

END NOTE

GREENS, OLIGARCHS, AND ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE

By Taras Kuzio

Of Ukraine's 130 registered parties, seven claim to be "green." These include the All-Ukrainian Chernobyl People's Party (registered in October 1998), the Green Ecological Party (February 2001), the Green Party of Ukraine, the Ecological Party, the Ecological Party "Defense" (all in March 2001), and the Green Party--21st Century (April 2001).

Six of Ukraine's seven "green" parties have little influence in comparison to the oldest, the Party of Greens of Ukraine (PZU), which was registered far ahead of the others on 24 May 1991. Until its electoral success in 1998, the ZPU faced little competition from other "greens," but another five "green" parties were registered between the winter of 2000 and the spring of 2001.

The "Greens" underwent a similar process that took place within other Ukrainian political parties. In 1994-1998, some centrist and national democratic parties were gradually taken over by oligarchs who needed to convert their newly found economic clout back into political influence. After the ZPU and the People's Democratic Party (NDP) were taken over by them, those members of both parties who stayed loyal to their original pre-oligarch ideology left to create other parties or join existing ones. Those nonoligarchic parties have joined Our Ukraine or the Yuliya Tymoshenko blocs, while the ZPU and NDP support the oligarchs and Kuchma.

Of the 34 parties and blocs originally registered for the election campaign, only two are "green," and both are supported by competing oligarchs. The Rayduha (Rainbow) election bloc included the Ecological Party of Ukraine "Defense" and is financed by Vadym Rabynovych, an oligarch who was recently accused of acting as a middleman in the sale of Ukrainian tanks to the Taliban in the mid-1990s. Rabynovych holds dual Israeli-Ukrainian citizenship, is the head of one of two competing Jewish organizations in Ukraine, and is persona non grata in the United States. The title of this bloc is also meant to appeal to the gay community, whose international flag is made up of the colors of the rainbow.

Rabynovych went ahead and created his own election bloc after falling out with the ZPU, which he helped to finance in its successful return to Ukrainian politics in the March 1998 parliamentary elections. In an interview in August 2001 in "Stolichnye novosti," a newspaper funded by Rabynovych, Ukrainian Ambassador to Canada Yuriy Shcherbak initially toyed with the idea of

heading the Rainbow coalition as an alternative "green" bloc to the ZPU. Shcherbak founded the Green World Association in 1986 and was the first head of the ZPU, which he now accuses of having betrayed "green" ideology. Rabynovych and Shcherbak have known each other since the early 1990s when the latter was Ukraine's first ambassador to Israel.

On 20 February, the Central Election Commission cancelled the registration of the Rainbow bloc, following a verdict by a Kyiv district court saying that the bloc was formed in an illegitimate manner. This decision has left the ZPU as the only group representing Ukrainian environmentalists in the elections.

Genuine "green" parties, in the same manner as genuine women's parties, find it impossible to be successful in Ukraine's political system. Only parties that have been captured by oligarchs (such as the ZPU) or created especially by them for the elections (Women for the Future) can be successful because they have financing and, being pro-presidential, also have access to "administrative resources." The Rainbow bloc was not successful in winning popularity because Rabynovych was no longer on good terms with the executive. The Women of Ukraine Party, the only other registered gender party, has also failed to win support because it is backed by neither the oligarchs nor the executive.

Ukraine's largest "green" party, the ZPU, grew out of the Green World Association, an ally of the Rukh nationalist movement in the late Soviet era. It is contemporary Ukraine's third-oldest political party, and its inaugural congress was held in September 1990 where it championed both "ecosocialism" and state independence. Its main base of support then was western and central Ukraine, the same as Rukh's.

After Ukraine became an independent state in 1991, the ZPU began a long period of decline. In the eyes of Ukraine's elites, environmental problems became less important than ensuring sufficient energy supplies in the face of Russia's use of energy pressure, mounting debts, and a shift in world prices. During the ZPU's stagnation, it elected a new leader in October 1993, Vitaliy Kononov, who has remained in that position until today. In 1994, before the ZPU was taken over by oligarchs, the ZPU joined the European Federation of Green Parties.

The ZPU re-entered the Ukrainian political scene in the March 1998 elections when it won 5.44 percent of the vote. The new ZPU was very different from that created in 1990-1991. At its peak the ZPU held 25 parliamentary seats, which has since declined to 15, and it boasts 52,000 members, small by the standards of other oligarchic parties.

The ZPU's 1998 success was due to two factors: a very effective Western-style advertising campaign, and a huge injection of new finances. As with the Women for the Future party in the current elections, the ZPU campaigned in 1998 on an "antiparty" ticket with the slogan "Politicians Utilize Demagoguery." This attracted disaffected young people (the ZPU was one of the youngest factions) and those easily turned off by politics.

The main financier of the ZPU since 1998, as well as the Women for the Future whose campaign is building on the earlier

success of the ZPU, is Vasyl Khmelnytskyi, No. 3 on the Green election list, and director of the huge Zaporizhstal plant. He was successful in recruiting other businessmen who needed a "krysha" (roof) to protect their business interests in telecommunications, banking, insurance, hotels, and -- more surprisingly -- energy. Khmelnytskyi's additional support for Women for the Future has been made possible by his close relationship with President Kuchma and first lady Ludmyla Kuchma.

Throughout the entire term of the 1998-2002 parliament, the ZPU remained loyal to the president without going overboard in its support, presumably so as not to turn off potential young voters. Only two minor government positions were granted to the ZPU. Last year, Ambassador Shcherbak severely criticized the ZPU's lack of legislative initiative in the current parliament.

The ZPU has 9.9 and 7 percent support in southern and eastern Ukraine respectively, and its two strongest bases are Zaporizhzhya and Odesa. Ironically, in western and central Ukraine, where the ZPU began 10 years ago, its support is only 5.1 and 3 percent, according to a January poll by the Center for Economic and Political Studies. Khmelnytskyi's two pet projects, the ZPU and Women for the Future, will therefore enter the next parliament, but neither are likely to promote green or gender issues.

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