

# Yanukovych's not so anti-EU behaviour

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by Iryna Krasnoshtan

**Having always been described as a pro-Russia, Yanukovych has a crucial role for the troubled path of Ukraine towards EU integration. A deeper look shows what the real aims of Ukrainian political elites are.**

The end of the year 2011 was supposed to be decisive in Ukraine's relations with the EU. It is still supposed to be so. However, the recent events in Ukraine are changing the path that Ukraine is taking.

Some time after being elected in 2010 and after a "rapprochement" in Ukraine -Russia relations through the Kharkiv agreement, the president, although known as pro-Russian, began pursuing a clear objective of European integration. This was a leitmotif of all his high-level meetings and of all his speeches on the foreign policy of Ukraine. Because of this, the relations between Ukraine and Russia, including the personal relations between Yanukovych and **Putin**, became colder and the Ukrainian president started to lose the support of some of his eastern voters: he was blamed for not being close enough to Russia.

It would be a mistake to evaluate the successful course of the EU-Ukraine negotiations only as Viktor Yanukovych's victory. Its foundation was laid by the previous president. However, the declarative approach and indecisive way of leading the country, together with the internal political chaos, did not allow Yushenko to achieve substantial results during his term. The pragmatic approach in relations with both the EU and Russia taken by Yanukovych accelerated the course of European integration.

However, the intentions of Viktor Yanukovych were not that clear. With strong determination to integrate in the EU and the good dynamics of the Association talks, de facto Yanukovych was consolidating his power: more presidential authority, control over the Parliament and the judicial system, prosecution of the opposition and pressure on the media. This has recently come to a highest point with a **biased sentence against Yulia Tymoshenko**.

The Tymoshenko case is changing the course of the EU-Ukraine negotiations. On the one hand, some hoped that the system will not have gone that far to give her a sentence; on the other hand, it was quite clear that the process was meant to go till the end. It's not obvious if Yanukovych understood all the consequences of the trial. In one interview he was complaining that the international community was paying too much attention to Ukraine domestic affairs and Tymoshenko case. Yanukovych clearly underestimated the response of the **international community**. But it was also the way to show the world that whatever they may think about it, it would remain Ukraine's domestic business.

Is this the way for a reconciliation with Russia? As a response to this question the **prime minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov** has rapidly signed a free-trade agreement between the CIS countries. However, the relations in eternal triangle EU-Ukraine-Russia are way more complicated today. Too many things were already achieved in order to conclude the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. However, the warnings of the EU on political prosecutions and the rule of law in Ukraine were not heard.

The outcome of the Tymoshenko trial puts the EU in an uncomfortable position. Ukraine is decisive for the EU in its Eastern Partnership: failure to sign the Association Agreement with Ukraine will point the programme's failure. But could the EU tolerate Yanukovych's ignorance to democratic values? And to which point will the EU go to pressure Yanukovych?

The main fear in Ukraine is that not the ruling elite but the ordinary citizens will suffer the most from this pressure, and that this will affect the already strict **visa regime** that complicates the travel of Ukrainians to the EU. At the same time, the question is how far Yanukovych can go to show his determination. The isolation of Ukraine from the West will bring Ukraine closer to Russia. But except Russia, neither Ukraine nor the EU will win from that.

There is no predictability in what Yanukovych and the EU will decide. The hope is that Ukrainian high officials and their colleagues in the EU will not step away, and that the efforts towards the European integration of Ukraine would not be vain.