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Cable title: **UKRAINE: DEATH TOLL AND PANIC RISING WHILE POLITICIANS**

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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: DEATH TOLL AND PANIC RISING WHILE POLITICIANS
TRADE ACCUSATIONS

REF: A) 09 KYIV 01890 B) 09 KYIV 01893

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1. (SBU) Summary. The Ukrainian government appealed for international help on November 1 as the official death toll from flu and respiratory infections reached 60, with at least 13 of those deaths caused by the A-H1N1 virus. The government is implementing unprecedented measures to combat the outbreak (Ref B) and has pledged \$375 million (3 billion hryvia) to fight the flu outbreak. Minister of Health Knyazevich urged politicians to "cease spreading panic" and stated that Ukraine's situation is not unusual among countries experiencing A-H1N1 flu outbreaks. The political opposition meanwhile accused the government of failing to prevent the flu epidemic. End Summary.

DEATH TOLL RISING

2. (U) The Ministry of Health has confirmed 67 influenza- and acute respiratory viral infections-associated deaths in Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, Lviv, Rivne and Volyn oblasts (all in Western Ukraine) for the period of October 19 through November 1. At least 22 of those deaths are confirmed to have been caused by A-H1N1. The official estimate as of November 1 of flu-sufferers numbers 191,431; of those, 7,524 have been hospitalized. So far, there are no confirmed cases of A-H1N1 in Kyiv, but there have been at least three flu-related deaths in Ukraine's second largest city -- Kharkiv -- in eastern Ukraine, according to the media.

STRICT MEASURES

3. (U) The government announced strict measures to combat the spread of the flu, closing schools in all Ukraine for three weeks and suspending all public events (Ref B). [Note: Interestingly, the Dynamo Kyiv - Inter Milan Champions League match is expected to take



place as scheduled on November 4. End Note.] Over the weekend, Presidential candidates cancelled their election events, and the Ministry of Defense suspended the annual draft into Ukraine's conscript army. At an Emergency Session on October 30, the Cabinet

of Ministers declared the flu outbreak a "level three" threat (the highest possible threat level) and allocated UAH3 billion to fight the disease. The government has also launched a public service announcement campaign to educate the public about steps to prevent the spread of the flu. In addition, authorities have set up two hotlines to provide information about the A-H1N1 virus and to collect complaints about pharmaceutical and medical services and incidents of price gauging.

APPEAL FOR HELP AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

4. (SBU) President Yushchenko appealed for international help on October 30 and, according to the Presidential Secretariat's website, sent letters to his counterparts in Belarus, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, the United States, as well as to the EU President, and NATO Secretary General. According to Foreign Minister Poroshenko, 12 countries have agreed to supply Ukraine with equipment and medicine to tackle the outbreak. Meanwhile, Ukraine negotiated a purchase of 300,000 doses of Tamiflu from Swiss drug maker Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd at a price of UAH67 (about US\$8.40) per dose. The shipment arrived at the Kyiv Boryspil International Airport to great fanfare this morning, with Prime Minister Tymoshenko, Poroshenko and Kyiv governor Ulyanchenko welcoming the shipment. The drug will reportedly be distributed to hospitals in western Ukraine and provided to sick patients free of charge. According to news reports, a World Health Organization (WHO) team is expected to arrive in Ukraine today, November 2, to evaluate the outbreak.

PANIC MODE

5. (SBU) Witnesses continue to report lines outside of pharmacies, as people try to stock up on flu medicine and surgical masks. A number of pharmacies were reportedly unable to meet the sudden spike in demand and quickly ran out of supplies. People of all ages are now seen wearing surgical masks on Kyiv's streets. According to an Interfax news report, Our Ukraine/People's Self-Defense Bloc MP Volodymyr Stretovych even proposed that all MPs attend Rada meetings in surgical masks to demonstrate the seriousness of the flu epidemic threat.

6. (U) Minister of Health Knyazevich urged politicians to cease spreading panic and stated that Ukraine's situation is not unusual among countries experiencing A-H1N1 flu outbreaks. PM Tymoshenko meanwhile blamed the "dishonest behavior of Ukrainian politicians

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and certain political forces" for spreading panic. According to Tymoshenko, Ukraine is grappling with "an epidemic of common flu accompanied by a small number of lab-confirmed cases of [A-H1N1] flu."

COMMENT: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

7. (SBU) Tymoshenko has imposed severe measures to deal with the outbreak, although infection and death rates are comparable to other countries experiencing swine flu. The opposition is criticizing her, however, saying that the measures were not taken early enough. It is still too soon to tell whether the public supports

Tymoshenko's response to the outbreak, but commentators are starting to question whether the extreme measures (such as closing schools, limiting travel within the country, and cancelling political rallies) are simply motivated by the Prime Minister's desire to look strong in advance of the January presidential elections. There are rumors circulating that the election could be postponed because candidates are losing out on three weeks of campaigning. However, under Ukrainian law, postponement of the elections would require a state of emergency to be declared and be in effect on election day, January 17. The Prime Minister, the President, and the Rada leadership would also need to agree to a postponement, something that would be difficult to achieve given the current political environment. End Comment.

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