

END NOTE

UKRAINE TAKES TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK

By Taras Kuzio

According to the final results released by the Central Election Commission, only six of the 33 parties and blocs contesting the elections passed the 4 percent barrier for representation under the proportional system. Of these, two are pro-presidential (For a United Ukraine, or ZYU, 11.98; and the Social Democratic Party-united, or SDPU-o, 6.24), one is ambivalent toward the executive (Our Ukraine, 23.52), and three are antipresidential (Communist Party of Ukraine, or KPU, 20.04; Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc, 7.21; and the Socialist Party of Ukraine, or SPU, 6.93). Although the authorities tried their damndest, they failed to keep the fiercely antipresidential Yuliya Tymoshenko and Socialist blocs from getting into parliament.

Independent Ukraine's third parliamentary election produced six important results.

First, the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) did not obtain the highest results and is no longer the largest faction in the newly elected Verkhovna Rada. The KPU faction of 66 deputies was reduced by nearly half of the 115 seats it held in the outgoing parliament, and is even fewer than the 80 it had in the 1994-1998 Verkhovna Rada. The KPU lost protest votes to the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc and the Nataliya Vitrenko Bloc. Ukraine's population, which has declined by 4 million people since the 1989 Soviet census, has also affected the KPU's support base among pensioners. As a result, the newly elected parliament is the least left-wing of any that has preceded it.

Some voters were attracted by the two communist "clones"-- the oligarch-funded Communist Party of Ukraine-revived (KPU-O) and the radical splinter Communist Party of Workers and Peasants, which together obtained 1.81 percent. The Nataliya Vitrenko Bloc, which garnered 3.22 percent, also took votes from the KPU.

Second, the outcome of the elections reveals why the executive was in favor of maintaining the mixed 50:50 proportional-majoritarian election system. Ideologically driven parties on the left and right preferred a proportional system from which they stood to gain. The ideologically amorphous centrist, oligarchic pro-presidential parties preferred the majoritarian system through which their "independents" could be elected. Our Ukraine and the KPU obtained 70 and 59 seats on the proportional lists, and 42 and seven seats on the majoritarian lists, respectively. Meanwhile, the relationship for the ZYU was the opposite (36 and 66 seats). In addition, 93 "independents" will be under great pressure to join the ZYU.

The exception to this rule is the SDPU-o, which is the only oligarchic party able to stand alone and espouse an ideology. Nevertheless, considering that the SDPU-o has massive financial resources and controls the 1+1 Television and Inter television channels, it only managed to increase its vote by just over 2 percent compared to the 1998 elections. This poor result for the SDPU-o will damage party leader Viktor Medvedchuk's chances in the 2004 presidential elections. Similarly, the Democratic Party-Democratic Union bloc backed by wealthy oligarch Oleksandr Volkov only managed to obtain 0.88 percent. Financial resources do not necessarily translate into political power in Ukraine.

Third, the poll results show a growth in political and civic consciousness among Ukrainians. Anatoliy Hrytsenko, president of the Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies (UCEPS), recently wrote that, "The authorities think we are all idiots." Obviously, they are very wrong. Cloned and fake oligarchic and presidentially inspired parties such as Women for the Future (2.11 percent), Winter Crop Generation (2.01), Greens (1.30), and Rukh for Unity (0.16) fared badly, and some of their votes may have been "donated" to For a United Ukraine (ZYU). Some votes may have also been stolen from Viktor Yushchenko's Our Ukraine and given to ZYU, as Our Ukraine's result was approximately 6.5 percent less than Yushchenko's personal popularity rating. Our Ukraine has claimed that the real result was 27 percent, 3.5 percent more than the official figure.

At the same time, disillusionment with Ukraine's political process is running high, and voter turnout was lower than in the 1998 elections, particularly in eastern Ukraine, which hurt ZYU and the KPU. This disillusionment will increase if the large number of ZYU deputies are perceived to have gained their seats in an unfair election. In addition, the elections showed that Ukrainians tend to vote for personalities (e.g., Yushchenko, Tymoshenko, and SPU head Oleksandr Moroz) rather than parties or ideologies.

The Greens, the only one of the three oligarchic parties in the outgoing parliament that fared badly in the elections, had a particularly poor showing. Despite a sophisticated election campaign featuring some of the best posters and billboards, the Greens failed to win over the electorate to its image as an environmental party, as voters knew the party had not proposed a single legislative initiative in the 1998-2002 Verkhovna Rada.

Fourth, President Leonid Kuchma's "party of power," the ZYU, increased its core popularity of 4 percent to only 10-11 percent. This should not be considered a victory, considering the fact that administrative resources, vote falsification, and ballot rigging worked in the party's favor. ZYU's poor showing in the proportional voting was counterbalanced by a high vote count in majoritarian districts where most of the irregularities took place. Aside from "donations" from oligarch parties and vote theft from Our Ukraine, ZYU's result was also assisted by high vote counts from closed institutions (hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, military voters, and by voting on the country's four closed military bases).

Fifth, the election results confirmed Ukraine's regional divisions. Ukrainophone western and central Ukraine are the regions with the greatest civic activity and consciousness, as reflected in

the massive vote counts in favor of Our Ukraine, the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc, and the SPU. Our Ukraine obtained upward of 60-75 percent in some Galician regions compared to between 5-10 percent in eastern Ukraine. Our Ukraine took the lead in 14 western and central oblasts, as well as in Kyiv, whereas the KPU won eight eastern and southern oblasts along with the Crimea. ZYU took only Donetsk Oblast with 36.80 percent, and the SPU led in Poltava Oblast with 22.12 percent.

Western and central Ukraine reconfirmed themselves as the country's bulwark against a backward slide to communism or a Sovietophile regime such as those found in Moldova and Belarus. In addition, those regions also showed that they are opposed to the typical CIS authoritarian presidential state favored by the oligarchs. The two Russian nationalist blocs obtained a total of only 1.16 percent in proportional voting nationwide, a reflection of the unpopularity of their views in Ukraine.

Kuchma still continues to talk about implementing the flawed April 2000 referendum that would convert Ukraine into a presidential state with a weak parliament, but he has neither a parliamentary majority nor the constitutional two-thirds to ensure this. A March poll by UCEPS found that, of the successful parties in the elections, only the ZYU supports the implementation of the referendum results. Prime Minister Anatoliy Kinakh believes that the newly elected parliament will therefore not be in a position to implement the referendum.

The "party of power" had to fall back on Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, where it won 19 out of 22, and seven out of 11 of the majoritarian districts amid widespread allegations of fraud. The greatest number of violations recorded by the OSCE monitoring teams were in the Donbas, which the respected Ukrainian weekly "Zerkalo nedeli/Dzerkalo tyzhnya" labeled "a mini Belarus" and "totalitarian enclave" within Ukraine. ZYU's tactics in the Donbas negatively affected both the KPU and Our Ukraine's results in the region.

Sixth, parliament will be stalled in the next few months by two problems. The election of a new parliamentary leadership will be difficult, as these positions are crucial in deciding the parliamentary agenda and in acting as launching pads for further political careers. The KPU, SPU, and the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc have also already supported calls for the new parliament to launch impeachment proceedings against President Kuchma. Whether these are successful depends on the attitude of Our Ukraine, which is composed of a radical anti-Kuchma wing and those inclined to favor cooperation on some issues with ZYU, but not with the SDPU-o.

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