

**TYMOSHENKO THE REAL WINNER OF UKRAINE'S 2007 ELECTION**

**By Taras Kuzio**

**Ukraine officially announced its parliamentary election results on October 15. Unlike the 2006 elections, no political force has contested the results. The Party of Regions closed its makeshift camp in downtown Kyiv on October 18 after declaring that they would take their 175 seats, despite rumors to the contrary. Had they refused, they would have triggered another political crisis, as the constitutions requires dissolution if 150 deputies or more resign.**

**The elections again showed that Ukraine's regional diversity, which is routinely disparaged as a source of instability by Russian and Western commentators, is in reality a source of its democratic strength. Regional diversity thwarted former President Leonid Kuchma's attempts to establish autocratic parties of power in the 1998 and 2002 elections.**

**Since the Kuchma era, regional diversity has prevented any political force from establishing a monopoly of power, which makes it impossible to establish a one-party autocracy.**

**The major victor of the elections is unquestionably the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc (BYuT), which finished second overall. BYuT is on a steady trajectory upward from 7% in 2002, to 23% in 2006, and 31% in September. BYuT received 1.5 million votes more than in 2006 and increased its seats from 129 to 156. Three-quarters of the new votes were from western-central Ukraine and the remaining quarter in eastern-southern Ukraine.**

**Of the additional 302,000 votes for BYuT in eastern-southern Ukraine, only one-sixth were from Party of Regions strongholds in the two Donbas oblasts, the Crimean autonomous republic, and the port of Sevastopol.**

**BYuT has proven itself capable of winning votes in eastern and southern Ukraine for seven reasons.**

**First, BYuT is by far Ukraine's best-organized election campaign machine. As the BBC wrote, BYuT is "one of the slickest image-making machines in Europe."**

**Second, Our Ukraine personnel on the ground in eastern Ukraine campaigned for BYuT rather than their own political force, because they had little hope that eastern Ukrainian voters would back Our Ukraine**

**Third, disillusioned Our Ukraine and some Party of Regions voters defected to BYuT.**

**Fourth, alone among the three original orange political forces, BYuT has a consistent position that attracts voters. President Viktor Yushchenko and Our Ukraine have wavered constantly between aligning with BYuT or with pro-Kuchma centrists (prior to 2004) or with the Party of Regions.**

**Fifth, BYuT's voters like its anti-elitist campaign rhetoric.**

**Sixth, BYuT's territorial nationalism can win votes in Russophone eastern Ukraine, unlike the ethno-cultural nationalism of Yushchenko and Our Ukraine. BYuT is not associated with promoting the Ukrainian language.**

**Seventh, BYuT is not associated with promoting NATO membership. BYuT has shied away from discussing NATO, which is unpopular in eastern Ukraine. Tymoshenko's May-June Foreign Affairs article "Containing Russia," on Ukraine's place in European security, never mentions NATO.**

**The only other political force that gained votes in this year's elections was the Communist Party (KPU), which jumped from 3.5% to 5.3%. Other left-wing forces collapsed in their support, notably the national Bolshevik Progressive Socialist Party and the Socialist Party.**

**The newly elected parliament will be the least left wing of any Ukrainian parliament since the disintegration of the USSR.**

**During the 1990s the left controlled upwards of 40% of parliamentary seats and chairmanships.**

**Our Ukraine's vote decreased by 250,000 and its results were similar to 2006. A 14% result is only 4% less than Rukh obtained in 1998 and 10% less than Our Ukraine obtained in 2002.**

**Since the elections, senior Our Ukraine–People's Self Defense (NUNS) officials have declared that the president was mistaken in openly campaigning for Our Ukraine, unlike in 2006 when he remained neutral. Our Ukraine's poor results suggest that voter disillusionment with Yushchenko transferred to low voter support for his political force. As the Economist wrote after the 2007 elections, "That Mr. Yushchenko's support is now relatively weak reflects not a change of mood but his failure to live up to the orange revolution's promise."**

**NUNS's poor showing means it cannot act alone as party machine in Yushchenko's upcoming presidential campaign. NUNS needs to become a more united force.**

**Compared to 2006, NUNS lost the three Galician oblasts to BYuT. NUNS only won Trans–Carpathia oblast (in contrast to four oblasts in 2006).**

**The 2007 elections also showed a return to "normality," following two years of mass mobilization by orange and anti–orange political forces in 2004–2006. Turnout traditionally is lower in Ukraine's elections in eastern Ukraine, where civil society is weaker. The 2007 elections showed higher turnout in western than eastern Ukraine, which worked in favor of BYuT but against the Party of Regions.**

**The Party of Regions increased its vote by 2% but it lost eleven seats and obtained fewer votes overall. The Party of Regions was stunned by its near loss of first place in the election, as BYuT closed the gap from 10% last year to only 2% this year.**

**The subsequent panic that struck Party of Regions could be seen in two ways. First, rumors circulated that the U.S. public relations company Paul Manafort was sacked because of**

disagreements over how to run the Party of Regions campaign. Second, during times of political panic the Party of Regions has traditionally resorted to raising the status of the Russian language and NATO membership in an attempt to mobilize eastern Ukrainian voters.

The 2007 elections showed that Ukraine has two political machines: BYuT and the Party of Regions. Yushchenko can only win a second term in 2009 in an alliance with one of these machines.

The 2007 elections will be seen as a democratic watershed for Ukraine, returning to power an orange coalition and a Tymoshenko government. Democratic backsliding is unlikely, but the question remains will Ukraine now walk or run with reform.

(Ukrayinska pravda, Glavred, October 8; [www.focus.in.ua](http://www.focus.in.ua), [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), October 5; Economist, October 4; New York Times, October 4)