
Why is Ukraine fighting Russia?

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MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti commentator in Kiev Zakhar Vinogradov) - Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko has once again surprised Russia and other countries.

He recently unveiled a monument to Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko in Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, signed several intergovernmental agreements there, and announced his intention to establish a museum of the Soviet occupation of Ukraine, like the one he visited in Tbilisi together with his friend, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, and those in several Baltic countries.

As usual, the Ukrainian and Georgian presidents said cynically that they had nothing against Russia, and that the museums were only proof of their countries' respect for their past, for the elder generation victimized by the Soviet regime.

Neither leader explained how they would separate the victimized Ukrainians and Georgians from the Ukrainian and Georgian occupiers. The picture has been complicated by the fact that millions of those who had been considered occupiers one day became victims of Stalin's regime the day after.

The truth is that these official speeches are poor camouflage for ordinary Russophobia. Attempts at political correctness made by Yushchenko and Saakashvili did not sufficiently hide their anti-Russian sentiments. It is clear to everyone that they have become friends because they hate Russia.

Yushchenko's stance in this historical confrontation looks more vulnerable and less consistent than the position of Saakashvili.

Under its current president, Ukraine is moving further away from its neighbor and partner, Russia, contrary to economic logic and common sense. Some two months ago, Ukraine's parliament passed a law on the famine of the 1930s, which it has interpreted as a Soviet genocide against the Ukrainian people.

These are the methods used by Yushchenko and his ideological comrades to consolidate Ukraine. Unfortunately, they are uniting the country not to tackle issues of social and economic development of interest to both the eastern (pro-Russian) and western (anti-Russian) parts of Ukraine, but to focus its attention on negative issues, hunt down witches and stir up ghosts.

By doing this, Yushchenko is creating more problems for himself. Ukraine's parliament expressed its outrage at the famine in Ukraine in the 1930s, but completely overlooked the hunger in Belarus and Russia. Moreover, Ukrainian leaders are pretending not to remember that the famine happened because of the policies pursued by Stalin, a Georgian by nationality, and unnamed leaders of Ukraine.

In principle, the Ukrainian elite knows very well that its pseudo-historical stand is vulnerable. But it is using it to hide its anti-Russian policies.

Russia, busy with its gas and oil projects, has chosen to disregard

the new ideological studies of its neighbors. Its parliament seems not to notice the ideological tumor spreading through the Commonwealth of Independent States, an ailing but still alive organization bringing together 11 former Soviet republics.

As all of us who belong to the older generation were told in Soviet universities, the viability of the superstructure depends on the foundation, that is, on economic relations. Unfortunately, the superstructure (ideology) is being turned into the foundation in some ex-Soviet countries.

Russia and Ukraine have more things uniting them than pushing them apart economically. These ties do not just include Russian oil and gas supplied to Ukraine, which it delivers to Europe. This makes our countries natural and indivisible partners.

But the main thing is that Russians and Ukrainians have a common history, which was both good and bad, and a common culture, which they developed over centuries. And lastly, many Russian and Ukrainian families are interrelated.

But Ukrainian politicians' ideological confrontations with Russia, and Russia's apathy towards the issue, are making their people hostages to a war against the ghosts of the past. This is a perfect background for some Ukrainian political analysts, who write in the press about choosing a specifically Ukrainian path towards Europe, in the name of which Russia, once the closest and friendliest of neighbors, is termed "the country of Russian imperialism." They seem to believe that if they want to become part of Europe, they should attack Russia.

A top official in Yushchenko's administration recently told me that Ukraine can become not only a gas transit but also a political corridor between Russia and Western Europe. This is a disputable idea, for Russia does not need intermediaries, but it is quite new for Ukraine. Maybe Ukraine should use the available foundation to rebuild its ideological superstructure of confrontation with Russia into that of real partnership.

This idea has also been supported in the European Union, which Ukraine wants to join so much. Justas Paleckis, a Lithuanian member of the European Parliament who attended meetings of the Ukraine-EU inter-parliamentary cooperation committee, told the Ukrainian daily Den: "The main thing for Ukraine is to have good relations with Russia. The European Union does not need countries that have problems with their neighbors."

Therefore, the war against the ghosts of the past is useless and even harmful to Ukraine. In the meantime, Yushchenko will be building his museum of Soviet occupation, and maybe some time soon U.S. anti-ballistic missile systems will be deployed near it. After all, what could be better than a good neighbor?

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