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On Behalf of Monsanto: GMO Food Crops for Ukraine's Bread Basket

The Role of Public Relations Firm Hill and Knowlton

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Finally, a little-known aspect of the crisis in Ukraine is receiving some international attention. On July 28, the California-based Oakland Institute released a report revealing that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), under terms of their $17 billion loan to Ukraine, would open that country to genetically-modified (GM) crops and genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture. The report is entitled "Walking on the West Side: the World Bank and the IMF in the Ukraine Conflict." [1]

In late 2013, the then president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, rejected a European Union association agreement tied to the $17 billion IMF loan, whose terms are only now being revealed. Instead, Yanukovych chose a Russian aid package worth $15 billion plus a discount on Russian natural gas. His decision was a major factor in the ensuing deadly protests that led to his ouster from office in February 2014 and the ongoing crisis.

According to the Oakland Institute,

> "Whereas Ukraine does not allow the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture, Article 404 of the EU agreement, which relates to agriculture, includes a clause that has generally gone unnoticed: it indicates, among other things, that both parties will cooperate to extend the use of biotechnologies. There is no doubt that this provision meets the expectations of the agribusiness industry. As observed by Michael Cox, research director at the investment bank Piper Jaffray, 'Ukraine and, to a wider extent, Eastern Europe, are among the most promising growth markets for farm-equipment giant Deere, as well as seed producers Monsanto and DuPont'." [2]

Ukrainian law bars farmers from growing GM crops. Long considered "the bread basket of Europe," Ukraine's rich black soil is ideal for growing grains, and in 2012 Ukrainian farmers harvested more than 20 million tonnes of corn.

Monsanto's Investment

In May 2013, Monsanto announced plans to invest $140 million in a non-GMO corn seed plant in Ukraine, with Monsanto Ukraine spokesman Vitally Fechuk confirming that 'We will be working with conventional seeds only" because "in Ukraine only conventional seeds are allowed for production and importation." [3]

But by November 2013, six large Ukrainian agriculture associations had prepared draft

amendments to the law, pushing for "creating, testing, transportation and use of GMOs regarding the legalization of GM seeds." [4] The president of the Ukrainian Grain Association, Volodymyr Klymenko, told a Nov. 5 press conference in Kiev that "We could mull over this issue for a long time, but we, jointly with the [agricultural] associations, have signed two letters to change the law on biosecurity, in which we proposed the legalization of the use of GM seeds, which had been tested in the United States for a long time, for our producers." (Actually, GM seeds and GMOs have never undergone independent, long-term testing in the U.S.)

The agricultural associations' draft amendments coincided with the terms of the EU association agreement and IMF/World Bank loan.

The website sustainablepulse.com – which tracks GMO news worldwide – immediately slammed the agricultural associations' proposal, with director Henry Rowlands stating: "Ukraine agriculture will be seriously damaged if the Ukrainian government legally allows GM seeds in the country. Their farmers will find their export markets reduced due to consumers' anti-GMO sentiments both in Russia and the EU." Rowlands said that Monsanto's investment in Ukraine "could rise to $300 million within several years. Does Ukrainian agriculture want to totally rely on the success or failure of one U.S.-based company?" [5]

On December 13, 2013, Monsanto's Jesus Madrazo, Vice President of Corporate Engagement, told the U.S.-Ukraine Conference in Washington, D.C. that the company sees "the importance of creating a favorable environment [in Ukraine] that encourages innovation and fosters the continued development of agriculture. Ukraine has the opportunity to further develop the potential of conventional crops, which is where we are currently concentrating our efforts. We also hope that at some point biotechnology is a tool that will be available to Ukrainian farmers in the future." [6]

Just a few days before Madrazo's remarks in Washington, Monsanto Ukraine had launched its "social development" program for the country, called "Grain Basket of the Future." [7] It provides grants to rural villagers so they can (in Monsanto's words) "start feeling that they can improve their situation themselves as opposed to waiting for a handout."

Actually, the real "handout" is the one going to Big U.S. Agribusiness through the terms of the IMF/World Bank loan, which besides opening the country to GM crops, will also further lift the ban on the sale of Ukraine's rich agricultural lands to the private sector. [8]

As Morgan Williams, president and CEO of the U.S.-Ukraine Business Council, told International Business Times in March, "Ukraine's agriculture could be a real gold mine." [9] But he added that there are "many aspects of the [Ukraine] business climate that need to be changed. The major item would center around getting the government out of business…"

The WikiLeaks Cables

In August 2011, WikiLeaks released U.S. diplomatic cables showing that the U.S. State Department has been lobbying worldwide for Monsanto and other biotechnology corporations like DuPont, Syngenta, Bayer and Dow. The U.S. non-profit Food & Water Watch, after combing through five years of these cables (2005-2009), released its report entitled "Biotech Ambassadors: How the U.S. State Department Promotes the Seed

Industry's Global Agenda" on May 14, 2013. [10] The report showed the U.S. State Department has "lobbied foreign governments to adopt pro-agricultural biotechnology policies and laws, operated a rigorous public relations campaign to improve the image of biotechnology, and challenged commonsense biotechnology safeguards and rules – even including opposing laws requiring the labeling of genetically-engineered (GE) foods."

According to consortiumnews.com (March 16, 2014), Morgan Williams is at the nexus of Big Ag's alliance with U.S. foreign policy." [11] Besides being president and CEO of the U.S.-Ukraine Business Council, Williams is Director of Government Affairs at private equity firm SigmaBleyzer, which touts Williams' work with "various agencies of the U.S. government, members of Congress, congressional committees, the Embassy of Ukraine to the U.S., international financial institutions, think tanks and other organizations on U.S.-Ukraine business, trade, investment and economic development issues."

The U.S.-Ukraine Business Council's 16-member Executive Committee is packed with U.S. agribusiness companies, including representatives from Monsanto, John Deere, DuPont Pioneer, Eli Lilly, and Cargill. [12] The Council's twenty "senior Advisors" include James Greene (Former Head of NATO Liason Office Ukraine); Ariel Cohen (Senior Research Fellow for The Heritage Foundation); Leonid Kozachenko (President of the Ukrainian Agrarian Confederation); six former U.S. Ambassadors to Ukraine, and the former ambassador of Ukraine to the U.S., Oleh Shamshur.

Shamshur is now a senior advisor to PBN Hill + Knowlton Strategies – a unit of PR giant Hill + Knowlton Strategies (H+K). H + K is a subsidiary of the gargantuan London-based WPP Group, which owns some dozen big PR firms, including Burson-Marsteller (a long-time Monsanto advisor).

Hill + Knowlton Strategies

On April 15, 2014 Toronto's The Globe & Mail newspaper published an op-ed piece by H+K assistant consultant Olga Radchenko, [13] The piece railed against Russian President Vladimir Putin and "Mr. Putin's PR machine" and stated that "Last month [March 2014 – a month after the coup], a group of Kiev-based PR professionals formed the Ukraine Crisis Media Centre, a voluntary operation aimed at helping to communicate Ukraine's image and manage its messaging on the global stage."

The PBN Hill + Knowlton Strategies website states that the company's CEO Myron Wasylyk is "a Board member of the U.S.-Ukraine Business Council," and the company's Managing Director/Ukraine, Oksana Monastyrska, "leads the firm's work for Monsanto." Monastyrska also formerly worked for the World Bank's International Finance Corporation.

According to the Oakland Institute, the terms of the World Bank/IMF loan to Ukraine have already led to "an increase in foreign investment, which is likely to result in further expansion of large-scale acquisitions of agricultural land by foreign companies and further corporatization of agriculture in the country." [14]

Meanwhile, Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev stated in April: "We don't have a goal of developing GM products here or to import them. We can feed ourselves with normal, common, not genetically modified products. If the Americans like to eat such products, let them eat them. We don't need to do that; we have enough space and opportunities to produce organic food." [15]

Hill + Knowlton, with its Kuwait "incubator babies atrocities" falsehood, was instrumental in getting the American public to back the first Gulf War on Iraq in the early 1990s. Now the company is involved in fomenting a Cold War 2 or worse, and on behalf of Monsanto – recently voted the "most evil" corporation on the planet. That's something to recall in the midst of the extensive mainstream media demonizing of Putin.

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Notes

[1] http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/press-release-world-bank-and-imf-open-ukraine-western-...

[2] Ibid.

[3] Reuters, "Monsanto plans $140 ml Ukraine non-GM corn seed plant," May 24, 2013.

[4] http://en.interfac.com.ua/news/press-conference/173536.html

[5] http://sustainablepulse.com/2013/11/05/sustainable-pulse-slams-ukraine-agri-associations...

[6] http://monsantoblog.com2013/12/19/monsanto-and-its-commitment-to-ukraine/

[7] http://monsantoblog.com/2013/12/13/monsanto-ukraine-launching-social-development-pr...

[8] http://www.globalresearch.ca/ukraine-secretive-neo-nazi-military-organization-involved-i...

[9] http://ibtimes.com/westerners-know-very-little-about-ukraine-qa-us-ukraine-business-co...

[10] http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/biotech-ambassadors/

[11] http://www.printfriendly.com/print/new?url-http%3A%2F%2Fconsortiumnews.com%F...

[12] http://www.usubc.org/site/u-s-ukraine-business-council-usubc-executive-committee

[13] http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/in-the-battle-of-hearts-and-minds-kiev-is...

[14] http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/press-release-world-bank-and-imf-open-ukraine-western...

[15] http://rt.com/news/154032-russia-gmo-food-ban/

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