



COMMENTARY

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Ukraine Seeks its Way after the Rada Elections

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Ukrainians went to the polls on March 26 to decide the composition of the 450-member Rada (parliament). Four months later, Ukrainians are still waiting to see which parties will comprise the majority coalition in the Rada, and who will be Ukraine's prime minister.

The electorate in March split along the lines of the third round of the 2004 presidential election, when Victor Yushchenko defeated Viktor Yanukovych. Just over half of the voters supported parties associated with the Orange Revolution. The Tymoshenko bloc won 129 seats, Yushchenko's Our Ukraine 81, and the Socialists 33. The "old guard" parties, Yanukovych's Regions Party and the Communists, won 186 and 21 seats respectively.

Given the antipathy between Tymoshenko and Yanukovych, Yushchenko found himself positioned to pick the coalition that would form a majority in the Rada. Our Ukraine could ally with the Tymoshenko bloc and Socialists in an "Orange" coalition, or join the Regions Party in a "broad" coalition.

Yushchenko and Our Ukraine spent weeks weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each option, conducting parallel talks with both sides. By early June, Our Ukraine leaned publicly toward a coalition with the Tymoshenko bloc and Socialists, despite concerns that this would mean the return of Yuliya Tymoshenko to the prime ministership (Yushchenko fired her in September 2005). Negotiations, however, dragged on regarding the distribution of positions and a common action program, while other elements in Our Ukraine continued to explore possibilities with the Regions Party. Then the shocker: on July 6 Socialist leader Oleksandr Moroz bolted and entered a majority coalition with the Regions Party and Communists. That coalition promptly proposed Yanukovych to be prime minister.

Yushchenko thus far has not submitted Yanukovych's name to the Rada for confirmation as prime minister – he has until August 2 to do so – and is weighing his options. Moroz's stunning defection left the president with a far less attractive set of choices than he faced at the end of March: call new parliamentary elections; join the coalition with Regions, the Communists and Socialists; or join the Tymoshenko bloc in opposition.

Yushchenko has suggested he might invoke the right to call early parliamentary elections, as no government was in place 60 days after the new Rada first met. Tymoshenko has urged him to do so, but the legal basis for such a move could be disputed. Yushchenko, moreover, has to ask himself whether new elections would be wise: every indication suggests that Our Ukraine would wind up in a weaker position.

Yushchenko has talked of building a new coalition, presumably a reference to Our Ukraine joining with the Regions Party, Socialists and Communists. Doing so could increase Our Ukraine's ability to affect the make-up and policies of the cabinet. Our Ukraine and Regions agree on a number of areas, particularly economic questions. But Our Ukraine wants someone other than Yanukovych as prime minister. While Yanukovych in June was prepared to consider other candidates, that was when he needed Our Ukraine to form a coalition. Now his coalition has a majority without Our Ukraine.

Going into opposition with the Tymoshenko bloc would maintain fealty to Our Ukraine's core supporters, many of whom would strongly oppose an alliance with Yanukovych. The party may find it difficult, however, to play an

opposition role when Yushchenko, as president, remains a key player in the executive branch. In any event, few doubt that the fiery Tymoshenko will emerge as the primary opposition spokesperson.

There may be a middle course. Our Ukraine could decide not to join the coalition but also not ally in opposition with Tymoshenko, instead working with the coalition where policy preferences converge and opposing it on other questions.

Yushchenko faces a difficult decision. But the drawn-out process is costing Ukraine. Foreign investors are holding off on investment decisions while they wait to see what kind of business climate the new prime minister will offer. Ukraine has made no progress the past four months in passing legislation to bring its trade regime into conformance with World Trade Organization rules. It is time for Yushchenko to make his choice; his options have become less palatable since March, and there is no reason to think they are going to improve.

You can go to the [Ukraine](#) section of the webpage for more information on the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program's work related to Ukraine.

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