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FALSIFICATION OF ELECTIONS ALREADY UNDERWAY IN UKRAINE

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Although Ukraine's presidential elections are still six weeks away, last week the authorities hinted at two methods it could use to secure the election of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych.

First, officials could deploy all available "state administrative resources" to win additional percentage points for Yanukovych. According to Ukrainian government officials who spoke to Eurasia Daily Monitor on condition of anonymity, Defense Minister Yevhen Marchuk was fired last week after he refused to guarantee that the armed forces would be ordered to vote for Yanukovych. Marchuk's replacement is the highly discredited and corrupt former defense minister, Oleksandr Kuzmuk (Ukrayinska pravda, September 24). Kuzmuk was forced to resign in October 2001 after being caught red-handed lying about the complicity of the armed forces in the shooting down of a civilian airliner over the Black Sea.

During the 2002 parliamentary elections the pro-presidential For a United Ukraine bloc obtained upwards of one-third of its 11% tally from votes forcibly collected in the armed forces (prior to Marchuk's appointment), hospitals, psychiatric institutions, and prisons. His appointment is aimed at ensuring that the armed forces will "vote as required." Kuzmuk was a member of parliament in the Labor Ukraine faction, which is based upon the Dnipropetrovsk clan's party of the same name and led by Serhiy Tyhipko, the head of Yanukovych's election campaign.

Second, officials could submit fake signatures for the presidential candidates who are loyal to Yanukovych (Ukrayinska pravda, September 23). Each of the 26 registered presidential candidates was required to submit to the Central Election Commission a minimum of 500,000 signatures in their support by mid-September. Yet, the Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU) noted that its regional branches had witnessed the collection of signatures for only seven: Yanukovych, Viktor Yushchenko, Petro Symonenko, Oleksandr Moroz, Natalie Vitrenko, and Leonid Chernovetskyi (cvu.org.ua, September 21).

Where then, did the remaining 19 candidates each obtain half a million signatures? Information collected by the CVU and the civic organization "I Know!" (Znayiu), together with survey data from the Razumkov Center, point to the widespread use of bogus signatures. Two-thirds of the candidates who support Yanukovych were guaranteed signatures on their behalf by members of Yanukovych's shadow presidential campaign team.

Preparation of the requisite signatures for these "pseudo-candidates" was delegated to the Kyiv-based law firm De Jure. Firm employees were given lists of signatures collected for Yanukovych as well as databases of Ukrainian citizens from state organizations, such as the Pension Fund, the State Automobile Inspection Agency, and the State Tax Administration.

Large numbers of students from the Kyiv Agrarian and Polytechnic Universities were also hired to counterfeit the signatures, at a going rate of 20-40 kopecks per name. The Yanukovych camp has regularly hired students to turn up at rallies as alleged "supporters." The "pseudo-candidates" obtained ready-made signature packets that they submitted to the Central Election Commission last week.

The Razumkov Center has provided concrete data confirming the scam. According to a survey conducted in the first half of September (i.e. the final two weeks to collect signatures) only 23.8% of Ukrainians admitted to having signed a petition in support of a candidate. Of these, 11.8% were for Yanukovych, 8.1% for Yushchenko, 2% for Symonenko, and 1% for Moroz. Another 1.5% signed for the remaining 22 candidates (Ukrayinska pravda, September 23).

The gulf between these figures and the signatures submitted back the concerns raised by the CVU and "I Know!" Yanukovych's election campaign team, for example, claims they collected 7.2 million signatures (i.e. 19% of voters) and yet only 11.8% admitted to having signed for him. Around 1%

of these 11.8% claimed they were forced to sign for Yanukovych. Of Yanukovych's alleged 7.2 million signatures, 45% were from Donetsk.

Pseudo-candidates who support Yanukovych are useful in several ways. First, they dominate 60% of territorial commissions, placing them in a good position to potentially manipulate the final vote. In its August report the CVU concluded that these candidates, "appear to be registered in order to put Yanukovych representatives on the commissions" (cvu.org.ua). Local "parties of power" loyal to Yanukovych provided these thousands of commission officials and paid the \$100,000 deposit for each candidate. In Lviv oblast, for example, the Social Democratic United Party performed this task (Ukrayinska pravda, August 27).

An August 26 presidential administration document leaked to Eurasia Daily Monitor entitled "Expert Survey of the 'Effectiveness' of the Use of Candidate Resources During the Election Campaign in Ukraine" concluded that the pseudo-candidates could add upwards of 5-6% to Yanukovych's election result.

These votes for pseudo-candidates are also aimed at preventing Yushchenko from winning in the first round (Zerkalo nedeli, August 14-20; Ukrayinska pravda, July 28). Each candidate will drain small percentage points away from the opposition, just as the numerous virtual parties created by the authorities in the 2002 parliamentary elections took votes away from the opposition.

In addition, these candidates obtain free time on state television, which they are using to attack Yushchenko. These attacks from the extreme left (Oleksandr Yakovenko) and right (Roman Kozak), as well as Slavic Party candidate Oleksandr Bazyluk, target Yushchenko's American wife. The extreme right claims they, as "nationalists," support Yushchenko, while the extreme left attacks him for allegedly being a "nationalist." Spots for these two candidates are immediately followed by Yushchenko's campaign message, a step that the Supreme Court ruled illegal, as campaign messages have to be separated by 20-minute gaps (Ukrayinska pravda, August 27, September 1 and 8).

These open violations suggest that the authorities have never planned to hold a free and fair election. As Zerkalo nedeli (August 21-27) pointed out, "The meticulous preparation, centralized planning, and scale of the operation testify that the authorities charge the election commissions with more than administrative functions. One can only guess what their true motives are."