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ORANGE REVOLUTION BACK ON TRACK AFTER UKRAINE ELECTION

By Taras Kuzio

Ukraine's September 30 parliamentary elections mark a resurrection of the Orange Revolution. The two orange forces, the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc (BYuT) and Our Ukraine–People's Self Defense (NUNS), together won 45% of the votes. Their expected 230 seats (out of 450) should be enough to create a slim orange parliamentary coalition and government.

President Viktor Yushchenko has called for a broad coalition consisting of BYuT, NUNS, and the Party of Regions. Although he campaigned for a "democratic" (i.e., orange) coalition and continues to support this, he believes that the Party of Regions should be given some government and parliamentary positions.

BYuT immediately restated their long-standing refusal to join any coalition that included the Party of Regions. NUNS is prevaricating, as it did following last year's elections. Although ostensibly the president's party, NUNS was not consulted ahead of Yushchenko's statement.

Democratic and orange political forces have now won four elections since the 2000. In 2002, Our Ukraine came first, then Yushchenko was elected president two years later. In the 2006 and 2007 elections three (BYuT, Our Ukraine, Socialist Party [SPU]) and two (BYuT, NUNS) orange forces, respectively, achieved slim parliamentary majorities.

Although election fraud took place in the 2002 and 2004 elections, triggering the Orange Revolution, international organizations (OSCE, Council of Europe) and Western governments have declared the 2006 and 2007 elections to have been "free and fair." The Russian government has also recognized this year's elections.

However, the Party of Regions has resumed some of its 2004 tactics with inflated voter turnouts and stuffed ballots in its Donbas stronghold for two reasons.

First, it needed to bolster the party's vote count in the face of an onslaught by BYuT (see EDM, September 17). Last year the Party of Regions had a 10% lead over BYuT, but now the gap has narrowed to only 3% percent. BYuT's 31% share this year marks a remarkable rise from only 8% in 2002.

Most of BYuT's gains are in Russian-speaking eastern and southern Ukraine, making it Ukraine's first and only all-national political force. BYuT and its territorial-based form of nationalism have successfully attracted Russian-speaking voters, many of whom have been put off by NUNS's ethno-cultural nationalism.

Second, eastern Ukrainian administrations controlled by the Party of Regions and large factories with Socialist directors sought to bolster the SPU vote. In central Ukraine SPU support collapsed from an average of 10% in the 2006 elections to 2% percent this year. However, while attempts to stuff ballots on behalf of the SPU temporarily pushed the party above 3%, in the end this was insufficient to allow them to enter parliament.

The new Ukrainian parliament will consist of five political forces, but with two changes. First, the SPU has been replaced by former parliamentary speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn's bloc. According to presidential secretariat sources, the Lytvyn bloc has little choice but to join the orange coalition, as its voters are from orange central Ukraine.

The Lytvyn bloc could have played the role of kingmaker, as the SPU did in 2006, if the two orange forces themselves had fewer than 225 seats. But instead, the orange coalition will have approximately 230 seats; therefore, the Lytvyn bloc cannot break the coalition. It will be unable to demand the post of speaker, as did SPU leader Oleksandr Moroz.

Second, the Party of Regions and Communist Party both will have about the same number of seats that it had in the outgoing parliament. The big change will be an additional 30 seats to BYuT, giving it close to the same number as the Party of Regions.

As NUNS did not win more votes than in 2006, it is BYuT's breakthrough that has given Yushchenko's presidency a new lease of life. NUNS placed first only in Trans-Carpathia (home base of presidential secretariat head Viktor Baloga), down from winning four regions in 2006. The Tymoshenko-Yushchenko alliance still could split ahead of the 2009 presidential ballot.

NUNS leaders have reconciled themselves to BYuT's undisputed dominance in the orange camp, as seen by the visit of NUNS leader Yuriy Lutsenko to the BYuT election headquarters to publicly embrace Tymoshenko as the next prime minister. The presidential secretariat is finding it difficult to accept the new reality that Yushchenko's fate rests in Tymoshenko's hands. As a Western Ambassador in Kyiv told EDM, even with Tymoshenko's support as prime minister, Yushchenko will find it difficult to win a second term, as his ratings have long hovered below 15%.

However, Yushchenko will no longer have a trump card to use in his rivalry with Tymoshenko. In 2005, Yushchenko was constitutionally able to dismiss the prime minister, and he fired Tymoshenko in September 2005. But since 2006, the reformed constitution only allows the parliamentary coalition – not the president – to remove the prime minister.

The holding of Ukraine's second free elections and the fourth victory in five years of pro-Western democratic forces gives the Orange Revolution and Yushchenko a second chance. Whether the opportunity will be used this time still remains an open question.

(Ukrayinska Pravda, September 29–30, October 1–4, Financial Times, October 1–2, cvk.gov.ua)