

END NOTE

BELARUSIANIZATION OR EUROPEANIZATION? POSTELECTION UKRAINE STRUGGLES TO DEFINE ITS FUTURE

By Taras Kuzio

Over a month after Ukraine held its third parliamentary elections it is in the midst of a fierce struggle to define its future.

The Belarusianization camp seeks to transform Ukraine into a presidential republic along the lines of the majority of CIS states by implementing the internationally unrecognized results of the April 2000 referendum. During the March parliamentary elections the use of "administrative resources" proved impossible in Lviv, while it was completely successful in Donetsk Oblast, which has been redefined as Ukraine's "Belarus" and is the only oblast where For a United Ukraine finished first. In Donetsk, voters were transported on "ecological picnics" to different election districts with absentee ballots in order to swing votes in United Ukraine's favor, while hired thugs from organized-crime groups threatened election officials, the Committee of Voters NGO, and observers.

The Belarusianization United Ukraine camp is composed of conservatives who are attempting to hold the country back without providing any direction in domestic and foreign affairs. United Ukraine was soundly defeated in the elections, finishing third with only 11.98 percent in the half of seats elected proportionately. But by blatantly using "administrative resources" in single-mandate constituencies, United Ukraine was able to greatly better this result. Regional governors were replaced for failing to ensure the necessary United Ukraine vote in Lviv, Vinnytsya, and Sumy, three oblasts that Viktor Yushchenko's Our Ukraine won. The original 120 United Ukraine deputies prior to the opening of the Verkhovna Rada last week was expanded to become the majority Rada faction with 177 deputies through blackmail. Deputies were summoned to the Prosecutor-General's Office and "discreetly warned that they have dossiers on all deputies." In condemning such tactics, Our Ukraine has said it believes this is evidence that "Ukraine is being transformed into a totalitarian state."

Although the Belarusianization camp lacks distinguishing ideological features, its members are nevertheless very Soviet in their political culture. United Ukraine has never ruled out cooperation with the Communist Party (KPU), as was demonstrated by the coalition of pro-presidential parties and the KPU against the Yushchenko government in April 2001. The manner in which both President Leonid Kuchma and United Ukraine have cynically attempted to change the election results in the Verkhovna Rada is another example of their Soviet-style contempt for the will of voters.

Forcing the population to demonstrate in support of the authorities is another revival of Soviet political culture, as evidenced on 1 May when 300,000 people were constrained to show their support for President Kuchma and United Ukraine in Kharkiv, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizhzhya.

The creation of a mega United Ukraine faction is linked to the attempt to have Volodymyr Lytvyn, the head of the presidential administration and United Ukraine, elected as Rada chairman followed by the installation of the disgraced former head of the Internal Affairs Ministry, Yuriy Kravchenko, to replace him as head of the presidential administration. These three steps are aimed at enabling Kuchma to leave office with immunity in 2004.

Lytvyn's leadership of United Ukraine in the elections and his activities since then in the Verkhovna Rada have led many deputies to view him as an "odious," "suspicious," and "narrow-minded" figure, the newspaper "Zerkalo nedeli/Dzerkalo tyzhnia" observed. "A force that secured 11 percent in the elections does not have the moral right to vie for the leading post in parliament," Our Ukraine leader Yushchenko argued.

If Lytvyn becomes Rada chairman, United Ukraine will simply disintegrate more quickly than it is otherwise expected to do. In the 1998-2002 Verkhovna Rada, the first attempt at creating a "party of power" through the Peoples Democratic Party (NDP) failed. The NDP began with 89 deputies and ended four years later with 14, the minimum required to register a faction. United Ukraine is likely to divide into four of its five constituent parties -- the Party of Regions (60), NDP (58), Labor Ukraine (35), and Agrarians (27), with the remainder as "independents."

The executive and United Ukraine are, however, faced with an increasingly restless business and political elite who believe that Kuchma is holding the country back domestically and internationally. As the 2004 presidential election campaign begins next year, many will desert United Ukraine knowing that this is Kuchma's last term. In a highly critical article last week in "Den," former President Leonid Kravchuk, a leading member of the oligarchic Social Democratic Party Ukraine-united (SDPU-u), argued that Ukraine lacks any domestic or foreign policies and strategic aims and that it is high time the parliament adopted clear policies leading to integration into Europe. According to Kravchuk's argument, Ukraine's pro-European orientation currently exists only "on paper."

Support for Europeanization is led by Our Ukraine, which former Rada Chairman Ivan Plyushch, who has deserted the NDP, sees as the kernel of a future union of patriotic, democratic forces drawn from 33 parties. Our Ukraine has proposed the most far-reaching radical changes as the basis for Ukraine's Europeanization as a "transitional consensus" to the 2004 presidential elections. Titled "On Joint Actions of the Fourth Supreme Rada of Ukraine," it seeks to transform Ukraine from a country where politics are conducted in a Soviet, nontransparent fashion, to one in the open. The Verkhovna Rada would define Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy strategy that the executive would merely manage with purely representational functions. Administrative reform would reduce the number of oblasts and end state (executive) administrations in Kyiv and Sevastopol (for

the proposals in full, see [http://www.razom.org.ua/news/?news\\_id=4968](http://www.razom.org.ua/news/?news_id=4968) and 4971).

The executive would no longer be able to play off factions in the struggle over Verkhovna Rada positions and other institutions where the Rada allocated members, as these positions would be divided fairly between those factions who signed the agreement. Ukraine would move to a full proportional system of voting so that the composition of the Rada reflected the election result. Not surprisingly after the antics of United Ukraine, all other factions support this change, which would be followed by new laws prohibiting the use of "administrative resources." Local and parliamentary elections would be held at different times, the Rada would have the exclusive authority to form the Central Election Commission, and opposition groups would be guaranteed equal access to the media.

Other envisaged changes would make the Verkhovna Rada responsible for forming a coalition government and for its performance. The Tax Administration and State Customs Committee, hitherto under the executive and a source of both corrupt revenue and intimidation of the opposition, would be brought under the government. (After the elections, "corruption" charges against oppositionist Yuliya Tymoshenko and her husband, imprisoned since August 2000, were dropped.) Regional governors would be elected, rather than being appointed by the executive, a move welcomed by most governors. The Verkhovna Rada would be able to appoint and discharge the chairman of the Security Service and the prosecutor-general. The legal status of the president would be defined with his powers greatly reduced, especially vis-a-vis the government. The most controversial proposal is to establish procedures for impeachment of the president.

These proposals, "Zerkalo nedeli/Dzerkalo tyzhnya" believes, "should lead to the country's internal transition to European values and processes." They will nevertheless be opposed by those seeking to export the Belarusian experiment in Donetsk to the rest of Ukraine. Dr. Taras Kuzio is a resident fellow at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto.