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TAGS: PREL PGOV UP

SUBJECT: TYMOSHENKO APPEALS TO EMOTIONS, PATRIOTISM IN HER
PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN KICK-OFF

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Before an estimated 150,000 followers and spectators, Prime Minister Tymoshenko accepted on October 24 her party's nomination for president. The event was a four-hour, highly staged, nationally televised extravaganza on Independence Square (the site of the 2004 Orange Revolution) featuring a variety of well-known entertainers. Speeches focused on three central themes: economic recovery and development, European integration, and Ukrainian identity. Tymoshenko vowed to fix the economy that, she maintained, was broken by others; integrate Ukraine into Europe while maintaining an equal and dignified relationship with Russia; and help the common folk -- from whence, she stressed, she came -- build a better life. Tymoshenko relied heavily on patriotism and nationalist symbolism to make her trademark emotional appeal. However, with only twelve weeks to go and behind at least ten points in the polls, Tymoshenko will have to make full use of her legendary campaigning skills while making a substantive, and not merely symbol-rich, case if she is to overtake front-runner Yanukovich. End Summary.

TYMOSHENKO "LOVES YU..."

2. (SBU) During a four-hour, tightly-choreographed media extravaganza on Independence Square, PM Yuliya Tymoshenko accepted the Bat'kivshchyna (Motherland) party's nomination for president on October 24, in front of an estimated 150,000 spectators. (Bat'kivshchyna is the core of the Tymoshenko Bloc). The event, which featured speeches from political, cultural, and international figures interspersed with performances from popular Ukrainian recording artists, was broadcast to the crowds on screens scattered throughout the square. Tymoshenko relied heavily on patriotism and nationalist symbolism, wearing her signature white (for purity) with traditional Ukrainian embroidery down the lapel. Her speech was delivered without notes or, as far as we could tell, teleprompters, which likely explains its length (fifty minutes), lack of organization, and the subsequent



absence of the text from the internet. Speakers emphasized three themes: economic recovery and development, European integration, and homespun populism -- while the popular performers continued her "Love Yu"-themed concert campaign that has toured the country. (Note: Advertisements depict a heart followed by the Cyrillic letter "Yu" - the first letter in "Yuliya.")

SHE'LL FIX THE ECONOMY THAT OTHERS HAVE BROKEN

3. (SBU) Team Tymoshenko was particularly anxious to rebut the charge that the PM is responsible for the floundering Ukrainian economy. The head of the Bloc Yuliya Tymoshenko (BYuT) faction in the Rada (parliament), Ivan Kyrylenko, praised Tymoshenko's determination to fix the economic problems caused by President Yushchenko. People's Movement of Ukraine (Rukh) leader Borys Tarasyuk told the audience that "Tymoshenko alone can lead the country out of political chaos and economic disorder." Rector of the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute Mykhailo Zhurovskiy praised her efforts to attract new industry to Ukraine and her support for economic development. National Academy of Sciences President Borys Paton underscored her leadership in promoting innovation and research.

4. (SBU) Tymoshenko continued this message during her acceptance speech, promising to stabilize the hryvnia, finish paying back depositors in the Soviet-era "Sberbank," and normalize Ukraine's volatile energy market. She called upon Ukraine to rely more on its own coal reserves than imported natural gas and protect the Black Sea's oil and gas deposits from foreign hands. Appealing to students and young professionals, she vowed to stabilize the economy and lower interest rates so that they can buy apartments instead of paying exorbitant rents.

UKRAINE'S PATH LEADS TO EUROPE

5. (SBU) The second major theme of the evening was Tymoshenko's ability to integrate Ukraine into Europe. Pictures of her with various European heads of state and religious leaders were scattered on the screens behind the stage throughout the evening. A pre-recorded speech by a representative of the European People's Party was broadcast during the congress and touted her singular ability to further Ukraine's European integration. The first President

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of independent Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, called on her to "take the baton of Ukrainian independence" from him and continue the fight.

6. (SBU) Tymoshenko pledged to bring Ukraine closer to Europe, but without provoking its "traditional and friendly neighbor, Russia." She promised "equal and dignified" relations with Russia that are "open and without a hidden agenda." She also vowed to protect Ukraine, preventing anyone from "either humiliating or touching (Ukraine's) national interests, even with a finger."

JUST A SMALL-TOWN GIRL WHO MADE IT GOOD

7. (SBU) Tymoshenko appealed to the emotions of the voters

and stated numerous times that she understood them because she was just like them. Underscoring her humble beginnings and "rags-to-riches" story, she spent about half of her 50-minute speech recounting her impoverished childhood as one of seven living in a one-room apartment; her work as a teenager in a tire factory in Dnipropetrovsk (unloading tires "three times larger than I"); and discussing how she put herself through school, started her own small business, became an executive in the energy sector, and then set out to rid the sector of corruption while she was the Deputy PM for Fuel and Energy. She also reminded the crowd of her imprisonment during the Kuchma presidency on allegations of fraud as further proof of her status as a victim, outsider and crusader. She talked of receiving letters in prison from imprisoned children who were there "because they had stolen bread to feed their families," while oligarchs who had stolen the riches of the state were enjoying their freedom.

8. (SBU) To appeal to voters in the east, congress organizers invited the Director General of the Rovenki coal mine in Luhansk, Yuriy Zyukov (bedecked in full military decoration) to speak about Tymoshenko's deep concern for the plight of miners, and her willingness to "follow them into the mine" to see first-hand the unacceptable conditions under which they had to work. Zyukov applauded her leadership in passing legislation to protect the industry and its workers. Tymoshenko also made a point of standing with BYuT MP Natalia Korolevska from Luhansk as she watched the concert following her speech.

9. (SBU) Tymoshenko recounted that she had recently met with Pope Benedict XVI and asked for his blessings on Ukraine, and had prayed for the country in Jerusalem and with the leaders of the myriad Orthodox churches. She criticized current President Yushchenko for his failure to realize the promise of the 2004 Orange Revolution and for becoming another pawn to the oligarchs. She also attacked Party of Regions (PoR) leader Yanukovych, reminding the crowd of his attempt to falsify the 2004 Presidential election.

COMMENT: FULL OF SOUND AND FURY, BUT SIGNIFYING...?

10. (C) Tymoshenko's campaign achieved an impressive turnout, gambling successfully that the weather would cooperate with a late-October outdoor venue. However, Tymoshenko took the rostrum two hours into the event, after the sun had set and a chill wind had begun to blow. While she made a rock-star's entrance onto the stage, her fifty-minute speech, disjointed in parts, seemed, as it went on, to dampen the fervor of even some loyal supporters. There were no breaks for applause, and a less-than-exuberant ovation at its finish. (Some speculate that she was suffering from a fever.)

11. (C) We continue to be struck by the number of people -- pundits, diplomats, and politicians -- who assume, almost as an article of faith, that Tymoshenko will come from behind and win the election because she is a superior campaigner to front-runner Yanukovych. The fact is she is ten points or more behind with less than twelve weeks to go. The crowd turned out, but she failed to electrify them. Despite her pledge to fulfill the promise of the Orange Revolution which she blames Yushchenko for squandering, Tymoshenko has to overcome the burden of having been PM at a time of severe economic crisis. Tymoshenko will need all of her legendary campaigning skills -- not fully in evidence October 24 -- plus more reliance on a substantive platform and not simply symbolic appeals, if she is to overtake Yanukovych.
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