



Taras Kuzio

Gender bias, anti-Semitism contributed to Yanukovich's victory

Yesterday at 17:33 | Taras Kuzio

Gender bias and anti-Semitism were two important factors that helped tip the balance in Viktor Yanukovich's favor in the 2010 elections. Yanukovich won by only 3.5 percentage points, or approximately 900,000 votes, and became the first president to not win a majority of Ukraine's regions or 50 percent of the vote.

The foremost expert on gender in Ukraine, Reed College Professor Alexandra Hrycak, believes that "traditionalistic attitudes" towards women "are considered to be more prevalent within the Orange electorate." Much of this electorate originates in the country's western region and in rural areas of central Ukraine'.

An October 2008 psychological portrait of Viktor Yushchenko published by Ukrayinska Pravda showed him to have patriarchal and traditionalist views of the role of women in society. Yushchenko's inability to work with Tymoshenko is undoubtedly a product of her being a strong-willed and self-confident woman. Yushchenko surrounded himself with sycophants and motherly figures, such as his last chief of staff Vira Ulianchenko, and would never tolerate anybody talking back to him like Hanna Herman does to President Viktor Yanukovich.

Anti-Semitism was used against only two candidates in the 2010 elections: Tymoshenko and Arseniy Yatseniuk, but the campaign was more systematic and at a higher level against her. Marginal candidate Serhiy Ratushniak, mayor of the Trans-Carpathian capitol city of Uzhgorod, was openly anti-Semitic against Yatseniuk. Ratushniak's views did not win widespread support and Yatseniuk still won more votes than the mayor in Uzhgorod. Ratushniak came in 16th out of 18 candidates with only 0.12 percent of the vote in the Jan. 17 first round.

Anti-Semitism was not a threat to Yatseniuk's campaign. He came in fourth with 7 percent of the vote. Yatseniuk, who is from Chernivtsi, has denied having Jewish origins.

The anti-Semitic campaign against Tymoshenko presented more of a threat. I witnessed anti-Semitic leaflets distributed throughout Galicia during the last week of the second round that called upon Galicians to not vote for Tymoshenko as she is allegedly Jewish. Such spurious allegations had been around for the last 2-3 years and surfaced in the 2010 elections with the support of Yushchenko. His allies in Lviv had openly described Tymoshenko as the “Jew in the braid.”

The west Ukrainian branch of the Ukrainian Language Society “Prosvita” had published booklets by the rabid anti-Tymoshenko former parliamentarian Dmytro Chobit, who also claimed she had Jewish origins. Tymoshenko’s father had separated from her mother when she was three and his surname was Grigorian, suggesting an Armenian ethnic origin.

Regardless of Yatseniuk’s or Tymoshenko’s ethnic heritage, they were both born in Ukraine and are, therefore, Ukrainian as defined by Ukrainian legislation.

Yushchenko stirred the issue of Tymoshenko’s ethnicity over the last two years by casting doubt on her Ukrainian patriotism. In August 2008, the presidential secretariat issued a 300-page dossier revealing her alleged “treason.” Although the dossier had been prepared by secretariat deputy head Andriy Kyslynsky, who was then promoted to the position of deputy chairman of the State Security Service (SBU), the allegations of “treason” and “un-Ukrainian” stuck to Tymoshenko. Kyslynsky was discredited and removed from the SBU after it was found that he had forged his university degrees.

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Yushchenko’s anti-Tymoshenko crusade served to dampen the Orange vote in western Ukraine. Tymoshenko received three million fewer votes than Yushchenko in December 2004. Yushchenko claimed that both candidates were allegedly “Moscow projects.”

In the Feb. 7 second round of the elections, nationalist groups in Lviv and the diaspora rallied to Yushchenko’s call to vote against both candidates. Yuriy Shukhevych, son of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army commander whom Yushchenko had honored in 2007, was a leading supporter of the “no” campaign.

So too were nationalist parties, such as Oleh Tyanybok’s Svoboda (Freedom), the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (KUN), as well as the Andriy Melnyk (OUN-m) and Stepan Bandera (OUN-b) wings of the émigré Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. All four political forces supported Yushchenko’s double “no” vote campaign.

The anti-Semitic views of Tymoshenko had also moved during the last two years to the Ukrainian diaspora where a sharp debate over Bandera has spread to the European Parliament and Western media.

The Ukrainian diaspora stayed very silent during most of the 2010 election campaign, unlike five years earlier, because it had partially bought into the Yushchenko view about both candidates lack of “patriotism.”

The supreme irony of the 2010 elections is that anti-Semitism in western Ukraine directed against Tymoshenko and fanned by Yushchenko could have been one of the factors that led to the election of pro-Russian autocrat Yanukovich. In a 50/50 election, where every percentage point counts, the “no” vote could have proven to be decisive in Tymoshenko’s defeat.

A second conclusion is that the Ukrainian diaspora cannot hope to counter charges of anti-Semitism against Bandera or itself unless it condemns such views within its ranks.

Suspicious about Yushchenko’s “patriotic” motives should have emerged over the intentional timing of the decree to honor Bandera on the eve of the second round. This was undertaken to undermine Tymoshenko’s campaign by mobilizing eastern Ukrainian voters against the “nationalists.”

And yet diaspora Ukrainians and Galicians still have sympathy for the “patriotic” Yushchenko. A majority of Ukrainians, on the other hand, see him as the worst of the three presidents to have ruled the country and as someone who did more than anyone to bring about Yanukovich’s election.

Yanukovich’s thank you was not to make Yushchenko prime minister, as the ex-president had hoped, but to make the non-Ukrainian speaking Nikolai Azarov his prime minister and the Ukrainophobe Dmytro Tabachnyk the minister of education in the new government. Thank you, Yushchenko.

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