

Under reconstruction! We apologize for the absence of certain materials.**NEW HORIZONS OF UKRAINIAN MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM**

28 June 2003

In developed western democracies, political parties are the foundation underpinning the political system. Through political parties different social groups express and realize their political interests. Ukraine presents a different case - it is difficult to make the right political choice in the country with more than one hundred parties. Especially taking into consideration that these parties become active only on the eve of elections, fighting for their share of parliamentary pie.

At the same time, nothing better than political parties were invented - both for politics and society at large. In this connection, our response to the skeptics would be like this: today Ukrainian political parties have real chances to become a viable political institution, active and capable to win support of the population.

We will point out only key points. The political reform foresees that parliamentary coalition (or a party that won the majority of voices during election) obtains the right to form the government and will act according to the principle "rule and bear responsibility for your ruling". Lengthy battles to introduce proportional election legislation for Verkhovna Rada leave hope that sooner or later this legislation would come into force and stimulate political party activities. And finally a group of parties discerned that again and again are elected and settle on the Parliamentary Olympus. Noteworthy is the debate (so far pertaining to political elite only) on the possibility of budgetary funding for most eminent parties.

However, many parties today are fighting for survival. They have to prove to the Ministry of Justice that they exist not on paper only. The political life is boiling. And to a larger extent sets new horizons for Ukrainian multi-party system. The future will depend upon the choice made today.

Party Activities or Termination in Accordance with Law

We have obtained the first significant results of enactment of the Law on Political Parties. They were disclosed on May 19, when the Supreme Court of Ukraine satisfied the first petition of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine asking to annul the registration certificates of two parties with rather exotic names: the Third Millennium Conscience Party and Progressive-Automobile Party of Ukraine, which in fact means their termination (to date, all in all 13 parties ceased to exist). These are the parties that were not able over a year time foreseen by the law to establish and register their regional units in the majority of regions, Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Kyiv and Sevastopol. If the Ministry of Justice and Supreme Court of Ukraine proceed at such pace, by the end of the year we will have two times less parties than at the beginning (the number of parties at that time was 123).

By the way, the major reason for criticism of Ukrainian multi-party system was the existence of a large number of "divan" parties having less than a hundred members. Only laziness would prevent a political scientist or journalist from computations of how many communist, social-democrat, Christian or green parties Ukraine had per capita.

Ukrainian President more than once used the situation as a pretext to reject the law on election based on proportional principle. Leonid Kuchma also insisted on including into the Law on Political Parties tougher rules for new parties registration as well as re-registration of already established parties.

The current Law on Political Parties resulted as compromise of a tough presidential position and more liberal parliamentary position (represented, among others, by V. Lavrynovych, the Minister of Justice). It is noteworthy, that adoption and enactment of this Law was one of pre-requisites for Ukraine's membership with the Council of Europe negotiated in 1995; as we see, it took six years to meet this requirement...

One can argue whether the above law facilitated establishment of potent and influential political parties in Ukraine, but one thing we can state for sure. **The law has raised barriers to the growth of minute political parties, helped to get rid of fictitious parties and expedited agglomeration of similar in spirit smaller parties into larger ones.**

Since the enactment of the Law on Political Parties (April 2001), only 7 new parties have been established, while before, from 1997 to 2000, the number of political parties doubled from 54 to 107. More than that, starting from April 2001, we witnessed several unifications, quite different from earlier practices when after unification three instead of one party would emerge. For instance, the Ukrainian Conservative republican Party aligned with "Batkivshchyna" [Fatherland], the Youth Movement aligned with the Popular Democratic party, the Ukrainian republican Party merged with the Ukrainian Nationalist Party "Sobor". Some unification attempts failed, though, like the iniquitous case of the once united People's Movement "Rukh".

Under current conditions, the impact of the Law can be regarded as positive. At least, we can state that they are in accord with attitudes of Ukrainian citizens. This is confirmed by the opinion polls conducted by Razumkov Center. Out of 46,6% of citizens who recognize the need for a multi-party political system in Ukraine, more than a half (54,9%) believe that the number of parties should not exceed 5, nearly every fourth (24,9%) thinks that the number of parties should be within limits of 5 to 10, nearly every tenth (9,3%) considers that we need from 10 to 20 parties, and 2,6% suppose their number should be from 20 to 100. Only 1,8% adherents of the multi-party system, believe it is normal to have more than 100 parties: what, in fact, Ukraine has starting from 2000.

The Portrait of Political Parties, with Society in the Background

According to the statistics of the Razumkov Center, only one voter in twenty believes that political parties serve his interests. More than a half (55,7%) regard parties as proponents of interests of financial and business circles, 45,6% are confident that parties provide for the interests of party leaders. 31,5% of respondents think that parties serve the interests of the state apparatus (*in total, the answers exceed 100%, because respondents were to choose among all possible variants*).

So, the majority of electorate regards political parties as structures established to satisfy private or corporate interests. It is worth mentioning that after parliamentary elections of 2002, this majority still increased. Only few citizens (5%) look at parties as proponents of their own interests.

Considering the above, it is not a surprise that 38,9% of population do not consider a multi-party system necessary for Ukraine (in 1994 this figure was lower by a quarter). Therefore, in ten years 10% of adult population got disappointed in a multi-party system. On the one hand not too many. On the other hand, it comprises 3,7 million of our compatriots who do not have any interest in political parties. Accordingly, it is not a surprise that political parties suffer from a lower level of citizens' trust compared with other institutions, like church, trade unions, national and foreign media. In April 2003, only 14,5% citizens trusted political parties completely or partly, while 73,1% did not have any trust in them.

To a large extent, political parties deserved this attitude. The first and foremost issue - the failure to fulfill election campaign promises. Parties do not bear any obligations to their voters, except for moral ones, unfortunately, not all of them suffer from overindulgence.

And today we face the following situation: during the election campaign, a famous bloc promised to increase the real income of population by 1,5 and create 1,5 million jobs, and now one cannot come across its name in Parliament. It looks like the parties that constituted the above bloc do not have any obligations for the promises it gave. After the bloc "Yedyna Ukraina" [Integral Ukraine] was dissolved, not a single party publicly took on the responsibility for the failure to keep up the election campaign promises.

In this respect, oppositional parties are more "conscientious". At least, their factions are still found in Parliament, operate and do not go back on their election campaign promises.

It is quite explicable, though it may sound cynical. The opposition often appeals to their electorate for support, calls on for participation in the actions of protest. While the party in power is self-sufficient and does not care for its electorate and people in general - until the next election or all-national discussion of some extremely important initiative.

Lack of proper information on the activities of this or that party in Parliament - the major activity of any political party - aggravates the negative attitude to political parties even more. As a result, 65 % of citizens are dissatisfied with Parliamentary majority and 55,1% with the opposition. **We refer to the above numbers not just to point the finger at political parties. Firstly, the low level of citizens' trust to political parties can be explained by general negative attitude of citizens to authorities, politics and everything related with them. And this is a normal state of affairs for the country where the central government institutions - President, Parliament and Cabinet - enjoy only 6 to 8% of citizens' support .**

Secondly, though political parties do not have the trust of the majority of citizens, they do not stop to be an important political institution crucial for existence of democracy. We cannot take from them what they were created for. We cannot deprive political parties of their important specific functions, like to structure the Parliament based on party membership lists, form majority in Parliament and elect the Cabinet) just because they do not have enough trust. Seemingly, we should have denied the President or Verkhovna Rada to fulfill their functions.

Besides, during 13 years of existence of a multi-party system in Ukraine (starting from the registration of the first non-communist party People's Movement Rukh in 1990) certain accomplishments were achieved. In Parliament, we can observe a core of political parties present from several convocations (first of all, the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the People's Movement Rukh, the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United), the Popular Democratic Party.

Three out of four last premiers were leaders of their political parties (V. Pustovoytenko, A. Kinakh, V. Yanukovych). Besides, party leaders chair the National Bank of Ukraine, are the heads of the Presidential Administration, the State Committee for TV and Radio Broadcasting. Still, it is worth mentioning that not a single political party ever bore any political consequences for activities of its leaders. Political parties and their representatives in power co-exist separately.

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All in all, about two dozens political parties were able to get rooted in the society: some as advocates of interests of certain social categories and groups, others as political instruments of potent industrial groups or regional business-elites. This type of parties does not bring us closer to Europe, but we have to understand this phenomenon and accept it - as it is an effect of initial accumulation of capital and redistribution of property.

If asked today, whether are there any political parties in Ukraine ready for power (in other words, to win elections and form the Government), the answer would be in the best Lenin tradition, "Yes, there are ones". Another question would be, whose interests the parties in power would protect and promote, but this would depend upon voters' choice.

Power without Political Parties - Power without Responsibility?

Will tomorrow's party-rooted rule be better than today's non-partisan authority? It is a difficult question, because parties differ. One thing we can say for sure: it can never be worse, than today. The major benefit of the party system is that power would cease being anonymous, faceless; and that authorities would be structured on a clear and transparent basis.

After the Parliament will be formed of parties, and parliamentary majority will form the Cabinet, citizens will know for sure: the coalition of Parties A, B, and C is now in power. And if the government does not keep up its election promises to increase salaries two times, the next election another coalition will take power and Parties X, Y, and Z will form the government. Under such conditions there will be no need to look for our own "Ukrainian" solutions how to draw the demarcation line between the parties in power and opposition parties.

The situation will be clear: if the party has its representatives in the government, it is in power and has to vote for legislative drafts submitted by the Cabinet, and take responsibility for the ministers. If the party is not in the Cabinet, it is in the opposition and has to fight for power. Then, we will not face an absurdity when the opposition party voted for the Program of the rival Cabinet.

We will take the risk and assume that if the party system pertaining to democratic states will be installed in Ukraine, after several parliamentary elections political parties will not be regarded by electorate as something futile and pointless. More than that, if party representatives succeed while in power, citizens will trust these parties more and more.

Today seems the most proper moment to conduct the necessary changes and give political parties the opportunity to prove that they are capable of fulfilling their mission. President declared a political reform aimed at building the parliamentary-presidential republic in Ukraine. And paraphrasing the popular film "Caucasian Captive", we can conclude that "parliament without parties is like a wedding without the bride".

Yet, we cannot avoid the question: to what extent the above political system will be popular with authorities? The legislative draft on amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine submitted to the Parliament by President foresees that the government is formed by parliamentary majority. Nevertheless, if we study the draft more carefully, we will come across several traps and tricks.

For instance, rather dubious and inadequate for the parliamentary-presidential republic is the division of ministers into "black" and "white", i.e. appointed by the Parliament and appointed by the President. And extending the retirement age for judges of the Constitutional and Supreme Courts under current conditions can be regarded as a veiled political bribe.

The Presidential draft somehow lacks the current constitutional norms reading that people's deputies are elected through on universal, equal and direct elections based on secret vote or allowing for submission of deputy's request or petition directly to President. And quite unexpectedly another norm emerged that President appoints all (!) heads of central executive bodies, except for the Cabinet of Ministers, unless other is ruled by the Constitution. We can assume that Chairs of Anti-Monopoly Committee, State Property Fund, Security service and, most probably, State Tax Administration will all be subordinate to the Head of the State (the latter was in fact enacted by President who denied the Premier the chance to appoint the head of tax administration).

Especially perplexing is the desire of the Head of the State to hold all elections in the same year. Our modest assumption would be that due to this novelty the election year would be wasted on social-economic development of our country as the authorities on all levels would not be engaged in politics and elections and neglect economic development.

Yet, by many, this President's drive is explained by his political interests. In case the above Constitutional amendments pass, it will not be difficult to summon 226 deputies to vote in favor of election terms (currently, the election term is defined by the Constitution). It is most improbable that deputies would vote to reduce their own term in power. Therefore, the realistic year for the next elections would be 2006, even 2007 and this means the extension of the term of President in power.

We can assess real intentions of those in power with the regard to political reform, if we consider their attitude to parliamentary election based on party list system, because the latter under current conditions present the viable mechanism to charge political parties with responsibility.

It is common knowledge that President is definitely against election to Parliament fully based on party lists. Lately, he justifies this position of his with the argument that this helps to ensure equal representation of the interests of the regions. An election act ruling that regional party lists should be introduced can ensure regional representation. There are other possibilities; one should only have a desire to use them.

Evidently, elections in one-mandate constituencies are more advantageous for power because it allows for more influence on election results. If we look at election results of 2002, according to party lists the opposition has won more than 57% of votes, while parties and blocs representing the power three times as low. But in one-mandate majority constituencies the bloc "For an Integral Ukraine!" was at the forefront. As witnesses testify, in one-mandate constituencies the competition was tough to gain the support of local authorities. **Therefore, by declaring his aversion to the law allowing for elections based on party lists, President reveals lack of confidence in those parties that represent power and doubts as to their capability to compete with the opposition.** Representatives of pro-power parties, namely the Social Democrats (United), the Popular Democratic Party, the Agrarian Party, have several times openly stated that time has come to transfer to elections based on party lists. Some of them have even opposed President's will and voted in favor of the relevant legislation on April 17. For the law to pass, the support of Social Democrats was necessary, it is the largest, best structured and organized pro-presidential party. What a pity it did not happen. If social-democrats had had the will then, today all political parties would not jitter and wait patiently for 2006 election, preparing their candidates for the posts of premiers and ministers.

Still, if politicians in power are not willing to work for their own benefit, what can be said about officials without party affiliation? They remember that parties exist only before the elections. What else can we add, if All-Ukraine Political Advisory Committee with the President of Ukraine comprised of leaders of the major political parties, did not convene for more than three years?

Contrary to the above, there are moments when the power is quite heavily infected with "party" momentum. This happens when one or another political leader gains power and settles in Ukrainian government Olympus. Then we witness the massive entree of bureaucrats into a party, as was the case with People-Democratic Party or the Regions' Party. This process is very unstable and quite often an overturn happens: after a while apolitical power would attack their party-affiliated colleagues.

Reverse movement would happen in central and local executive authorities mainly when one or another political leader would be discarded from the party cartridge. The resignation of V. Shevchuk, who represented the Popular Democratic Party in the current Cabinet is an evident, though sad illustration of President's position and attitude to the coalition government and pro-presidential parliamentary parties which have formed it. Under the circumstances, what chances does the opposition?

Citizens, though unaware of many details, have their own opinion on how the leadership of the state influences the development of multi-party system in Ukraine. The majority of respondents (42%) believe it has no influence at all; every fifth respondent (21,4%) considers that this influence is negative and 13,3% believe that this influence is positive. Nearly every fourth citizen (23,3%) was not able to answer this question. Obvious, that the answers reveal lack of interest on behalf of citizens to political parties and related issues; and mentioned earlier negative attitude to power; yet. One thing remains clear: citizens do not observe any attempts by the government to facilitate development of a multi-party system in Ukraine. **If this is the case, it is common to say that those who are drowning should rescue themselves. In other words, if it is not in the interests of the authorities, political parties themselves should take efforts to bring political parties into power.**

To achieve this, the organization system should be replaced. Today, party factions in Parliament (no matter, whether pro-presidential or oppositional) comprise constitutional majority. Therefore, it will not be a problem for them to introduce amendments in the Constitution which would allow for political parties to become viable political actors and subjects of power.

This is a chance for the parties to demonstrate what are they, whether they are self-confident in their political future or need "crutches" in the form of President's support and further benefit from his "good will", in other words to continue being "political parasites".

Keys to the House where Money Is Kept

The issue of funding political parties activities has always been acute. In the early stages of party development several ways of collecting funds to party accounts were known

The issue of funding political parties activities has always been acute. In the early stages of party development, several ways of soliciting funds to party accounts were known. Some parties made an emphasis on membership and membership fees, others actively involved sponsors (it is worth mentioning Savva Morozov among them) or established commercial enterprises managed by especially trusted party members; a few indulged in confiscation and expropriation, or to put it simply, robbed the banks and simpletons. Some tried to combine all of the above.

Of course, expropriation is out of the question today. Paying membership fees is problematic in a country on the brink of poverty; while funding exclusively from sponsors will make political parties an obedient toy of the former, which was discussed before.

Therefore, we would like to raise the issue of funding political parties from the state budget. Thinking logically, if a party performs functions significant for existence and operation of the state (and the functions of political parties described in article 36 of the Constitution really seem important), then the state should provide for proper environment, including financial conditions, allowing parties to function properly. That is why funding political parties from state budget seems appropriate in western democracies. Meanwhile, when the average wage in the Ukraine does not exceed the living minimum standard, the prospects of funding party activities from taxpayers' money look embarrassing.

It will be embarrassing if parties are regarded as a way to obtain a deputy's mandate and all due benefits with it. If parties are regarded as components of a political system, equal in their status to parliament and government, then the issue of budgetary funding will come in a new light.

For instance, the draft submitted by people's deputy I. Hryniv proposes funding for political parties should be calculated as one hundredth percent of minimum wage multiplied by the number of voters. In order to qualify for budgetary funding, the party is to win no less than 3% and the bloc no less than 4% at parliamentary elections. The developer of this legislative draft assumes that only competitive parties would benefit from budgetary funding, while budgetary funding would provide for a more competitive environment.

Another approaches exist. One foresees that citizens themselves would take the decision which political party to fund and direct a certain amount of their taxes straight to the account of a political party they prefer to support. would fund political parties; direct their taxes

The draft law promoting this method of funding has not been submitted to Parliament yet. The main issue for now is whether in principle we support or deny the idea of funding political parties from the budget.

The parties are in the predicament: this idea causes discontent of President and is very unpopular with voters. As revealed by opinion polls, the majority of citizens (60,7%) believe that the state should not support political parties. And this is understanding, taking into account citizens' attitude to political parties.

To support the above idea will be most difficult for the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. But the pains will be worth the gains. Consider: the opposition parties are the ones that suffer most from lack of funding, as the majority of their members are poor, and their "sponsors" are under the vigil of tax administration and other controlling bodies.

Yet, parties that support government will benefit from budgetary funding, as well. More than that, no guarantees were given to any party so far, that one day they may have to join the opposition.

It is important, that many experts recognize the rationale for funding from the state budget. Following the results of Razumkov Center opinion polls, 35,3% of experts spoke in favor of government support to political parties and 18,6% believe that it is a good possibility for the future when social-economic conditions improve. 37,3% of respondents resolutely deny this idea. Summing up, it is the right time to bring this issue for a broad public debate. If the situation remains as it is, we will have to continue complaining about "oligarch", "corporate" and other "improper" parties.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize three important points.

First, the Law on Political Parties has produced initial benefits. So far, these benefits are mainly cutting the dead branches off the tree of Ukrainian multi-party system - inert parties that do not meet the "national party" criteria ceased to exist.

Second, Political parties are given a unique opportunity to improve their standing, upgrade their status and become full-fledged players participating in governance. First and foremost, we mean the Law on Election, ruling elections based on party lists, and amendments to the Constitution recognizing the right of a parliamentary majority (a coalition) to form a coalition government.

Third, funding from the budget would provide for more transparency of political parties' activities, proper working conditions for competitive political parties, would reduce their dependency of sponsors and make them more dependent on citizens.

Should our political parties use the chance and amend the rules of the game to their advantage depends on their readiness to give up their tactical short-term interests in favor of long-term perspective. This equally refers to the parties in opposition and pro-presidential parties. If they lose this chance, either fearful of responsibility or scared to lose some immediate benefits, they will have to wait for another 10-15 years till another opportunity emerge.

A short period in terms of history of civilization. But very long for you and me.

This article makes use of the data of opinion polls conducted by the Razumkov Center in 2002-2003. For each poll, more than 2000 respondents, 18 years of age or older, were involved. The sample mistake was 2,3%.

Expert opinion polls were conducted June 3 to 18, 2003 r. 105 experts were interviewed (from the Office of the President of Ukraine, Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers, Verkhovna Rada Secretariat, public research institutes, NGOs, leading political journalists).

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