



## Fall-out from Toxic Train Disaster

As the train of surviving tank-cars from the Ukraine phosphorus disaster limped home to Kazakhstan, Ukrainian officials were busy counting the human, economic and political cost of the toxic chemical spill.



On 16 July the freight train carrying yellow phosphorus derailed near Ozhydiv station in the Lviv region in western Ukraine. It had been en-route from Kazakhstan to Poland when 15 tank-cars from its 58-car load derailed. Six ruptured and caught fire. The yellow phosphorus – which ignites on contact with air – burned furiously, contaminating land and shedding a toxic plume that covered 90 square kilometres.

To-date some 200 people have been hospitalised and a thousand people evacuated.

The dangers to health were real. Once absorbed into the body, phosphorus is transformed into phosphoric acid which can affect the heart, kidneys, liver and nervous system.

The government is under fire for its handling of the incident and serious questions are now being asked about the adherence to procedures for the safe rail transport of hazardous materials and the overall safety of Ukraine's railway system.

The government's handling of the situation was not helped by Deputy Prime Minister for Security Oleksandr Kuzmuk, who appeared on TV screens on 17 July and compared the spill to the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster. While Mr Kuzmuk later retracted his remarks, the damage was done. "It was not my fault. One local reporter made a mistake," he said, arguing weakly that he meant the accident concerned "the same liquidation of consequences" as Chernobyl.

Also, President Yushchenko appeared in no rush to visit the scene. In fact he waited until 20 July to visit the region, cutting short a holiday in Crimea. While in Lviv he announced that he would appeal to Polish experts for help.

Speaking on 1+1 TV, leader of the opposition, Yulia Tymoshenko, also suggested the government seek help from countries "which have already overcome the consequences of similar emergency situations and have the necessary scientific knowledge and skills to provide immediate help to the people." Ms Tymoshenko said that this was a natural step for "any government to take within 30 minutes of such a disaster."

According to an unnamed government official, the bill for the disaster is estimated at 100 million hryvnyas (\$20 million). Most of this will be stumped up by the state as insurance compensation was restricted to nearly 2 million hryvnyas (\$400,000).



A report in Ukrayinska Pravda says how the 2 million hryvnias will be spent: "Under the law 50 percent of this sum shall be directed to persons whose health was harmed, 20 percent of the compensation for damages to their property and 30 percent to compensate for damages to the environment."

To-date, about 400 metres of land have been cleaned up and 47 tonnes of contaminated soil collected. Yet reports about the success of the clean-up were patchy. On 18 July, the Environment Ministry reported that the phosphorus concentration in the air of two nearby villages was 22 times higher than normal. Today the most recent reports state that toxic levels measured in the air, water, soil and flora now fall within normal prescribed levels.

First Deputy Prime Minister and Party of Regions faithful Mykola Azarov, declared that the government had coped with the disaster professionally and, notwithstanding Mr Kuzmuk's Cherynobyl remarks, put the blame on the media for hyping the situation.

Opposition factions, including President Yushchenko, remain critical of Transportation and Communications Minister Mykola Rudkovsky and Emergencies Minister Nestor

Shufrych. Although the Ukrainian transport authorities defended the state of the rail tracks, evidence emerged that the potentially hazardous freight – which should not be exposed to excessive heat – was transported in breach of rules that prohibit its movement in daylight hours. Furthermore the train passed through densely populated areas including the capital Kyiv, where a derailment could have been catastrophic.

So far, calls by Ms Tymoshenko and other opposition leaders for Mr Rudkovsky's dismissal have gone unheeded. In the meantime, the perilous state of Ukraine's railway network continues to draw fire. On 12 July a tank-car with chlorine derailed in the Kharkiv region and on 26 July in Kharkiv, a tank-car containing 60 tonnes of hydrochloric acid was found with a 50 centimetre crack that leaked acid. Worse still, it transpires that the Ukrainian Secret Service (SBU) warned the Transport Ministry that the risk of a serious incident was high, given that 50 percent of the national railway transport infrastructure was in poor condition and in need of repair. The SBU gave the warning in June, after an investigation following the crash of an express passenger train in Dnepropetrovsk in May.

### **BYuT Provides Relief to Residents and Emergency Workers**



BYuT has sent 260 tonnes of water and thousands of packs of absorbent to aid relief workers and citizens impacted by the toxic spill near Lviv.

The emergency aid was rushed to the region in the form of 173,000 1.5 litre bottles of water, 34,000 packings of absorbent carbon and 75 packs of Enterosgel detox agent. The focus of the mission was to provide support to residents in 22 villages within the Lviv area and relief workers.

"We didn't do this for political dividends," says Ivan Denkovych, Chairman of BYuT electoral staff in the Lviv area, "and while there will be cynics out there who will dismiss this as electioneering, the simple fact is that we wanted to rally round and show our compassion and support. Water is always one of the most needed commodities in the aftermath of a disaster, particularly when people are unsure if they can trust the safety of their tap water. In addition, we took the precaution to make sure that BYuT deputies at Lviv City Council were safe and looked after."



"Accidents are happening day by day," said Ms Tymoshenko, "this latest one highlighted that the authorities are under-prepared. Stronger management and investment is need in our rail infrastructure, not just for freight but, most importantly, for our citizens so that they can travel in safety. Also, we must ensure that visitors to the 2012 Euro Finals who decide to use our railway network do so with confidence and safety."

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## BYuT to Announce Election List

The bloc of opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko (BYuT) is to hold its convention on Sunday to make public a list of its candidates for the early parliamentary elections.

Some 270 delegates and more than six thousand party members from all regions of the country will participate in the convention on 5 August at the International Exhibition Centre. Proceedings officially start at 12.00 noon.

Ms Tymoshenko and her First Deputy Oleksandr Turchynov, as well as other party leaders, will address the meeting to outline key tasks and priorities of the bloc ahead of the elections.

Numerous representatives of foreign organisations, ambassadors and top Ukrainian officials were invited and more than three hundred reporters will cover the convention.

The meeting will approve the final election list of 450 candidates running for the parliament with the bloc, which includes three parties: *Batkivshchyna*, Social Democratic Party of Ukraine and the Reforms and Order Party.

**"The whole country will see how our list will be formed. I pledge no candidates with a shady background will be there."**



said Ms Tymoshenko.

The candidates, who will contest the elections on the bloc's list, are to swear to refuse the lawmakers' immunity, state apartments, any material help and other usual privileges provided to parliamentary deputies.

### Quote of the week:

On the Foreign Notes website, an article entitled 'Stealing BYuT's best lines' discussed the recent Our Ukraine-People's Self Defence Party campaign to strip Verkhovna Rada deputies of their immunity. The incisive LEvko observed:

*"Removal of immunity from politicians has been at the centre of BYuT's political platform for several years – other parties have, until recently, been rather lukewarm on this. Thanks largely to BYuT's persistent efforts, a law was passed in April 2006 to take away immunity from thousands of city council deputies..."*

*"...Social welfare initiatives, particularly for the least well off, have always figured prominently in Tymoshenko's manifesto also."*

<http://foreignnotes.blogspot.com/2007/07/stealing-byuuts-best-lines.html>



"We are to serve our people and our state, not oligarch clans, as Yanukovych does," said Ms Tymoshenko referring to Ukraine's Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych.

Ukraine was locked in political turmoil for more than two months after President Viktor Yushchenko dissolved the parliament in April and called for early elections. His Orange Revolution foe and political opponent Viktor Yanukovych refused to obey the order and appealed to the country's Constitutional Court.

But later in a bid to defuse a political crisis that had threatened to escalate into clashes between troops loyal to both leaders, Mr Yushchenko and Mr Yanukovych reached an agreement to hold new parliamentary elections on 30 September.

Lawmakers in the 450-seat parliament will be chosen exclusively by voting on party or alliance lists, with the groups receiving the most votes allotting seats to their listed candidates. There will be no direct voting for individual candidates.

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