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THE FUTURE OF THE ORANGE COALITION WILL BE DECIDED IN MAY

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Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's April 14 speech to the Parliamentary Council of Europe (PACE), where she outlined her support for constitutional reforms that would transform Ukraine into a parliamentary republic modeled on Germany, is both a sign of the growing frustration inside the orange coalition and a warning shot at President Viktor Yushchenko.

The month of May will see mayoral elections in Kyiv and Kharkiv that the BYuT is likely to win. In Kharkiv and Kyiv the Party of Regions and pro-Yushchenko mayors respectively were removed from power on charges of corruption.

Relations between Tymoshenko and Yushchenko have never been good, and their alliance has always been a matter of convenience rather than one of ideology. Yushchenko was the archetypal establishment official, who faithfully served President Leonid Kuchma for seven of his 10 years in office. Tymoshenko was the self-made businesswoman outsider who was brought into Yushchenko's 2000-2001 government to deal with energy.

Yushchenko and Tymoshenko's ideological outlook have always differed radically regarding how the system that emerged in Ukraine under Kuchma should be dealt with. Yushchenko refused to blame the head of state (Kuchma), but focused all his blame on pro-Kuchma hardliners in Viktor Medvedchuk's Social Democratic United Party (SDPUo). Medvedchuk headed the presidential administration in Kuchma's last three years in office (2001-2004). Tymoshenko refused to acknowledge Yushchenko's "good tsar, bad boyars" theory but focused her criticism on both the tsar and the boyars, calling for Kuchma's impeachment in the Kuchmagate crisis and trial after he left office.

A second factor that has remained constant has been Yushchenko's indecisiveness. After his government was removed in April 2001 by a presidential-instigated no confidence vote, his newly created Our Ukraine bloc negotiated with pro-Kuchma centrist parties for a coalition. The two conditions were Yushchenko's return as prime minister, based on Our Ukraine having come in first in the 2002 elections, and the exclusion of the SDPUo from the coalition. These conditions were rejected and Our Ukraine had an uneasy relationship with the radical opposition BYuT. The

Yushchenko-Tymoshenko alliance came together in the 2004 elections and Orange Revolution.

In the Yushchenko era the president has not been able to decide whether to work for an orange or a grand coalition, while being unable to work with either Tymoshenko (January to September 2005 and since December 2007) or the Party of Regions leader Viktor Yanukovich (August 2006-April 2007) as prime minister.

The president's legendary indecisiveness has been made doubly worse by presidential secretariat head Viktor Baloha, who replaced two earlier heads, Oleksandr Zinchenko (2005) and Oleh Rybachuk (2005-2006). Zinchenko was head of the 2004 Yushchenko campaign and Rybachuk is an old banking associate of Yushchenko's. Both were removed as presidential advisers in March-April as part of Baloha's growing control over Yushchenko.

Yushchenko and, in particular, Baloha have developed a double strategy against Tymoshenko that has backfired and led to the May showdown.

First, beginning four days after Tymoshenko's ratification as prime minister by parliament on December 18, 2007, the National Security and Defense Council (NRBO) was being transformed into a "grand coalition in waiting." The NRBO is headed by Party of Regions faction leader Raisa Bohatiorova with two deputies from the Kuchma camp, Stepan Havrysh, and the Party of Regions, Kostyantyn Hryshchenko.

Second, vitriolic attacks and unconstitutional demands were made daily by the president and his chief-of-staff. In Tymoshenko's first 100 days in office, there were more than 800 such demands, three times more than those given to the Yanukovich government. At a March 26 meeting of governors in the Crimea, Baloha distributed a brochure heavily criticizing Tymoshenko.

The attacks and demands were ignored until the second week of April, as they brought Tymoshenko popularity giving her an image of a government leader trying to do something positive for the average Ukrainian but being blocked by the president. The approval ratings of Yushchenko and Our Ukraine-Peoples Self Defense (NUNS) collapsed to 12 percent and 8 percent, respectively, while Tymoshenko and the BYuT took the lead with 30 percent support. An internal presidential poll leaked to Jamestown gave Tymoshenko 42 percent, Yanukovich 23 percent and Yushchenko 12 percent.

Senior Party of Regions official Dmytro Tabachnyk publicly admitted that with such ratings Tymoshenko would be easily elected president. Any fresh pre-term elections would also see only the BYuT gaining support. The Party of Regions has declared that it has no intention of seeking the government's removal and has finally established Ukraine's first shadow opposition cabinet (www.okm.com.ua).

After another blistering presidential attack on the government, the BYuT parliamentary faction issued on April 16 its first counter-attack accusing the president of undertaking "anti-Ukrainian activities." Yushchenko was accused of protecting

corrupt interests and of blocking all of the government's policies, including privatization.

The BYuT and the Party of Regions have a constitutional majority of 331 deputies, who could initiate constitutional reforms inside parliament that would bypass the president's National Constitutional Council established on December 27, 2007. The Party of Regions would support such reforms out of fear that Tymoshenko could be elected president in January 2010 (constitutional reforms in 2003-2004 were initiated out of fear of a Yushchenko election victory).

The Lytvyn bloc and Communist Party, with an additional 47 deputies, would support constitutional reforms toward a parliamentary republic on ideological grounds. Even from among NUNS's 72 deputies, 18 from Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko's People's Self Defense group have given their backing to Tymoshenko's constitutional reforms. In 2006 Lutsenko defected from the Socialist Party, which is a strong supporter of a parliamentary republic.

Tymoshenko's continued support for constitutional reform is conditional on a radical change in Yushchenko's relationship with her. The first demand will be the removal of Baloha who is widely seen as a source of instability in the orange coalition and a block on the government's reforms and anti-corruption policies. A day after the BYuT's sharp attacks, Yushchenko publicly described his secretariat as merely a "technical apparatus." The second demand would be to end what Tymoshenko calls the "chaos" of the 2006 constitution, which failed to divide responsibilities between the executive, parliament and the government.

In May Yushchenko will be faced with choosing one of two options put to him by Tymoshenko: Either to continue with the current policies and face defeat to his constitutional reforms in parliament and his own campaign in the presidential elections; or repair the orange coalition, recognize Tymoshenko and the BYuT as the senior partner and be re-elected for a second term (www.pravda.com.ua, April 1-23; www.gart.org.ua, www.byut.com.ua, April 16; www.nuns.com.ua, April 22).