

Vision of the future as introduction of parliamentary crisis

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On May 28, 2002, 226 members of the parliament – just the minimum number required – voted in favor of the package of nominees for the positions of the leaders of the Ukrainian parliament. No vote against was cast. As a result, the seat of the Speaker was occupied by leader of the block of the «parties of power» «Za Yedynu Ukrainu!» and former presidential chief of staff Volodymyr Lytvyn. The seat of the First Vice Speaker was received by the former attorney of the Donetsk region and a representative of the so-called «Donetsk group of influence» Hennady Vasyliiev, and the seat of the Vice Speaker was given to one of the leaders of the United Social Democrats (SDPU(o)) and de facto owner of the Inter TV channel Oleksandr Zinchenko.

Commenting on the election of Lytvyn as the Speaker, leader of Nasha Ukraina Victor Yushchenko announced that the situational majority, formed by members of the «ZaYedU!», the SDPU(o), two Communists and seven members of Nasha Ukraina was «formed under pressure and definitely will not be either strategic or stable» (UNIAN, May 28, 2002). «We were present at a show for which they will soon be selling tickets,» he said. One of the members of the «Opposition Four» – Nasha Ukraina, Yulia Tymoshenko's block, the Socialist party led by Oleksandr Moroz and the Communist party – said that the election of the leadership of the Rada was «the Pirr's victory» and told the journalists that the «authorities» had run the policy of «placing the fingers of businessmen MPs in the door. And they had to give away their ballots in order to avoid execution» (UNIAN, May 28, 2002). Though the words, of course, were used to figuratively describe the process of «convincing» MPs to vote the necessary way, they properly describe the impression.

Lytvyn's victory can be seen as the «Pirr's victory» for the parliament as a whole. The person extremely loyal to president Kuchma, Lytvyn was an outsider of the race and cannot be regarded as a figure of consensus or compromise. There are also strong doubts that the «block of power» will repeat its success and restore even a situational parliamentary majority. The present-day contradictions over the distribution of leadership of the 23 parliamentary committees is an indication of the growing crisis. Recently, the new Speaker even failed to gather a coordinating council of factions.

The situation in fact brought the faction of Victor Yushchenko, Nasha Ukraina, under the banners of the opposition which it so far had sought to avoid. Victor Yushchenko made a

number of very strong statements after the election of Lytvyn as the Speaker, calling on the opposition forces in the Rada to unite. «Nowadays all who can openly counter the hideously formed power are facing a choice: to be smashed one by one or to consolidate themselves politically and act as a single block,» his statement read (www.korrespondent.net, May 29, 2002). «This means that two political holdings, «Za Yedynu Ukrainu!» and SDPU(o) in fact usurped the whole power in Ukraine and officially took the whole responsibility for the situation in Ukraine on themselves,» read the formal statement of Nasha Ukraina, «these political forces hold the leadership of the parliament, the government, local self-governance, they have been officially supported by the President of Ukraine.» In a way, such a scenario is good for Nasha Ukraina and its leader, for they are released from responsibility for the political and economic processes in the country, which are under the utmost influence of president Kuchma, anyway. The current division of the parliament is not along the traditional ideological line: the «right» – the «left» the «centrists», but into the «power» and the «opposition». The opposition, in its turn, has both blue-and-yellow and red colours.

All facts indicate the presence of a parliamentary crisis, provoked by the pro-presidential scenario of the «Speakeriada». With the elections of the leadership of the parliament over, a new stage of the crisis is in place – the distribution of the committees. It is difficult to say how long the crisis will take place. Even is numerous consultations result in a compromise, it is hard to expect that the agreements will produce stable results. The two mega-factions of the parliament will find it increasingly difficult to come to terms due to their different political visions and strategies.

Almost all in the parliament remember the almost three-months-long bargaining process over the elections of the leadership of the parliament in 1998. Many in this parliament would prefer to avoid the same story and did not want to show inability to come to terms and add to the reduction of the respect for the parliament in the society. The 1998 parliament was weak – for only a weak parliament could allow the April 2000 referendum and its specific questions about the no-confidence in the Rada and conditions for the dissolution of the parliament. In 1998 the Speakeriada was a result of the weak political structure and vagueness of the parliament. The first Speaker of the 3rd parliament, Oleksandr Tkachenko, was not a figure of compromise and could not soften political conflicts and contradictions within the Rada. Instead, there were a number of «non-consensus» decisions that were virtually «squeezed out» of MPs. For instance, the issue of joining the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS was presented for voting for many times in contradiction to the norms of parliamentary practice. The crisis then ended up with the «velvet revolution» and the formation of a majority that later collapsed because of political contradictions and the split-up into the pro-Yushchenko and pro-Kuchma parts.

Nowadays, there are all the conditions for even tougher repetition of the experience, and the crisis is in progress notwithstanding the declared readiness to avoid it. At the beginning of the sessions leaders of all the six blocks and parties announced they wanted the elections of the leadership of the Rada to be «rather peaceful, without contradictions», as Yulia Tymoshenko put it (UNIAN, May 10, 2002). However, the competing political

forces sought to carry out their own scenarios of electing the Speaker. The problem was not just that the different forces were oriented at key personalities for that position. One of the reasons that led to the crisis is rooted in the general vision of the political future of this country by different political forces and the tasks that stem from that vision. The current crisis has personal and strategic dimension that is linked to the next presidential elections, due in the fall of 2004.

Nasha Ukraina viewed the Speakeriada as a key element of a major package of plans to undertake a thorough reshuffle of the institutions of power and civil service . After the election of the leadership of the parliament and the heads of the parliamentary committees, it was expected that the block will initiate major personnel changes at the regional level, primarily in the regions where the block received a convincing victory. Victor Yushchenko also announced the idea to involve MPs in the formation of a coalition government and argued that the new parliament wished to develop its influence on the executive branch as well. «Procedurally, that will be the hearing in order for us to give a right assessment of what has been done in Ukraine by the government and, secondly, there is a need to represent political forces of the parliament [in the government]» (UNIAN, May 10, 2002).

Victor Yushchenko's block received a clear victory in the recent parliamentary elections (over 23 percent of the votes) and brought 70 members of the block to the parliament. Given the number of MPs who won in majoritarian constituencies with support of the block, and some friendly independent MPs, Nasha Ukraina could have the largest faction. The intended total reshuffle, announced by the block and the plan to change the power elites in the regions was designed to reduce and gradually abolish the non-transparent mechanisms of power. Yet, Nasha Ukraina and the majority of its members never identified themselves or the block in general as the opposition to the current regime.

Similar political tasks were declared and pursued by the opposition – primarily the block of Yulia Tymoshenko and the Socialist party of Oleksandr Moroz that did identify themselves as the opposition to the Kuchma regime. Their stated objectives included transforming Ukraine into a parliamentary republic, re-division of power and major «migration» of political elites. Some members of Nasha Ukraina, too, spoke about the need for a constitutional reform and reduction of the president's powers.

A particular place in the political puzzle is occupied by the Communist party of Ukraine, seen as traditional opposition to the power and, in which ideological purity is to be kept, should be in opposition to the current partners of the Opposition Four. Due to the ideological incompatibility of the opposition forces, sustainable agreements between them are unlikely, and even situational agreements are very difficult.

The «ZaYedU», the block generated by the establishment and generating the establishment in its turn, has the tasks that are opposite to those of Nasha Ukraina. Hence, it has to stick to a different strategy of fulfilling those tasks. In addition to keeping the property and influence of particular interest groups, its major political task is to maintain the status quo and preserve the existing power and individuals that personify it. The task

is clearly seen from the block's election program's key message – stability, presented as an axiom.

Maintaining control over key positions in the legislature could theoretically make it possible for the top power-brokers and the establishment in general some guarantees of political preservation and immunity for the future. Such a solution would guarantee permanent stability not only for the establishment as such, but also contribute to keeping the influence by political and business interest groups that are now affiliated with the establishment. Moreover, today the block controls the executive, as Prime Minister Anatoly Kinakh, number two in the «ZaYedU» election block, is likely to keep his job for a while. Similar ambitions persist in the SDPU(o), given the desire of the party leader Victor Medvedchuk to improve his chances for presidency. The implementation of the political preservation task was not discouraged by the fact that the «block of power» received only 11.77 percent of the votes and initially brought only 35 MPs to the parliament. In a short while the faction was blown up with different «independent» recruits, mainly MPs with business background and often with conflicting business interests.

The broad use of administrative methods for recruiting business MPs who, according to former self-styled «director» of the 3rd parliament Oleksandr Volkov, have something to lose, allowed the «ZaYedU» to transform their modest election result into a formula «he is not on top who got most of the votes, but he who has the largest faction». The quantity rather specifically transformed into quality. The «ZaYedU» succeeded in achieving one of its goals and making Volodymyr Lytvyn («the maker of Bonaparts», as a regional newspaper once referred to him), the leader of the «block of power» and the close president's aid, the Speaker. Lytvyn, who was virtually pushed to the light of public politics from the depth of the presidential administration, was given the task of cementing the variety of MPs around himself.

The trick worked – so far almost all political figures who could be seen as credible presidential hopefuls arrived from the walls of the parliament, and not the presidential administration. The position of the Speaker can be seen as a good spring-board for the presidential race. Should the scenario of electing Lytvyn and transforming him into a public politician succeed, he would accumulate substantial image and publicity for becoming a favorite of the race. Although Lytvyn lacks the party of his own and support in the parliament, and although he does not look convincing in the leadership position today, the efforts, invested in his election, suggest that he is considered as a possible «successor» to Kuchma. Yet, the parliamentary crisis does not add to his popularity, low as it is now. To complete the picture, he will have to counter rivalry of his own faction-mates, as some of the politicians of the «Trudova Ukraina» and SDPU(o) have certain potential and aspirations for the 2004 race.

Noteworthy, after the election of Lytvyn as the Speaker and the distribution of the committees his faction may cease to exist as a singly entity. Possibly, soon the parliament will have new bodies – like the «Trudova Ukraina» led by Serhiy Tihipko, the People's Democratic Party led by Valery Pustovoitenko and other groups. Volodymyr Lytvyn

seems to be ambivalent about the future of his block and the faction: after becoming the Speaker he announced it was up to members of the block to decide whether the «Yedyna Ukraina» should remain or split up into several smaller factions. The closer to the fall 2004, the lesser the influence of president Kuchma on the processes in the parliament will be. The election of the Speaker that is loyal to Kuchma is only the attempt to hold the levers of power. Though, it is unclear whether the success will last long. The key strategic objectives of the forces in the parliament indicate that they have been (and, likely, will be) unable to achieve consensus on a number of issues, leadership being the principle one. Although for the first time in Ukraine's history a number of politicians in the parliament share market values and declare the desire to promote integration into the «international community», their values are interpreted within the above tasks. Notwithstanding the striking similarity of election platforms, the political forces in the parliament will find it difficult to agree on key political issues, as no compromise between strategies of stability (i.e., maintaining the status quo or stagnation) and strategies of change have not been found yet.