service.

During the parliamentary election in October 2012, Romanyuk garnered almost 10,000 votes more than his closest rival, a candidate of the pro-government Party of Regions, **Tetyana Zasukha**. Yet, district courts invalidated 33,000 votes given to Romanyuk. Later, the Central Electoral Commission of Ukraine declared that the results of voting in five election districts, including district No 94, were invalid.

Opposition calling for no-confidence vote

On 22 March 2013 opposition has registered in parliament a bill of no-confidence in the Cabinet of Ministers headed by **Mykola Azarov**.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Prosecutor's office suggests imposing liability for defamation

First Deputy Prosecutor General **Renat Kuzmin** on 18 March 2013 said that Ukraine needs to introduce criminal responsibility for libel.

At the same time, Kuzmin did not specify possible penalty envisaged by the bill.

In autumn 2012, the Party of Regions already came forth with an initiative to criminalize defamation.

On 20 March, the International Federation of Journalists warned Ukraine against attempts to introduce criminal responsibility for slander.

SOCIETY

Ukraine 71st among 158 countries in global peace ranking in 2012

Ukraine took 71st place among 158 countries in 2012 in the global peace ranking, news and analysis website Delo.ua reported on 21 March 2013, citing the survey of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

ECONOMICS

Ukraine's external debt tops 135bn dollars

The gross external debt of Ukraine (public and private debt) in 2012 increased by 8.81bn dollars, or 7 percent, to 135.05bn dollars, news and analysis website Lb.ua reported on 22 March 2013, citing statistics from the National Bank.

The U.S. dollar remained the major currency of Ukraine's external borrowings as of the end of 2012, constituting 74.7 percent of its gross debt (71.9 percent at the beginning of the year). The shares of liabilities in euro and Russian ruble at the end of 2012 totaled 10.7 percent and 2.6 percent, respectively. The share of obligations to the International Monetary Fund in 2012 dropped from 12.8 to 9.5 percent. The share of external debt in the Ukrainian hryvnya was only 1.9 percent of the gross debt.

The public and publicly guaranteed debt of Ukraine in 2012 increased by 5.38bn dollars to 64.55bn dollars.

Finance ministry expects internal debt to exceed foreign borrowing in 2013

Deputy Finance Minister **Anatoliy Myarkovskyy** on 22 March 2013 said that his agency expects the share of Ukraine's domestic debt to exceed the share of external borrowings and total 51.3 percent of the total debt by the end of 2013.

According to the finance ministry's 2013 debt management programme, the amount of public debt by the end of 2013 is expected to reach 60.43bn dollars, which makes approximately 30.6 percent of Ukraine's GDP against 28.5 percent recorded in 2012.

Agriculture ministry raises corn exports forecast

The Ministry of Agrarian Policy on 19 March 2013 increased its corn exports forecast by 2.8m tonnes to 14.8m tonnes for the current marketing year (July 2012 – June 2013).

As reported by the ministry, as of 19 March, Ukraine exported 19m tonnes of grains, including 6.2m tonnes of wheat, over 2m tonnes of barley and 10.1m tonnes of corn.

Ukraine ranks 4th among world's arms exporters

In 2012, Ukraine took the 4th place in the rating of global arms exporters. The volume of arms exports from Ukraine last year reached 1.344bn dollars, the Interfax-Ukraine news agency reported on 18 March 2013, citing the data published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

ENERGY MARKET**Ukraine's state energy firm sues its subsidiary**

As news and analysis website Lb.ua reported on 20 March 2013, state-run energy company Naftohaz Ukrayiny has filed a lawsuit against its subsidiary – Ukrtranshaz company – demanding that it return 638m dollars.

The hearing is scheduled for 8 April 2013. The details of the case are not disclosed.

In turn, Ukrtranshaz announced its disagreement with the claim and expressed hope for a peaceful resolution of the issue.

According to business daily Kommersant Ukraina, the companies have mutual debts to each other, and therefore, the claim will soon be revoked.

Firtash's company enters Ukrainian gas market

Owner of Ostchem company **Dmytro Firtash** on 19 March 2013 announced that his company this year plans to sell up to 2bn cu. m. of natural gas to industrial consumers in Ukraine. According to the businessman, the respective request came from the management of state-run energy company Naftohaz Ukrayiny.

According to business daily Kommersant Ukraina, Ostchem aims to become a major gas trader, and it significantly increased gas imports in February. At the same time, the newspaper notes, Ostchem is exempt from VAT on natural gas.

ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY

Ukraine to spend 91m dollars in 2013 on securing Chernobyl site

On 20 March 2013 the government take a decision to spend 91m dollars on the safety maintenance at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant and the transformation of the Shelter facility into an environmentally safe system.

According to a survey conducted by the Gorshenin Institute in April 2011, the majority of the Ukrainians (78.3 percent) believe that the Chernobyl NPP still constitutes a serious threat to the humanity.

Founded in July 2010, Gorshenin Weekly is a weekly digest of expert analysis covering the most important political, social and economic events in Ukraine. It is the key source of information about opinion polls carried out by the Gorshenin Institute as well as the best professional commentaries on recent developments.

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