

The Tymoshenko Government's Domestic and Foreign Policies: The First 100 Days

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The root of the repeated political crises since the Orange Revolution have been the president's indecisiveness. Between the removal of his government in 2001 and the 2003 Viktor Yushchenko and the bloc of parties he led, Our Ukraine, could not decide if it was allied to pro-regime centrists or the radical opposition. The 2004 presidential elections and Orange Revolution brought Yushchenko together with Yulia Tymoshenko in an uneasy alliance that failed to last until the end of his first year in office. After being elected President Yushchenko has wavered between supporting orange or grand coalitions.

The orange coalition won a slim majority of 228 (out of 450) deputies in the 2007 pre-term elections. But, with such a slim majority every vote counted. Tymoshenko was only confirmed by parliament in a second vote on December 18, 2007. Since becoming prime minister the Tymoshenko government has been beset by a Party of Regions organised parliamentary blockade, vitriolic antagonism from the president and his secretariat and an orange coalition that has failed to act as one voice.

Although the Tymoshenko bloc won twice as many votes as the presidents Our Ukraine (31 to 14%) it agreed to abide by its election promise of granting half of cabinet posts to Our Ukraine. The president demanded the Interior and Justice Ministers which do not constitutionally come under his prerogative. The president

has the constitutional prerogative to appoint the Defence and Foreign Ministers, Prosecutor-General, Security Service chairman and National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) secretary.

An immediate aspect of the president's indecisiveness was to establish a competing grand coalition outside parliament in the NSDC, a grand coalition government in the waiting. Four days after Tymoshenko's confirmation the Party of Regions faction leader was appointed NSDC secretary. Since then other senior Party of Regions officials have been brought into the NSDC.

The Tymoshenko government promised change, battling corruption and greater transparency. Of Ukraine's three largest political forces the BYuT is the only one not in favour of the status quo. President Yushchenko, for example, continually supports the status quo. The government's priorities are transparent privatisations, reducing corruption in the energy sector, democratic reforms and repayment of Soviet era savings lost in Oschadbank.

Opposition to the government has come from within and without. The Party of Regions sought to launch a counter revolution by organising an unpopular parliamentary boycott. They also used the drive to join NATO ahead of NATO's Bucharest summit to organise protests. The protests and blockade backfired on the party's and Yanukovich's ratings as voters are concerned with 'bread and butter' issues, not with NATO or the status of the Russian language.

A second counter revolution was launched by the president and his aggressive chief of staff, Viktor Baloha. In February 2008 an attempt was made to reformat the

coalition by Our Ukraine withdrawing its support but no majority of deputies failed agreed to vote in support of the counter revolution. 10 Our Ukraine deputies did resign to establish a new United Centre pro-Yushchenko party but they claimed that they remained members of the orange coalition. The government's policies, including in the field of privatisation, have been blocked to prevent funds entering the budget that could be used to continue the repayment of future tranches of lost Soviet era savings. The president has refused to allow the government to replace the heads of the State Property Fund, Anti-Monopoly Committee and the State Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting.

In the first 100 days of the Tymoshenko government a staggering 880 demands were made by the president and his secretariat, most of which were unconstitutional, towards the government. In comparison, only 260 demands were made to the Yanukovych government.

The president and his chief of staff are seemingly unaware or ignore the new 2006 constitution that removed the government from under the president. The government is now responsible to a parliamentary coalition. It is unclear how a senior clerk, such as Baloha, who is head of what the president calls his 'technical service' has the moral right and audacity to make such brazen and aggressive attacks on the government.

The attacks did disservice to the president as they continued to damage his ratings while increasing those of the prime minister. The resultant image is that of a

government that is trying to introduce popular policies but is thwarted from doing so by the president.

President Yushchenko is increasingly under the control and influence of his chief of staff, Baloha. Seemingly Yushchenko is wrongly convinced that Baloha's aggressive style is good in placing the president at the centre of Ukrainian politics. Baloha has also convinced the president that he alone can guarantee Yushchenko a second term. Baloha has successfully blocked access to the president from his long-term supporters, many of whom, such as Oleh Rybachuk, have been removed as presidential advisers.

In reality, Baloha is disastrous for the president's popularity and for his chances of winning a second term. BYuT and Tymoshenko have increased their popularity since the 2007 elections while Yushchenko and Our Ukraine, and the Party of Regions and Yanukovich, have declined in popularity. Yushchenko and Our Ukraine have ratings of 12-8%. BYuT would win any pre-term election and Tymoshenko is slated to win the presidential elections.

Another area of disagreement are further constitutional reforms. The presidents attempt at returning Ukraine to a more presidential constitution are unlikely to receive parliamentary support from the two largest factions, BYuT and the Party of Regions.

Tymoshenko's support for constitutional reforms towards a parliamentary model are a product of the conflict between the executive and government. The president has in effect become an obstacle to Ukraine's further reforms. The presidents

unwillingness to abide by the 2006 constitution's limitations of his powers has discredited the reforms as chaotic.

Parliamentarism is popular among Ukraine's business and political elites as it gives them greater freedom. Ukraine's 'grown up elites' do not wish to return to the Kuchma era when the president manipulated and played them off against each other.

Ukraine's historic political culture is more suited to parliamentarism just as Russia's culture is more suited to a strong Tsar. Ukraine's regional diversity is better represented by parliamentarism. In a presidential system one side always wins, whether eastern Ukraine and Kuchma in 1994 or western Ukraine and Yushchenko in 2004, and one side is therefore left disgruntled at being marginalised. Presidential elections have always been the source of inter-regional instability, whether in 1994 or in 2004, that have nearly led to the breakdown of the country.

Parliamentarism would take Ukraine towards Europe and away from Eurasia. Since the late 1990s the 27 post-communist states have split into two groups, with those in central-eastern Europe adopting parliamentary and those in Eurasia presidential systems. Parliamentarism assisted central-eastern Europe in its democratisation and eventual integration into NATO and the EU. In moving towards parliamentarism Ukraine moves away from Russia and the Soviet past and towards a European future.

The president's counter-revolution has failed in two important areas. First, his attempt at constitutional blitzkrieg. Second, the new presidential party of power

(United Centre) will prove to be as disappointing as earlier attempts at creating parties of power. Ukraine's regional diversity, democratic system and unpopular president all mitigate against the success of a party of power. Russia has greater regional coherence, an autocratic system and popular leader who heads the Unified Russia party.

Both the Party of Regions and Our Ukraine have declined in popularity since last years elections. The Party of Regions suffers from a compromised leader (who could not win a presidential election), weak intellectual resources, a disconnect between voters concerned with 'bread and butter' issues and party elites who wish to focus on exotic issues, such as NATO, poor strategy (such as the parliamentary boycott) and an inability to establish an effective shadow cabinet.

Ukraine's internal political crises negatively influence its foreign and security policy. In the next two years Ukraine could break through to the West by building on its WTO membership through a Deep Free Trade Agreement and Enhanced Agreement with the EU and a Membership Action Plan with NATO. The CIS is no longer seen as an alternative to Western integration even by the so-called 'pro-Russian' Party of Regions. Besides domestic elite divisions, the passivity of the EU remains an external obstacle.

The energy sector is a case in point where a unified elite could easily face down Russian threats and demands. Based on gas price increases since the Orange Revolution Ukraine will be paying 'market prices' by 2010 and the ability of Russia to use energy blackmail will be therefore reduced. Ukraine's leverage in its energy

negotiations includes WTO membership (when Russia's membership is still far away), pipelines that continue to transport 80% of Russian gas and gas storage facilities that Gazprom needs.