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POLITICAL REALIGNMENT BEGINS IN UKRAINE

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The ruling centrist and oligarchic elites that supported President Leonid Kuchma over the last decade are now rushing to adapt to the reality that Viktor Yushchenko is Ukraine's new president. The Supreme Court and Central Election Commission threw out complaints by his opponent, former prime minister Viktor Yanukovych, paving the way for Yushchenko's unofficial inauguration before his Orange Revolution supporters in Kyiv on December 31 and then officially in parliament in mid-January.

Kuchma's allies have five techniques to regroup following their failed efforts to install Yanukovych as president.

First, they could go into "stern opposition." Yanukovych's anger is directed at both Yushchenko and at the Kyiv elites who failed to secure his victory in round two. Yanukovych's threat to join the opposition will only be possible in alliance with presidential administration head Viktor Medvedchuk's Social Democratic United Party (SDPUo) and the Communists. Yet such an alliance is unnatural, as it is not based on any ideological unity. Yanukovych's Regions of Ukraine and the SDPUo were created as "parties of power" and will find it very difficult to act as oppositionists. Yanukovych's confusion can be seen from his declaration of being in opposition while still prime minister.

Second, Kuchma-era elites could defect to the Yushchenko camp. At the victory rally after the December 26 election, Yushchenko appeared on stage with former oligarch Andrei Derkach, who had been a high-profile member of the Dnipropetrovsk Labor Ukraine clan before defecting to Yushchenko in the spring. His ERA TV station, which rents airtime on state channel 1, favored Yushchenko in the elections.

Other defectors include former Kuchma adviser Oleksandr Volkov, who played a central role in Kuchma's re-election in 1999. Volkov accompanied Yulia Tymoshenko to Donetsk to calm regional leaders. Kyiv Mayor Oleksandr Omelchenko remained neutral in the elections, though he feared a Yanukovych victory because of the highly negative business reputation of the Donetsk clan. During the Orange Revolution Omelchenko provided crucial logistical support to help hundreds of thousands of protesters to remain on Kyiv's streets for weeks on end.

Some defectors are treated with more suspicion. For example Vasyl Baziv, the

former deputy head of the presidential administration, has claimed that he was always a Yushchenko supporter, and that the majority of his colleagues voted for Yushchenko in the repeat election. In reality Baziv told this author in summer 2003 that "Yushchenko was finished."

Third, former elites might opt for suicide, either voluntarily or after pressure. Yuriy Liakh, a high-ranking SDPUo member and chairman of the Ukrainian Credit Bank, committed suicide after round two of the elections. The Ukrainian Credit Bank was used to launder funds for Yanukovych's shadow election campaign, which reportedly spent \$600 million.

Minister of Transportation Heorhiy Kirpa committed suicide on December 27, following a visit from Andriy Kluyev, head of Yanukovych's shadow campaign headquarters. Kirpa had been heavily involved in organizing transportation for Yanukovych supporters who voted with multiple absentee ballots in the November 21 runoff. Kirpa's refusal to undertake this operation in round three (December 26) led to a violent fight between Yanukovych and Kirpa; the latter was hospitalized with severe injuries. According to well-informed Kyiv sources, upon release from the hospital Kirpa condemned Yanukovych as a "bandit" and admitted that his Ministry had been paid to transport Yanukovych's supporters in November. Kirpa offered to provide evidence to the Security Service (SBU).

Fourth, outgoing elites could try and save themselves by either fleeing Ukraine or uniting with others in the same boat. Yuriy Boyko, former chairman of the state Naftohaz Ukrainy company, which was heavily involved in funding Kuchma's 1999 re-election, has fled Ukraine. Boyko was put in charge of the state body that oversees supplies to the presidential administration on the eve of the elections. The buildings it controls were used to store illegal anti-Yushchenko posters and leaflets.

Former interior minister Yuriy Kravchenko fled to Russia last summer. Kravchenko had been dismissed during the Kuchmagate crisis because of his involvement in the murder of opposition journalist Heorhiy Gongadze.

After round two, Serhiy Tyhipko resigned as chairman of the National Bank and head of the Yanukovych campaign. His Labor Ukraine parliamentary faction disintegrated, forcing it to unite with Valeriy Pustovoitenko's crumbling People's Democratic Party faction. Both parties suffered from supporting Yanukovych.

Kharkiv governor Yevhen Kushnariov, who was also involved in widespread election fraud, has sought to create a new political party that would back Yanukovych. Whether this will save Kushnariov is doubtful. Besides fraud, he has been questioned

by the prosecutor's office over his support for separatism.

Fifth, Kuchma-era elites could return to parliament or obtain a new government position; either post would guarantee immunity. Deputy chairman of the SBU Volodymyr Satsyuk and Andriy Kluyev both illegally held government positions while remaining parliamentary deputies. Both are implicated in election fraud and attempts on Yushchenko's life. Kluyev figures prominently on the audio tapes illicitly made by the SBU in Yanukovych's shadow campaign headquarters.

Kuchma has attempted to save Stepan Havrysh, who has been implicated in election fraud. Havrysh was Yanukovych's representative to the Central Election Commission in rounds one and two. Despite his involvement in election fraud, Kuchma proposed Havrysh as a judge to sit on the Constitutional Court, a fitting confirmation of Kuchma's view of the rule of law.

(maidan.org.ua, December 30; *Ukrayinska pravda*, December 28, 29; *Zerkalo nedeli*, December 30, 2004 - January 2005).