TITLE: Russia’s New Minister of Agriculture

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RUSSIA'S NEW MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE

Don Van Atta*

Some two hours before the Russian Federation State Duma took a vote of confidence in the Chernomyrdin government on Friday, October 28, a new Minister of Agriculture was appointed. The appointment was clearly understood to be a deal in return for Agrarian Party support for the government. The new man is Aleksandr Nazarchuk.

Nazarchuk, Aleksandr Grigor'evich, was born in 1939. His passport nationality is Ukrainian. He was elected a Russian Federation People's Deputy in 1990 from territorial district no. 150, Altai krai, centered on the Aleiskii raion. That district has been the site of a long-running experiment with farm reorganization run by staff from the Institute of the Economics and Organization of Industrial Production (Aganbegian's old institute) in Novosibirsk.

As of 1993, Nazarchuk was chairman of the Altai agropromsoiuz (agricultural-industrial union), the local name for the agricultural administration. Nazarchuk also chairs the Altai krai organization of the Agrarian Party of Russia.

Nazarchuk was a member of the (large) group which drafted the resolution on the rebirth of the countryside at the II RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies in late 1990. This was a response, the quid pro quo, for acceptance of the Law on the Peasant Farm which allowed individuals to leave farms with land and property shares. The program for the

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rebirth of the countryside promised generous government financing, which has never been fulfilled, making a continuing issue for the agrarian deputies.

 Nazarchuk stood fifth on the Agrarian Party of Russia candidates list for the State Duma as published on November 19, 1993. In that position, he was easily elected. He became chairman of the Duma committee on agriculture.

 Zaveriukha, Nazarchuk, and former RSFSR agriculture minister Gennadii Kulik were the only three members of the APR fraction in the RF state duma to vote in favor of the post-voucher privatization program on July 21, 1994, despite a previously-agreed parliamentary deal which had supposedly committed the faction to voting in favor of the legislation (Chubais' major concession was removing the land market matters from the program - El’tsin eventually implemented the program, apparently with the compromises, anyway.)

 Comments: An initial read of the available biographical details suggests that Nazarchuk's career is very similar to that of Deputy Prime Minister for agriculture Aleksandr Zaveriukha, who used to run agriculture in Orenburg oblast' (another Siberian region).

 Nazarchuk's willingness to work with the government on the privatization issue must have made him seem at least marginally more acceptable than other possible candidates, such as the former GKChP (anti-Gorbachev putsch) committee member Vasilii Starodubtsev.

 Viktor Khlystun's removal as Minister of Agriculture was expected after the strange rumor of his resignation, attributed to close El'tsin advisor Georgii Satarov, appeared in Izvestiia last month and after the (apparently true) story that he was to be hospitalized for at least a month appeared earlier this month. (Khlystun was really hospitalized, but it should be
I spoke on 10/31 with Leonid Bespalov, Bashmachnikov’s chief of staff at AKKOR, the Russian private farmers’ association. According to him, Khlystun had a very minor operation. El’tsin had to be convinced to remove Khlystun, and resisted at first but finally agreed. Lapshin of the APR wanted Starodubtsev, so Nazarchuk was a compromise.

Three deputy ministers of Agriculture and Food Supplies (Averianov, in charge of investment policy, Kopylov, in charge of reform, and Efremov) have also handed in their letters of resignation.

According to Bespalov, the change was done "delicately." Khlystun presented the new minister, and Nazarchuk "said all the right words." He is supposed to visit AKKOR officially in two weeks.

Meanwhile, the association has just received a chunk of investment credit promised by the government. So very cautious optimism about the change seems to be in order (Bespalov sounded extremely tired on the phone, though.)