

# Ukrainian Multi-Vectorism: Satisfying Europe While Craving a Managed Democracy

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(Source: Reuters)

Ukraine's next parliamentary election will take place in 2012. During this period the Viktor Yanukovich administration will attempt a precarious balancing act to satisfy the West. At the same time, the administration will try to put in place a managed democracy to facilitate Yanukovich's re-election for a second term in 2015.

The first step to satisfy Western demands is to deal with the demand to halt the criminal case against Yulia Tymoshenko and other opposition leaders so that Kyiv can complete negotiations with the EU for the Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) under the Polish presidency by December. The US and EU issued this demand ahead of the planned sentencing of Tymoshenko to a lengthy prison sentence in the second week of September. The trial was postponed until September 27, not coincidentally two days before the Eastern Partnership summit in Warsaw, and her sentencing could be delayed until the New Year ([www.lb.ua](http://www.lb.ua), September 14).

A second step is the adoption of a new election law within one year of the elections that is aimed at appeasing the Council of Europe. Ukraine has routinely, as in the October 2010 local elections, changed the rules of the game months before election day. The plan is to replace the proportional system with the mixed proportional-majoritarian system used in 1998 and 2002. A proportional system only gave the Party of Regions a 31 percent to 34 percent plurality in the 2006 and 2007 elections while a mixed system is aimed at securing half to two thirds of the seats, thereby possessing a constitutional majority with the assistance of its allies. In 2002, For a United Ukraine bloc received only 11 percent, but President Leonid Kuchma established a parliamentary majority.

While satisfying Europe, the authorities are seeking to satisfy their craving for political and economic monopoly of power through a managed democracy that will guarantee the next decade in power. The composition of the 2012-2016 parliament could support or hinder Yanukovich's re-election for a second term in January 2015.

Free and fair elections could lead to a large opposition presence that may hinder Yanukovich's re-election. The EU has insisted that opposition leaders be permitted to stand in elections so they can be declared in accordance with democratic standards. But, the Yanukovich administration does not want to have Tymoshenko in parliament in the three years leading up to the presidential elections. First, because she

would receive immunity from prosecution and second because she excels in the role of opposition leader from which she will harangue the authorities and mobilize the opposition. Moreover, it is easier to win a presidential election in opposition than in power, and 2015 could therefore provide Tymoshenko with a second opportunity to defeat Yanukovich. In February 2010 she was defeated by a mere 3 percent even though she was in government.

Three factors may contribute to fewer voters being dissuaded from voting for Tymoshenko in 2015 than in 2010. First, Yanukovich has succeeded in antagonizing many different social groups. Second, Viktor Yushchenko, who in the 2010 elections rallied western Ukrainian voters against Tymoshenko, is no longer a political player. Third, the Yanukovich administration has introduced unpopular reforms demanded by the IMF, such as raising the pension age for women from 55 to 60 and increasing household utility prices to market levels. These have reduced the popularity of Yanukovich and the Party of Regions even in their home base of Donetsk.

Plans for parliament aim to ensure it is compliant and acts as a rubber stamp. Of the five political parties that are likely to enter parliament only one – Tymoshenko's Batkivshchina (Fatherland) – will not be under their control:

1. Party of Regions and the Communist Party are traditional allies drawing on the same group of voters and regions.

2. Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Tigipko's Silna Ukrayina (Strong Ukraine) party will merge with the Party of Regions. Tigipko came third with 13 percent in the 2010 elections, drawing on middle class young Ukrainians.

3. Front for Change, led by Arseniy Yatsenyuk, is in negotiations with Donetsk oligarch Rinat Akhmetov for a \$140 million election war chest in return for 30 percent to 50 percent of the seats (Ukrayinska Pravda, September 2). Inside sources in Kyiv told Jamestown that Presidential Administration head Serhiy Levochkin and Akhmetov are in competition for Front for Change which will occupy Yushchenko's Our Ukraine "constructive opposition" niche (Ukrayinska Pravda, July 19, 21, September 6, 22).

4. Batkivshchina will receive fewer seats than in 2007, when it obtained 31 percent, under a mixed election system. In the 2010 local elections Batkivshchina was obstructed from participating in two of its strongholds, Kyiv and Lviv. With Tymoshenko in jail, the authorities had planned to install Batkivshchina Luhansk deputy Natalia Korolevska as its new leader. Batkivshchina, like Front for Change, would have thereby been co-opted.

5. Svoboda (Freedom) nationalist party may enter parliament, if the threshold is not raised from three percent to five percent. There have long been rumors that Svoboda receives financing from the Party of Regions (see critical March and May reports by pro-Yanukovich American Institute Ukraine at [www.aminuk.org](http://www.aminuk.org)).

Of these six political forces only Batkivshchina, if led by Tymoshenko, would be the real opposition in parliament. The US and EU demand not to imprison Tymoshenko and permit her to stand in elections therefore upsets the authorities plans for a managed democracy. Nevertheless, the authorities have a card up their sleeves against parties who attempt to be a real opposition by pressuring big business to not provide financial support (all Ukrainian parties are supported by big business). Batkivshchina, Kyiv insiders have told Jamestown, are in dire financial straits after big business deserted them.

The authorities are applying pressure on big business to withdraw support from Front for Change whose leader Arseniy Yatsenyuk was funded in the 2010 elections by Viktor Pinchuk. Kuchma, Pinchuk's father-in-law, was charged in March 2010 as a way to pressure Pinchuk from staying out of politics and his place as Yatsenyuk's sponsor is now being taken by Akhmetov. As one commentary noted: "The [biggest] threat the authorities' tactics pose to Yatsenyuk himself right now is loss of financing...forcing him to consider seeking a 'roof' provided by one of the Party of Regions' oligarchs and becoming a Party of Regions-operated glove-puppet opposition (leader)" (Komentari, September 8).

The EU will continue to discover undemocratic practices undertaken by the Yanukovich administration whose elites want the economic benefits of Europe, with a managed democracy at home. This neo-Soviet multi-vectorism fails to understand the incompatibility of “Belarus-Lite” and Europe.