

## Ukraine's New Politics

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WASHINGTON, April 8 (UPI) — The recent parliamentary elections in Ukraine were a wake-up call, not just for President Viktor Yushchenko, but also for the European Union and the United States.

Voters handed Yushchenko's pro-Western Our Ukraine Party a humiliating defeat that was a resounding rejection of his weak leadership and inability to implement a coherent reform program for Ukraine.

While Yushchenko should be credited with holding Ukraine's first free and fair election, which stands as a dramatic contrast to elections held a week earlier in Belarus, his party came in a distant third in balloting with just 14 percent of the vote, ten less than in 2002.

The Russia-backed Party of the Regions, led by former Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych — who lost to Yushchenko in the presidential elections in November 2004 — came out on top with 32 percent of the vote, although still less than the 44 he garnered in 2004. The party led by former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko — Yushchenko's one-time ally whom he fired last September — placed second with 22 percent of the vote.

However, while badly battered, Yushchenko can still salvage his presidency if he puts the goals of the Orange Revolution ahead of his personal resentment toward Tymoshenko. In essence, Yushchenko now faces a stark choice. He can either form an alliance with Tymoshenko and several small parties, or form an alliance with Yanukovych. The outcome could determine whether Ukraine sees its future linked to the West or to Russia.

An alliance with Yanukovych's Party of the Regions, as some Western analysts are urging, would be a fatal mistake. It would further undermine Yushchenko's credibility at home and in the West.

Yanukovych's agenda is incompatible with the goals of the Orange Revolution and Western integration. His Party of the Regions is opposed to Ukraine's membership in NATO. It favors closer ties to Russia and Ukraine's full membership in the Common Economic Space, an economic union of post-Soviet states dominated by Russia. And the Party of Regions is opposed to Ukraine's membership in the World Trade Organization.

Moreover, under the amendments to the Ukrainian Constitution adopted in January, the president's powers will be reduced vis-a-vis the prime minister. Thus Yushchenko risks being little more than a figurehead, while the real power on a day-to-day basis would be exerted by the prime minister. As prime minister, Yanukovych or one of his

allies would be in a position to steer Ukraine in a dramatically different direction than Yushchenko.

If Yushchenko hopes to salvage his tattered presidency, he has little choice but to ally himself with Tymoshenko. She has made no secret that she wants to regain her former position as prime minister. Her record in office, however, was mixed. While she aggressively sought to root out corruption, her economic policies, especially regarding re-privatization, frightened off foreign investors and contributed to rising inflation.

Tymoshenko's appointment as prime minister thus entails some risk for Yushchenko. But these risks pale beside the costs of an alliance with Yanukovych. That would result in a return to the discredited policies of the era of former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma — a stagnation of reform, a vacillating multi-vector foreign policy, a slowdown of Euro-Atlantic integration, and an increase in corruption.

By contrast, an Orange coalition with Tymoshenko would send a strong signal that the ideals and goals of the Orange Revolution were still alive. It would give Yushchenko a second chance to salvage his presidency and could give new impetus to Ukraine's hopes for closer integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

At the same time, both Yushchenko and Tymoshenko need to learn from their mistakes and cooperate more effectively than in the past. For Yushchenko, this means an end to half measures and half-baked compromises. Such compromises include Yushchenko's signing of the memorandum of cooperation with Yanukovych in September and Yushchenko's failure to pursue aggressively charges of abuse of office and election fraud, both against former Kuchma-ites and members of his own camp.

"Bandits to prison," the slogan of the Orange Revolution, was never seriously acted upon by Yushchenko. This failure was one of the chief reasons for his party's poor showing in the recent elections.

Yushchenko also needs to exert greater hands-on leadership. He wasted a year when he had uncontested power and strong popular backing but failed to use it to push through badly needed reforms. Instead, he spent much of his first year traveling abroad while his ministers engaged in fruitless and debilitating turf wars.

If a new Orange Coalition emerges, Ukraine should be invited to join the World Trade Organization this year and receive a Membership Action Plan from NATO at its Riga summit later this year. The EU should also develop a more forward-leaning strategy towards a democratic Ukraine.

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