

Box 16.2 UKRAINE THROUGH RUSSIAN EYES

Ukraine at the turn of the millennium was arguably the most important country in the world from the Russian perspective. A series of official Russian foreign policy documents had defined the newly independent former Soviet republics along Russia's periphery as Moscow's top foreign policy priority.ⁱ Ukraine's large population, deeply rooted historical and cultural ties to Russia, and its centrality to Russia's economy made it by far the most prominent state in this category. Nearly a quarter of Moscow's state revenues derived from oil and gas exports to Europe, and some 80 percent of its gas exports to the lucrative European market depended on pipelines crossing Ukraine.ⁱⁱ Short of physical ownership of the pipelines, the Kremlin anxiously sought a regime in Kyiv that would respect vital



Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) with Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, March 2002.

Russian energy interests. It was therefore not surprising that Moscow had selected one of its most powerful energy titans, ex-prime minister and erstwhile Gazprom chair Viktor Chernomyrdin, as its ambassador to Ukraine in 2001.

Beyond these energy concerns, the

unsettled question of Ukraine's geopolitical orientation was a matter of great emotional and practical import for Russia. The North Atlantic