

Yanukovych Seeks Deeper U.S. Ties

September 22, 2010

The  Moscow Times

NEW YORK — Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, who has repaired relations with Russia and taken his country out of the running for NATO membership, said he wants to improve strategic relations with the United States.

Yanukovych, speaking during an interview Wednesday in New York, also said that despite restoring historically close ties with fellow Slavs in Russian, his nation is determined to win membership in the European Union.

"The people of Ukraine and Russia are very close. And this allows us to solve many economic issues. It's a good factor, the human factor," he said.

Shortly after Yanukovych's election this year, he pushed a measure into law that makes Ukraine a "non-bloc" country, meaning it will be technically nonaligned with any global grouping, including NATO.

That, Yanukovych said, does not preclude cooperation with NATO nor the country's bid for European Union membership.

"Ukraine has chosen its road," Yanukovych said in his suite at the Four Seasons Hotel. "It's the road toward the European Union. And we are carrying out our plans and programs in that direction. I'm confident this European road of Ukraine is not going to negatively effect relations with Russia."

But as for NATO membership, Yanukovych said, "Any attempt to take this or the other side will disturb the balance and will create potentially dangerous situations."

Even so, the president said, he felt strategic relations with Washington has not reached a useful level.

"If we want these strategic relations to be on a par with the objectives we have set, I believe we have to increase the level of the commission we have with the U.S. I think we have to elevate this activity." He was speaking of a joint U.S.-Ukraine commission set up to guide bilateral relations under the previous pro-Western government.

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