



Friday, December 17 -- Volume 1, Issue 149

YUSHCHENKO VICTORY TO SPEED UP UKRAINE'S DEMOCRATIZATION AND EUROPEANIZATION

Taras Kuzio

Ukraine is undergoing radical change in anticipation of a Yushchenko victory in the repeat presidential runoff on December 26. Challenger Viktor Yushchenko will have eight months to undertake sweeping and radical reforms before his powers are reduced when constitutional reforms go into effect in September 2005. Planned policies include launching criminal charges for election fraud and completing the investigation into the murder of opposition journalist Heorhiy Gongadze.

Such moves will be important for two reasons. First, they will demonstrate that the rule of law is now sacrosanct in Ukraine; no one will be above the law. Second, they will placate the "Orange Revolution," whose younger members are closer in spirit to the radical right populist Yulia Tymoshenko, whose parliamentary faction cast the only negative votes against this month's compromise constitutional reform package.

Youth groups, such as the radical PORA! (It's Time!), believe Yushchenko should have pressed his Orange Revolution advantage further. Tymoshenko's popularity has grown in recent weeks, and her bloc should secure a larger portion of the vote in 2006.

Cadre changes will be key in the early phase of a Yushchenko presidency. Expect the Interior Minister Mykola Bilokin to be removed and possibly indicted. Yushchenko campaign manager Oleksandr Zinchenko described him as a "bandit" (razom.org.ua, December 15). The entire Interior Ministry will require an extensive house cleaning.

Other cadre changes will take place in the military and state administration. Discredited Defense Minister Oleksandr Kuzmuk cannot be expected to stay on, and the Yushchenko camp did not welcome Svyatoslav Piskun's reappointment as prosecutor. Regional governors who used state resources to campaign for Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych can also expect to lose their jobs.

The presidential administration has been in crisis since the November 21 runoff. Yushchenko supporters have blockaded both the Cabinet of Ministers building and the

presidential administration building. Viktor Medvedchuk resigned as head of the presidential office in order to concentrate on the Social Democratic United Party. Meanwhile, deputy presidential administration chief head Vasyl Baziv has declared that he and his staff now support Yushchenko (*Financial Times*, December 13). Both obviously fear criminal charges for election fraud.

Ukraine's media fundamentally changed after television censorship collapsed in late November. With Medvedchuk gone, the president's office no longer issues *temnyky* (secret instructions on censorship). Pro-Yushchenko Channel Five is now the third most popular channel after Inter (the only channel still controlled by Medvedchuk) and 1+1 (Interfax-Ukraine, December 7).

Ukraine's centrist political spectrum is re-forming and new alignments negotiated. Yushchenko should be able to muster a parliamentary majority of upwards of 260-270, far higher and more stable than the parliamentary majority created by President Leonid Kuchma's camp after the 2002 elections. This new majority will include Yushchenko's Our Ukraine, the Tymoshenko bloc, and the Socialist Party (SPU). Another 100 or so deputies will defect from the pro-Kuchma camp. Parliamentary speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn's Agrarians have indirectly supported Yushchenko throughout most of this year.

Serhiy Tyhipko, former head of Yanukovich's election campaign, saw his Labor Ukraine faction implode. The Dnipropetrovsk clan, Kuchma's home base, has no representation in parliament for the first time since the mid 1990s. Its deputies will migrate to Yushchenko. Former Labor Ukraine oligarch Andrei Derkach supported Yushchenko in the elections by providing him with access to his ERA television and radio channels. The People's Democratic Party (NDP) also collapsed when its leaders supported Yanukovich against the wishes of the rank-and-file.

Yushchenko's parliament will have a new opposition that includes the Communist Party (KPU), Medvedchuk's SDPUo, and Yanukovich's Regions of Ukraine. Besides being in opposition to Yushchenko, the opposition will be pro-Russian. This new opposition currently has 140-150 deputies, but the figure is likely to decline further.

Volodymyr Satiuk, former deputy head of the Security Service and an SDPUo loyalist, is also anticipated to lose his job. Yushchenko likely ingested dioxin during a meal at Satiuk's country residence on the evening of September 5. Satiuk would have only undertaken such an operation with authorization from political higher ups, such as Medvedchuk. Neither Medvedchuk nor Satiuk have parliamentary immunity and are therefore easy targets for a criminal case.

Without Medvedchuk, the SDPUo will no longer be a viable political force. Its extensive party infrastructure will crumble, as it would no longer be able to steal from the state budget or extort businessmen. Russian businessman Konstantyn Grigoryshyn has already threatened to take back many of his assets that he claims were stolen by Medvedchuk and his allies (*Ukrayinska pravda*, December 13-14).

A Yushchenko victory on December 26 will permanently change Ukraine's political landscape. Instead of Yanukovich's consolidated autocracy and Russian-style managed democracy, Ukraine is set to move decidedly ahead in democratization ahead of the 2006 elections, the first election to be held in Ukraine with a fully proportional law.