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INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL**UKRAINE-EU****EU envoy says Ukraine has political prisoners**

There are political prisoners in Ukraine, the head of the EU delegation to Ukraine, **Jan Tombinski**, has said.

"Ukraine has political prisoners and one can hear this statement even from individuals who are closely connected to the current government camp," he said in an interview with Polish Radio on 8 October 2012.

Tombinski added that the Ukrainian government was becoming more aware of the fact that dragging out the case of jailed former Ukrainian Prime Minister **Yuliya Tymoshenko** was turning Ukraine into a hostage of this situation.

When asked about sanctions which can be slapped on the Ukrainian government if the situation does not change, Tombinski did not rule out that the possibility of punitive measures did exist. However, he also stressed that a decision on this issue would be taken on a political level.

In her turn, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's (PACE's) co-rapporteur on Ukraine, **Mailis Reps**, said that the assembly did not consider either Tymoshenko or former Interior Minister **Yuriy Lutsenko** political prisoners, although believed that the charges pressed against them were politically motivated.

Reps said in an interview with the analytical daily Kommersant Ukraina on 8 October that pardoning Tymoshenko and releasing Lutsenko from prison due to his health condition could be the most feasible way out of the current situation.

In the opinion of former Ukrainian ombudsman **Nina Karpachova**, Tymoshenko can be qualified as a political prisoner under the definition adopted by the PACE on 3 October.

Brussels to discuss ties with Kiev after Ukraine's parliamentary polls

Foreign ministers representing the EU member states will not discuss issues of their future relations with Kiev before Ukraine holds its October parliamentary election, the Ukrainian news agency UNIAN quoted its source in Brussels on 9 October 2012 as saying.

Earlier, the head of the EU delegation to Ukraine, **Jan Tombinski**, said in an interview with Polish Radio on 8 October that the situation in Ukraine would be discussed at a meeting of foreign ministers on 14 November.

In an exclusive commentary for the Lb.ua news and analysis website, the vice-president of the European People's Party and a member of the European Parliament, **Mario David**, said that the upcoming Ukrainian parliamentary election had been discussed at a meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs on 11 October. He added that the discussion showed that the EU was seriously concerned about the current situation in Ukraine.

EU confirms probe into violations during issuing of visas for Ukrainians

The EU has confirmed the previously reported information about an investigation which was launched into breaches of the procedure for issuing visas to Ukrainian nationals by certain embassies of the EU member states, the EU commissioner for internal affairs, **Cecilia Malmstrom**, was quoted by the Lb.ua news and analysis website as saying.

Earlier, Ukraine's envoy to the EU, **Kostyantyn Yeliseyev**, also spoke about the launch of the investigation into the matter.

The results of a survey carried out by the Gorshenin Institute in November 2010 suggest that the majority of the Ukrainian population (76.3 per cent) believe that the introduction of visa free travel is the most appropriate way of becoming closer with the EU.

UKRAINE-RUSSIA**Russia promises Ukraine gas price cut in exchange for entry into regional customs bloc**

Ukraine will be able to buy Russian gas for 160 dollars per 1,000 cu.m. if it joins the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, Ukrainian Prime Minister **Mykola Azarov** said on 9 October 2012. This is a proposal of the Russian side, he added.

On 10 October, Ukrainian Energy and Coal Industry Minister **Yuriy Boyko** said that Ukraine was not conducting negotiations with Russia on joining the Customs Union in exchange for a reduction in the gas price.

The Energy and Coal Industry Ministry said that the price of Russian gas during the first months of 2013 would remain approximately 432 dollars per 1,000 cu.m.

On 8 October, Russia launched the second line of the Nord Stream pipeline, thus doubling its transport capacity to 55bn cu.m. per year.

Ukraine has yet to agree with Russia volumes of gas to be purchased next year

Ukraine has not yet agreed with Russia the volume of natural gas it plans to buy in 2013, Ukrainian Deputy Energy and Coal Industry Minister **Volodymyr Makukha** said on 11 October 2012.

Earlier, Energy and Coal Industry Minister **Yuriy Boyko** said that Ukraine had applied for the purchase of 27bn cu.m. of gas from Russia's Gazprom in 2012 and 24.5bn cu.m. in 2013.

UKRAINE-DNIESTER REGION**Ukraine abstains from commenting on Dniester Region's complains**

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry has not commented on complaints filed by the parliament of Moldova's breakaway Dniester region regarding what it describes as Ukraine's unilateral demarcation of a section of the state border.

"We are not commenting on this yet," the Foreign Ministry's spokesman, **Oleksandr Dykusarov**, said on 9 October 2012.

Earlier, the Dniester region parliament expressed its deep concern over Ukraine's unilateral demarcation of the joint border in September 2012.

DOMESTIC POLICAL

AUTHORITIES

Ukraine's next year state budget to be submitted to parliament after polls

The Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers will submit an updated draft state budget for 2013 after the election, the deputy prime minister and minister of social policy, **Serhiy Tihipko**, said on 9 October 2012.

Tihipko said however that the draft state budget for 2013 shall be reviewed by the parliament of this convocation that will continue working till mid December 2012.

Tihipko also said that Ukraine is unlikely to resume cooperation with the International Monetary Fund before this year end.

Ukrainian president signs law on land bank

Ukrainian President **Viktor Yanukovich** signed the law establishing the land bank on 9 October 2012.

The LB.ua news and analysis website has reported that the approved law sets up pre-conditions for operation of the land market. In particular, the law establishes the state land bank that would provide commercial loans to agricultural companies and farmers with an interest rate not exceeding 5 per cent of the National Bank's rate. According to provisions of the law, the government shall transfer farmland plots owned by the state to the statutory fund of the state land bank. The bank is owned by the state and shall not be privatized.

In an interview with the Dzerkalo Tyzhnya weekly on 12 October, Finance Minister **Yuriy Kolobov** said that the land bank will set up land pools (consisting of land plots owned by the state or private land plots leased from people) of at least 50,000 hectares and will rent those to investors for longer terms.

President Yanukovich also said he supports the law approved by parliament on 2 October that allows foreigners and individuals with foreign capital to buy non-arable land in Ukraine.

Ukrainian parliament to expand powers to tax police

The Ukrainian parliament develops amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code (to come in force on 19 November 2012) to strengthen powers of the tax authorities in investigating economic crimes, the Ekonomicheskiye Izvestiya paper reported on 11 October with a reference to sources in the Interior Ministry.

Ukraine's pro-presidential party to change Supreme Justice Council head

The Party of Regions has submitted a draft resolution to parliament nominating **Volodymyr Kolesnichenko**, chairman of a court in Cherkasy Region, for the head of the Supreme Justice Council. The draft resolution to this effect was registered in parliament on 5 October 2012, the LB.ua news and analysis website reported.

Kolesnichenko was elected head of the Supreme Justice Council in March 2010.

Ukrainian media suggest that the president's advisor, **Andriy Portnov**, is looking to take the post of the Supreme Justice Council head.

President allows Ukrainian peacekeepers use arms

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich on 9 October 2012 signed the law broadening powers of Ukrainian peacekeepers abroad.

The term "peacekeeping operations" in the law is superseded with the term "international operations to maintain peace and safety" expanding the range of tasks Ukrainian soldiers can perform abroad. In particular, the law authorizes them to take part not only in humanitarian and peacekeeping missions but also in military operations.

Media say the law actually allows Ukrainian servicemen to use arms to defend themselves and their allies.

Ukraine denies arms supplies to Syria

Ukraine did not supply and does not supply any weapons to Syria, the Foreign Ministry's spokesman, **Oleksandr Dykusharov**, said on 9 October 2012.

Dykusharov confirmed that Ukraine signed a contract with the Saudi Arabian Defence Ministry for supply of arms in 2010.

Earlier, BBC correspondents found at least three boxes with munitions from Ukraine at the disposal of militants in Syria.

OPPOSITION**Ukraine's united opposition postpones congress**

United Opposition Fatherland has postponed its congress until 15 October 2012. Earlier, opposition members planned to hold a congress on 10 October, although 14 October was also named as a potential date for organizing the event.

The Interfax-Ukraine news agency quoted a member of the united opposition as saying that the congress would be closed to the press.

It is expected that during the congress the united opposition will revise its list of parliamentary candidates, as well as take a decision about who among its candidates currently running in single-seat constituencies will have to quit the race to boost the electoral chances of the UDAR party candidates.

UDAR and the united opposition are currently involved in the negotiations on a joint nomination of parliamentary candidates for single-seat constituencies.

The results of a survey carried out by the Gorshenin Institute in April 2012 suggest that the majority of the Ukrainian population (66.7 per cent) believe that Ukraine needs the opposition.

European court appoints new judge in case of Ukraine's jailed ex-premier

The judge in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on Ukraine's quota, **Hanna Yudkovska**, who participated in a court hearing of the case of jailed former Ukrainian Prime Minister **Yuliya Tymoshenko**, has been replaced by ad hoc judge **Stanislav Shevchuk**, Ukraine's representative at the ECHR **Nazar Kulchytsky** said on 11 October 2012.

We learned earlier that Yudkovska is on maternity leave.

Tymoshenko's lawyers hope that the appointment of the new Ukrainian judge at the ECHR will affect the date of handing down the verdict in the case of the former prime minister.

Ukrainian authorities deny OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's vice-president permission to see jailed ex-premier, ex-interior minister

The Ukrainian government has denied the vice-president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the head of the OSCE observation mission to the Ukrainian parliamentary election, **Walburga Habsburg Douglas**, permission to meet jailed former Ukrainian Prime Minister **Yuliya Tymoshenko** and jailed former Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) said on 11 October 2012.

Back in March, Douglas already attempted to arrange a meeting with Tymoshenko, but was denied permission.

Ukraine's penitentiary service refuses to hospitalize jailed ex-interior minister

Preliminary conclusions drawn by physicians suggest that the health condition of jailed former Ukrainian Interior Minister **Yuriy Lutsenko** is satisfactory and that he has no diseases requiring hospitalization, the Ukrainian State Penitentiary Service reported on 11 October, following a further examination of the former minister.

Earlier, doctors who visited Lutsenko on 2 October said that he needed a further examination.

In the opinion of the wife of the former interior minister, **Iryna Lutsenko**, her husband has not been properly and fully examined.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Observers say election situation in Ukraine deteriorating

The election situation in Ukraine has deteriorated, the international organization ENEMO concluded in a report published on 11 October 2012.

According to observers, one of the most widespread violations is the misuse of government machinery. Intimidation of opposition candidates has become more frequent too, they said. The report reads that the opposition parties have difficulty accessing mass media and booking outdoor advertisements. Observers also mentioned the lack of balance among representatives of political parties in constituency election commissions.

ENEMO is most concerned about polling day.

Commenting on the report, the pro-presidential Party of Regions said ENEMO was "dancing to the tune" of the opposition.

The deputy head of the opposition parliamentary faction Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc, **Serhiy Sobolev**, said in an exclusive commentary to the news and analysis website Lb.ua that if the election was recognized as non-democratic, Ukraine would face sanctions, up to losing its seat at the PACE.

As of 12 October 2012, the Central Electoral Commission has registered 1,064 official observers representing international organizations and foreign states.

Kristina Wilfore, the National Democratic Institute regional director in Ukraine, said that the presence of international observation missions at the parliamentary polls is not meant to and cannot ensure their transparency. She said at a round table at the Gorshenin Institute on 2 October 2012 that the transparency of the Ukrainian election could only be ensured by people administering the polls.

European Parliament to open mission in Ukraine soon

The European Parliament's observers at the Ukrainian parliamentary election will soon enter an active phase of their work, the chairman of the mission and European Parliament MP, **Pawel Kowal**, said on 9 October 2012.

The head of the OSCE observation mission at the Ukrainian parliamentary election, **Walburga Habsburg Douglas**, said, in her turn, that the OSCE mission would be the largest over the history of its foreign operations.

Main election body faces problems during printing of ballot papers

Many candidates registered in first-past-the-post constituencies are pulling out of the election run, a deputy head of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), **Zhanna Usenko-Chorna**, said on 8 October 2012.

"This means the CEC must change the text of ballot papers all the time. Therefore we cannot start full-scale printing," she said.

She said that if candidates running in first-past-the-post constituencies decided to withdraw en masse after the ballot papers were printed, they would need to be stamped "cancelled". "This is a dangerous situation. It poses a risk to voters' free choice because a wrong candidate can be stamped as cancelled, either by accident or on purpose. It leaves room for abuse at polling stations," she warned.

The head of the Committee of Voters of Ukraine, **Oleksandr Chernenko**, said that about two thirds of parliamentary candidates in first-past-the-post constituencies were registered as technical. Real candidates did this to have a wider presence in polling station commissions, he said.

Up to 70,000 policemen to be on duty on election day

The Interior Ministry is planning to engage 65,000-70,000 policemen to ensure public order on the Ukrainian parliamentary election day, Deputy Interior Minister **Viktor Ratushnyak** said on 12 October 2012.

Police will beef up security as of 20 October.

Since the election law forbids policemen from being present in voting rooms on election day, they are planned to be stationed in separate rooms or on adjacent territories. They will be called in if a violation is committed at a polling station.

Chesno: Party of Regions' candidates in first-past-the-post constituencies among top violators

The Party of Regions' candidates running in first-past-the-post constituencies were among the most frequent violators of election regulations, the public movement Chesno (Ukr: Honestly) said on 10 October 2012.

According to the Chesno monitoring findings, the Party of Regions accounts for 144 out of 214 violators among the analysed candidates, United Opposition Fatherland for 57 out of 155, Vitaliy Klitschko's UDAR for 44 out of 198, and the Communist Party of Ukraine for 40 out of 224.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ukraine among top countries with most human rights violations

Ukraine occupies the fifth position when it comes to the number of complaints submitted to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), Ukraine's representative at the ECHR **Nazar Kulchytskyy** said on 11 October 2012. In particular, the ECHR has received 10,400 complaints against Ukraine.

Among the main reasons for complaints he listed the dragging out of the implementation of court rulings, as well as the length of time it takes Ukrainian courts to consider cases.

The Ukrainian analytical weekly Dzerkalo Tyzhnya reported that on 24 October the UN would consider the situation with human rights in Ukraine. Two reports were sent from Ukraine to the UN: the first is official, drawn up by the government, and the second was prepared by NGOs.

Ukraine's pro-opposition private TV channel suffering losses due to shutdown broadcast

The Ukrainian pro-opposition TV channel TVi will lose additional 2m dollars after it was removed from cable networks, its director-general **Mykola Knyazhytsky** said on 10 October 2012.

He added that as a result of tax persecution the TV channel had lost extra 1.2m dollars.

As previously reported, Ukraine's regional cable companies have been shutting down TVi broadcasts during the past several months. In Knyazhytsky's opinion, cable companies took such a step following an order from the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council.

Journalists of Ukraine's news website might be banned from entering parliament

The administration of the Ukrainian parliament has asked the committee for freedom of speech to consider whether it makes sense to allow journalists of the Ukrayinska Pravda news and analysis website, **Serhiy Leshchenko** and **Mustafa Nayem**, to attend sessions of the parliament of the next convocation. It addressed a statement to this effect to the committee's head **Yuriy Stets** on 8 October 2012.

The reason for the statement was a banner urging MPs not to adopt the libel law which Leshchenko and Nayem placed in the press box during the parliamentary session on 2 October. The parliament administration considers such an action a violation of parliamentary rules.

Number of violations of Ukrainian journalists' rights on the rise

According to the monitoring data published by the Institute of Mass Information, the number of violations of rights of Ukrainian journalists is on the rise ahead of the upcoming parliamentary election.

As many as 51 violations have been reported during the two months of the election campaign. They are directly related to the election and/or were committed by either political parties or parliamentary candidates.

It is noteworthy that 35 violations were reported in September, while there were just 16 of them in August.

The biggest part of violations had to do with beating, attacking and intimidating journalists (six cases), as well as with obstructing journalistic activities and censorship (six cases), the institute said.

ECONOMICS

NBU promises stable exchange rate amid growing devaluation expectations among public

The National Bank of Ukraine (NBU) sees no objective grounds for devaluation of the Ukrainian hryvnya as of today. The statement was made by the director of the NBU's Analysis and Forecasting Department, **Serhiy Korablin**, on 9 October 2012.

Earlier, Prime Minister **Mykola Azarov** also made a statement that the exchange rate of the national currency would remain stable.

At the same time, Fitch Ratings believes that the hryvnya may lose 10 per cent of its value by the end of this year.

Despite the government's assurances of a stable exchange rate, devaluation sentiments are growing in Ukraine. Specifically, net purchases of foreign currency by the public (the difference between volumes of currency purchased and sold to banks) in September totalled 1.802bn dollars. This is the record-high amount this year, which is 2.5 times higher than in August when net purchases of currency amounted to only 722.8m dollars.

Also, net sales of foreign currency by the NBU in September totalled 1.5bn dollars.

According to Finance Minister **Yuriy Kolobov**, during the IMF-Ukraine talks, the sides discussed the possibility for minor weakening of the hryvnya (5 per cent at the most).

Finance Ministry gets green light to borrow above debt ceiling

The Ministry of Finance has received permission to go beyond the ceiling level of public debt during a year. According to the magazine *Forbes Ukraine*, the respective law (proposed by the Party of Regions) was passed on 2 October 2012.

Now, the debt ceiling will have effect only at the end of each year when the government closes a fiscal period, the magazine says.

Fitch worsens Ukraine GDP growth outlook, IMF keeps forecast unchanged

Fitch Ratings, a global rating agency, has worsened its outlook on the economy growth in Ukraine in 2012 from 1.6 per cent to 0.5 per cent. The GDP growth in 2013 is expected by the agency at 3.1 per cent.

At the same time, the IMF has preserved its forecast of Ukraine's GDP growth at 3 per cent in 2012, and 3.5 per cent in 2013.

According to the news and analysis website LB.ua, the national budget of 2012 is based on the economy growth forecast of 3.9 per cent (in January-August 2012, the Ukrainian economy grew only by 1.5 per cent); the government expects 4.5 per cent for 2013.

Finance Ministry preparing budget cuts, say media

Due to lower budget revenues, the Ministry of Finance is preparing for a budget sequestration, or budget spending cuts, the magazine Forbes Ukraine reported on 10 October 2012, citing two sources in the government.

According to the State Treasury, the state budget in September received 3.19bn dollars in revenues, which is 225m dollars less than in August. The largest drop was recorded in proceeds of customs duties. Last month the agency transferred to the budget 1.151bn dollars, which is 26 per cent less than in August.

As finance experts say, at the current rate of proceeds, the budget revenue shortfall can reach 3.753bn dollars (excluding the planned deficit of 3.378bn dollars), and with coverage of the Pension Fund's cash gaps – up to 6.255bn dollars, Forbes Ukraine says.

According to news agency RBC-Ukraine, the deficit of Ukraine's Pension Fund in the first nine months of 2012 amounted to 1.21bn dollars

Ukraine continues talks with IMF

On 10 October 2012, a Ukrainian delegation flew to Japan to hold talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The delegation included governor of the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU) **Serhiy Arbuzov**, Finance Minister **Yuriy Kolobov** and Economics Minister **Petro Poroshenko**.

As the news and analysis website LB.ua reported citing its own sources, the delegation did not include all the officials who wanted to represent Ukraine during the talks. Earlier LB.ua journalists speculated that there is a group of young officials in the government closely related to the president's family who oppose incumbent Prime Minister **Mykola Azarov**.

The business daily Kommersant Ukraina on 11 October reported, citing sources close to the negotiations with the IMF, that the fund would provide financial aid to Ukraine if the government meets all of its obligations, or in the event of a critical situation in the economy.

In an interview with the weekly Dzerkalo Tyzhnya on 12 October, Kolobov reported that the NBU administration is holding talks with the IMF, urging the fund to send its mission to Ukraine right before the election.

Naftohaz to receive almost 500m dollars from budget

On 11 October 2012, a law came into force in Ukraine according to which Naftohaz Ukrayiny, a state-run oil and gas company, will receive 488m dollars from the 2012 state budget in order to cover the difference between the purchase price of imported gas and the price of gas sales to business entities.

VISA, MasterCard losing positions in Ukraine

On 12 October 2012, President **Viktor Yanukovich** signed a law on payment systems and non-cash transactions.

The international payment system VISA raised objections against the law, with its representatives asking the president to veto the document.

According to LIGABusinessInform, the law introduces new rules for non-cash payments that may reshape the market of payment systems. In particular, the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU) will create a clearing centre which will process electronic payments. Today, international payment systems carry out settlements through centres located outside Ukraine. As a result, VISA and MasterCard may partially lose market positions or even leave the Ukrainian market. Their place will be taken by a local operator – National System of Mass Electronic Payments (NSMEP).

In addition, according to the document, the NBU will have the right to impose restrictions on cash payments.

According to the weekly Dzerkalo Tyzhnya, the NBU's initiative to establish a national payment area receives its main support from Privatbank (controlled by **Ihor Kolomoyskyy**) which has been engaged in a price war with VISA after the latter reduced bank fees on ATM transactions.

Government allows increase in wheat exports

The Ministry of Agrarian Policy has increased the volume of permitted wheat exports from 4m to 5m tonnes, its head **Mykola Prysyazhnyuk** announced on 11 October 2012.

During the first three months of the current export season, which is July-September, Ukraine exported 5.5m tonnes of grain, including 2.6m tonnes of wheat.

Last season, the volume of grain exports from Ukraine totalled 21.8m tonnes. Wheat exports amounted to 5.17m tonnes.

NBU to expand currency basket

The National Bank of Ukraine (NBU) is considering a possibility of including Singaporean and Canadian dollars, as well as Norwegian and Swedish kronas into the foreign exchange reserves, the news and analysis website Comments.ua reported on 10 October 2012.

Currently, the major currencies that form the country's international reserves include the US dollar, euro, British pound, Swiss franc, Australian dollar, IMF Special Drawing Rights, Japanese yen and monetary gold.

As of early October, Ukraine reserves totalled 29.255bn US dollars.

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