

Europe and the Ukrainian Parliamentary Elections of 2006¹

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Key Points:

- The parliamentary elections consolidated Ukraine's democratisation, moving still further away from the managed democracy of the Kuchma years.
- The elections were the first to be held under the new constitutional arrangements that came into force on 1 January 2006.
- The Party of the Regions made a spectacular comeback to win first place by a large margin.
- No one party won a decisive victory, which complicated coalition building.
- Patterns of voting by region are largely unchanged since the presidential elections of 2004.

Introduction

Ukrainians went to the polls to elect a parliament (*Verkhovna Rada*) for the fourth time since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 on 28 March 2006. The elections were the first to be held under the new constitutional arrangements that came into force on 1 January 2006, which have transferred many powers away from the President in favour of parliament. For the first time, the conduct of the elections met with the approval of the OSCE, and this marked a considerable improvement on the presidential elections of 2004, and the dramatic events of the Orange Revolution which followed the disputed second round of polling.²

The 2006 elections were also the first to be held in Ukraine under the party-list system of proportional representation, with a single nationwide electoral district and votes being allocated to parties or electoral coalitions as a whole, rather than to individual candidates. Previously, 50 per cent of *Verkhovna Rada* deputies were elected in single mandate constituencies, with the rest of the seats allocated on a proportional basis.

Ukraine's newly-elected deputies in the *Verkhovna Rada* elected in the 2006 elections exercise considerably more powers, including the right to nominate and dismiss the prime minister and most of the cabinet (except the foreign and defence ministers, the head of the Security Service and the prosecutor-general – although parliament still has to approve presidential nominees for these posts). Moreover, the prime minister reports directly to the *Verkhovna Rada* and not the president. Nonetheless, the president retains the power to call for new elections if the *Verkhovna Rada* fails to

¹ I am indebted to the Britain-Ukrainian Legal Association, whose financial support made the research on which this project is based possible.

² See Nathaniel Copsey '[Europe and the Ukrainian Presidential Election of 2004](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/1-4-2-8.html)' EPERN Election Briefing No 16. Available at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/1-4-2-8.html>.

form a majority within 30 days or fails to choose a new prime minister and cabinet within 60 days of dismissing the old one.

This briefing paper has four sections. First, it examines the background and context of the Ukrainian parliamentary elections of 2006. Second, it looks at the campaigns mounted by the political parties competing, with the emphasis placed on the five parties that gained the necessary three per cent of the popular vote – the threshold for gaining seats in the Verkhovna Rada. Third, it tabulates and interprets the results, with a focus on what they mean for coalition forming. Fourth, it briefly analyses the European dimension of the elections. Finally, it reiterates the main arguments and concludes. The material on which this election briefing is taken comes from three main sources: reportage in the Ukrainian and international press; the author's own observations as an election monitor³ in the 2006 parliamentary elections; and, interviews with 12 Ukrainian voters carried out in Kyiv over the weekend of the parliamentary elections.

I. Context and Background

Ukraine's parliamentary elections of 2006 attracted relatively little attention on the part of the international media, in marked contrast to the contested presidential elections of 2004 that led to the 10-day Orange Revolution. The peaceful settlement of the Orange Revolution that signalled the end of the ten-year Kuchma era was brokered in exchange for a series of constitutional reforms that transferred considerable power from the presidency to the parliament – most notably the right to nominate the prime minister and government. As such, these were the first elections to take place under the new constitutional arrangements, which came into force on 1 January 2006. Ukraine had therefore moved away from the post-Soviet camp of presidential republics of dubious democratic repute towards a more pluralist democracy.

The 15 months between Viktor Yushchenko's [official] swearing in as president in January 2005 and the election of the new parliament in March 2006 were tumultuous. The sacking of Ukraine's outspoken and populist prime minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, best known outside Ukraine as the co-leader of the Orange revolutionaries together with Viktor Yushchenko, in September 2005, caused a serious split in the Orange camp, largely composed of two electoral blocs: the Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko (BYUTY) and Our Ukraine (*Nasha Ukraina*). The appointment of a new government led by Our Ukraine's Yuri Yekhanurov was supposed to restore confidence in President Yushchenko, following an exceptionally tough first few months in office, however, the new government's popularity continued to wane in late 2005 and early 2006.

Declining public trust in Viktor Yushchenko and Yuri Yekhanurov was evident for some time. This seemed to be the result of four factors.

First, the worsening economic climate in Ukraine in 2005 and 2006, as economic growth falling from around 12 per cent per annum in 2004 to 2.6 per cent in 2005

³ Particular thanks are due to my good friend and colleague Mariusz Sielki of Sciences-Po in Paris, without whose kind assistance this project would never have been possible.

meant that there was a sense of economic malaise. Annual GDP growth in 2006 slowed further to 1.5 per cent year-on-year in the first three months of 2006. Inflation also plagued Ukrainian consumers with food prices fluctuating wildly over 2005 and 2006, accounting for over two-thirds of consumer price index inflation, a particular problem for pensioners living on low incomes. Sugar prices, for example, rose by a vast 56.6 per cent year-on-year in February 2006. Growth in Ukraine's previously booming metallurgy industry slowed considerably in 2005 as world steel prices fell by about 22 per cent between January 2005 and January 2006. The effects of the doubling of gas prices on the economy have yet to be seen. On the positive side, the achievements of Yulia Tymoshenko's administration in increasing the government's effectiveness in tax collection have been consolidated with the Ukrainian government running a budget surplus of \$4.8 billion in the three first months of 2006, in comparison with the \$6.8 billion deficit inherited in 2004. Moreover, Ukraine was awarded market economy status by both the United States and the European Union, and this was a crucial step along the road to WTO membership, a move that will greatly ease the flow of Ukrainian exports onto world markets.

Second, relations with Russia worsened considerably since the Orange Revolution, reflected most obviously in Russia's decision in December 2005 to increase the price of the gas it sells to Ukraine by 460 per cent from \$50 to \$230 per 1,000 cubic metres. The crisis was exacerbated by Russia's decision to cut off supplies of gas to Ukraine – in turn triggering a reduction in gas supplies to western Europe – in the middle of the coldest winter since the 1940s. Although the deal struck between Russia and Ukraine at the beginning of 2006 introduced an interim price of \$95 per 1,000 cubic metres valid until June 2006, upward pressure on gas prices were expected to continue year-on-year until 2009 when the world price of around \$230 is reached. Ultimately, Russia's decision to increase the price of gas to Ukraine seemed to be in some sense understandable as the previous pricing arrangements amounted to a Russian subsidy of Ukrainian gas prices of around \$135 per 1,000 cubic metres. The issue at stake was rather more the way in which the price hike was introduced and the crude way in which gas supplies were abruptly cut off in the middle of negotiations. Tellingly, in the context of the 2006 parliamentary elections, not even the pro-Russian Party of the Regions led by 2004 presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovich promised to renegotiate the old price of \$50 per 1,000 cubic metres – he merely signalled that a better deal could be reached.

Dissatisfaction with the handling of the gas dispute led to the sacking of the government of prime minister Yuri Yekhanurov on 10 January 2006 by the *Verkhovna Rada*. Although the constitutional changes giving parliament the right to sack the prime minister and government, had come into force on 1 January 2006, the government remained in office since it did not have the power to remove the government until after the March parliamentary elections.

Third, the eruption of a corruption scandal in September 2005, triggered by the resignation of Oleksander Zinchenko, then head of the presidential secretariat had important implications for the election. Zinchenko alleged that Petro Poroshenko, then head of President Yushchenko's National Security Council, had been involved in a number of unspecified ethically-dubious dealings. None of the allegations were proven yet Yushchenko's failure to handle the situation in a visibly strong-armed

manner made him appear weak in the public eye – electorally fatal in post-Soviet politics.

Fourth, the government's mishandling of public expectations in the wake of the Orange revolution played a role in the election result. In brief, there was not the 'new dawn' that many had hoped for in the post-Kuchma era. Whilst the age of electoral fraud, government sponsored murders, distorted privatisations, tight media control and 'managed democracy' or 'virtual politics' in the words of Andrew Wilson⁴ came to an end, the lives of most Ukrainians had not improved. Indeed for many Ukrainians, the combination of low economic growth and erratic inflation brought lower living standards in 2005 and 2006 after the relative prosperity that characterised the last years of the Kuchma presidency. There was no real breakthrough in negotiations with the European Union. The Yushchenko administration failed to secure even the very vaguest of commitments on the part of the European Union to eventual Ukrainian accession in the period before the election. This is not to deny that progress was made in foreign policy. Ukraine appeared close to NATO membership, yet accession to NATO was a highly divisive issue in Ukrainian politics, with the bulk of public opinion remaining squarely opposed to this as it has done since 1991, seeing the alliance as an unnecessary encumbrance likely to sour relations with Russia – where many Ukrainians have family members living – even further for little gain.

Thus overall, disappointment and disenchantment with the government of Viktor Yushchenko was running high at the time of the parliamentary elections on 28 March 2006. Of the 12 Ukrainians that we interviewed in Kyiv, eight said that they were disappointed with the government of Viktor Yushchenko, describing him as 'weak and ineffective'. All identified the economic situation as worse than previously, and only two remarked that in their opinion it would take more than a year to bring serious improvement to Ukraine's situation economically and politically. These qualitative results were gathered in Kyiv – the heart of the Orange Revolution – a city that voted overwhelmingly for Yushchenko in the presidential elections of 2004. Yet it was not inevitable in late 2005 that Yushchenko's Our Ukraine would be pushed from first place in the parliamentary elections of 2002 and the presidential elections of 2004 to third place in the parliamentary elections of 2006, as the following section explains.

II. Campaign

Campaigning in the Ukrainian parliamentary elections began officially on 13 January 2006 and ran through to 24 March 2006, although some would argue that campaigning really began with the dismissal of Yulia Tymoshenko in September 2005, or even with the agreement to shift power to the parliament brokered at the height of the Orange Revolution on 8 December 2004. This section is divided into three sub-sections: opinion polls, manifestoes and campaign issues.

It is worth noting at the outset, that in contrast to previous election campaigns in Ukraine, there was no attempt by the government to exploit the 'administrative resources' of the state (i.e. the considerable advantages of incumbency in the drawing up of voter lists, control of state-owned media, putting pressure on government

⁴ Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: faking democracy in the post-Soviet World*, Yale, 2005.

employees and so on) during the campaign. As noted above, this election built considerably on the achievements of Ukraine's last national poll – the (repeat) second round of the 2004 presidential elections – and in the opinion of the OSCE conducted a free and fair election.

Opinion Polls

Despite the unpopularity of Viktor Yushchenko and the government of his prime minister, Yuri Yekhanurov, according to the Razumkov Centre, at the end of 2005, Our Ukraine at 13.5 per cent was not too far behind the Party of the Regions' 17.5 per cent support, with the Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko on 12.4 per cent. Following the gas crisis, the Party of the Regions leapt to 24.7 per cent support in January 2006. Our Ukraine's campaign did little to improve its support, ultimately losing out to Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko, and trailing in third place on election day.

Manifestoes

The broad policy outlines on which the main parties and blocs fought the 2006 parliamentary elections did not differ on many issues. The party manifestos of the 'big two' at the outset of the campaign were very similar at the outset of the campaign.

The manifesto of the Party of the Regions – *Welfare to the People! Power to the Regions!* – promised non-aligned status, a referendum on NATO accession, promotion of European integration, improved relations with Russia (including the completion of the Single Economic Space), the elevation of Russian to an official second state language, devolution of power to the regions and tax cuts. Our Ukraine's manifesto – *We have one Ukraine* – offered voters European integration as the main foreign policy goal, WTO accession in 2006, deregulation of business, simplification of the tax system, devolution of power to regional government, reform of the judiciary, war on corruption, and the formation of a professional army by 2010. Essentially, the differences between the two main contenders for power boiled down to disagreements on NATO and relations with Russia and the status of the Russian language in Ukraine.

Yulia Tymoshenko's manifesto was by contrast decidedly vague. Her pledges included 'understanding people's problems', 'making morality and spirituality the country's main development priority' and a more 'humane' tax system. Characteristically populist Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko also promised regular referendums and the abolition of VAT.

Oleksander Moroz's Socialist Party manifesto – *We will Build Europe in Ukraine* – promised a more left agenda, including control of prices, the creation of one million jobs, an end to privatisation of strategic industries, the restoration of state funding for health and education, as well as a referendum on NATO accession.

The Communist Party of Ukraine's manifesto – *Power and Ownership to the People of Ukraine!* – committed the party to the abolition of VAT, to set a single price nationwide for food, medicine and necessities, an end to price increases, opposition to NATO accession, better relations with Russia and the CIS, official status for the

Russian language, a nationalisation programme, together with the introduction of state monopolies on tobacco, alcohol and foreign trade.

Campaign Issues

Campaigning was dominated by the Party of the Regions and Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko. The extraordinary comeback of Viktor Yanukovich – leader of the Party of the Regions – since his defeat in the 2004 presidential elections was one of the big stories of this election. Yanukovich greatly benefited from the experience and skill of a group of American election strategists. Instead of fumbling or falling over his words, his campaign was slick and professional. On one notable occasion, he spoke in Chernivtsi⁵ in western Ukraine, apologising for his inability to address the crowds in Romanian – this was the first attempt to pitch his Party of the Regions as the voice of all Ukraine’s regions and not simply a Donetsk-based⁶ union of Russian-speaking oligarchs or Soviet nostalgics. The Party of the Regions broadcasts focused primarily on the worsening economic situation of Ukraine. Reportage was relentlessly negative, filmed in black and white, depicting under-funded, crumbling hospitals or struggling pensioners.

Our Ukraine’s election campaign was poorly handled, coming on top of January’s gas price hike, it comes as little surprise that the party limped into third place on polling day. In terms of campaign strategy, Our Ukraine’s first mistake was to emphasize the spirit of the Orange Revolution, urging Ukrainians not to ‘betray the Maidan’. This move backfired when it became evident that most Ukrainians blamed Our Ukraine and its chairman, Viktor Yushchenko, for the political infighting and corruption scandals of the post-Kuchma era.

Yulia Tymoshenko’s campaign was distinctly understated in the first weeks of the campaign, with the emphasis on billboards and television placed on the image of Yulia Tymoshenko – the Madonna of Ukraine and martyr of the Revolution – looking dignified and strong. It is possible that her strategists had calculated that their best move would be to say little, in the hope of distancing Yulia Tymoshenko herself from the failures of the present administration (it should not be forgotten that Tymoshenko as prime minister from January to September 2005 was responsible for many of the mistakes of the post-Orange regime). In later weeks, her campaign appealed with greater success to the spirit and principles of the Orange Revolution asking for faith in Yulia and Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko, the true heirs of the Orange Revolution. Her campaign was distinctly short on concrete promises, but this seems to have served to place her ‘above’ the petty squabbles and disputes that divided the other two main parties.

One bright light on the campaign trail was provided by the Communist Party of Ukraine, whose supporters have deserted it in droves since the 2002 parliamentary elections. In 2002, the party came in second place with around 20 per cent of the votes. In 2006, as the table below shows, it polled just 3.66 per cent, barely enough to

⁵ A city on the Romanian border that had been part of Romania between 1918 and 1940.

⁶ Donetsk is a large almost exclusively Russian-speaking city in eastern Ukraine, dominated by a large steel industry. The wealth of the steel industry gave Donetsk’s businessmen the resources to enter the political arena both locally and nationally. The Donetsk ‘clan’ under the Kuchma regime was perceived as one of the most influential – and ruthless – regional business clans on the Ukrainian political scene.

secure representation in parliament. Most of its supporters have passed their support in recent years to the Party of the Regions, particularly since its rhetorical lurch to the left.⁷ Its response in 2006 was to rebrand communism as cool. Out with Stalin and Brezhnev, and in with Neruda and Castro. South American dance and bodybuilding were both exploited as cool activities in which communists excel. Although the campaign failed to lift the communists off the electoral floor, it certainly provided an interesting backdrop to an otherwise (by Ukrainian standards) tame election.

In conclusion to this section, the Party of the Regions' spectacular comeback was made possible by its relentless focus on the discontent of Ukrainian voters with the failure of the Orange Revolution to deliver the sweeping changes it promised. Ukraine's economic woes also greatly aided the Party of the Regions, particularly since its leader had presided as prime minister of Ukraine from 2002–04 over a period of strong economic growth. Our Ukraine was campaigning from a position of weakness at the outset of the campaign, and exacerbated its position with a clumsy campaign that annoyed and alienated many voters who transferred their support to Yulia Tymoshenko. Smaller parties that might have been expected to gain seats in the new *Verkhovna Rada* – notably the Lytvin bloc or the Natalia Vitrenko bloc – were squeezed out by the abolition of single mandate constituencies and the feeling amongst many voters that casting a ballot in their favour would be a waste. The Lytvin bloc aimed to build a new electoral bloc based on the popularity of Volodymyr Lytwin, former speaker of the *Verkhovna Rada*, and perceived by many as an 'honest broker' in the Orange Revolution. The Natalia Vitrenko bloc ran on a Leninist programme with a strongly nationalist 'socialism in one country' theme, promising to liberate Ukraine from its dependence on foreign energy.

⁷ The Party of the Regions – like all Ukrainian political parties with the exception of the Communists – is a party of the rich, the only difference in this instance is that the Party of the Regions boasts the support of Ukraine's very wealthiest, including Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest man and now a Party of the Regions deputy.

III. Results

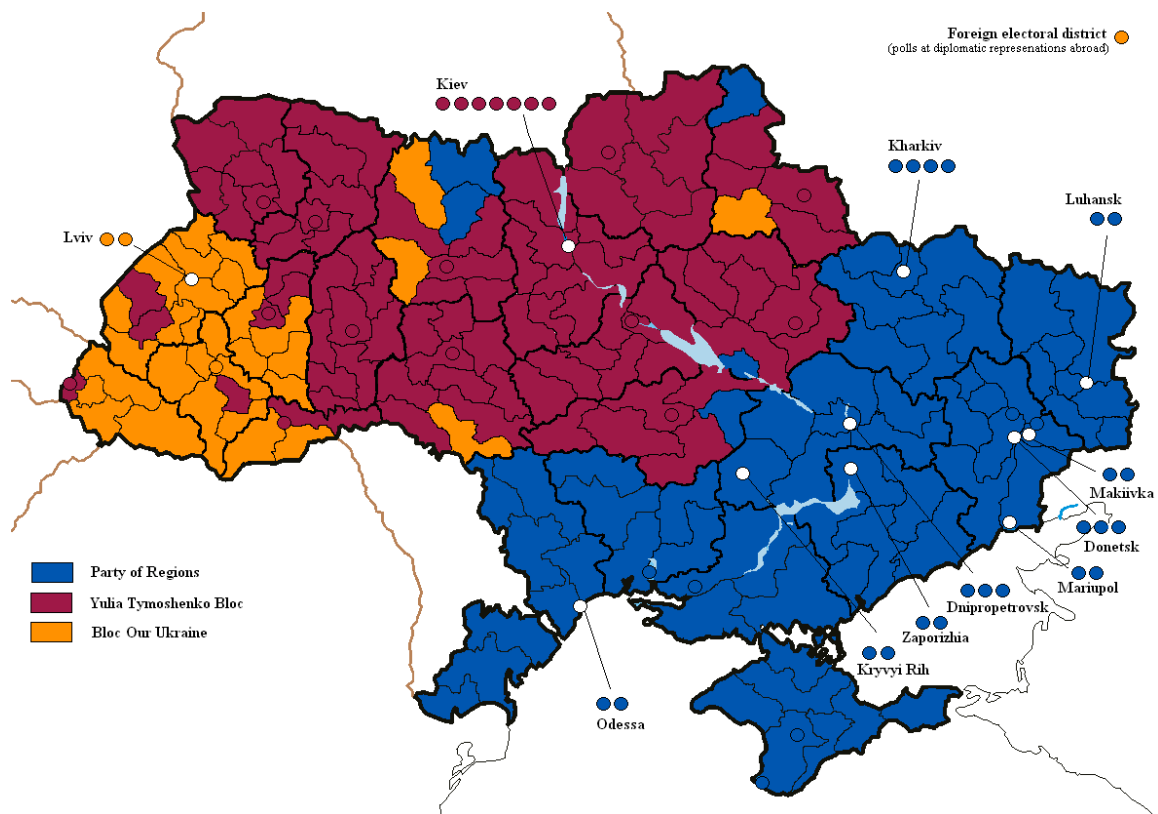
Table 1: Results from the Ukrainian Elections to the *Verkhovna Rada* in 2006

	Total Votes	% of Vote 2006	% of Vote 2002	Seats 2006
Party of the Regions	8,148,745	32.14	11.8	186
Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko	5,652,876	22.39	7.2	129
Our Ukraine	3,539,140	13.95	23.6	81
Socialist Party of Ukraine	1,444,224	5.69	6.9	33
Communist Party of Ukraine	929,591	3.66	20	21
Natalia Vitrenko Bloc	743,704	2.93	3.2	0
Lytvyn Bloc	619,905	2.44	0	0
Kostenko-Plyushch Bloc	476,155	1.87	0	0
Viche	441,912	1.74	0	0
Pora-Reforms and Order Bloc	373,478	1.47	0	0
Opposition Bloc 'Ne Tak'	257,106	1.01	0	0
Others below 1%	1,785,299	7.04	n/a	n/a
Against all	449,650	1.77	n/a	n/a
Spoilt ballots	490,595	1.9	n/a	n/a
Totals:	25,352,380	100	n/a	450
			Turnout:	67.30%

Source: Central Electoral Commission of Ukraine. <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/>

Turnout for the parliamentary elections at 67.3 per cent was considerably down on the 77 per cent mean turnout in the three rounds of the 2004 presidential elections, but not markedly lower than the 69.4 per cent recorded for the parliamentary elections of 2002. Overall these results are not particularly surprising, presidential elections traditionally attract more public attention than parliamentary elections – although it is just possible that this may change once it becomes more immediately apparent to voters where the real power in Ukraine now lies, i.e. with parliament and not with the presidency.

Map 1: Voting by Region in Ukraine



Source: Central Electoral Commission of Ukraine. <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/>

Regional patterns of voting showed little change on the presidential elections, with support for Yanukovich being concentrated in the east and south of the country. Tymoshenko's gained most votes in western and central Ukraine, although the concentration of die-hard supporters of Our Ukraine in the western region around Lviv turned out in sufficient numbers to make the front runner in a few regions as the map above indicates. As a point of interest for those with an interest in history – in a similar pattern to Poland – divisions in voting patterns in Ukraine in 2006 still run along the lines of the partitions of seventeenth century Ukraine between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the Two Nations and the Russian Empire in the Treaty of Andrusovo of 1667. Overwhelmingly, in Ukraine this is a reflection of the degree of Russification, particularly linguistically – rather than Sovietisation – of the different regions of Ukraine.

As the above table demonstrates, the Party of the Regions was the undisputed victor of the elections, gaining 32.14 per cent of the popular vote and 41.3 per cent of the seats in the *Verkhovna Rada*. Yet this position of strength is deceptive, since it does not have an obvious coalition partner, despite rumours of a possible 'grand coalition' between the Party of the Regions and Our Ukraine.

Yulia Tymoshenko ruled out the possibility of entering into a coalition with the Party of the Regions and made it clear in the campaign that she would expect Our Ukraine to do the same. It is likely that her position on this won over many wavering erstwhile Orange voters. Returning to the issue of remaining 'true to the spirit of the Maidan', it could potentially be electoral suicide in the future for Yushchenko's Our Ukraine to

enter into coalition with the Party of the Regions, the present home of many of the Kuchmisti who tried to steal the 2004 presidential elections, triggering mass protests and the Orange Revolution that swept Yushchenko to power. Thus an Our Ukraine-Party of the Regions Coalition, with a majority of 84 seemed unlikely.

In the post-election, coalition-forming stage, Our Ukraine and its parliamentary leader, Yuri Yekhanurov, found itself in a very awkward position as the weakest of the big three political parties, yet the only one of the three willing to enter into a coalition with one of the other two. There was no dream solution of a return of the January–September 2005 Orange coalition plus Oleksander Moroz’s Socialists, with a majority of 36, since this would entail the appointment of Yulia Tymoshenko. Interestingly, much of the post-electoral speculation centred on what Viktor Yushchenko intended to do – despite the removal of the presidential right to nominate the prime minister, he still appeared the key player behind the scenes in Ukrainian politics, meeting with Yanukovych and Tymoshenko to discuss possible coalition deals.

IV. European Dimension

European issues were represented in the campaign in the question of Ukrainian accession to the European Union. Ukraine has long had a clear majority of about 56 per cent in favour of European integration, with 16 per cent against.⁸ This largely due to its association with higher living standards and the rule of the law. The same is not true for NATO membership, which a majority of Ukrainians against joining. This section discusses the implications of the 2006 parliamentary election results for Ukraine’s integration into the EU and NATO. NATO membership was important as part of the European dimension of this election, since at the time of the poll, many Ukrainian politicians considered that NATO accession represented a staging post on the road towards EU accession.

As noted above, there is a broad consensus amongst the three main political parties in Ukraine about the need for European integration. Although the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc tended to remain silent on the EU integration issue during the campaign, there is little doubt that the bloc remains committed to that goal. The only question is whether Tymoshenko would be willing – if chosen as prime minister – to make the kind of tough policy choices that will be needed to integrate Ukraine into the western European structures. Our Ukraine is fully pro-European and promised to make the early achievement of EU associate member status a foreign policy priority. The Party of the Regions remains slightly more ambiguous in its European policy, promising both closer ties with the EU and better relations with Russia, particularly through the completion of the Single Economic Space. However, the pro-Russian policy of the Party of the Regions seems to be more about appealing to certain sections of the eastern Ukrainian electorate than about serious foreign policy realignment – after all, EU integration was the main foreign policy goal of the Kuchma era. The reason for this lies largely in the Party of the Regions’ position as the political choice of many of Ukraine’s richest businesspeople who see closer integration with the EU as desirable in opening up new markets in western Europe. Given that full integration into the

⁸See: Joanna Konieczna, *Polska-Ukraina Wzajemny Wizerunek*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warsaw, 2001, p. 71.

Russian-dominated Single Economic Space is not compatible with EU membership, there is little question that Ukraine will continue to push for closer relations with the EU.

Ukraine should not have expected any more of a warm welcome from within the EU in its membership ambitions that it received after the Orange Revolution. It may have proved its democratic credentials and have made the fateful 'European choice' that former President of the Commission, Romano Prodi, urged Ukrainian voters to make several years ago. Substantially, however, the conditions affecting the enlargement debate within the Union had not yet shifted since the French and Dutch referendums on the European Constitutional Treaty in May 2006 and this represented the major obstacle to EU integration for Ukraine. Ukraine's main ally in its quest for European integration Poland had lost the confidence of many of its European allies since the election of a populist government and president in autumn 2005 and their combined implementation of a clumsily anti-European policy.

Yet Ukraine's European outlook is not as bleak as it perhaps appears. Ukrainian membership of the Union by anyone's reckoning is a very long way off anyway. In 2006, Ukraine is likely to join the WTO which will win easier access to the Single Market and lift the burden of potential anti-dumping measures being imposed on Ukrainian businesses exporting to the Union. Ukraine would be better advised to seek a new form of agreement with the EU – perhaps something akin to associate membership – when its current agreement comes up for review in autumn 2006. In this, Ukraine should focus more on winning concrete access to the Single Market and perhaps some relaxation of the visa restrictions for Ukrainian citizens travelling to the Schengen area, rather than pushing for a symbolic pledge to recognise Ukraine's right to membership of the Union. In the run-up to the 2009 presidential election, Ukraine would then have plenty of time to approximate much of the *acquis communautaire* and prepare for accession in the longer term – in any case, many of these reforms would be beneficial to Ukraine politically and economically in any case.

NATO membership is highly unpopular amongst Ukrainians. According to a Democratic Initiatives Poll conducted in February 2005, only 15 per cent of Ukrainians were in favour of accession, with 48 per cent against and 36 per cent undecided.⁹ Yet this poll is misleading in that it does not take into account the opinions of the military, who after all will be most affected by the decision to join. The Ukrainian military is largely in favour of membership and of professionalisation of the armed forces – which Our Ukraine has promised to achieve by 2009.¹⁰ Moreover, there are several concrete benefits that Ukraine would reap by joining NATO in the next two or three years. First, Ukraine – in contrast to, for example, Slovakia, the Czech Republic or the Baltic States – has much to offer NATO in terms of firepower and equipment, especially military transport aircraft. Second, Ukraine has already participated in peacekeeping missions around the world, most recently in Iraq and its role as a regional exporter of security would be bolstered by the decision to join NATO. Third, and in a sense most importantly, Ukraine's reputation as a

⁹ Source: Democratic Initiatives Foundation. Methodology: Interviews to 2,040 Ukrainian adults, conducted from Feb. 4 to Feb. 15, 2005. Margin of error is 2.3 per cent.

<http://foreignpolicy.org.ua/eng/headlines/society/opinion/index.shtml?id=4244>

¹⁰ Author interview with Pavlo Klimkin, deputy head of mission, Ukrainian Embassy, London, 24 January 2006.

respectable 'western' power in the eyes of Madrid or Paris would rise, thus supporting its claims to EU membership. There is a minor risk that Ukraine could be seen as another American Trojan horse within the Union like the UK or the eight ex-communist Member States, but this is a risk worth taking, and in any case it is better to be perceived as pro-US European state than as a province of Russia.

If the unpopular move towards joining NATO could be linked to the popular idea of abolishing conscription it is possible that public opinion could be brought around. Joining NATO would nonetheless prove a major hurdle for any Ukrainian administration, both in terms of hostile public opinion and in terms of deteriorating still further relations with Russia. Ukrainian politicians may reflect to themselves, however, that once Ukraine is paying the world price for its oil and gas supplies, there largely remains little else that Russia could do to hurt Ukraine beyond introducing a visa for Ukrainians travelling to Russia. The question of NATO membership should be resolved one way or another before the presidential elections in 2009 since the issue is likely to divide the electorate.

Conclusions

What is remarkable about the 2006is Ukrainian parliamentary election is how uneventful it proved to be. In contrast to previous elections, there was no vote rigging, ballot stuffing, government censorship of the media, intimidation of voters, political murders or similar undemocratic behaviour. It is true that some voters had to queue for a couple of hours to cast their ballot, but in the opinion of the OSCE and the author this was not an attempt to rig the election so much as administrative oversight. Moreover, there was no attempt on the part of the Russian government to influence the election by endorsing a particular political party, either through favourable reportage on the Russian channels that many eastern Ukrainians prefer or through the personal intervention of President Putin in a state visit timed to coincide with the elections. The peace and calm of the Ukrainian elections were all the more obvious when compared to what took place in the presidential elections in Belarus in March 2006.

The parliamentary elections of 2006 further consolidated Ukraine's democratisation and gave a sense of a move away from the managed democracy of the Kuchma years. Power was more effectively dispersed between the presidency and the parliament, although it remained to be seen how the new constitutional set up will actually work in practice.

On the policy front, two of the three main political parties or blocs – the Party of the Regions – share a broadly similar policy agenda, despite their opposing positions during the Orange Revolution. Ukraine's path towards European integration will certainly be slow, but it is highly unlikely that it will abandon this course. The third main political force – the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc – did not have a clear policy agenda and seemed likely to remain something of a loose cannon in the subsequent legislature, whether within government or without.

EU and NATO accession will be pursued, although the latter is likely to be achieved far more quickly and in the face of strong public opinion against membership. The economy is unlikely to recover the dizzy heights of the double-digit growth GDP

growth it clocked up around the turn of the century, but once the shock of the increase in energy prices is absorbed, it should rise with continuing programme of government reform.

Looking back at the events of the Orange Revolution 16 months on, or the 'spirit of the Maidan' that was so often invoked for different reasons during this quiet election campaign, a few observations may be made. First, given the tidal wave of expectations on which the Orange revolutionaries were swept to power, the revolutionaries inevitably disappointed in government. Ukraine changed radically, but there was no 'new dawn'. Second, the opposition made a spectacular comeback and abandoned its old anti-democratic habits. Yet this should be welcomed since the government will need a strong – and loyal – opposition. Third, since the 'spirit of the Maidan' was less about political personalities or policies than the rule of law, all Ukrainians, but especially those who protested on the Maidan should be proud of the way in which the 2006 parliamentary elections were conducted. That Ukraine is becoming a 'normal country' is more a result of the temerity and fortitude of its citizens than any amount of strong leadership on the part of Ukrainian politicians or US-funded democracy programmes. Ukraine may still be a poor country, but it is a democratic one. Ukrainians need only look over the border at their neighbours to the north to realise just how far they have come in so short a period of time.

