

VIKTOR YUSHCHENKO LINES UP HIGH-PROFILE ELECTION TEAM

By [Taras Kuzio](#)

On the eve of the official July 3 launch of the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections, front-runner Viktor Yushchenko announced three important steps in his campaign strategy. The three-pronged approach will help Yushchenko consolidate a wide-embracing election campaign against his main opponent, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, the candidate backed by President Leonid Kuchma's allies.

First, on June 14, First Deputy Parliamentary Speaker Oleksandr Zinchenko became Yushchenko's election campaign director. Zinchenko's contacts with Yushchenko began in early 2003 with secret negotiations between the "constructive" wing of the Social-Democratic Party of Ukraine-United (SDPUo) and Yushchenko's "Our Ukraine." These negotiations became public later that year (Ukrayinska Pravda, November 25, 2003).

On April 7, Zinchenko revealed that he was the initiator of "Civic Position," a new inter-faction parliamentary group with 26 members drawn primarily from the pro-presidential camp. Zinchenko may draw moderates away from the presidential camp and to Yushchenko.

Civic Position is closely tied to the newly formed "Center" parliamentary faction that claims to be a "third force" (i.e. neither with the opposition or the presidential camp) in Ukrainian politics. Nevertheless, Center has always voted with the opposition. Center was a major factor in the failure of the parliamentary vote on constitutional changes that mustered 289 votes, 11 short of the required two-thirds majority of more than 300.

Second, Anatoliy Hrytsenko, head of the Oleksandr Razumkov Center for Economic and Political Studies (better known as the Razumkov Center [www.uceps.com.ua]) think tank, will head the Information-Analytical department of Yushchenko's election campaign.

Third, the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc will sign an alliance this week to back Yushchenko in the elections. This eliminates Tymoshenko as a possible rival candidate.

Zinchenko's support for Yushchenko will further split the pro-presidential camp. The Agrarian, People's Democratic, Labor Ukraine, and Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Parties, all four of whom

are members of the pro-Kuchma parliamentary coalition, remain uneasy about being pressured by the Presidential Administration to support Yanukovych as their "joint candidate."

Until June 19, 2003, Zinchenko was deputy head of the SDPUo, led by the head of the Presidential Administration, Viktor Medvedchuk. Zinchenko's alliance with Yushchenko will open up divisions within the SDPUo where he continues to command loyalty within its "constructive" wing, which is not hostile to Yushchenko. Some regional branches of the SDPUo have called upon their party to back Yushchenko's candidacy in this year's elections.

As a social democrat, Zinchenko's support for Yushchenko will also place additional pressure upon the Socialist (SPU) leader Oleksandr Moroz to follow Tymoshenko and align himself with Yushchenko. SPU parliamentary faction member Yuriy Lutsenko described Zinchenko's decision as "the choice of a moral . . . strong and bold person" (Ukrayinska Pravda, June 15). Zinchenko's SDPUo background -- coupled with Moroz's SPU -- would be a tremendous boost for Yushchenko's election chances in Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine, where he is weakest.

In Zinchenko's 2003 resignation letter, he had complained about his growing divergence from the

After Zinchenko's defection to Yushchenko, the SDPUo began to openly demand that he be removed as First Deputy Parliamentary Speaker. However, the SDPUo are unlikely to obtain the 150 votes needed to table a vote in parliament to replace Zinchenko. The SDPUo's allies in the pro-presidential camp do not support replacing Zinchenko with Nestor Shufrych, the most likely nominee (Ukrayinska Pravda, November 24, 2003, June 17 and 18). The head of Yushchenko's election campaign will therefore continue to maintain this high profile parliamentary position during this year's elections.

Zinchenko, whose organizational experience was fine-tuned when he headed the Department on Propaganda and Agitation in Soviet Ukraine's Komsomol, has warned Yushchenko to not be over-confident about his election victory. Zinchenko warned of further "tests" for Yushchenko before election day (Lvivska Hazeta, April 28). If those guilty of massive election violations in Mukachevo were not brought to justice (as seems to be the case) then there cannot be free and fair elections, as Zinchenko is concerned that similar methods would be used against Yushchenko.

Zinchenko had also attempted to transform the Inter television channel, which he headed but the SDPUo controlled. His efforts ultimately failed, and Inter continues to be an SDPUo mouthpiece. Inter TV is very popular in eastern Ukraine, where oligarchs are entrenched, and it is dominated by Russian-language programs. Zinchenko's desire to reform Inter is part of his "extremely negative" view of growing attacks on independent media outlets (Ukrayinska Pravda, March 15).

In the event of a Yushchenko victory, Zinchenko has predicted that Inter TV would be returned to its rightful owners. In the interim, Zinchenko has warned that he would soon, "judicially show that not everything is as well as some claim it is" at Inter TV (Ukrayinska Pravda, April 28).