



## UKRAINE: President's plots vs premier will backfire

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**SUBJECT:** The appointment of an opposition deputy as National Security and Defence Council chief.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** The president is creating his own 'grand coalition' outside parliament with part of the main opposition, aiming both to split it and control the government.

**ANALYSIS:** President Viktor Yushchenko's appointment of Raisa Bohatyriova as National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) secretary on December 24 continues its use as an alternative power centre. In 2005, during Yulia Tymoshenko's first administration, Yushchenko appointed Petro Poroshenko NSDC secretary, with the remit to counterbalance the government.

The use of the NSDC against political rivals began under former President Leonid Kuchma. After the first round of the 1999 elections, Kuchma coopted opposition leader, Yevhen Marchuk, by making him NSDC secretary and using him against Tymoshenko, who was then deputy prime minister aiming to combat corruption in the energy sector. However, parliamentary deputies have complained to the Constitutional Court that Yushchenko has infringed the constitution in expanding the NSDC remit, and the court has begun examining presidential decrees on the council.

**Ministerial counterweights.** Bohatyriova's appointment is part of a strategy of seeking counterweights to the Tymoshenko government (see *PROSPECTS 2008: Stability in Kiev may be short-lived - December 27, 2007*):

- **Defence.** The inexperienced Yuriy Yekhanurov has replaced Anatoliy Hrytsenko at the Defence Ministry. Hrytsenko, who was popular with the armed forces, NATO and Western governments, had been president of the Razumkov Centre think-tank. He was one of the few ministers to come from 'civil society', despite high 'Orange Revolution' hopes of an inflow of young non-governmental activists.
- **Interior.** The president's Our Ukraine-People's Self Defence (NU-NS) is demanding control of the Interior Ministry in the new cabinet, aiming to place law enforcement fully under the president's control.

Under Kuchma, the NSDC secretary was usually an expert in foreign and defence policy. Under Yushchenko, the post has been held by businessmen or technocrats -- Poroshenko, Anatoliy Kinakh and Vitalii Hayduk -- or political associates like Ivan Pliushch, parliamentary speaker during Yushchenko's 1999-2001 government. Yekhanurov, Poroshenko, Kinakh and Pliushch are members of the NU-NS anti-Tymoshenko wing. Bohatyriova is another example of appointing an inexperienced but politically loyal NSDC secretary.

**Asserting control.** Following constitutional reforms, the president may no longer dismiss the government, as he did in September 2005, when Tymoshenko's first administration ended. Yushchenko has three means of influence:

- using the NSDC and NU-NS control over law enforcement;
- appointing the parliamentary speaker, who is loyalist Arseniy Yatsenyuk (NU leader Vyacheslav Kyrylenko had been proposed, who is closer to Tymoshenko); and
- using the presidential secretariat -- if relations deteriorate -- to force NU-NS to withdraw from the coalition and bring down the Tymoshenko government.

Yushchenko has made six specific proposals, namely:

- the government should meet the president and speaker every week;
- the prime minister should meet the president every day for 30 minutes;
- the president should attend government meetings;
- Bohatyriova should ensure the implementation of all NSDC resolutions, most of which would deal with domestic issues within the government's competence, such as law enforcement, energy and coal;
- the NSDC should set national priorities for the government; and
- the NSDC should become a vehicle of dialogue between the government and opposition, and promote national integration.

**Yushchenko's prospects.** However, the success of this strategy looks unlikely because of the transfer of constitutional power, NU-NS divisions and Tymoshenko's rising popularity:

- NU-NS withdrawal from the Orange coalition would cause its collapse, as it has a bare majority of 227 deputies (see [UKRAINE: Premier faces new conditions and challenges - December 19, 2007](#)). Upwards of one-third of NU-NS deputies are in the anti-Tymoshenko camp. However, this would split the bloc ahead of the 2009 presidential election.
- The Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc (BYuT) was only three percentage points behind the Party of Regions in the September 30 elections (see [UKRAINE: Yushchenko needs Tymoshenko as ally again - October 5, 2007](#)). A December poll put it ahead for the first time, with 26.3% to Regions' 25.0%. NU-NS support has collapsed from 14.0% in September to 7.9%. Another poll -- for 'politician of the year' -- gave Tymoshenko 30.7% compared with 14.8% for Region's Viktor Yanukovich and a mere 6.6% for Yushchenko. The Tymoshenko government's proposed anti-corruption programmes and social policies should increase her popularity.

**Dividing Regions.** The Regions presidium opposed Bohatyriova's appointment as at variance with its opposition status. Yushchenko has a long-standing aim of bringing the authorities and the opposition closer:

- During Kuchma's second term, Yushchenko and NU wavered between joining Tymoshenko in outright opposition, or forming a 'loyal opposition' along with pro-Kuchma moderates, including Regions. In autumn 2006, NU was at the same time in opposition and in the Yanukovich government, until its ministers were forcibly removed.
- The presidential strategy aims to divide Regions between its 'constructive' and conservative wings. Bohatyriova is a close ally of Regions' 'liberals' Borys Kolesnikov and oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, who threatened to resign from the party in December.

**Political realignment?** In the two years running up to the presidential election, the political spectrum could be realigned, between:

- a centre-right, comprising BYuT and most of NU-NS;
- a centrist, pro-business tendency, comprising Region's liberal and youth wings, and the anti-Tymoshenko NU-NS minority; and
- the remnants of Regions under Yanukovich.

A large majority within NU-NS is exasperated by Yushchenko's arrogance. The bloc was not informed of the plan to appoint Bohatyriova and many opposed it. Yushchenko has felt more comfortable -- in opposition under Kuchma and as president -- with the centrists than either of the other two groups. As NSDC secretary, Bohatyriova would be in a good position to assist in Yushchenko's realignment as pro-business candidate in 2009, at the cost of losing most Orange support.

**Anti-corruption tensions.** Tymoshenko's justice-seeking agenda will produce conflict with the president, as in 2005. Tymoshenko wants to "purify" Ukrainian politics. No senior officials have faced criminal charges under Yushchenko, who has instead sought reconciliation. If corruption is to be tackled, senior officials may not remain above the law. Two Socialist members of the former Yanukovich government are being investigated -- the Socialists are no longer in parliament.

If charges are laid against senior Regions deputies, there is the potential for conflict between president and government. In December, Yushchenko decorated Kolesnikov, who headed Regions' 2007 election campaign and was briefly arrested for extortion in 2005. Kolesnikov was among those seeking compromise during the crisis after the president dissolved parliament last April, and is close to presidential secretariat head Viktor Baloha. He agreed to early elections after being offered a grand coalition with NU-NS afterwards. The appointment of Bohatyriova, who shared a parliamentary office with Kolesnikov, is an attempt to fulfil the deal, but outside parliament.

The NSDC secretary would be in a position to defend Regions from criminal charges and oppose reprivatisation. Tymoshenko says she wants to take back Dniproenergo, which was sold last summer to Akhmetov, a close ally of Kolesnikov and Bohatyriova. Tymoshenko has also asked who is responsible for allowing state energy firm Naftohaz Ukrainy to come close to bankruptcy.

**CONCLUSION:** The appointment of a senior Regions official to the NSDC continues the tradition of using it not for foreign policy but as a counterbalance to the government. The presidential strategy also seeks alternative allies within Regions ahead of the presidential election. However, an unpopular president will be unable to control the Tymoshenko government, causing conflict and a possible final split in the Orange camp.

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