

## **SIGNS DEAL WITH YANUKOVYCH TO GET PRIME MINISTER APPROVED**

**By Taras Kuzio**

The Ukrainian parliament confirmed Yuriy Yekhanurov as prime minister on September 22 with 289 votes. His candidacy had been rejected by parliament two days earlier when only 223 members of the 450-seat legislature voted for him (see EDM, September 21).

Without enough votes on his own, Yushchenko had to reach a compromise with either former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko or the centrists that had supported former president Leonid Kuchma. Tymoshenko had held out a hand of friendship to Yushchenko after the failed first vote, calling for them to conduct negotiations and "return to our cooperation, our program" (Ukrayinska pravda, September 21). Yushchenko needed a new prime minister after firing Tymoshenko earlier this month.

Nevertheless, members of the business wing of Yushchenko's camp refused any dealings with Tymoshenko. Acting Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk, whose Rukh faction voted on both occasions for Yekhanurov, said in Washington on September 20 that he hoped Tymoshenko and Yushchenko would re-unite.

Instead, Yushchenko struck a deal with his rival for the presidency in 2004, Viktor Yanukovich, head of Regions of Ukraine. The 50 votes from the Regions of Ukraine faction, the second largest in parliament, tipped the vote decisively in favor of a "yes" in the second attempt. In the first vote, three Regions of Ukraine MPs had voted for Yekhanurov and had, ironically, been expelled from the faction a day later.

Why did Regions of Ukraine accommodate Yushchenko in the second vote? Regions had already expressed a willingness to work with Yushchenko when they, alone among the hard-line opposition, signed the bombastically entitled "Declaration of Unity and Cooperation for the Sake of Ukraine's Future" after the removal of the Tymoshenko government.

Regions of Ukraine and Yekhanurov signed a ten-point declaration that convinced the party to throw its weight behind the vote (partyofregions.org.ua). The declaration, however, ties Yushchenko's hands and leaves him vulnerable to charges of "betraying the Orange Revolution."

The ten points include support for constitutional reform, ending "political repression" against the opposition, introducing an amnesty, and preventing pressure on courts. Other points outline the adoption of laws on local government, the opposition, the Cabinet of Ministers, and the president of Ukraine. The government is to be based on "professionalism and the separation of business from politics," while the right to private property will be guaranteed. Finally, there is a commitment to hold free parliamentary elections in 2006.

Why did Yushchenko take this potentially dangerous step towards Yanukovich?

First, the outgoing government left the economy in crisis and immediate action is needed. Economic growth had plummeted, inflation was high, and high populist social spending depleted budgetary revenues.

Second, Yushchenko was losing high-ranking allies. He had signed a decree reducing the unconstitutional additional powers of the National Security and Defense Council and the state secretariat. Oleksandr Tretyakov's positions as first adviser and the state secretary were abolished. Tretyakov had been accused of corruption, but cleared by the prosecutor's office.

Third, the deal with Yanukovich severely fractured the unity of the hard-line opposition. The Social Democratic-United (SDPUo) and Regions of Ukraine parties will now enter the 2006 elections separately, rather than in the same bloc (Ukrayinska pravda, September 22).

The Regions of Ukraine agreement with Yushchenko reveals how shallow was the party's commitment to its "opposition" stance. Regions of Ukraine had always reluctantly opposed Yushchenko, because the oligarchs who supported it want to be on friendly terms with the executive. Yanukovich praised the agreement as a major victory for his party (regionsofukraine.org.ua).

The reaction of the "Orange" opposition was predictable and harsh. Outgoing First Deputy Prime Minister Mykola Tomenko described the agreement as a betrayal of the Orange Revolution. In place of Tymoshenko, he argued, Yushchenko had brought in Kuchma and Yanukovich. Tomenko advised Yushchenko to replace his campaign slogan "Kuchma and Yanukovich -- Away!" with "Kuchma and Yanukovich -- Yes!" (Ukrayinska pravda, September 22).

The most alarming phrase in the declaration is "political repression." By using the opposition's derogatory phrase, Yushchenko implied that he agrees with the opposition that criminal cases introduced this year against former Kuchma officials for abuse of office, corruption, and election fraud qualified

as "repression." This decision, coupled with the declaration's call for an amnesty, is highly controversial.

The Committee of Voters of Ukraine (KVU), a widely respected NGO involved in election monitoring, called upon Yushchenko to recant his stated support for an amnesty for those who committed fraud in last year's elections ([cvu.org.ua](http://cvu.org.ua)). The KVU wonders how the 2006 election could be free and fair if the same officials who committed election violations in 2004 are still in place

What does the new Yushchenko-Yanukovych alliance mean for Ukraine?

First, Tymoshenko will now claim the mantle of the true representative of the Orange Revolution. Those who believe that Yushchenko has "betrayed" the revolution will flock to her side in the 2006 elections.

Second, the hard-line opposition that once challenged the president has been split, as Yushchenko has co-opted almost the entire centrist camp.

Third, the former Kuchma camp can claim a victory, as they were the main backers of the impending constitutional reforms that weaken the presidency - and Yushchenko. The Kuchma camp and oligarchs also won amnesty for election fraud and guarantees that re-privatization is over.

Fourth, Ukraine's relations with Russia will improve. (Tymoshenko had been unable to travel there due to an open criminal case against her.) However, Yushchenko's reliance on centrists, especially the pro-Russian Regions of Ukraine, could derail Ukraine's desire to be invited to join the process for NATO membership at the NATO-Ukraine summit in May 2006.

This has been a turbulent week in Ukrainian politics. Yushchenko abandoned his principal ally from the 2004 presidential election, Tymoshenko, in favor of his principal adversary, Yanukovych. With some six months to go before the parliamentary elections, there is ample time for more maneuvering and more shifting alliances.