

The 2006 Parliamentary Elections in the Ukraine

Voters Give the 'Orange Force' its Last Chance

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Executive Summary

For the first time since the 2004 presidential elections, the parliamentary election of March 26, 2006, offered Ukrainian voters an opportunity to pass judgement on the policy of Viktor Yushchenko, the 'president of the revolution', as well as on the work of Mr Yekhanurov's government. This judgement turned out very grim for the 'orange coalitionists': At 32.1 percent of the votes, the opposition 'Party of Regions' of Yushchenko's former opponent Viktor Yanukovich, the so-called 'blue camp', was returned as the strongest political force. Surprisingly, the Yulia Tymoshenko Block came in second at a share of 22.3 percent. This election alliance is led by the same charismatic politician who was dismissed from office as prime minister by president Yushchenko in September 2005 after a term in office of no more than seven months. The election block of Nasha Ukraina (Our Ukraine), which is close to the president, suffered a severe defeat, winning a disappointing share of no more than 13.9 percent. In addition, the Socialists led by Oleksandr Moros (5.7 percent) and the Communists under Petro Symonenko (3.7 percent) jumped the 3-percent hurdle.

Many electoral alliances which had counted on jumping the 3-percent hurdle came away empty-handed including, for example, the block of Mr Kostenko and Mr Plyushch (1.9 percent) and the Pora/Reform and Order Block (1.5 percent), which belong to the 'orange camp', as well as the opposition block 'Ne Tak!' (1.0 percent) led by the former Ukrainian president, Mr Kravchuk, and Natalya Vitrenko's block 'People's Opposition' (2.9 percent). From this, it can be seen clearly that Ukrainian voters are interested in a more profiled political structure, i.e. a party landscape that is arranged more clearly.

The parliamentary election of 2006 was judged democratic, fair and free by most of the election observers both inside and outside the country. While during the presidential election of 2004, there had been a wide range of irregularity and rigging, none of this was registered in 2006. All political forces had the same access to the media, and the use of 'administrative resources' by government representatives was limited to the extent accepted in democratic states.

Five political forces are represented in the new Ukrainian parliament: The Party of Regions (186 seats), the Yulia Tymoshenko Block (129 seats), the Nasha Ukraina Block (81 seats), the Socialists (33 seats), and the Communists (21 seats). Despite the losses on the part of the Nasha Ukraina block, the so-called 'orange forces' (Tymoshenko Block / Nasha Ukraina Block / Socialists) had another chance to form a government: In purely arithmetical terms, they have a slight majority in parliament (243 of 450 seats, 17 more than necessary). The process of forming this 'orange coalition', however, is very slow. Yulia Tymoshenko does not intend to renounce the office of prime minister under any circumstances, while Nasha Ukraina does not intend to repeat the 'Tymoshenko experiment' which has failed once before. Although a coalition between Nasha Ukraina and the Party of Regions is not officially considered, a future 'blue-orange cooperation' is not impossible. Anyway, the Ukraine cannot be governed successfully without including the Party of Regions – the 'blue camp' is now the strongest force in ten eastern and southern regions, with a considerable majority in most of them. The Party of Regions is gradually losing its terrible image. The 40-year-old billionaire Rynat Akhmetov (rank 7 on the party list) heralds a change of generations. Moreover, it is

noteworthy that the ,blues‘ are meanwhile openly discussing European integration and liberal market economy. This would have been hardly imaginable two years ago.

The Ukraine urgently needs a stable government. While the ,orange forces‘ cause a political vacuum by their constant internal disputes, the economic situation of the Ukraine is deteriorating dramatically. The growth rate of the gross domestic product declined from 12 percent in 2004 to under 3 percent in 2005, and experts predict a growth of 4 percent at best for 2006. The Ukraine cannot afford to lose any more time. The country has freed itself from the fetters of the Kuchma era and changed for the better. If the politicians were only half as smart as their voters, the country would be better off. Whether GUAM or the accession to NATO, the country’s actual problems are of domestic nature. However, the real test is still to come. Once the new government has taken office, it will have the chance to rule for three years without interference from election campaigns—officially, the next election in the Ukraine (presidential elections) is scheduled for the autumn of 2009.