



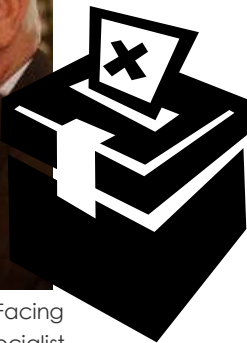
Inform

Newsletter for the international community providing views and analysis from the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc (BYuT)

Issue 40, 18 July 2007

Concern Over Elections

The Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, Ivan Plyushch, dismissed rumours over the breakdown of the early parliamentary elections as mere speculation and "misinformation." His comments came a week after President Viktor Yushchenko signed a decree to ensure that Ukraine's early parliamentary elections are fair and transparent.



▲ Signs of desperation. Facing ignominy at the polls, Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz is fighting a losing battle to avoid the ballot box.

"We will welcome foreign election monitors with open arms," says Yosyp Vinsky, who is helping to spearhead BYuT's election campaign, "for no one should question the legitimacy of what transpires at the ballot box. Having observers present is absolutely crucial as this election will not just determine who is in office for the next five years, but the future direction of this nation."

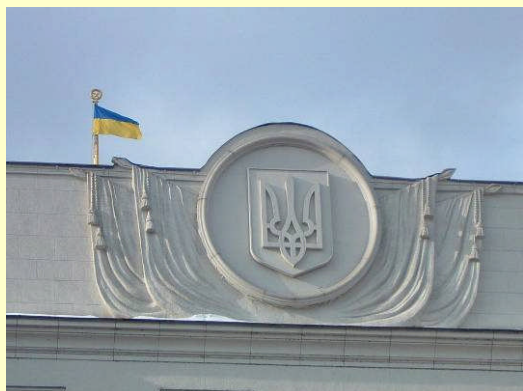
Yet there are still forces bitterly opposed to the election. Chief amongst them is Oleksandr Moroz, leader of the Socialist Party and Chairman (Speaker) of the Verkhovna Rada.

Mr Moroz, who is regarded by many as a spent political force after his shock defection to the Yanukovych-camp in July 2006, speculated that the National Unity Coalition (comprising the Party of Regions, Socialist and Communist Parties) may form a single electoral block to stand against the Orange forces.

For the past few months Mr Moroz has done everything in his power to obstruct the forthcoming elections. This includes repeatedly questioning the legality of the presidential decrees dismissing parliament. More recently he sought to slow down the process of inviting international observers, saying that invitations need only be made once the decrees have been declared legitimate.

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Ten into One Does Go

Ten democratic parties have coalesced to create a bloc to contest the forthcoming elections. Signing a declaration to work together as a single bloc are: Our Ukraine, Forward Ukraine!, People's Movement of Ukraine, Ukrainian People's Party, Sobor, Christian Democratic Union, European Party of Ukraine, PORa, Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists and Party of Motherland Defenders.

The new electoral block is named Our Ukraine – People's Self-Defence (OUPSD). Leading it is the former interior minister Yuriy Lutsenko, also the leader of the People's Self-Defence Party.

The bloc hopes to gain 16-18 percent of the vote in the forthcoming elections. Mr Lutsenko expressed that this would be sufficient, with votes from BYuT, to form a democratic majority in the parliament.

BYuT, which is campaigning separately, signed an agreement last February with Our Ukraine that details the process for assigning portfolios post-election. The bloc with the largest poll has the right to nominate the premiership role. "We will honour this agreement to the very last letter," said Hryhoriy Nemyria, Ms Tymoshenko's foreign affairs adviser.

When questioned, the OUPSD leader ruled out the new bloc forming a coalition with the Party of Regions and Communist Party.

Mr Moroz's views did not go down well with Goran Lennmarker, president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, who was emphatic that his organisation will send observers. Addressing the Verkhovna Rada, Mr Lennmarker was firm, "I have already told President Yushchenko and want to repeat in the presence of the fifth Verkhovna Rada Speaker that on 30 September we will surely send our observers."

Oleksandr Chernenko, press secretary for the Committee of Voters of Ukraine, spoke for many when he said, "Moroz may or may not want elections, but everything is moving toward them taking place. The main thing is for the Central Elections Commission to function, and here Moroz's wishes are not that important."

Speculation is rife

Despite assurances from Mr Plyushch, rumours persist in Kyiv that forces controlling the Party of Regions may seek to prevent the elections from taking place, or thwart the outcome. An unusual amount of attention has been ascribed to the rule that the result will be invalid if the turnout is below 51 percent.

"They could derail it by finding an excuse to call a boycott and so invalidate the proceedings," said a member of an NGO based in Ukraine.

Such a move would most likely rebound on the perpetrators and incur the wrath of the international community.

Mr Lennmarker put into perspective why foreign governments had not lost faith in Ukraine and its transformation, "Ukraine is a state at the very heart of Europe. We know that somewhere in Western Ukraine there is an obelisk saying that Ukraine is at the centre of the entire continent. One may question this fact but nevertheless Ukraine is part of the European continent."

Who is the Populist Now?

Ukraine's prime minister, Viktor Yanukovich recently branded President Viktor Yushchenko a "populist" following the president's declaration that legal immunity should be lifted for parliamentary deputies. Our Ukraine leader Vyacheslav Kyrylenko went a step further demanding that deputies sign a declaration absenting them from immunity. The declaration is a condition for candidates wanting to be included on Our Ukraine's list.

"They are stealing our clothes," said Yulia Tymoshenko smiling, obviously content that the president's bloc was supporting the policy of her eponymous bloc, "and I am pleased that they are for this has nothing to do with populism, it's about doing what is right for the country."

The reality is that BYuT has been consistent with its policies, unlike the Party of Regions which has flip-flopped on issues as far ranging as pensions, economic intervention, WTO and NATO, depending on whether it is in government and who is pulling the policy strings. Yet strangely, it is BYuT, and in particular Yulia Tymoshenko, who is labelled a populist.

"It's a convenient label with which to black paint the opposition," said a western advertising executive based in Kyiv, "looks and oratory skills make her an easy target. Some foreign journalists, who are too busy or lazy to study the facts, have allowed themselves to swallow the populist line."

Policies not slogans

In an article in Kyiv Post, Dr. Taras Kuzio, a Research Associate at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, at George Washington University, observed, "Yulia Tymoshenko and her eponymous bloc have not supported policies that are routinely ascribed to 'populists' in Western Europe. Tymoshenko is in favour of EU membership, has not raised the issue of immigration and supports foreign investment." Dr Kuzio noted that "the Party of Regions is in a parliamentary coalition with the Communists and Socialists who are against EU membership, are suspicious of the US, oppose foreign investment and land privatisation."

The core of BYuT, Ms Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna Party, has attracted the attention of the European People's Party (EPP). The EPP is Europe's largest transnational political party. Founded in 1976, it includes Christian Democratic and conser-

vative parties and has the largest group in the European Parliament. Amongst its ranks are 11 EU and 6 non-EU heads of government. Last month, Mario David, Vice President of the EPP, visited Ukraine, met with Ms Tymoshenko and extended an invitation to Batkivshchyna to become an EPP member. "We will be glad if the decision is to join the party," said Mr David.



▲ Yulia Tymoshenko meets a delegation from the European People's Party in Kyiv.



In the meantime, BYuT has an election to contest for which it will stand alone rather than merge into a mega-bloc. "We have decided against merging into a reconstituted Orange bloc, however we have an agreement in place with Our Ukraine that decides the process for distribution of portfolios if we form a majority. There must be no repetition of the scenes following the last election," said Hryhoriy Nemyria Ms Tymoshenko's foreign affairs adviser.

Following the 2006 parliamentary election, there were protracted negotiations over the division of government portfolios within the new Orange coalition. Although President Yushchenko agreed to Ms Tymoshenko's appointment as prime minister, his bloc's vacillation over the appointment of Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz as Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, enabled the Party of Regions to entice Mr Moroz to cross the floor to the Regions-led Anti-crisis Coalition, so paving the way for Viktor Yanukovich's return as prime minister.

"We will abide by our agreements," said Ms Tymoshenko, "and let the people judge us on our policies which we will communicate widely. The people are faced with a choice: maintain the status quo or vote for real improvements in living standards, health, education, jobs, the rule of law and for a stable, prosperous economy."

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Yet a focus on policies rather than slogans is unlikely to stop the Party of Regions from branding Ms Tymoshenko a populist. However, the label is wearing thin. Successful diplomatic visits to Washington, Paris and Brussels have enabled the leader of the opposition to garner some powerful friends. Furthermore, the way Ms Tymoshenko stood back from the recent political fracas between the prime minister and president was noted by foreign governments. "The silence was golden," remarked one political analyst.

As postulated in the Kyiv Post, perhaps the application of the term "populist" says more about the user than its intended victim?

Lies, Damned Lies and Election Polls

Making sense of Ukraine's election polls is a bewildering exercise. While contradictions abound, recent polls* all agree that Ukrainian voters will turn out in force to decide the fate of their nation. Three recent polls suggest a likely turnout of around 75 percent – a figure far above the new rule specifying that 51 percent is needed if the elections are to be valid. The figure would be a significant improvement over the 68 percent turnout for the 2006 parliamentary election.

Of those who have decided to vote, the recent polls place Party of Regions as the front-runner with between 31-33 percent, followed by BYuT at 15-17 percent and Our Ukraine at 11.5-17 percent. But the latest poll, published on July 12 in Korespondent, puts Party of Regions at 26.2 percent, BYuT at 23.1 percent and the new Our Ukraine – People's Self-Defence (OUPSD) megabloc at 13 percent. Confusing things further, an incisive article on the 'Foreign Notes' website speculates about rifts in the Party of Regions, saying that the party conducted a "secret opinion poll survey which, to their horror, revealed that at best they can count on 25 percent of the vote; and at worst - hardly 20 percent."



An Imprecise Art

All these figures prove on thing: that election polling in Ukraine is an imprecise art. This was underlined during the 2006 campaign when three polls, conducted between December and January 2006, put BYuT at 12-13 percent and Party of Regions at 17.5-27.5 percent. In the end, BYuT did far better than predicted, taking 22.29 percent – a whopping 10 percent more than the early predictions. The discrepancy was explained by BYuT's stronger second half campaign and people changing their minds, gravitating from Our Ukraine and smaller parties to BYuT.



In 2006, Our Ukraine managed 13.95 percent and Party of Regions 32.14 percent. The Communist Party barely scraped through the 3 percent barrier with 3.66 percent, confirming its downward spiral from the heady days of 1998 when it enjoyed nearly 25 percent.

Undoubtedly, the battleground in 2007 is the mass of the undecided voters. Recent polls estimate these to be between 17 and

19 percent. Their indecision stems from fatigue: a hangover from the most recent political stand-off which saw troops surround key government buildings, and from the 2006 post-election stalemate that bordered on farce.

"They are greatly disappointed in all politicians," said Political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko, who predicted the election campaign would be "fiercer and dirtier" than the previous one.

Although we must expect a barrage of polls between now and the end of September, politicians should be mindful of the finding from the Democratic Initiatives Fund and the Ukrainian Sociology Service, which concludes that 58 percent of Ukrainians believe the country, is developing in the wrong direction with only 18 percent believing the opposite. While there will no doubt be "lies, damned lies and statistics," perhaps this is the one figure those aspiring to the Vekhovna Rada should heed.

* Polling data from the Democratic Initiatives Fund and Ukraine Sociology Service, SOCIS Centre for Social and Political Research and the FOM Ukraine Policy Agency.

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