

A decorative background consisting of a grid of grey dots of varying sizes, with several dots highlighted in red. The dots are arranged in a pattern that roughly outlines the map of Ukraine.

Old and New Elites

Ukrainian Political Parties before the Parliamentary Elections

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- In the run-up to the early parliamentary elections on 26 October all Ukrainian parties have put Independence Square («Maidan») activists, investigative journalists and commanders of volunteer units in a prominent position on their party lists. The next parliament will thus consist of many newcomers to the business of politics. We can therefore expect that the voting behaviour of the parliamentary factions will be even more unpredictable and radicalised.
- The election campaign is in full swing. As one might expect, there is little substantive debate on the urgently needed reforms. Nor is there much discussion of the future of the Donbass region and a rational policy towards Russia. Instead, hogging the limelight are the personal «political projects» of the leading politicians. To that extent any attempt to categorise the parties in terms of the right/left pattern familiar from the West is futile.
- The parties are pretty much locked-in to trying to outdo one another in talking tough and embracing or at least accommodating populism. The favourites, the «Petro Poroshenko Bloc», with close ties to the president, is the most moderate, by and large, notwithstanding numerous gaffes perpetrated by leading candidate Vitali Klichko. In view of the likelihood that, in accordance with Ukrainian custom, the president will be able to win over many of the direct candidates standing as »independents« after the election Poroshenko will probably achieve his aim of a broad base in parliament.

Introduction

What do the leaders of the Independence Square movement, battlefield commanders, career politicians and investigative journalists have in common? They are all candidates in the Ukrainian parliamentary elections on 26 October 2014. The well-known artists, singers and sportsmen who contested previous elections have now given way to field commanders and other war heroes on the ballot paper.

Although the all-star line-up may encourage voter turnout, the lack of professional politicians among the representatives who will enter parliament via the party lists gives cause for concern. In the brief history of independent Ukraine the parliament has been characterised more by populism than by »Realpolitik« and personal interests have taken precedence over the good of the country. This trend is likely to be consolidated by the soon to be elected parliament.

This election stands out, however, because the votes of the Crimea are largely ruled out and only half of the constituencies in the Donbass will be involved because the others are controlled by separatists. Nevertheless, all Ukrainians at least in principle have the right to cast their vote somewhere. It is doubtful, however, that many of the Ukrainians who have remained in the Crimea and the refugees from the Donbass region will exercise their right to vote. Already in the presidential election turnout among voters from these regions was much lower than the national average. The opportunity to cast a vote is available even abroad, however. In Russia Ukraine has set up polling stations in six consulates, in Moscow, Rostov-on-Don, St Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg and Novosibirsk.

The political differences between the parties most likely to prevail are marginal. Not much sets them apart with regard to the choice of means to end the war in eastern Ukraine, implementation of the lustration law (the complete exclusion of politicians and high-ranking officials from the Yanukovich era) and the adoption of radical economic reforms. Issues such as the role of the Russian language and integration in the EU are not being debated given the dominance of a clear and to that extent uniform »mainstream«: none of the leading parties is demanding special status for the Russian language and

practically all the parties favour accelerated EU integration and NATO membership.

Foundations of Electoral Law

The diverging interests in the previous parliament prevented changes from being made in electoral law. While the (former) representatives of the »Party of the Regions« insisted on retaining the mixed system and abolishing the five per cent threshold the »Batktivshchyna« (Fatherland) group of Yulia Tymoshenko wanted to abolish direct constituencies. President Petro Poroshenko and his allies in Vitali Klichko's UDAR group, in turn, had an interest in the official authorisation of electoral blocs. Since no amicable agreement could be reached Poroshenko decided, together with the »UDAR« and »Svoboda« (Freedom) groups to terminate the (transitional) coalition government in order to be able to convene early elections. As a result, the coming elections, like the previous parliamentary elections in 2012, will be based on a so-called mixed electoral law: half of the representatives will enter parliament via party lists, the other half via direct constituencies, although without the two being set off against one another. After a ruling by the Constitutional Court, in keeping with the principle of equality, list candidates may not also stand as direct candidates. There is a five per cent threshold for political parties.

After Russia's annexation of the Crimea, however, only 213 instead of the 225 representatives laid down in the Constitution will be elected in direct constituencies. The 12 seats for the Crimea will not be occupied but they will be included when it comes to working out the parliamentary majority, so that there will still be 225 votes. The extent to which direct candidates will not be elected in other constituencies due to the armed conflict in the eastern parts of Ukraine remains unclear. The Central Electoral Commission has registered direct candidates for the constituencies currently controlled by separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk, but the assumption is that there will be elections in only 15 out of the 32 constituencies in the region.

In order to circumvent the legal problem of the ban on the formation of electoral blocs or similar electoral alliances numerous new »parties« are being established

composed of members of existing parties. However, they have to renounce their membership of their parties of origin. Apart from »Batkivshchyna«, the Communist Party of Ukraine and »Svoboda« the other lists are best viewed as mergers of heterogeneous parties, groupings and individuals.

In total there are 3,487 candidates for the 213 direct seats, 1,401 of whom are being put up by political parties and 2,086 are standing as independent candidates.

Every party has to deposit 1 million hryvnia (about 60,000 euros) with the Central Electoral Commission, with direct candidates depositing 10,000 hryvnia (about 600 euros). Parties and direct candidates who fail to get elected to parliament will lose their deposit. Electioneering expenses cannot be claimed back. The Central Electoral Commission uses these deposits to cover part of its costs (for organising the elections, publications and broadcasting slots for campaign ads).

Parties with the Best Prospects

Opinion polls on voting intentions are part and parcel of the election campaign in Ukraine.¹ However, they do not give us much to go on because they generally give those who commissioned them the answer they were looking for. As things stand at the moment it seems that between four and seven parties could make it into parliament via the party lists, substantially more than looked likely even at the beginning of October. However, because all the parties, apart from the Petro Poroshenko Bloc (PPB) and Oleh Lyashko's »Radical Party«, are hovering around the five per cent threshold it is too close to call, given the high margin of error.

According to opinion polls conducted in the first half of October² the PPB is the strongest party, on 33.5 per cent, and could be looking at between 88 and 126 seats via the party list, depending on the number of parties that manage to get over the five per cent threshold. If only four parties manage to get into parliament, however, the PPB could even secure an absolute majority of

the party-list seats. Oleh Lyashko's grouping stands at 12.8 per cent. Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk's »People's Front«, on 8.9 per cent, is ahead of Tymoshenko's »Batkivshchyna«, on 6.9 per cent. Parties hailing from eastern Ukraine have made up considerable ground over the past few weeks, including Serhiy Tihipko's »Silna Ukraina« party (Strong Ukraine) on 7.8 per cent; the »Opposition Bloc«, founded only a month ago, on 5.1 per cent; and the Communist Party on 4.5 per cent. Former foreign minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko's »Hromadianska Pozycja« (Civil Position) still has only 4.6 per cent, the extreme right-wing party »Svoboda« 3.9 per cent and »Pravyy Sektor« (Right Sector) only 1.7 per cent. They are thus unlikely to make it over the five per cent threshold. Mayor of Lviv Andriy Sadovyi's »Samopomich« party (Self-Help) may also make a respectable showing, if things go well for it, because it is the only force that has turned its back on representatives of the former national political elite and will benefit from the low turnout in eastern Ukraine (5.4 per cent). The PPB seems to be losing around 0.5 per cent a week and even »Batkivshchyna« is losing support to prime minister Yatseniuk's »People's Front«.

Voter turnout will be key to the election result. In western and central Ukraine this is likely to be as much as 90 per cent, while in the Donbass region almost half of the voters seem to have decided not to vote. The situation is similar in the other eastern regions of the country, where the voters feel politically disenfranchised. The PPB is the strongest party in all regions, but neck and neck with Tihipko's party and the Opposition Bloc in the Donbass, on around 10 per cent.

Politicians formerly close to the ruling »Party of the Regions« decided fairly late in the day to stand as candidates of the Opposition Bloc, which, alongside Serhiy Tihipko's party and possibly the Communist Party, may get into parliament and play some sort of role there, if not a politically decisive one.

With the exception of president Poroshenko (51 per cent approval rating) the Ukrainian people, according to opinion polls, consider all politicians as generally, in some cases even extremely untrustworthy. The main issues among those who plan to vote are resolution of the conflict in the Donbass region (35 per cent) and implementation of economic reforms (21 per cent), while

1. The latest opinion polls may be found at: http://ukraine-elections.com.ua/socopros/parlamentskie_vybory

2. Opinion poll conducted by the Rating Group, which is also operating in eastern Ukraine: <http://www.ratinggroup.com.ua/en/products/politic/data/entry/14106/>

few mention social issues (11 per cent) or even energy security (3 per cent). While eastern Ukraine considers it important (24 per cent) to improve relations with Russia, voters in western Ukraine want to step up relations with the West (23 per cent). The country is also divided in relation to the importance of social issues (western Ukraine 8 per cent, Donbass 32 per cent) and the importance of developing the military-industrial complex (western Ukraine 33 per cent, Donbass 6 per cent). The Crimea question has only minor importance nationwide, prioritised by only 6 per cent.

»Petro Poroshenko Bloc« (PPB)

The Central Electoral Commission has registered 193 candidates on the party list of the »Petro Poroshenko Bloc«, distributed 70/30 between Poroshenko's party and UDAR. As a result, Vitali Klichko's party project »UDAR« has, at least for the present, been entirely subsumed in the electoral alliance of Petro Poroshenko and has thus ceased to be an independent political force. It remains to be seen what will come of UDAR's membership of the European People's Party (EPP). Party leader is the mayor of Kiev Vitali Klichko, which is the outcome of talks between Klichko and Poroshenko before the presidential election, when Klichko withdrew his candidacy in favour of the current president. As mayor of Kiev Klichko has lost considerable support due to mismanagement. After numerous gaffes on the campaign trail, which have exposed him to some ridicule, he has ceased to figure in the campaign. On the other hand, while Western governments take a dim view of his call, in Berlin, for a wall to be built on the Russian border, it plays well in Ukraine. Second on the party list is former interior minister from the time of President Kuchma and the Tymoshenko government, Yuriy Lutsenko, a former member of the Ukrainian Socialist Party. Lutsenko now plays the role of presidential advisor and chair of PPB, which he represents publically as a leading candidate.

Among those further down the list there is the doctor and presidential advisor Olha Bohomolets, well-known for organising medical services during the Independence Square events in Ukraine; current deputy prime minister for regional development Volodymyr Hroisman (who has a reasonable prospect of becoming prime minister); and leader of the Crimean Tatars Mustafa Dzhemilev.

Next comes army lieutenant Yuliy Mamchur. It should also be mentioned that, according to the opinion polls, civic activist Svitlana Zalishchuk, investigative journalist with »Ukrainiska Pravda«, Serhiy Leshchenko (the two are married and both likely to enter parliament together) and Mustafa Nayem (one of the first activists to urge Ukrainians to gather in Independence Square and journalist with »Ukrainiska Pravda«) are front-runners to enter parliament via the PPB party list.

Independence Square activists are candidates on all lists not related to the »Party of the Regions« or the Communists. They have explained that they have done this because they do not possess the organisational or, especially, financial means to stand as independent candidates. After the elections their aim is to congregate in a non-aligned group to advance their programme. Nayem has already declared that he will not accept allowances for attendance or voting from the political group budget, although at the same time he has stated that he is unable to live in Kiev on the 6,000 hryvnia (360 euros) a month that MPs receive. He has left open how the non-aligned group will be funded, although he has called for state funding of political parties, which in the current climate of opinion is likely to fall on deaf ears. Nayem has already gathered together a cross-party group of 13 candidates, mainly Independence Square activists and journalists, who try to put pressure on the various party leaders via the media to adopt their favoured candidates.

There is well attested evidence to show that, in particular with the help of the abovementioned 30 per cent UDAR quota, former »Party of the Regions« MPs who are now without a political home, or their confederates, will also find their way into the new Rada (Ukrainian parliament), including MPs representing the interests of oligarchs Ihor Kolomoiskyi and Viktor Pinchuk. This does not have to happen directly via the PPB list because by deft use of electoral-law anomalies there are around a dozen instances in which the PPB has deliberately selected such weak direct candidates that the former functionaries of the »Party of the Regions« standing as opposing independent candidates are likely to be elected in their place. Acolytes of former head of the Yanukovich presidential administration Serhiy Lyovochkin will be able to enter the new Rada in this way, as will MPs close to the oligarchs Kolomoiskyi (also governor of Dnipropetrovsk since February 2014) and Pinchuk.

The PPB has proceeded a little more transparently with »Svoboda«. Presumably as a quid pro quo for its loyalty when parliament was being dissolved clear-cut agreements were made. In the constituencies in which »Svoboda« won direct mandates at the previous elections PPB has agreed not to field candidates of its own. In this way the president's party will ensure, at least indirectly, that the extremist right-wing nationalist party, which has its stronghold in western Ukraine, will be represented in the next parliament; it is by no means certain that it will reach the five per cent threshold via the list ballot, as already mentioned. There is also clearly an agreement with prime minister Yatseniuk's »People's Front«, under which in some instances the PPB will put up either very weak candidates or none at all, clearing the path for the »People's Front« candidate.

It is striking how similar this way of »organising« the election result is to the approach taken by the »Party of the Regions« at the previous parliamentary elections in 2012. President Poroshenko will thus, like his predecessor Yanukovich, in all probability ensure his parliamentary majority with the help of the directly elected MPs. The direct candidates will thus continue to play a stabilising role. Each individual MP with a direct mandate is likely to pursue his own personal interests and so will be susceptible to political enticements from the president. Because this time around primarily politically inexperienced, and in some instances radical and populist forces will get into parliament via the party lists the directly elected MPs could provide the expertise required for the legislative process.

Another trend from the period of government of the »Party of the Regions« – getting politicians' family members into parliament – will continue, not least in the person of president Petro Poroshenko's eldest son, Olexiy, who has succeeded his father as constituency candidate, notwithstanding the intense criticism this practice aroused when the »Party of the Regions« was in power.

From the president's standpoint it was important that the parliamentary elections take place relatively soon after his own election in May; he is still enjoying a political honeymoon and the prospect of the harsh economic and social austerity facing Ukraine has receded from view somewhat during the long summer holidays. If the situation in eastern Ukraine does not escalate again the

big lead in the opinion polls is likely to be retained up to the elections, not least due to Poroshenko's experienced campaign team.

Oleh Lyashko's »Radical Party«

When former journalist Oleh Lyashko first stood as a candidate at the parliamentary elections in 2012 he was perceived primarily as a »political clown«. He often used parliament as an arena for PR stunts, such as eating Ukrainian soil in front of the cameras. In the almost unanimous opinion of Ukrainian observers he and his »Radical Party« have been turned into an artificial political project by Serhiy Lyovochkin, head of the office of the president under Yanukovich, in order to take votes away from Yulia Tymoshenko and her »Fatherland« party in western and central Ukraine. His unabashed populism directed undifferentiatedly against the political elite and his presence especially in rural districts and in the war zone in eastern Ukraine with the volunteer units have brought Lyashko considerable popularity. Already in the presidential election he won over 8 per cent of the votes and came third, a remarkable result. It seems likely that he could improve on this position with more controversial, perfectly staged media events. For example, he personally interviewed opponents of war in a black uniform in eastern Ukraine. The media campaign conducted in particular by Ihor Kolomoiskyi showing Lyashko in a private jet has paid dividends in the opinion polls, shifting support to »Svoboda«, Hrytsenko's »Hromadianska Pozytsia« and the »People's Front«.

However, Lyashko's »Radical Party« can still count on becoming the second largest parliamentary faction, with up to 50 MPs. The composition of party lists provides clear evidence of the ties to Lyovochkin and former secret service chief and businessman Valeriy Khoroshkovskiy, although the latter is himself a candidate, in second place on Serhiy Tihipko's list. In the first ten places on the »Radical Party«'s list, which serve as a kind of figurehead, one finds, alongside Oleh Lyashko, the commanders of the volunteer units active in eastern Ukraine Aydar, Luhansk-1 and Azov (namely Serhiy Melnychuk, Artem Vitko and Ihor Krivoruchko), who reputedly nurture right-wing extremist attitudes. In sixth place there is Ihor Popov, former first deputy head of the national Civil Service Agency, an associate of Serhiy Lyovochkin. Lower

down one finds, for example, sportsman Denis Silantiev and businessman Oleksandr Yurakov, who are also unswervingly loyal to Lyovochkin. Besides other members of the business elite the list also features representatives of »Independence Square«, such as the lawyer of the »Automaidan« movement, Viktor Smalyi. It thus remains to be seen how the erstwhile political opponents will be able to work together in one parliamentary faction, or whether after the elections the Radical Party will splinter into new factions or groupings.

Anatoliy Hrytsenko's »Hromadianska Pozytsia« (Civil Position) Party

Former defence minister in the Yushchenko/Tymoshenko government, Anatoliy Hrytsenko, has managed to incorporate the »Demokratichnyi Alians« (Democratic Alliance) movement, which made a name for itself in Independence Square, in his »Hromadianska Pozytsia« (Civil Position) Party, assigning it three places in his party list. Hrytsenko is commonly referred to as »Oleh Lyashko for intellectuals«. Like Lyashko, Hrytsenko had to be taken seriously after coming fourth in the presidential election and achieving a personal vote that, if repeated in the parliamentary elections, would be enough to see him over the five per cent threshold. Thus on the surface at least he has managed to emancipate himself politically from Tymoshenko's »Fatherland« Party, whose faction he was a member of up to 14 January 2014, and to establish himself as an independent force.

Second on the party list after Hrytsenko is chair of the »Democratic Alliance« Vasyl Gatsko. Also near the top of the list are Maryna Soloveva, member of the Supreme Council of Justice and representative of social organisations fighting corruption; well-known anti-corruption activist Vitaliy Shabunin; and MPs from regional parliaments. Civil Position's platform favours a synthesis of a specifically pro-Western course, the demands that arose in Independence Square and a strongly national-populist basic tone. In contrast to Lyashko's party, however, Civil Position eschews actionism and courts urban, educated voters. Based on its history the party represents the last politically relevant remnant of the »Nasha Ukraine« (Our Ukraine) grouping of former president Viktor Yushchenko.

»Narodnyi Front« (People's Front, NF)

The new party »People's Front« is a political stopgap for leader prime minister Arseniy Yatseniuk, whose bluff was called in negotiations with both president Poroshenko and Yulia Tymoshenko, whose deputy and de facto »Fatherland« party chair he was during her time in prison. He demanded a commitment that he would remain prime minister after the elections, as well as 50 per cent of the list places for his supporters, and all this despite the fact that even at the beginning of his period in government he had spoken of a short-term »kamikaze government«. Left in the lurch the »People's Front« was established in a few days, its name modelled after that of Yatseniuk's previous party »Front Zmin« (Front for Change), which he had ditched to join the leadership of »Batkivshchyna« (Fatherland).

Yatseniuk used khaki and camouflage posters as early as 2009 when he founded »Front Zmin«. Today, too, he and his supporters in the NF have adopted symbols of war in his election campaign, both visual and rhetorical. Under the motto »no one will give us peace, we have to fight for it« and the branding »the party of Independence Square« Yatseniuk (prime minister), Oleksandr Turchynov (parliamentary speaker), Arsen Avakov (interior minister) and Andriy Parubiy (commander of Independence Square and former secretary of the National Security Council) have managed to win over the commanders of some volunteer units. All four men owe their political position originally to Yulia Tymoshenko but now want to step out of her shadow.

There are numerous indications of close political ties with Ihor Kolomoiskyi, Governor of Dnipropetrovsk and one of the richest men in Ukraine. On one hand, Yatseniuk evidently enjoys the support of Kolomoiskyi's media empire. Second, he suspended Kolomoiskyi's repayment of the millions he owes to Ukrainian gas supplier NAFTOGAZ without even giving a reason and, on 12 September, he got the government to commit itself to making available 100 million hryvnia (around 5.5 million euros) in connection with Kolomoiskyi's idea to build a 2,000 km wall between Ukraine and Russia, like the one that separates Israel and Palestine.

Giving many commanders of volunteer units and leaders of the »anti-terror operation« against eastern Ukrain-

ian separatists secure places on the party list gives the »People's Front« a distinctive military profile, which is somewhat at odds with Yatseniuk's personal profile as an economic expert. The People's Front's election campaign is confined largely to trumpeting and supporting the armed resistance to the »Russian aggression«. This appears to strike a chord with voters, according to opinion surveys, because before the commanders of the volunteer units were brought on board the People's Front, despite its plethora of government figures, was languishing in the polls at 3.7 per cent at best. Today, several polls already put them above the five per cent threshold.

Finally, the fact that second place on the party list, originally intended for parliamentary speaker Turchynov, has been allotted to Independence Square activist Tetiana Chornovol is noteworthy, particularly because only a few weeks ago she resigned from her office as coordinator of anti-corruption policy, which publically she attributed to »ineffective policy« for which Yatseniuk was personally responsible. At present Yatseniuk is trying to persuade President Poroshenko to commit himself to a coalition even before the elections, but so far without success. Poroshenko himself in the run-up to the elections indicated that he would take action against anyone who sought to establish a front within the government because this is against Ukraine's interests. However, the »People's Front« has brought about such an internal split within the government camp purely for reasons of personal power. We can thus assume that the positions of the PPB and the »People's Front« will continue to diverge rhetorically in the election campaign, notwithstanding occasional cooperation, such as the agreement on »People's Front« direct candidates with a prospect of winning.

Yatseniuk is generally regarded – and not just since Victoria Nuland's remarks in early 2014³ – as »America's man« in Ukraine. It has to be said that the party he re-founded has presented itself increasingly as hardline in recent weeks, while the Petro Poroshenko Bloc and the president himself have appeared more moderate and have made serious efforts to find a solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

3. It was in a telephone call with US ambassador Pyatt in Kiev that the now famous words »Fuck the EU!« were uttered. At that time the issue was which of the Independence Square party politicians was the most trustworthy and the most able.

Yulia Tymoshenko's »Batkivshchyna« (Fatherland)

After Yatseniuk, together with a large part of »Batkivshchyna«'s leadership team, broke with Yulia Tymoshenko many analysts assumed the worst for her party. The opinion polls beg to differ. Her core electorate has remained faithful to Tymoshenko; the proportion of votes lost since before Yatseniuk and his crew jumped ship is no more than 1 per cent. This means that Yulia Tymoshenko will probably get into the next parliament and will remain a feature of Ukrainian politics. »Batkivshchyna«'s party list is led by fighter pilot Nadiya Savchenko who was arrested in Russia in the course of military operations in eastern Ukraine, with Yulia Tymoshenko in second place. With this surprising step Tymoshenko hopes to compensate for the fact that neither she nor those around her have played a direct role in anti-terror operations and thus, in contrast to her political opponents, she has no military »heroes« in her ranks. The current political perception is that leaders must be regarded as patriotic and not as traitors to Ukraine. Tymoshenko has laboured in vain to outdo her political opponents in terms of nationalist and populist outpourings, at times adopting a rather shrill tone.

The top ten on the party list includes member of the Kiev city council and civil rights activist Ihor Lutsenko, MP Serhiy Soboliev, lawyer Olena Shkrum, businessman Ivchenko and former deputy prime minister Hryhoriy Nemyria. Many of the leadership positions are occupied by unknowns because in recent months Tymoshenko, also because of the split in the party, has »purged the ranks« and changed the composition of the party list with »new faces« (which was also one of the main political demands of Independence Square).

With regard to future NATO and EU membership Tymoshenko's party is calling for referendums, in which it would unequivocally support both integration goals. Concerning NATO this violates current Ukrainian law, which provides for »non-aligned« status for the country. In practical terms similar demands have been made in this campaign by the »People's Front«, which indicates once again that Yatseniuk's split was not a matter of political substance.

Serhiy Tihipko's »Silna Ukraina« (Strong Ukraine)

After the »Party of the Regions« decided not to participate in the parliamentary elections the party re-established by Serhiy Tihipko, »Silna Ukraina«, and the »Opposition Bloc« are competing for its core voters. Tihipko began as early as February 2014, after Yanukovich had fled, to put clear blue water between him and the departed former president by standing as an independent in the presidential election, which led to his expulsion from the »Party of the Regions«. Tihipko is a successful businessman and regards his political activities as an »investment«, which of course entails a corresponding »return«. He is supposed to have been well compensated for merging his old party with the »Party of the Regions« in 2012.

After the rest of the »Party of the Regions« had decided not to put up candidates and the newly founded »Opposition Bloc«, although putting Tihipko at the top of the list, did not want to give him another 50 per cent of the places on the party list, Tihipko decided to try his luck in eastern Ukraine with his party as an independent, new force for reform and as a »party for peace«. Just as the »Party of the Regions« did previously he leans, on one hand, on businessmen as a driving force of Realpolitik and on the other hand on populism. Because the »Party of the Regions« is not putting up candidates as a party there is a good chance that Tihipko, as rallying point for eastern Ukrainian voters, will get past the five per cent threshold. Interestingly, in second place on the party list is former first deputy prime minister and head of the secret service, the SBU, Valeriy Khoroshkowskyi, who in 2012 fled abroad, returning only a few weeks ago. Khoroshkowskyi had to sell his media empire, including the most important TV broadcaster INTER, to Dmytro Firtash and Sergey Lyovochkin. Tihipko and the oligarchs Pinchuk and Kolomoiskyi have distributed the places on the party list among themselves in accordance with their internal party quotas, bringing in other businessmen to top up the list. President Poroshenko is all in favour of this list because, on one hand, he needs an opposition open to compromise, and on the other hand, he is dependent on the commitment of businessmen in the east of Ukraine and would like to be sure that they are politically tied to him. Ultimately, what is happening is pretty much like what happened during the Yanukovich

period, except that this time the places on the party list are being filled by supporters of Kolomoiskyi and Pinchuk, not those of Firtash and Akhmetov.

»Opozitsijnyi Blok« (Opposition Bloc)

This is a vehicle for a number of supporters of the »Party of the Regions« who wish to continue to exert political influence in Kiev. First and foremost, there is Serhiy Lyovochkin, who has brought his newly founded »Partia Rozvitku« (Development Party) into the »Opposition Bloc« and who, with his investment in Oleh Lyashko and the PPB, is keeping his options open. Because the »Opposition Bloc« was founded at the last moment, only a matter of days before the registration deadline, there is a major recognition problem with regard to the party's leading lights.

There are many reasons why Lyovochkin (with oligarch Dmytro Firtash as second major player) decided to take this step without the rest of the »Party of the Regions«. On one hand, it is a long-term project and already has an eye to future elections. On the other hand, Firtash and Akhmetov in particular want to prevent any further extension of Kolomoiskyi's political and economic sphere of influence and to establish a counterforce. If Tihipko's »Strong Ukraine« fails to get into parliament Kolomoiskyi's influence on direct candidates from his home region of Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa and the places he controls on other lists will be limited. If the party does make it into parliament, however, Kolomoiskyi could in future take over the role of »patron« in parliament previously played by Akhmetov and hold sway over more than 50 MPs in the Verkhovna Rada.

Others featuring on the »Opposition Bloc«'s party list include the Centre Party of Vadym Rabynovych (Jewish community), former minister of social affairs Natalia Korablevska and some other very small parties. The list is headed by Yuriy Boyko, former energy minister and deputy prime minister under Mykola Azarov, followed by Oleksandr Vilkul (Kryvyi Rih), Mykhailo Dobkin (Kharkiv) and other well-known politicians of the former »Party of the Regions«.

Something that distinguishes the party's platform from those of its rivals is its demand for a ceasefire, coupled

with an express wish for future military neutrality. It does not support the separatists and wants to keep a unified Ukraine, while reaching an accommodation with Russia.

»Party of the Regions«

In recent months the »Party of the Regions« has withdrawn to its original strongholds in the Donbass, as well as in Kharkiv, Kirovohrad and Odessa. This contraction was foreseeable and, after the Yanukovich debacle, necessary. What is surprising, however, is the complete obliteration of its organisational and coordinating structures. The »Party of the Regions« is still largely funded by Rinat Akhmetov and Vadim Novinskyi, as well as other associated businessmen. Realists among political observers in Ukraine see the need for political representation for these regions, not to mention local people and businesses. To some extent the Petro Poroshenko Bloc can play this role, besides Tihipko's party, but the Donbass remains without representation by a political party rooted in the region. The political and economic elites in eastern Ukraine have not been able to find someone who could take on the necessary function, also desired by Poroshenko, of regional coordinator, one that is both a partner for the president in Kiev and businessmen in the region, but also accepted by Moscow and the separatists.

There is much to be said for the view that Russia has exerted its influence over Akhmetov and Novinskyi and that they at the last moment refrained from putting their party into the field. Akhmetov and Novinskyi, like other Donbass businessmen, have lost a considerable part of their businesses and wealth and are financing corporate loans via Russian banks. Thus they are now more dependent than ever on trade relations with Russia and Russian support, which makes them eminently biddable. If Akhmetov had rejected Russia's offer, as claimed by sources in Kiev, of another 2 billion US dollars for his firms in April 2014 and of coverage for his loans, after wearisome negotiations, his firms would no longer be worth even this amount. Novinskyi, who lost substantial parts of his businesses in the Crimea, and whose bank, Forumbank, once the third biggest in Ukraine, has had its licence revoked by the new Ukrainian government, is also fighting for economic survival.

Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU)

On 8 July 2014 the Ukrainian ministry of justice opened proceedings to ban the Communist Party. The petition was grounded on the assault on the constitution with the use of force, the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and unity, the glorification of war and violence, the provocation of inter-ethnic conflict, the assault on human rights and freedoms and the call to form armed militias. The case has repeatedly been postponed and the justice ministry – the current minister is a candidate on the party list of the »People's Front« – has now threatened to »dismiss« the responsible court in Kiev on the grounds of inaction.⁴ Even if the party is banned in Ukraine the CPU may still appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strassbourg, which in previous rulings has erected substantial legal obstacles to effective bans on political parties.

In the meantime practical action has been taken against the current Communist Party faction in parliament. On 23 July 2014, after a special law was passed to raise the threshold for attaining faction status in parliament, the Communist Party faction was dissolved by speaker Turchynov because it was unable to come up with the requisite number of MPs. However, because the party is still registered Ukraine's Central Electoral Commission permitted it a party list of 205 candidates. Heading the list is party chair Petro Symonenko, followed by former deputy speaker Adam Martynyk. The party's main demand is the withdrawal of all military units from eastern Ukraine, which, according to Symonenko, is the real reason for the ban proceedings. Because the separatists have occupied the Communist Party's historical strongholds around Luhansk in the forthcoming election it has little chance of entering parliament.

»Svoboda« (Freedom)

»Svoboda« has had to cede its position on the extreme right of Ukrainian politics to Oleh Lyashko. Between the radical actions of the »Right Sector« and Oleh Lyashko »Svoboda« has largely disappeared from view in Kiev politics. With the dismissal of the attorney general Oleh Makhnitskiy, whom they appointed, and the ensuing

4. In contrast to Germany and its Federal Constitutional Court, Ukraine does not have a procedure before the supreme court for banning political parties.

accusations of corruption against him, »Svoboda«'s remaining government politicians have barely been seen for months.

»Svoboda«'s party list is populated mainly by MPs elected to parliament in 2012, such as party chair Oleh Tyahnybok, deputy speaker Koshulynskyi, but also commander of the 22nd Motorised Battalion, Oleksiy Mirgorodskyi. Other candidates on »Svoboda«'s list include deputy prime minister Oleksandr Sych, minister for raw materials Andriy Mokhnyk and agriculture minister Ihor Shvaika. Any success the party is likely to enjoy in the forthcoming elections will be concentrated in its strongholds in western Ukraine; the party is largely irrelevant to the current development of Ukraine's political landscape, whether it surpasses the five per cent threshold or not, because it is unlikely to participate in forming a government. Nevertheless, »Svoboda« brings together voters on the far right who – together with the supporters of Lyashko's »Radical Party«, which is gaining in strength – represent a critical mass. In any case, the rhetoric of its supporters is scarcely in line with EU fundamental values.

Outlook: The Role of the Oligarchs, Russia and Political Newcomers

One of the principal reproaches directed against the Yanukovich regime by the »Euromaidan« activists was its unrestrained selling-out of political power to the oligarchs standing behind the government party. The extent to which the former president himself, together with his family and friends, profited has more fully come to light in Ukraine, from access to power to profitable projects. Given the continuing close involvement of the oligarchs in politics, as we have shown, there is every reason to doubt that the 2014 parliamentary elections will follow a different pattern from their predecessors. Well-known businessmen continue to fund political parties, not for altruistic reasons, but in the hope of direct financial returns or to establish and maintain a lobby of their chosen supporters in the Rada for their own economic interests. However, the power structure has shifted decisively in favour of Ihor Kolomoiskyi at the expense of Rinat Akhmetov, Dmytro Firtash and Sergey Lyovochkin, who are close to the »Party of the Regions«.

Russia has no interest in elections with a clear outcome, which, for example, would lead to more stability in eastern Ukraine. It is in Russia's interest that, as far as possible, the Donbass emerges from the election without political representation (which is what the »Party of the Regions« provided). Without political representation of up to 20 per cent of the voters from eastern Ukraine Russia would have a strong, internationally recognisable argument to contest the legitimacy of the elections and put the new government in Kiev and president Poroshenko under further pressure.

In the new parliament, due to the »missing« votes from the Crimea and the areas controlled by separatists, it will be almost impossible to put together the 300 vote majority needed to change the constitution. However, a change in the constitution is needed in order, for example, to implement decentralisation, which is required to establish internal peace and reconciliation, which is what president Poroshenko desires, too. The radicalisation of the parliament through the influx of a whole host of new MPs from the volunteer units and the populist parties of Lyashko and Hrytsenko is hardly likely to enable the establishment of a majority favouring a »moderate« foreign policy. If Poroshenko is unable to persuade the various, extremely heterogeneous groups, some controlled by the oligarchs but others made up of Independence Square (Maidan) activists, to unite in common action, then the parliament will rapidly descend into a hotbed of opposition to the president, as was the case in 2007 between Tymoshenko and Yushchenko. Social and economic reforms will demand a great deal from the population, and populists generally have no interest in participating constructively.

Already in the 1990s Ukraine went through a similar period of anarchy, when the parliament served rather as a stage for self-promotion than as a forum for political decision-making. It cannot be ruled out that Ukraine will once more turn in this direction. The reason for this is the absence in the ruling political elite of a spirit of compromise, social reconciliation and a politics of small, but realistic steps. One Poroshenko alone may not be enough to do what needs to be done.



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