

# Prince of Orange

Yatsenyuk to launch his own bloc as he looks to play coalition kingmaker in the Orange civil war

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Following the collapse of the Orange coalition on 16 September it is anybody's guess what President Viktor Yushchenko's strategy will be. After all, there has been little sign of strategy in the undermining of the Yulia Tymoshenko government and it looks uncomfortably like there is no credible post-undermining strategy either. Nevertheless, in the horse-trading that is currently dominating behind-the-scenes developments in Kyiv a number of second-tier political leaders led by rising star and

former parliamentary speaker Arseniy Yatsenyuk will be looking to punch above their weight as they play the role of kingmaker to a future coalition or, if elections are called, provide strength in numbers ahead of the coming campaign.

## Who wants new elections?

Recent events have suggested a failure to learn the lessons of September 2005, when the removal of the first Tymoshenko government sent the President's ratings into

a nosedive from which he has never recovered. As a result Ukrainian politics finds itself in a somewhat irrational position with the two political forces most likely to gain from elections (Yulia Tymoshenko's BYUT bloc and the Party of Regions) not favouring pre-term elections while the political force most likely to lose ground (Our Ukraine) ostensibly supporting them. Our Ukraine leader Vyacheslav Kyrylenko, undoubtedly with Bankova's prodding, last week laid down a set of tough conditions for Our Ukraine to



PARLIAMENTARY KINGMAKER: FORMER VR SPEAKER ARSENIY YATSENYUK ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK THAT HE INTENDS TO CREATE HIS OWN POLITICAL PARTY. YATSENYUK'S POPULARITY WITH AN ELECTORATE TIRED OF THE SAME OLD FACES COULD PROVE CRUCIAL IF UKRAINE IS FORCED INTO ANOTHER ROUND OF SNAP PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

▶ re-join any coalition with BYUT, but there is little to suggest that they are in a position to be issuing ultimatums.

The President's ratings are currently a fraction of Mrs. Tymoshenko's, while his political party has only a sixth of the support of BYUT. In any new election Our Ukraine could actually find itself failing to make it past the 3% threshold for entering a new parliament, with most pollsters giving the party 4% support, which is down from 14% in the 2007 elections. One would think that Our Ukraine's 2% share of the ballot in the May Kyiv city hall elections and their consequent failure to enter the city council would have focused the attention of Bankova. Obviously it has not.

Nor is support for the President within his dwindling political grouping a foregone conclusion. The withdrawal of Our Ukraine

Ukraine is left waiting for the President's decision to either re-establish a larger Orange coalition with BYUT and the Lytvyn bloc or, if he decides to go for broke after the thirty days allowed to establish a new coalition expires in mid October, to disband parliament and call fresh elections. Both scenarios offer little comfort to President Yushchenko

from the Orange coalition was only supported by a slim majority of 39 deputies, just two more than the bare minimum required. Five of the Our Ukraine/People's Self-Defence bloc's nine member parties did not support the decision, including the two largest – former Foreign Minister Borys Tarasiuk's Rukh and Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko's People's Self Defence. Lutsenko headed the entire bloc going into the 2007 pre-term elections. Rukh is currently negotiating to join BYUT to become its fourth party member. Other defections may be imminent.

### **Lytvyn and the chances of a new Orange coalition**

A new coalition will be difficult to establish because none of the issues that undermined the old coalition have been effectively dealt with. Demands made by the Tymoshenko bloc including the removal of Viktor Baloga from his post as presidential chief of staff have gone unheard, while Our Ukraine officials have responded with their list of requirements. One potential solution would be the construction of a wider coalition to include the Volodymyr Lytvyn bloc. If Mr. Lytvyn's eponymous political force joins BYUT and Our Ukraine in a new, wider Orange coalition this would improve its cohesion by increasing the previous slim majority of 228 to a comfortable majority of 248 deputies. The Lytvyn bloc did not support the July vote of no confidence, but it also remained outside of coalition talks in late 2007 following the slim Orange victory in the September 2007 snap poll.

Increasing the size of the coalition would be to BYUT's advantage but not to Bankova's. The Lytvyn bloc's additional 20 deputies would curtail the Presidential Secretariat's ability to blackmail BYUT by threatening to withdraw the votes of the 10-15 United Centre party supporters who are regarded as most loyal to the President.

### **The scramble for allies**

In the event of a decision by the President to disband parliament and call new elections, Mr. Yushchenko would be forced to place his hopes in a motley array of untried political forces and awkward realignments. The President would likely reject the strategy pursued in the 2002, 2006 and 2007 elections of establishing a bloc of pro-Yushchenko parties. Instead, Our Ukraine, which is one of the nine parties in the OU-PSD bloc, would become the sole electoral vehicle bearing Mr.

Yushchenko's name. Any national democratic parties seeking to support the bloc would be tasked to merge with Our Ukraine, something which they had promised to do prior to the 2007 elections before baulking at losing their party fiefdoms. Presumably the logic is that by adding Mr. Yushchenko's name the President's 5% support would improve its election chances.

As the Orange rivals play the percentages ahead of any coming vote, the role of former parliamentary speaker Arseniy Yatsenyuk could well be pivotal. Last week Mr. Yatsenyuk announced his intention to create his own political party, confirming speculation that he intends to take on a leadership role in any future coalition talks. As one of the few relatively new faces in Ukrainian politics and at the still tender age of 34, Mr. Yatsenyuk is widely regarded as the rising star of Ukrainian politics and his backing could prove invaluable to the under-fire President. His decision to head up his own party is in keeping with modern Ukrainian political tradition: the position of parliamentary speaker has regularly gone to the head of those who have held it, whether Ivan Pliushch, Oleksandr Moroz or Volodymyr Lytvyn. In a mature democracy such as Britain it would be unthinkable for the parliamentary speaker to launch his political project, but in Ukraine it remains standard practice.

Mr. Yatsenyuk is a Yushchenko loyalist and the President is thought to see him as a worthy successor. The main potential sponsors and allies of the Yatsenyuk bloc would likely come from the notorious "Dear Friends," as the business wing of Our Ukraine are mockingly referred to. These big business interests first entered politics in 2002 in the then newly created Our Ukraine party which was at the time headed by Viktor Yushchenko. These Dear Friends have not joined Mr. Baloga's United Centre party and are looking for an alternative political vehicle. Mr. Yatsenyuk's relatively untarnished reputation and reformist credentials could fit the bill.

The presence of former speaker Mr. Yatsenyuk may also help win over another former speaker with his own kingmaker potential. Many of Mr. Yushchenko's Dear Friends, such as National Bank chairman Petro Poroshenko, have had long-term ties to Mr. Lytvyn. Channel 5's airing of rumours that Mr. Poroshenko was one of the financiers of the Lytvyn bloc in last year's elections led to the dismissal of a Channel 5 journalist. Mean-

while, Mr. Yushchenko's personal gratitude to Mr. Lytvyn is related to his role as parliamentary speaker during the Orange Revolution and in the round-table negotiations that brokered a repeat second round and paved the way for his presidency. The Yatsenuk and Lytvyn blocs would therefore be fairly logical centrist allies.

Another figure with little experience on the national political stage is Kyiv Mayor Leonid Chernovetskiy, who could yet form a third pillar of pro-Yushchenko support. Any Chernovetskiy bloc would aim to build on his success in using his position in Kyiv to win sufficient votes to enter parliament. Ukraine's precedent for this is found in the 1998 elections when dissident oligarch Pavlo Lazarenko ensured his new political project Hromada crossed into parliament after winning the majority of its 4.68% votes in its home base of Dnipropetrovsk. A big vote in Kyiv could also push Mr. Chernovetskiy into parliament with a small but strategically important band of deputies.

Assuming that a reconstituted Our Ukraine together with United Centre and the Yatsenyuk, Lytvyn and Chernovetskiy blocs could each obtain 3-4% in a new election, this would give Mr. Yushchenko between 60-80 deputies in parliament. Even this meagre return would rely on a gamble that all these four political projects passed the 3% threshold. Even assuming all four blocs did enter parliament this would still only give the President control of a sixth of deputies.

In pre-term elections there would be always the danger that BYUT would again increase its faction. This is a genuine threat, given that BYUT remains the only political force to have accomplished this feat in every election held since 2002. Pre-term elections could also lead to an outcome whereby the Party of Regions increased its vote giving it enough deputies, together with the Communists and Lytvyn bloc, to create a second Anti-Crisis coalition. Currently these three political forces fall just short of a slim majority with 222 deputies.

### Coming to terms with the Party of Regions

Even with the appearance of new political forces such as the Yatsenyuk and Chernivetskiy blocs together with guaranteed support from the remaining Our Ukraine loyalists, there remain many question marks over the benefits of this strategy. The first is the question of where the so-called pragmatists in the

Party of Regions would fit. Would they remain within the Party of Regions as a pro-Yushchenko 'fifth column' or would they become natural members of the Yatsenyuk bloc where they would rub shoulders with the traditionally anti-Tymoshenko Dear Friends?

National Security and Defence secretary Raisa Bohatyriova was expelled from the Party of Regions on September 1 after she returned from a visit to the US, suggesting that there are also stresses within the famously united party of the pro-Russian camp. Party of Regions leader Viktor Yanukovich was said to be personally offended by Mrs. Bohatyriova's response to a question posed by myself at a Washington luncheon as to whether she supported Mr. Yushchenko's or Mr. Yanukovich's stances on Georgia. Mrs. Bohatyriova gave her strong support to Mr. Yushchenko's position on Georgian territorial integrity and ridiculed Mr. Yanukovich's support for Georgian separatism. The failed Party of Regions parliamentary draft in support of South Ossetian and Abkhaz independence was conspicuously not supported by 35 Party of Regions deputies (the Crimean parliament, where the Party of Regions controls 50% of seats, was more successful in adopting a resolution).

The pragmatic wing and the energy lobby within the Party of Regions do not support a coalition with BYUT and have long backed a grand coalition with Our Ukraine. The Presidential Secretariat's problem is that its entire anti-Tymoshenko campaign since late August has rested on attacking Mrs. Tymoshenko for allegedly contemplating forming a coalition with the Party of Regions which President Yushchenko and Mr. Kyrylenko have dubbed a "pro-Kremlin coalition." Mr. Kyrylenko, meanwhile, has commented that his party could not form a coalition with the Party of Regions, "because of deep differences over our world views." This is fanciful and flies in the face of President's Yushchenko's previous support for a broad coalition.

When acting Prime Minister and Our Ukraine leader Yuriy Yekhanurov was instructed by the President to negotiate a grand coalition with the Party of Regions following the 2006 elections and when the President instructed Our Ukraine to join the Anti-Crisis coalition in August 2006 this was defined by Bankova as a positive step towards national unity. Before BYUT and the Party of Regions have even formally established a coalition it is dubbed as treasonous and pro-Kremlin. Why is coalition with the Party of Regions positive

if undertaken by Mr. Yushchenko and terrible if undertaken by Mrs. Tymoshenko?

### No sign of Orange armistice

President Yushchenko has so far refused to heed BYUT's demand to remove Mr. Baloga because Mr. Yushchenko is convinced that only Mr. Baloga can ensure he wins a second term. He has ignored the 72% of Ukrainians who do not want him to stand in the 2010 presidential election, while heeding the call of 16% of Ukrainians who say he should. As the well-known Zerkalo Nedeli commentator Serhiy Rakhmanin wrote last week: 'Yushchenko, regardless of everything, does not believe in polls. Otherwise he would not be prepared to take part in the election campaign for a second term. Yushchenko believes in his mission. He believes in administrative resources. And he believes in Baloga.'

Mr. Yushchenko has made it abundantly clear that he believes a Tymoshenko presidency would be a disaster for Ukraine and that she should be therefore stopped in her tracks at all costs. The August treason charges, accusations of her involvement in a bizarre assassination plot against Mr. Baloga and investigations attempting to link her to Mr. Yushchenko's poisoning all have their origins in Bankova's aim to destroy her so that she either chooses not to stand in the elections or is unable to do so.

### A difficult choice for the President

Ukraine is left waiting for the President's decision to either re-establish a larger Orange coalition with BYUT and the Lytvyn bloc or, if he decides to go for broke after the thirty days allowed to establish a new coalition expires in mid October, to disband parliament and call fresh elections. The collapse of the coalition was the inevitable outcome of eight months of undermining the government which climaxed in August with attempts to destroy Mrs. Tymoshenko's political credibility.

Both scenarios offer little comfort to President Yushchenko. Either a new and larger Orange coalition will be created, leaving the PM position in the hands of BYUT, or pre-term elections are held that at best would only give Mr. Yushchenko a similar number of deputies to his current total. At worst, a new election could leave the President without any support whatsoever in parliament if his various allies and loyalists fail to make it past the 3% mark. ●