

TWENTY-SIX CANDIDATES COMPETE TO BE UKRAINE'S NEXT PRESIDENT, FOUR OF THEM SERIOUSLY

By Taras Kuzio

Candidate registration for the October 31 Ukrainian presidential election officially closed on August 6. Next, all candidates must collect 500,000 signatures by September 20 (Ukrayinska pravda, August 5).

The number of candidates has steadily grown with each presidential election: six in 1991, seven in 1994, thirteen in 1999, and double that number in 2004 (Ukrayinska pravda, July 28). However, this trend is not a reflection of democratic progress under President Leonid Kuchma.

Of the 26 candidates, only four have stable levels of support. These include reformer Viktor Yushchenko, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, Communist Party leader Petro Symonenko, and Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz. The remaining 22 are considered second-tier candidates. Some of these seek publicity, while others aim to publicize their political parties ahead of the March 2006 parliamentary elections.

From an ideological viewpoint, the 26 candidates can be divided into three groups. Reformers include Yushchenko, Anatoliiy Kinakh (Union/Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs), Mykhailo Brodskyi (Yabluko), Oleksandr Omelchenko (Unity), and Yanukovich.

Next are nationalists linked to the pro-Kuchma camp. These include Roman Kozak (OUN in Ukraine), Andriy Chornovil (formerly OUN in Ukraine), Dmytro Korchytsky (Brotherhood), and Bohdan Boyko (Rukh for Unity). The close ties between these groups and the pro-Kuchma camp can be illustrated by Chornovil, who is a member of the Social Democratic United Party's Social Justice faction in the Lviv oblast council.

On the left are Symonenko, Moroz, Oleksandr Bazyliuk (Slavic Party), Oleksandr Yakovenko (Communist Party of Workers and Peasants [KPRS]), and Natalia Vitrenko (Progressive Socialist Party).

Twelve candidates either represent completely marginal forces or are self-declared: Oleksandr Rzavskyi (United Family), Mykola Rohozhynskyi, Mykola Hrabar (All-Ukrainian Center for the Defense of Human Rights), Vasyl Volha (Civic Control), Yuriy Zbitnyev (New Force), Leonid Chernovetskyi (Christian-Liberal Party), Hryhoriy Chernysh (Party of the Rehabilitation of the Ukrainian People), Ihor Dushyn (Liberal Democratic Party), Vladyslav Kryvobokov (Party of Social Defense), Vitaliy Konovov (Green Party), Vitaliy Nechyporuk (People's Power-Democratic Initiatives parliamentary faction), and Serhiy Komisarenko (a former ambassador to Britain).

Many of the 26 were put forward indirectly by the authorities so that the candidate's supporters can fill quotas as election commissioners, posts that are vital when counting and recording the results. These second-tier candidates

are also useful for smear campaigns against the opposition. Pro-Kuchma nationalists such as Korchytsky, head of Brotherhood, declared that his main enemy in the campaign would be Yushchenko (tennik.com.ua, July 20).

Some candidates from the opposition camp want to ensure that the elections are as free and fair as is possible. These candidates include Komisarenko (Yulia Tymoshenko bloc), Brodsky, Hrabar, and Chernovetskyi.

Eight out of the 26 registered candidates are from parties that are indirectly linked to the authorities. Their supporters could work against the opposition inside election commissions. Four are from nationalist groups linked to the Kuchma camp: OUN in Ukraine, Brotherhood, and Rukh for Unity. The Greens were taken over by oligarchs between 1995 and 1998, while Nechyporuk is a member of the pro-presidential parliamentary group. Another two lead extreme left-wing parties that have traditionally been associated with the authorities: the Progressive Socialists and the KPRS.

Considering these alliances, nearly one-third of the candidates should be treated with suspicion. Vitrenko, for example, is one of the most disliked politicians in Ukraine, which makes her election impossible. A poll by the Institute of Social Research found that 57% of voters would never choose her (Ukrayinska pravda, June 30).

The election programs of the leading four candidates can be divided along left (Symonenko-Moroz) and center-right (Yushchenko-Yanukovych) orientations. At the same time, this division is blurred and may be confusing to voters. Popular opinion of all four candidates will be based on support for -- or opposition to -- the authorities. As oligarch Viktor Pinchuk admitted, the elections will be decided not by a competition of platforms, but by whom voters trust the most (Zerkalo nedeli, July 17-23).

Supporters of the authorities will most likely choose Yanukovych. But, two factors explain why his program will play little role in this. First, the centrist camp is ideologically amorphous. Of these centrist parties the most amorphous is Yanukovych's own Party of Regions, which has never seen the ideological need to invest in a party newspaper, something it could easily finance. Second, Yanukovych's first campaign speech at the Party of Regions congress and his election manifesto offer all things to all people.

Yanukovych's lengthy manifesto includes a huge array of promises that no politician could ever possibly keep. At the same time, the manifesto glides over democratization, and Yanukovych's election rally in Zaporizhzhia ignored this issue entirely. The Yanukovych platform also contains little mention of fighting corruption. At one point the manifesto merely calls for, "Reviving high morals and patriotism. In state service honest professionals will be employed" (Ukrayinska pravda, July 12). These omissions may be deliberate; should voters consider how well the authorities have fulfilled pledges made since Kuchma first came to power in 1994, their trust in the authorities will likely dwindle.

Yushchenko's platform stays clear of divisive issues such as language. Instead, he offers "Ten Steps for the People" (yuschenko.com.ua, July 9). These Steps include creating 5 million new jobs, emphasis on social spending, increasing

budgetary revenues, and lower taxes. Step 4 is entirely devoted to "Battling Corruption Decisively," while other steps advocate creating safe living conditions, protecting families, promoting spirituality, reviving the countryside, and raising the combat capabilities of the military.

Both Yanukovych and Yushchenko ignore the key issue of integration into the EU or NATO. Yushchenko claims his foreign policy (Step 10) will be "honest, transparent, consistent, and profitable." There is no mention of NATO, the United States, the European Union, or the CIS Single Economic Space. He does mention relations with Russia, which are promised to be, "mutually beneficial, friendly, and stable."

Moroz's election manifesto is still shorter than Yushchenko's. Predictably, both election programs are surprisingly similar. A Razumkov Center poll of Ukraine's leading experts rated Moroz and Yushchenko highest for their integrity and support for democratic and "European" values (Zerkalo nedeli, July 3-9).

Moroz, unlike Yushchenko, does not believe Ukraine will ever join the EU (Ukrayinska pravda, July 22). In this respect, he is similar to the Kuchma camp, which has backtracked from Euro-Atlantic integration (kuchma.gov.ua, July 15).

Moroz and Yushchenko both focus on improving the socio-economic situation, battling corruption and the oligarchs, and improving democratization. Moroz's program ends with the promise to build a, "strong, democratic, sovereign state. This is how I see democratic socialism and Ukraine's European choice" (Ukrayinska pravda, July 21).

Symonenko's program stands apart from the other three in being traditionally hard-line communist. A Razumkov Center poll found that experts distrusted Symonenko over democratization issues and he ranked lower than Moroz and Yushchenko on integrity (Zerkalo nedeli, July 3-9). Symonenko's program supports changing Ukraine's state symbols and raising Russian to a second state language, two traditional policies found on the extreme left.

Symonenko dropped his 1999 plank calling for Ukraine to join the Belarusian-Russian union. But he does support Ukraine's involvement in the CIS Single Economic Space to an extent greater than the Kuchma camp (Ukrayinska pravda, July 12).

Unlike the 1994 and, to a lesser extent the 1999 elections, foreign policy is marginal in this year's elections. The low priority attached to foreign policy issues in the four leading candidate's programs reflects the primacy of domestic issues in the election. Specifically, What kind of Ukraine will the next president build?