

Search for new directions in Ukraine's foreign policy

On 19 May the Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi arrived on a visit to Kyiv. During the visit a protocol was signed for cooperation between the ministers, and questions of economic cooperation were discussed. The visit may be a sign that Ukraine is testing the possibility of significantly deepening its political and economic relations with new partners, with the aim of increasing its room for manoeuvre in its relations with Russia and the EU.

Minister Yang met Ukraine's foreign minister Konstatyn Hryshchenko. Their talks concerned economic cooperation, including the participation of Chinese firms in preparations for the Euro 2010 football championships, which Ukraine will host together with Poland. It was also confirmed that this autumn President Yanukovych will pay an official visit to China. On 21 May, Hryshchenko declared during a session of parliament that Ukraine was considering the possibility of applying for membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

During the last five years, especially since the 'orange revolution', relations between Ukraine and China have not been very active; this was the first visit by a Chinese minister to Ukraine in nine years. In the last year, though, a growth in China's interest in cooperating with Ukraine could be observed, including matters concerning the arms industry. In 2009 China was Ukraine's third biggest trading partner, although it is not one of the main investors in that country. Ukraine has been conducting negotiations with China on receiving a long-term loan of US\$1bn to modernise its coal industry.

China's growing significance on the international arena, including within the territory of the former USSR, seems to have stimulated Ukraine's interest in the possibility of deepening its relations with a strong partner from outside the traditional East/West axis. <smat>