

Feds link economy, human rights in Ukraine

Government officials say talks are on track; diaspora calling for Canada to raise human rights in talks

Sneh Duggal

Canada's trade talks with Ukraine may have slowed while the Harper government waits out potentially controversial elections in the fall, say several observers—but others argue trade and politics aren't connected.

Parliamentary elections in Ukraine are set for October, but at least one international leader is already raising a red flag. The United States' director of national intelligence James R. Clapper told the US Congress that Ukraine is becoming authoritarian under its current president, Viktor Yanukovich, according to a Jan. 31 Associated Press report.

Canada and Ukraine launched free trade talks in May 2010, and three rounds have been held so far. The first and second rounds took place in Kyiv May 2010 and 2011. A third round was held Nov. 21 to 25 last year in Ottawa.

A fourth round of talks is scheduled for May in Kyiv, said Mykhailo Khomenko, chargé d'affaires at the Ukrainian embassy in Ottawa.

Even so, some observers say they are expecting Canada to wait out much of 2012.

"The sense that we're getting is that Canada is probably waiting until after the parliamentary elections in Ukraine," said Ukrainian Canadian Congress president Paul Grod.

"I suspect the free trade negotiations will not be signed if the parliamentary elections

are deemed to be fraudulent or somehow undemocratic."

The international community turned its attention to Ukraine after a court there handed former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko a verdict of seven years in prison on charges of abuse of office.

The Harper government was vocal in its opposition of the way Ms. Tymoshenko's case was handled. Prime Minister Stephen Harper said the sentencing "may have serious consequences for our bilateral relationship" during a Ukrainian Canadian Congress reception in October.

Axel Huelsmeyer, associate political science professor at Concordia University, also said the trade file with Ukraine is not moving very fast. He said this was in part due to the large Ukrainian population in Canada, and the fact that the political tensions in Ukraine matter to them.

The other reason, he said, is that neither of the countries have the deal high on their agendas.

Zenon Potoczny, president of the Canada-Ukraine Chamber of Commerce, said members of the Ukrainian diaspora are concerned about the human rights problems in Ukraine and the government's pressure on the opposition. He said the community voiced their concerns to the Canadian government and its negotiator for this deal.

"When we discussed it with him, we certainly wanted to make sure that when

Canada negotiates this free trade agreement with Ukraine...it includes some provisions protecting human rights."

He said he thinks all the political upheaval would have had some effect on the trade talks and have possibly slowed them down.

"The way things have gone in Ukraine, I don't think the free trade agreement between Canada and Ukraine is a priority right now for the Canadian government," he said.

"I think it's still on the list to being signed and concluded, but I'm pretty sure the pace has slowed down even more than before... it's still on the table but probably at a bit of a lesser importance than negotiations with the EU or India."

Mr. Grod said that while the talks seem to be moving forward at a reasonable pace, negotiations might conclude prematurely without a deal being signed until the political situation in Ukraine improves.

Government officials, however, insist both sides are on track. Mr. Khomenko said he hopes the main text of the deal will be finished this year, which could mean the signing of a deal in 2013.

He said the talks were progressing as planned, and he doesn't think political tensions are affecting them. Ukraine is very interested in a deal with Canada, he said, since it would be the first deal of this kind with a country in the Western hemisphere.

"We have lots of common business interests and lots of prospective projects," he said.

"We are talking into consideration the fact that 1.2 million people of Ukrainian decent are living in Canada...Canada is very important for us."

Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade spokesperson Caitlin Workman wrote in an email to *Embassy* that the government is "tremendously concerned" about Ms. Tymoshenko's wellbeing, and has offered and been granted permission to provide her with medical support.

But when asked whether the sentencing of Ms. Tymoshenko was slowing trade talks, Ms. Workman said "strong economic growth helps create a more prosperous, equitable and secure democracy where human rights are respected."

Two-way trade of goods was \$252.2 million in 2010. Canada's main exports to Ukraine include machinery, fish and seafood, aircraft, pharmaceuticals, and meat.

Other observers argued there was no link between Ukrainian politics and an international trade deal.

"Ms. Tymoshenko obviously didn't get what we would consider to be a fair trial, but I'm not sure a business relationship of the sort that Canada is proposing with Ukraine should hinge on the lack of due process in a particular case," said Lubomyr Luciuk, a professor in the politics and economics department at the Royal Military College of Canada who has studied Ukraine.

And Peter Solomon, professor at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs, said although Mr. Harper threatened that Ms. Tymoshenko's ruling might hurt relations, it doesn't necessarily mean it would affect trade.

He said Canada will not allow it to derail an agreement that is in Canada's interests. sduggal@embassyamag.ca

PAID MESSAGE BY THE EMBASSY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN CANADA

ARTICLE BY THE PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA DMITRY MEDVEDEV

Integrate to Grow, Innovate to Prosper

Russia has taken over the rotating chair of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in 2012 and will host this year's APEC Leaders' Week in Vladivostok. For Russia this honour comes with a great sense of responsibility. Just as Russia is an integral part of the vast and forward-reaching Asia-Pacific region, that is crucial for the socio-economic development of Russia, especially Siberia and the Far East. Therefore, one of the country's top priorities is to promote trade and investment cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries and to actively participate in regional integration.

We have many proposals for our Asia-Pacific partners that seek to address problems in spheres of energy, transportation, research and technology, and environmental protection; to promote dialogue among civilizations and ensure military-political stability in the region; to boost cooperation in emergency response and in the fight against international terrorism.

The APEC leaders' Honolulu declaration says, "Our region is now the vanguard for global growth." Russia, as the current APEC chair, will do its best to reinforce the region's leading position.

What does Russia intend to do as APEC chair? First of all, we plan to ensure continuity in APEC's work, while also trying to expand the forum's traditional agenda in a constructive manner.

Russia's key objective is to further liberalise trade and investment and to facilitate economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region. We expect our cooperation in these fundamental APEC spheres to yield practical results. Now that Russia has joined the World Trade Organisation, the country's representatives will be able to fully participate in trade liberalisation discussions. A consolidated position among APEC member economies should jumpstart multilateral trade talks and make them more constructive.

Russia's energetic involvement in regional integration is a conscious choice, and indeed the right choice. Following the successful conclusion of the WTO accession process, Russia is now ready to start talks on free trade agreements with APEC economies. Of course, Russia will act jointly with Kazakhstan and Belarus, the other members of the trilateral Customs Union. Added to the potential of the Common Economic Space, this could pave the way to a fundamentally new form of APEC integration and help expand the Asia-Pacific market to the whole of the Eurasian continent.

Russia also plans to promote APEC cooperation on food security. Like all other member economies, we have a stake in ensuring that food is available, affordable, safe and of high quality. In light of the growing social commitments of governments in the post-crisis period, we must develop stable food markets and dampen price fluctuations. Furthermore, we must continue to search for ways to ensure agricultural development based on rising mutual investments, modern technologies and compliance with quality standards.

The prospects of greater integration in APEC are closely connected to the need to improve logistics or (as it is often described within APEC) to ensure supply chains connectivity in the region. Russia is prepared to offer access to its transport corridors, which are the shortest route between Asia and Europe. We know that they must be upgraded, which will require major investment. This is what we will be discussing with our partners, who will surely show interest in our proposals. We have developed practical ways to use modern technology to resolve transportation issues, in particular organising cargo routes, cargo handling and vehicle tracking.

Innovation-based economic development is crucial for stable economic growth. This issue, which Russia sees as a priority, has been met with a lively response from our APEC partners. We will promote extensive interaction among universities, research centres and companies. Cooperation in education and developing human capital is vital, and the protection of intellectual property is becoming increasingly important. We also see opportunities for advancing joint initiatives in these spheres within APEC.

Russia is a leading supplier of energy to the global market, but energy will be just one of many focuses during Russia's tenure as APEC chair. It is certainly an important issue today, but we should also think about tomorrow. Therefore, we will promote further constructive discussions of the entire range of energy security issues as well as green growth.

The Asia-Pacific region is, unfortunately, prone to natural disasters and hazards. Earthquakes and tsunamis, anthropogenic catastrophes and epidemics demand that we redouble our efforts to better prepare APEC member economies for possible natural disasters and other emergencies.

During its tenure as APEC chair, Russia also will focus on cooperation in the fight against terrorism and transnational crime. We believe that no one will question the importance of this aspect of APEC's activity.

These are the main areas of Russia's activity under the motto, "Integrate to Grow, Innovate to Prosper." There is no doubt that by common efforts in 2012 we will successfully deepen Asia-Pacific integration in the name of economic growth and prosperity in the region.