

END NOTE

WINTER CROP GENERATION: FIRST OLIGARCH-BACKED CENTER-RIGHT PARTY

By Taras Kuzio

The center-right has traditionally been dominated in Ukraine, as it has in other non-Russian republics of the former USSR, by parties such as Rukh that combined national and democratic demands. The reasons why cosmopolitan civic center-right parties are likely to fail are fourfold.

First, mobilization by civil society in Ukraine is only able to take place when both the national and democratic questions are united. Cosmopolitan reformist movements cannot mobilize the masses either in Ukraine, or elsewhere, because an ethnocultural basis is required in addition to democratic demands for societal mobilization.

Second, Ukraine has not gone far enough in democratization and market reform to create a large enough middle class that could underpin purely reformist or center-right parties.

Third, the liberal area of Ukraine's party system has been captured by the oligarchs. The Liberals were one of Ukraine's first postcommunist "parties of power" in the Donbas and today are members of Viktor Yushchenko's Our Ukraine bloc. The Inter-Regional Bloc of Reforms (MRBR), an ally of Leonid Kuchma in the 1994 election campaign, joined the Popular Democratic Party (NDP), Ukraine's first "party of power," last year.

Fourth, cosmopolitan center-right parties have not been successful in developed democracies and therefore Ukraine will not be an exception. Western center-right parties such as the Republicans in the U.S. or the Conservatives in Great Britain are also traditionally "national-democratic" in that their ideology combines patriotism, opposition to multiculturalism, and support for a market economy.

Attempts to create cosmopolitan reformist parties in Ukraine began to be seriously made in the 1998 parliamentary elections. The Social-Liberal Alliance (SLON) was created by the MRBR and the Constitutional Democrats (KDP). As a cosmopolitan reformist bloc, it campaigned in defense of "the Russian language and culture." But its election bid failed miserably and won only 0.9 percent of votes for the party list, far less than national democratic parties.

In the 2002 elections, another attempt has been made to create a center-right cosmopolitan alternative called the Winter Crop Generation (KOP). The KOP includes four parties -- KDP again, the Liberal Democrats, the Party of Private Property, and the Peasant Democrats. Of these, only the national democratic Peasant Democrats has a long background in Ukraine and some social base. The other three parties within KOP have little support or are new and unknown.

The KOP is using the same public relations specialists from Moscow who molded Russia's Union of Rightist Forces (SPS). In the

1999 Russian elections, the SPS led by former Prime Minister Sergei Kirienko, Yegor Gaidar (Russia's Choice leader), and Boris Nemtsov fared well with 8.5 percent of the vote. Nemtsov, leader of the SPS, sent a statement of support to the KOP on 1 March.

Despite the support of its Russian colleagues, the KOP will not obtain the same support as the SPS obtained in Russia. Unlike the SPS, or center-right parties in the West and elsewhere, the KOP is cosmopolitan and hence does not combine traditional center-right patriotism with support for a free market. As with SLON in 1998, the KOP therefore has less than 1 percent support in all Ukrainian polls conducted since late 2001 and is highly unlikely to make it through the 4 percent barrier for party lists. Nevertheless, last week its campaign got a noticeable support boost from Labor Ukraine and the authorities.

Another problem for the KOP is that it is funded by Kuchma's son-in-law, oligarch Viktor Pinchuk, who has links to the Dnipropetrovsk-based Labor Ukraine oligarch party and parliamentary faction. Labor Ukraine is one of the five parties that make up the "party of power" -- the For a United Ukraine (ZYU) election bloc. In an attempt to woo voters away from Our Ukraine, the oligarchs are funding both the KOP and the extreme right Popular Movement for Unity. Unlike Our Ukraine, the Socialists, and the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc, the KOP is suspiciously being given blanket coverage on the main television stations controlled by oligarchs.

The KOP is the culmination of the oligarch takeover of the political center in Ukraine. Valeriy Khoroshkovskyy, the 32-year-old leader of the KOP, was an adviser to former NDP leader Valeriy Pustovoytenko, Ukraine's prime minister between 1997-1999.

However, the KOP's association with Pinchuk and, by default, the executive, has reduced its support with pro-business, younger generation supporters now provided with a nonoligarch alternative, Yabluko. Other younger generation business interests prefer to use the Green Party as their political "krysha" (roof). The KOP is therefore squeezed by Yabluko and the Greens on its liberal left and the popular Our Ukraine on its center-right. Not surprisingly, given its oligarch funding, the KOP refuses to describe itself as an opposition party, unlike Yabluko, and is critical of "social populists" and "oligarch-socialists" on its left and "conservative nationalists" on its right.

The KOP bills itself as a pro-market alternative of the younger generation and its members and election candidates are all in their 30s and 40s. Nevertheless, the KOP has been unsuccessful in targeting the youth vote. A February poll by Democratic Initiatives found that 70 percent of 18-29 year olds planned to vote in the elections, a 10 percent increase over the 1998 elections. Of those polled, 20 percent would vote for Our Ukraine, 12 percent for the Greens, 8 percent for the Social Democrats United, 6 percent for Women of the Future, and 5 percent for Yabluko. Support for the KOP was too low to record.

Perhaps the clearest indication of the artificiality of the KOP and its links to oligarchs are its foreign policy views. All center-right parties in European postcommunist states support their country's full integration into trans-Atlantic and European

structures. In Ukraine this orientation is supported by national democratic parties and, therefore, by Our Ukraine. In contrast, the KOP supports the foreign policy orientation favored by oligarchic parties; namely that Ukraine should join Europe together with Russia. By linking Ukraine's European fate to Russia's, the KOP therefore supports a foreign policy orientation that consigns Ukraine indefinitely to Eurasia. Taras Kuzio is a research associate at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto.