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Analysis: New Ukraine Foreign Minister May Reduce Tension With Moscow

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The 9 October appointment of Petro Poroshenko as Ukraine's foreign minister appears to be a sign of Ukraine's intent to improve relations with Russia, which reached a low point in August when Russian President Dmitry Medvedev publicly attacked Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko's "anti-Russia" policy and indicated he could not work with Yushchenko. Poroshenko immediately stated that his goal is to improve relations with Russia, and Russian officials and media have welcomed Poroshenko's appointment and suggested that it can reduce tension. Poroshenko was nominated by Yushchenko, who appears to have toned down his anti-Russia rhetoric, and Poroshenko's appointment was approved mainly with the votes of the faction of Premier Yuliya Tymoshenko, who has made better relations with Russia her priority in recent months. Some observers, however, question how much Poroshenko can improve relations as long as Yushchenko, who has been feuding with Russia, remains president.



Petro Poroshenko
(www.interfax.com.ua, 10 Jul)

Upon his appointment, Poroshenko indicated that improving relations with Russia was one of his top priorities, and he went to Moscow for 23 October talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

- On 13 October, he said that while "our main direction is European" and "gaining membership in the European Union

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remains Ukraine's strategic goal," "Russia is our largest and most important strategic partner" and stated that his aim was "to build constructive relations with the Russian Federation." He also said that "our relations will become, should become less emotional, more pragmatic, and equal" (Kanal 5 TV, 13 October).[\[1\]](#)

- In a 23 October Ekho Moskvyy radio interview, Poroshenko said that the recent clash between Yushchenko and Russian President Medvedev had been resolved; he stated: "I consider this dialogue finished on both sides after Viktor Yushchenko's response," and there is no need to dwell on this incident.[\[a\]](#) When asked about Russia's barring him from entry as "persona non grata" in 2007, he dismissed this as a "one-time matter" and noted that he had visited Russia repeatedly after this (*Ukrayinska Pravda*, 23 October).[\[2\]](#)
- In a 26 October interview, Poroshenko declared: "The task of my visit to Moscow was to show that the protection of Ukrainian national interests and the development of mutually advantageous cooperation with the Russian Federation are not mutually exclusive tasks." He said that "we have managed to move ahead in building trust between ministers and ministries" and pointed out that this is the first visit by a Ukrainian foreign minister to Moscow in a year and a half. He said that Russian officials told him Moscow would soon decide on sending its new ambassador to Kyiv (*Kommersant*, 26 October).[\[b\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- On NATO, he said that joining NATO remains Ukraine's "strategic goal," "while retaining good neighborly relations and a strategic partnership with the Russian Federation." He denied the "myth" that Ukrainian leaders were trying to "drag Ukraine into NATO despite the will of the people" and said: "We do not intend to go anywhere just to anger Russia" (*Kommersant*, 26 October).[\[4\]](#)

Poroshenko has long appeared to favor balance between Ukrainian aspirations to join Europe and good relations with Russia. For example, while secretary of the National Security and Defense Council in 2005, he argued that "we are not setting ourselves an alternative -- either Europe or Russia" (Inter TV, 9 June 2005).[\[5\]](#) While then Premier Tymoshenko was attacking Russian oil companies and threatening to stop buying Russian oil in mid-2005, Poroshenko went to Moscow and reportedly gave the Russians the impression he would be easier to deal with than Tymoshenko.[\[c\]](#)

Positive Russian Reaction

Russian officials and nonofficial media appeared to welcome Poroshenko's appointment and, after his 23 October meeting with Lavrov, began cautiously speaking of a thaw in Ukrainian-Russian relations.

- Russian Charge d'Affairs in Ukraine Vsevolod Loskutov said that Russia welcomed the appointment of Poroshenko and said that it may help improve relations between Kyiv and Moscow. Loskutov said: "We believe that the appointment of such a successful and influential politician will help to further improve interaction between our respective Foreign Ministries and will give us the opportunity to constructively resolve existing problems" (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 October).[\[6\]](#) Loskutov characterized Poroshenko's visit to Moscow as foreign minister as "successful, as constructive" (Interfax-Ukraine, 26 October).[\[7\]](#)
- Independent Moscow daily *Kommersant* concluded after interviewing Poroshenko about his meeting with Lavrov that "it appears that a warming has ensued in Ukrainian-Russian relations" (26 October).[\[8\]](#)
- Independent Moscow daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* said that the appointment of Poroshenko allows both Russia and Ukraine to "get out of the complicated diplomatic situation without damage to their reputations" (23 October).[\[9\]](#)
- Prominent Moscow observers Igor Bunin and Aleksey Makarkin - - president and first vice president of the Moscow Center for Political Technologies respectively -- in a wide-ranging analysis arguing that Ukraine needs to strike a balance between Russia and the West, wrote that Poroshenko's appointment "looks like the first step toward changes in the foreign policy sphere based on realization by most of the [Ukrainian] establishment that a blind alley has developed" in the conflict with Russia. They noted Poroshenko said that his 23 October visit to Moscow was "to renew dialogue, which clearly has been somewhat weakened lately," and they argued that during the visit Russia clearly made gestures to the new minister. While cautioning that there still is "the question of how much the new foreign affairs minister can facilitate resolution of these tasks" while Yushchenko remains president, Bunin and Makarkin argued that "Poroshenko can facilitate a substantial change of the climate in bilateral relations, reducing sharpness, and achieving agreement on concrete questions," as well as increasing "trust between the neighboring countries" (*Politkom.ru*, 26 October).[\[10\]](#)

Yushchenko Compromise on Foreign Minister

While not announcing any changes in foreign policy, Yushchenko recently has suggested the need for improved relations with Russia and appears to have toned down his rhetoric.

- On 21 September, Yushchenko complained that relations with Russia were bad and said that "neighbors should have a much better relationship and be able to settle even the most difficult inherited issues" (Interfax-Ukraine, 21 September).[\[11\]](#)
- On 9 October, Yushchenko called for early resumption of Ukrainian-Russian talks on settling border disputes (Interfax, 9 October).[\[12\]](#)
- Nominating Poroshenko, Yushchenko argued the need to break the seven-month stalemate over filling the post of foreign minister, saying: "We must get out of this blind alley," in which the post of foreign minister and several other ministerial posts were unfilled (*Ukrayinska Pravda*, 8 October).[\[13\]](#) Yushchenko said that Ukraine had lost much in relations with neighboring countries, the European Union, the United States, and other states because of the absence of a minister of foreign affairs for the past six months and, it must now make up for this by "strengthening our relations" (*Korrespondent.net*, 9 October).
[\[14\]](#)

Yushchenko's nomination of Poroshenko appeared to break from his past choices for foreign ministers, most of whom were objectionable to Russia.

- The previous foreign minister, Volodymyr Ohryzko, was accused of worsening relations with Russia and was voted out on 3 March by a coalition of the Party of Regions, Communists, and Tymoshenko's Bloc of Yuliya Tymoshenko (BYuT) faction (*Grani.ru*, *Lenta.ru*, 3 March).[\[15\]](#) [\[16\]](#) Russian parliamentary leaders praised the ouster, saying he was "trying to ruin intergovernmental relations between Russia and Ukraine" and calling him a "Russophobe" (*Delovaya Stolitsa*, 10 March).[\[17\]](#)
- Yushchenko's attempts to fill the post since then -- including the nomination of pro-NATO ambassador to the United States Oleh Shamshur -- had failed, as the other factions opposed his choices (*Lenta.ru*, 17 March; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 20 March).
[\[18\]](#) [\[19\]](#)

Tymoshenko Support for Poroshenko

Although a longtime close ally of Yushchenko and past bitter foe of Tymoshenko, Poroshenko was elected foreign minister mainly with the

votes of Tymoshenko's party. All 153 members of Tymoshenko's BYuT voted for Poroshenko's confirmation and, with most (63 of 72) from Nasha Ukrayina (formally headed by Yushchenko) and the small Lyvtyn faction (20), this provided Poroshenko with a majority (240, with 226 needed). Only one Party of Regions deputy and one Communist voted for him. No one actively opposed his confirmation (*Glavred*, 9 October),[\[20\]](#) and Party of Regions official Hanna Herman even said that if Poroshenko was effective, he may be kept on as foreign minister if Party of Regions leader Viktor Yanukovich is elected president (*Politkom.ru*, 26 October).[\[21\]](#)

Tymoshenko had declared her support for Poroshenko after Yushchenko nominated him, suggesting that her feud with Poroshenko is over.

- She said: "We as law abiding citizens and, moreover, responsible members of the government, will act according to the constitution. If the president nominates him...we will support him and help him as long as Yushchenko is president (*Korrespondent.net*, 8 October).[\[22\]](#)
- Ukrainian TV channel ICTV reported that Poroshenko "does not remember" Tymoshenko's past insults and that their relationship is said to be warmer than before their 2005 feud (9 October).
[\[23\]](#)
- The analytical weekly *Dzerkalo Tyzhnya* stated that Poroshenko is "viewed as a communications bridge between the president and the premier." According to the weekly, Yushchenko considers Poroshenko a loyal foreign minister who will be influential in the Tymoshenko-led Cabinet and work effectively in the area of foreign policy. The premier, on the other hand, considers Poroshenko an ally "of convenience" who owns a national TV channel (Kanal 5 TV) and has influence on some Rada members (17 October).[\[24\]](#)

One reason for Tymoshenko's support may be the prospect of improving relations with Moscow, which Tymoshenko in recent months has been actively fostering.

- Deputy Head of Tymoshenko's BYuT Andriy Kozhemyakin contended that Poroshenko is capable of improving Russian-Ukrainian relations. Kozhemyakin stated: "I believe that Poroshenko is that very candidate in these conditions -- when the crisis is upon us and relations between Russia and Ukraine remain tense -- who can find a compromise" (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 October).[\[25\]](#)
- *Vecherniye Vesti*, a paper linked to Tymoshenko, stated that while Poroshenko has inherited "a mass of formidable tasks,"

Poroshenko can become an effective minister. At the very least, his business background will serve him well "especially in strengthening business ties with Moscow" (20 October).[\[26\]](#)

Continued Doubts About Change Under Yushchenko

Some Ukrainian observers, however, have insisted that Ukraine's policy toward Russia would not change and contended that Poroshenko cannot improve relations as long as Yushchenko remains president.

- Former Foreign Minister Ohryzko asserted that Poroshenko's appointment will not alter the course of Ukraine's foreign policy, insisting that Poroshenko will have to follow Yushchenko's policy because "the minister only conducts the policy, which is decided by the president of the country" (Interfax-Ukraine, 12 October).[\[27\]](#)
- Volodymyr Kornilov, director of the Ukrainian branch of the Institute of CIS countries, opined: "While Viktor Yushchenko is president, it is doubtful that Ukraine's minister of foreign affairs, whoever he may be, will succeed in setting up normal good-neighbor relations with Russia" (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 October).[\[28\]](#)
- Some analysts contended that Poroshenko will not be able to smooth relations with Russia, pointing out that two years ago, Poroshenko himself headed Russia's list of "persona non grata" Ukrainians and was barred from entering Russia (*Vecherniye Vesti*, 20 October).[\[29\]](#)

Appendix: Poroshenko Background

After becoming a successful businessman, Poroshenko branched out into media and became an important political figure when Yushchenko decided to run for president in 2004 in opposition to then President Leonid Kuchma and the establishment. In 2004, Poroshenko bought the newspaper *Pravda Ukrainy* and created a new TV channel, Kanal 5, which became the only national channel opposing then President Kuchma. Poroshenko became a leader of Yushchenko's Nasha Ukrayina party and used his channel to support Yushchenko's presidential bid in 2004.[\[d\]](#)

After Yushchenko became president in early 2005, Poroshenko reportedly expected to be named premier, but Yushchenko named Tymoshenko instead.



Tymoshenko and Poroshenko before their feud (www.postup.brama.com, 2005).

Yushchenko persuaded him to take the lesser post of secretary of the National Security and Defense Council and expanded its powers to win Poroshenko's acceptance.^[e] A public rivalry developed between Premier Tymoshenko and security chief Poroshenko during 2005, with Poroshenko sniping at her publicly.^[f] The rivalry became so bitter and public that Yushchenko finally fired both of

them on 8 September 2005.^[g]

Since then, Poroshenko served as chairman of the important Finance and Banking Committee in the Rada and then was named head of the National Bank in February 2007 by Yushchenko (*Mfa.gov.ua*).^[30]

^[a] In early August, Medvedev sent Yushchenko a letter accusing him of ruining Russian-Ukrainian relations, and Yushchenko responded with a letter criticizing the "unfriendly character" of Medvedev's letter. Medvedev said that because of the "anti-Russia course of the Ukrainian leadership," he would not send Russia's new ambassador to Kyiv until there is a "new political leadership of Ukraine" that will be ready for better relations. For further information, see the 19 August OSC Analysis, **Russia's Medvedev Sharpens Conflict With Ukraine, Jumps Into Ukrainian Elections** ([CEF20090819317001](https://www.osc.state.gov/analysis/2005/08/1908050819317001)).

^[b] Lavrov told reporters after his talks with Poroshenko that the new ambassador "is getting ready to leave for Kyiv. I am convinced that his arrival in Kyiv will take place in proper time" (RIA-Novosti, 23 October).

^[c] For further information, see the 16 May 2005 FBIS Analysis, **Poroshenko Snipes at Tymoshenko's Efforts To Drive Down Fuel Prices** ([CEF20050516317002](https://www.fbis.gov/analysis/2005/05/16050516317002)).

^[d] See the 4 March 2004 FBIS Foreign Media Analysis, **Pro-Government Forces Move Against New Opposition TV Channel**" ([CEF20040304000295](https://www.fbis.gov/analysis/2004/03/04040304000295)).

^[e] See the 28 April 2005 FBIS Analysis, **Tension Between Poroshenko and Tymoshenko Flares Up** ([CEF20050428317001](https://www.fbis.gov/analysis/2005/04/28050428317001)).

^[f] See the 16 May 2005 FBIS Analysis, **Poroshenko Snipes at Tymoshenko's Efforts To Drive Down Fuel Prices** ([CEF20050516317002](https://www.fbis.gov/analysis/2005/05/16050516317002)).

[g] See the 8 September 2005 FBIS Analysis, **Yushchenko Dismisses Tymoshenko and Poroshenko After Public Dispute** ([CEF20050909317001](#)).

[1] [OSC | | [CEP20091013950204](#) | 13 October 2009 | | New Ukrainian foreign minister says better ties with Russia top agenda | | (U) | (U) | Kiev Kanal 5 TV in Ukrainian -- Pro-Yushchenko television channel owned by Yushchenko ally Petro Poroshenko]

[2] [Internet Site | | Ukrayinska Pravda | | 23 October 2009 | | [www.pravda.com.ua](#) | 23 October 2009 | Outspoken website founded by murdered journalist Heorhiy Gongadze, critical of various political sides]

[3] [OSC | | [CEP20091026046006](#) | 26 October 2009 | | Ukrainian Foreign Minister Foresees Improved Russia-Ukraine Relations | | (U) | (U) | Moscow Kommersant Online in Russian -- Website of informative daily business newspaper owned by pro-Kremlin and Gazprom-linked businessman Alisher Usmanov, although it still criticizes the government; URL: <http://kommersant.ru/>]

[4] [OSC | | [CEP20091026046006](#) | 26 October 2009 | | Ukrainian Foreign Minister Foresees Improved Russia-Ukraine Relations | | (U) | (U) | Moscow Kommersant Online in Russian -- Website of informative daily business newspaper owned by pro-Kremlin and Gazprom-linked businessman Alisher Usmanov, although it still criticizes the government; URL: <http://kommersant.ru/>]

[5] [OSC | | [CEP20050610033024](#) | | Ukrainian Security Chief Says Possible To Cooperate With Russia, EU | | (U) | (U) | Kiev Inter Television in Ukrainian -- Commercial station which, until the December 2004 Ukrainian election crisis, actively promoted SDPU(O) leaders and oligarchs Hryhoriy Surkis and Viktor Medvedchuk, as well as displaying a distinct anti-western, pro-Russian bias. Some of the channel's journalists publicly rebelled against its pro-government bias during the election crisis, forcing it to adopt a more impartial stance.]

[6] [OSC | | [CEP20091023006013](#) | 23 October 2009 | | New Ukrainian Foreign Minister Visits Moscow, Improves Bilateral Relations | | (U) | (U) | Moscow Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online in Russian -- Website of daily Moscow newspaper featuring varied independent political viewpoints and criticism of the government; owned and edited by businessman Remchukov; URL: <http://www.ng.ru/>]

[7] [OSC | | [CEP20091026950206](#) | 26 October 2009 | | Russian envoy to Ukraine describes foreign ministers' talks as 'constructive' | | (U) | (U) | Kiev Interfax-Ukraine in Russian -- Service provided by the Russian news agency Interfax focusing on events in Ukraine]

[8] [OSC | | [CEP20091026046006](#) | 26 October 2009 | | Ukrainian Foreign Minister Foresees Improved Russia-Ukraine Relations | | (U) | (U) | Moscow Kommersant Online in Russian -- Website of informative daily business newspaper owned by pro-Kremlin and Gazprom-linked businessman Alisher Usmanov, although it still criticizes the government; URL: <http://kommersant.ru/>]

[9] [Internet Site | | Nezavisimaya Gazeta | | 23 October 2009 | | www.ng.ru | 23 October 2009 | Daily Moscow newspaper owned by Konstantin Remchukov; it sometimes criticizes the Russian government]

[10] [Internet Site | Igor Bunin, Aleksey Makarkin | Politkom.ru | | 26 October 2009 | | www.politkom.ru | 26 October 2009 | Website created by the independent Political Technologies Center featuring insightful political commentary that is sometimes critical of the Russian government]

[11] [OSC | | [CEP20090922950053](#) | 21 September 2009 | | Ukrainian president says not 'proud' of ties with Russia | | (U) | (U) | Kiev Interfax-Ukraine in Russian -- Service provided by the Russian news agency Interfax focusing on events in Ukraine]

[12] [OSC | | [CEP20091009964012](#) | 9 October 2009 | | YUSHCHENKO CALLS FOR RESUMED EFFORTS TO SETTLE RUSSIA-UKRAINE FRONTIER DISPUTES | | (U) | (U) | Moscow Interfax -- nonofficial news agency]

[13] [Internet Site | | Ukrayinska Pravda | | 8 October 2009 | | www.pravda.com.ua | 8 October 2009 | Outspoken website founded by murdered journalist Heorhiy Gongadze, critical of various political sides]

[14] [Internet Site | | Korrespondent.net | | 9 October 2009 | | www.korrespondent.net | 9 October 2009 | An independent and much-visited website owned by American Jed Sunden; reports objectively]

[15] [Internet Site | | Grani.ru | | 3 March 2009 | | www.grani.ru | 3 March 2009 | Anti-Kremlin website owned by exiled magnate Berezovskiy]

[16] [Internet Site | | Lenta.ru | | 3 March 2009 | | www.lenta.ru | 3 March 2009 | Popular Internet news service published by Rambler Media Group, which is partially owned by business magnate Potanin]

[17] [OSC | | [CEP20090311950044](#) | 10 March 2009 | | Dismissal of Ukrainian foreign minister part of deal with Moscow, paper says | | (U) | (U) | Kiev Delovaya Stolitsa in Russian -- business weekly also containing political analysis]

[18] [Internet Site | | Lenta.ru | | 17 March 2009 | | www.lenta.ru | 17 March 2009 | Popular Internet news service published by Rambler Media Group, which is partially owned by business magnate Potanin]

[19] [Internet Site | | Nezavisimaya Gazeta | | 20 March 2009 | | www.ng.ru | 20 March 2009 | Daily Moscow newspaper owned by Konstantin Remchukov; it sometimes criticizes the Russian government]

[20] [Internet Site | | Glavred | | 9 October 2009 | | www.glavred.info | 9 October 2009 | Ukrainian general news site with focus on press freedom]

[21] [Internet Site | Igor Bunin, Aleksey Makarkin | Politkom.ru | | 26 October 2009 | | www.politkom.ru | 26 October 2009 | Website created by the independent Political Technologies Center featuring insightful political commentary that is sometimes critical of the Russian government]

[22] [Internet Site | | Korrespondent.net | | 8 October 2009 | | www.korrespondent.net | 8 October 2009 | An independent and much-visited website owned by American Jed Sunden; reports objectively]

[23] [OSC | | [CEP20091010950060](#) | 10 October 2009 | | BBC Monitoring: Ukrainian TV Highlights 9 Oct 09 | | (U) | (U) | Caversham BBC Monitoring in English -- Monitoring service of the BBC, the United Kingdom's public service broadcaster]

[24] [Newspaper | | Dzerkalo Tyzhnya (Zerkalo Nedeli) | | 17 October 2009 | | www.dt.ua | 19 October 2009 | Leading Ukrainian analytical weekly, probably the most influential analytical paper]

[25] [Internet Site | | Nezavisimaya Gazeta | | 23 October 2009 | | www.ng.ru | 23 October 2009 | Daily Moscow newspaper owned by Konstantin Remchukov; it sometimes criticizes the Russian government]

[26] [Internet Site | | Vecherniye Vesti | | 20 October 2009 | | www.vvnews.info | 22 October 2009 | Ukrainian daily linked to Tymoshenko]

[27] [Internet Site | | Interfax-Ukraine | | 12 October 2009 | | www.interfax.com.ua | 12 October 2009 | Kyiv Interfax-Ukraine -- nonofficial news agency]

[28] [Internet Site | | Nezavisimaya Gazeta | | 23 October 2009 | | www.ng.ru | 23 October 2009 | Daily Moscow newspaper owned by Konstantin Remchukov; it sometimes criticizes the Russian government]

[29] [Internet Site | | Vecherniye Vesti | | 20 October 2009 | | www.vvnews.info | 22 October 2009 | Ukrainian daily linked to Tymoshenko]

[30] [Internet Site | | Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine | | date of posting unknown | | www.mfa.gov.ua | 30 October 2009 | Website of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry]

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