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## Yanukovych Relies On Soviet Nationalism To Stay In Power

by Taras Kuzio

Western and Ukrainian analysts have long argued that three, basic factors apply in any political analysis of Ukraine.

First, President Viktor Yanukovych's Party of Regions (like other centrist parties) has no ideology.

Second, Ukraine's regional diversity prevents the monopolization of power by one political force.

And third, unlike in Russia, ruling parties cannot use nationalism in Ukraine to remain in power.

Violence last month in Lviv showed that all three of these factors are wrong.

On May 9, nationalist protestors clashed with police, Russian nationalists, Communists and the Russian Consul, a Soviet-era flag was burnt, and a commemoration wreath was destroyed. An adviser to a local deputy was shot in the leg.

Violence was inevitable after the parliamentary coalition supporting President Yanukovych voted on April 21 to fly Soviet flags on Victory Day (celebrating the end of World War II) for the first time since Ukraine became independent.

During, and since the 2004 presidential elections, the inciting of inter-regional conflict has been a strategy forged by Ukrainian and Russian political consultants ("technologists") working for Yanukovych and the Party of Regions to ensure they remain in power.

Yanukovych therefore cannot fulfill promises of national integration that he supported in the 2010 election campaign as he would have to take three impossible steps.

### The Return Of The 'Great Patriotic War'

First, he would have to halt the Party of Regions' reported financing of the nationalist Svoboda (Freedom) party, which was involved in the provocations in Lviv.

Svoboda's previous name in the 1990s was the Social National Party, a name that clearly evokes links to the Nazis. Mainstream nationalist parties in Ukraine and the diaspora rightly refuse to have any dealings with Svoboda.

Second, the Party of Regions should no longer draw on divisive issues, such as hostility to Ukrainian nationalism, anti-Americanism and hyping alleged threats from "Ukrainianization" to mobilize its core ex-communist voters during elections.

Third, Yanukovych should return to the religious policy promoted by Ukraine's first three presidents by staying neutral between the warring Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Churches (ROC) in Ukraine.

Yanukovych is the first president to grant the ROC a de facto state and official position while marginalizing Ukrainian Orthodox and Greek-Catholics, as well as other religious denominations. ROC Patriarch Kirill has visited Ukraine countless times in the last three years with Yanukovych in tow as his host.

Ukraine is more divided today than at any time in its two-decade, post-Soviet history.

This divide that has been deepened by Education Minister Dmytro Tabachnyk's Sovietophile policies, the return of the Soviet term "Great Patriotic War" and the flying of the Soviet flag, as well as importing the Russian position on the 1933 holodomor, or "terror-famine."

Freedom House recommended in its [April 27 report](#) "Sounding the Alarm: Protecting Democracy in Ukraine" that Yanukovych "[d]ismiss Education Minister Dmytro Tabachnyk, arguably the most polarizing official in the cabinet, for sowing unnecessary and dangerous divisions within Ukraine over issues of identity, language, and education."

Let's return to the three major misperceptions about Ukraine.

### Divide And Rule

The first is ideology. Yanukovych and the Party of Regions have a stable 20 percent base of support from former leftist, Stalinist and pan-Slavic voters who, until the 2004 elections, voted for the Communist Party, Progressive Socialist Party and Slavic Unity Party respectfully.

Since the 2006 elections, their natural allies in Crimea and Odessa have also been Russian nationalist-separatists who were permitted to travel to Lviv for the May 9 provocations.

Yanukovych and the Party of Regions therefore do not have the same electorate as other centrist parties such as Trudova Ukraina (now called Silna Ukraina and led by Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Tigipko) and the NDP (Peoples Democratic Party). These centrist parties target Ukraine's new middle class and have a liberal ideology.

In contrast, the Party of Regions has integrated left-populist paternalistic state capitalism and is perceived as supporting oligarchs.

This is evident in the foreign partners with whom the Party of Regions has signed cooperation agreements – Vladimir Putin's Unified Russia party, the Chinese Communist Party and the Socialist group in the European Parliament (none of whom are liberals).

The second factor, regional diversity, is overcome by the administration through divide-and-rule policies. The first region, Eastern Ukraine, can be controlled by appealing to pro-Russian and Sovietophile issues and by portraying the Party of Regions as defenders against "Ukrainian nationalism" which showed its "ugly face" on May 9 in Lviv.

### If All Else Fails, There's Always Political Corruption

The strategy directed at the second regional group, central Ukrainians, is to divide them from the "crazy nationalist Galicians," a plan successfully used in March 2001 when violence provoked by the authorities at an opposition rally in Kyiv turned the city against western Ukrainian radicals in the "Ukraine Without Kuchma" movement.

Changes in legislation last year also removed the right of Kyivites to vote for the city's mayor, who is henceforth the same person as the governor appointed by the president.

Finally, if all else fails, there is always political corruption, which was endemic in Kyiv and the region under former Mayor Leonid Chernovetsky.

The strategy for the third regional group, western Ukraine, is for it to become a Svoboda stronghold.

Yulia Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) party was denied registration in Kyiv and Lviv, two of its regional strongholds, in the October 2010 local elections.

This step ensured Svoboda's victory in three Galician oblasts, the first time a nationalist party has won control of Western Ukraine.

#### **First Bourgeois Nationalists, Now Crazy Galicians**

The third misperception is the alleged inability of Ukrainian authorities to use nationalism. Well-known Ukrainian sociologist Valeriy Khmelko believes "social authoritarianism" is stronger in eastern Ukraine, where its political face is extreme leftist parties and the Party of Regions, and has a stable 20 or more percent nationwide support. This compares to only 3-5 percent nationwide support for the "social authoritarian" Svoboda, whose support is limited to Galicians.

It is increasingly dawning on Western policy makers that the Yanukovich administration believes it will remain in office indefinitely; after all, giving up power goes against the grain of Eurasian, post-Soviet political culture.

In Eurasia, giving up power is also dangerous. The unleashing of criminal charges against Tymoshenko and her allies, and against ex-President Leonid Kuchma, has opened up a Pandora's Box of potential countercharges against current government officials and ex-President Yanukovich -- if they are out of power.

The popularity of Yanukovich and the Party of Regions is plummeting and will continue to plummet if IMF-mandated reforms, such as raising the pension age for women from 55 to 60 and increasing household utility prices by 50% for a second time are implemented.

With its popularity collapsing, coupled with a fear of being out of power, the Yanukovich administration is promoting a strategy of regional divide-and-rule through polarization, using May 9-style provocations, to maintain its eastern Ukrainian electorate permanently mobilized.

The traditional Soviet policy of dividing eastern against western Ukrainians, then "bourgeois nationalists" and now "crazy Galicians," remains in place.

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