

Russian Dezyinformatsia Campaign against the Orange Coalition

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By: [Taras Kuzio](#)

On December 9 it was announced that a larger orange coalition had been agreed upon in Ukraine. It was formally registered on December 16. The news came as a surprise, as it had been widely assumed that Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc (BYuT) was close to reaching a coalition deal with its arch enemy, the Party of Regions (PRU). Although unpalatable three months ago when Ukraine's political crisis began after the orange coalition collapsed, BYuT described the move as a short-term "coalition of national unity." The BYuT, pointing to other countries rallying around to defend their national interests, considered it a marriage of convenience to cope with the global financial crisis.

The stumbling block for the formation of the coalition of national unity was Regions' insistence on support for constitutional reforms that would transform Ukraine into a full-blown parliamentary republic. Regions, as in 2003 and 2004, when it supported the same reforms with other pro-Kuchma forces, supports the election of the president by parliament, because they fear defeat in the forthcoming presidential elections. In 2004 they lost to Viktor Yushchenko, and they are afraid they will lose to Tymoshenko in December 2009.

The BYuT does not support the election of the president by parliament. The consensus is to maintain the 2006 constitutional reforms that transformed Ukraine into a semi-parliamentary republic. Yushchenko is in a minority in backing a return to the presidential constitution.

The larger orange coalition is the third attempt to establish an orange alliance following Viktor Yushchenko's election in January 2005. The first lasted nine months and collapsed in September of that year, after the president dismissed the prime minister, as he was still able to under the 1996 constitution.

The second orange coalition lasted 11 months, from November 2007 to September 2008. It disintegrated after the president's faction, Our Ukraine-Peoples Self Defense (OU-PSD), withdrew on September 3.

The weak components of the three orange coalitions were first, Yushchenko's antipathy toward Tymoshenko, which overrides other considerations; and secondly, deep internal divisions within the OU-PSD (*Korrespondent*, December 6, *Fokus*, December 12). Our Ukraine has always been undecided, like the president, about whether to establish an orange coalition with the BYuT or a grand coalition with the PRU.

These deep divisions were evident in September and again this month. Four months ago the OU-PSD voted by a bare majority (39 of 72 deputies) to withdraw from the orange coalition. This month it voted to join a larger orange coalition with the BYuT and the centrist Volodymyr Lytvyn bloc by a similarly slim majority of 37 deputies (the list is re-published in *Zerkalo Nedeli/Tyzhnia*, December 13-19).

Lytvyn's election as speaker was only made possible by the 27-member Communist Party faction, which supported the vote (www.pravda.com.ua, December 9-10). Only 40 of the 72 OU-PSD deputies supported his election. The larger orange coalition cannot remain stable if it has to rely on the votes of the Communists, who would never support many of the anti-crisis measures that Ukraine is being forced to adopt as part of the IMF stand-by loan negotiated in October.

Of the nine parties in the OU-PSD, five did not support the OU-PSD's withdrawal in September, and this month six supported joining the larger orange coalition. It is interesting how many of the deputies have fallen out with Yushchenko. Only 30 of the 72 OU-PSD deputies attended a meeting with the president on December 15.

The president does not favor the larger orange coalition and holds out hope for a technocratic government (www.president.gov.ua, December 15); but this is unrealistic in a parliamentary democracy, as the position of prime minister will always go to the leader of a political party.

After much criticism from abroad and within Ukraine, Yushchenko has decided not to hold early elections. Dealing with the global crisis is now the priority. Early elections would have been the only way to remove Tymoshenko, even though this was a dangerous tactic, since the president's planned "Viktor Yushchenko bloc" only has about 3 to 4 percent support. Dealing with the economic crisis will be impossible if parliament remains unstable and the president continues to attempt to undermine the new coalition.

This domestic instability continues to give Russia opportunities to destabilize Ukraine. According to information given to The Jamestown Foundation, Russian intelligence hacked into the presidential secretariat during the invasion of Georgia creating a sense of paranoia among the president's staff. An analytical wing was compromised and its staff, after being accused of "working for Russia," was released.

Russia has also returned to the old KGB *dezynformatsiya* tactics. Stories were planted in the provincial Ukrainian media that the coalition was created "with the support of Moscow." These stories were then reprinted by the main Kyiv media.

The Russian threat is real, as can be seen from the hacking of the presidential secretariat and support for Russian nationalists and separatists; but the paranoia of Yushchenko and his staff about "Russian conspiracies" is exaggerated. Both the proposed coalition of national unity and the larger orange coalition have been accused of being in the "pay of the Kremlin," just as unfounded accusations of "treason" were leveled against Tymoshenko in August. The prosecutor's office declined to institute criminal charges after studying the 300-page "testimony" prepared by the Security Service (SBU) on the orders of the presidential secretariat. These accusations have been aimed at influencing western Ukrainians, but opinion polls and focus groups have determined that the public has not been duped by such crude propaganda, a senior BYuT official told The Jamestown Foundation. Yushchenko had hoped to attract patriotic voters away from BYuT ahead of the upcoming presidential elections.

The third (larger) orange coalition suffers from the same problem as its two predecessors; namely, presidential antipathy and internal disunity within the pro-presidential Our Ukraine. The third orange coalition also faces two additional new threats: the global crisis and a bellicose Russia.

