

END NOTE

ELECTION REVEALS UKRAINE'S GEOGRAPHIC POLITICAL DIVISIONS

By Taras Kuzio

Independent Ukraine's third parliamentary elections on 31 March marked an important milestone in the confirmation of Ukrainian statehood. The two main competitors -- For a United Ukraine (ZYU) and Our Ukraine (NU) -- both campaigned strongly on statist platforms. The ZYU pushed -- in ZYU head Volodymyr Lytvyn's words -- a "healthy patriotic" line. Nevertheless, the elections showed that west-central Ukraine voted for "Estonian-style" radical reform and a pro-Western orientation, while southern and eastern Ukraine voted along "Belarusian" lines for either a return to the communist past or for oligarchs who favor an authoritarian-corporatist state.

The poor result for the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU), which promotes a union with Belarus and Russia, coupled with the good election result by the pro-statehood Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU), confirms that Ukraine's independent statehood is no longer the central issue. The combined leftist vote declined from 40 to 30 percent. Even in separate elections to the Supreme Soviet of the Crimean Autonomous Republic, the Leonid Grach's communist bloc only gained 28 of 100 seats, losing control of the regional parliament to the pro-presidential Serhiy Kunitsyn bloc.

The KPU only made the top three in one western Ukrainian oblast, Chernivtsi, and was eclipsed by the SPU in many central Ukrainian oblasts. The KPU finished first only in eastern and southern oblasts, with the exception of Donetsk, and showed its highest support in Luhansk Oblast (39.69 percent) and the Crimean Autonomous Republic (33.95 percent). These results confirm a pattern of the left being unpopular in the west, the SPU dominating the leftist vote in the Ukrainophone center, and the KPU in the Russophone east and south.

Voters turned their backs on the two Russian nationalist blocs (the Russian Bloc and the Union of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia bloc) that advocated Ukraine's membership into the Russia-Belarus Union, Russian as a second state language, and Russians constitutionally defined as a second titular nation -- as those blocs obtained a combined 1.16 percent. Even in the Crimea, Our Ukraine finished third, as compared to the Russian Bloc's fifth-place finish on proportional party lists to the national elections. Only in the city of Sevastopol did the Russian Bloc manage a third-place showing, behind the KPU and ZYU, while achieving its highest support in Ukraine with 8.86 percent of the vote.

Voter turnout was lowest in the Crimea, Sevastopol, and Odesa Oblast, which hurt ZYU and the KPU, and in the city of Kyiv, which

hurt Our Ukraine. The highest turnouts were in areas sympathetic to reformers and the antipresidential opposition. Voter turnout was highest in Ternopil Oblast, where 82.1 percent voted, compared to only 65-67 percent in the Donbas. This is a reflection of lower civic activism in eastern Ukraine.

The division of the country is less a threat to Ukrainian statehood than a product of less-developed civic culture in eastern Ukraine and competition over different visions of what will be built in Ukraine -- a Western-style democracy and market economy (Our Ukraine's preference); a corporatist-authoritarian state with clientalistic relations between the state and economic and political actors (ZYU's preference); or perhaps a compromise between that proposed by ZYU and NU.

The ZYU only fared well in eastern and southern Ukraine with an 11.81 percent national average. Yet it failed to enter into the top three places in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts and the Crimea. Its worst result was in the three Galician oblasts, where it only managed a paltry 1.8-3.4 percent compared to its best performance in Donetsk Oblast, where it obtained 36.80 percent. Other regions where ZYU obtained better-than-average results were in the Kirovohrad, Odesa, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, and Kharkiv oblasts. ZYU's landslide victory in the Donbas was only achieved because of the worst-recorded election violations in Ukraine in the three parliamentary elections since 1994.

Our Ukraine came in first in 14 western, central, and northern Ukrainian oblasts and in the city of Kyiv, and had a countrywide average of 23.56 percent. NU also did surprisingly well in the Poltava, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson oblasts as well as the Crimea. But was this a victory for Our Ukraine? In the December 1991 presidential elections, the three national democratic candidates won a combined 30 percent. In the 1998 parliamentary elections, the national democratic Rukh, Reforms and Order, Forward Ukraine!, and the Republican Christians won a combined 14.8 percent. Our Ukraine's 2002 result lies between the high 1991 and low 1998 election results for national democrats.

The Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc built on the National Front bloc's poor showing of 2.72 percent in the 1998 elections and achieved impressive results in western, and less so in central, Ukraine, where it placed second or third, usually following Our Ukraine. In Kyiv, the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc attracted a large protest vote and finished second with 12.83 percent. Tymoshenko's own party, Fatherland, a member of her bloc, grew out of the now-defunct Hromada party created by former Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko, who has been in custody in the United States since 1999. This legacy proved less useful as ZYU took back control of Hromada's former home base, Dnipropetrovsk.

The Social Democratic Party of Ukraine-united's (SDPU-o) 6.25 percent nationwide tally, a 2.24 percent improvement over 1998, can be considered a poor showing when one considers the party's access to financial resources and control of media outlets. The party's control of two of Ukraine's main television stations was often utilized to smear SDPU-o opponents, particularly Our Ukraine, and this negative reputation may have cost the SDPU votes. The SDPU-o was the

worst-faring of the six parties and blocs that made it past the 4 percent hurdle for parliamentary representation, finishing lower than even the SPU and Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc, neither of which controls a major media outlet.

In west-central Ukraine, the SDPU-o only reached the top three in Transcarpathia Oblast, a stronghold of the party. Its main successes could be found in usually finishing third after ZYU and the KPU in Ukraine's east and south. Squeezed out of western and central Ukraine, the SDPU-o has de facto become an eastern Ukrainian party. A second factor working in this favor is the SDPU-o's control of the Russian-language Inter television channel, which boasts its primary viewership in eastern Ukraine. This also explains the SDPU-o's advocacy of Russian as an official language alongside Ukrainian.

The only serious competition in the remaining half of the seats elected through majority voting in 225 districts was between Our Ukraine and ZYU. In this voting the KPU, SPU, Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc, and the SDPU-o all did poorly. The victory of NU and ZYU in majoritarian voting in west-central and eastern and southern Ukraine, respectively, reflected the same regional distribution of voting in the seats elected on proportional party lists. NU took six out 12 Kyiv seats and ZYU swept the Donbas. In areas where the ZYU wished to camouflage itself and hide its true loyalties from voters its candidates were defined as "self promoted."

Ukraine's 2002 election results point to a country that combines an "Estonia" in the west-center, dominated by reformers (Our Ukraine), nationalists (Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc), and the pro-statehood left (SPU), and a "Belarus" in the east and south dominated by the hard-line, pro-Soviet left (KPU), and oligarchs and authoritarian corporatist statist (SDPU-o and ZYU). To be elected in 2004, Ukraine's next president will have to bridge Ukraine's "Estonian" and "Belarusian" regions.

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