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Ukraine after the March 2006 Parliamentary Elections: Quo Vadis?

Introduction

Located in Eastern Europe on the Black Sea, bordered by Poland, Romania, and Moldova in the west and Russia in the east, Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe by territory (603,700 sq. km) and has a population of about 47 million people.¹ Although it is economically important for the transit of Russian oil and gas to the West, Ukraine has, nevertheless, long been neglected.

In October-December 2004,² the falsified results of the presidential elections in Ukraine set off the “Orange Revolution”, a series of mass protests throughout the country, as a result of which Viktor Yushchenko became the new president, and a new Western-oriented government was formed. The elections and post-election events have re-ignited international interest in Ukraine. These elections were characterized by considerable involvement on the part of Russia and of Western actors (and the USA in particular). Russia intervened in the affairs of Ukraine by making a number of unilateral economic concessions and by providing political support and legitimation to “its” candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, for instance, by sending influential politicians to Ukraine. Russia’s President Vladimir Putin himself visited the country twice on the eve of the elections. The West was also heavily involved – both financially and politically. The administration of US President George W. Bush purportedly spent 65 million US dollars³ in supporting the pro-Western candidate, Viktor Yushchenko. Various politicians and American and European NGOs also provided the Orange Revolution with material and moral support, calling on Ukrainians to contest the election results and the legitimacy of the existing regime. The election was presented domestically and internationally not only as a choice between a fraudulent and corrupt government and the promise of democratic and liberal development, but also as a vital choice between Russia and the West.

1 Cf. The 56 OSCE Participating States – Facts and Figures, in this volume, pp. 439-455, here: p. 454.

2 The first round of presidential elections took place on 31 October 2004, the second round on 21 November; they both were fraudulent, and finally, on 26 December, a re-run of the second round took place, which was seen as a “breakthrough”. For more details on the course of the elections and their assessments see OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Ukraine, Presidential Election, 31 October, 21 November and 26 December 2004, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report*, Warsaw, 11 May 2005, ODIHR.GAL/33/05, at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr>.

3 Cf. Jean-Marie Chauvier, Orange Revolution, Origins and Outcome. Ukraine: a New Cold War, in: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 2005.

In the end, the leaders of the Orange Revolution – Yushchenko’s “Our Ukraine” bloc, Yulia Tymoshenko’s All-Ukrainian Union *Batkivshchyna* (“Fatherland”), and Oleksandr Moroz’ Socialist Party – declared their intention to strengthen democracy and economic liberalism and to integrate Ukraine into the EU and NATO. It seemed as a result that the period typified by the corrupt regime of President Leonid Kuchma (1994-2004) and the ambivalent games it played with both Russia and the Euro-Atlantic institutions would come to an end.

Since then, Ukraine has remained the focus of unremitting attention, as all developments in Ukraine in the aftermath of the election have been measured – both domestically and internationally – against the promises of the Orange Revolution. The parliamentary elections on 26 March 2006 were also followed closely. The “blue” Party of Regions, headed by Yushchenko’s opponent Yanukovich, which emphasizes close relations with Russia, received the largest number of votes, at 32.14 per cent, and gained 186 seats in parliament. The votes given to the “orange” parties, were distributed in the following way: Tymoshenko’s bloc received 22.29 per cent and 129 seats; 13.95 per cent of votes and 82 parliamentary seats went to Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine bloc; and Oleksandr Moroz’ Socialist Party won 5.69 per cent of the vote and 33 seats. The Communist Party, led by Petro Symonenko, with 3.6 per cent won the fifth largest number of votes and was entitled to 21 parliamentary seats.⁴

However, the significance of these elections goes much deeper than the official numbers indicate. The parliamentary elections were among the most important tests and challenges “post-revolutionary” Ukraine had to face. First of all, these were the first elections after the Orange Revolution, and their organization and conduct were an important test of whether Ukraine was committed to democratic ideals in practice. Second, Ukrainians were giving their verdict on the policies of the new government – the orange coalition. Third, in January 2006, Ukraine changed its “presidential-parliamentary” form of government into a “parliamentary-presidential” one, in accordance with the constitutional reforms passed by Ukraine’s parliament, the *Verkhovna Rada*, in December 2004. While, previously, half the members of parliament were elected on the basis of proportional representation and the other half in single-seat constituencies, as of 2006, all 450 members of the *Verkhovna Rada* were to be elected by proportional representation for five (instead of four) years. In the month following the first session of the *Verkhovna Rada*, the parliament had to form a coalition from the many parties represented that would include the majority of deputies (more than 225). Within two months, this coalition was to form a government, and to take the lead in naming the

4 See official website of the Central Election Committee of Ukraine, at: <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2006/W6P001>; Typology of the Ukrainian Elections, in: RFE/RL, *Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova Report*, vol. 8, No. 13, 4 April 2006.

prime minister, in particular. Without going into details,⁵ it is important to note that this reform has weakened the presidency and given more powers to the *Rada* and the prime minister. In Ukraine, the process of coalition building turned out to be protracted and difficult, and its results have been controversial. Finally, the parliamentary elections were again viewed as a choice between Russia and the West. Although this debate on whether Ukraine should aim to become a part of the West or should rather have a pro-Russian orientation was not as tense and dramatic as during the Orange Revolution, it is important for understanding political events during and after the elections. By considering these issues in the above-indicated sequence, this article will try to explain the situation in Ukraine before and after the parliamentary elections in March 2006.

Parliamentary Elections as the Confirmation of Ukraine's Decision to Pursue Democracy

Biased coverage in state media, misuse of state resources, pressure on certain categories of voters, a lack of will to conduct a genuine democratic election, a higher incidence of various serious violations, a pattern of intimidation, massive corruption and fraud – these were the results of the presidential elections in Ukraine in 2004, which ignited the Orange Revolution.

By comparison, the parliamentary elections in 2006, more than a year later, were recognized by international observers as free and fair, conducted in accordance “with domestic law, OSCE Commitments, Council of Europe commitments and other international standards for democratic elections”.⁶ Not only the official reports of the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) but also the representatives of individual Western states and organizations gave upbeat assessments of these elections. The EU Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, for example, saw them as “further proof of the consolidation of democratic standards in Ukraine since the Orange revolution”.⁷ The US Ambassador to the OSCE, Julie Finley, said: “Ukraine has made an astonishing amount of progress in the past year and should serve as an inspiration to others.”⁸ The com-

5 For more details see: Ukraina stala parlamentsko-prezidentskoy respublikoy [Ukraine has become a parliamentary-presidential republic], in: *Podrobnosti*, 1 January 2006, at: <http://www.podrobnosti.ua/power/rest/2006/01/01/275197.html>.

6 Cf. European Parliament/Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly/OSCE-ODIHR/NATO Parliamentary Assembly (eds), *International Election Observation Mission, Parliamentary Elections, Ukraine – 26 March 2006, Preliminary Statement*, Kyiv, 27 March 2006, p. 1, at: http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2006/03/18500_en.pdf.

7 Benita Ferrero-Waldner, cited in: The European Commission’s Delegation, Press Releases, News Archive: March 2006, at: http://www.delukr.ec.europa.eu/press_releases.html?y=2006&m=3.

8 Julie Finley, cited in: Jeffrey Thomas, *US Envoy Contrasts Belarus with Flourishing Democracy in Ukraine*, at: <http://usinfo.state.gov/utills/printage.html>.

ments by the official representatives of the Russian Federation were less effusive, but they also recognized the fair and free character of these elections: “Although conducted in an acute struggle and with some violations, [the elections] are to be judged valid. Citizens of Ukraine were able to make their conscious choice.”⁹

The elections demonstrated that the population has become more politically mature, and that the people of Ukraine really did make a “conscious” choice. At approximately 68 per cent,¹⁰ election participation was higher than expected or estimated on the eve of the poll. Only 1.77 per cent of the electorate voted against all candidates.¹¹ The practice of “paper” parties, i.e. parties, created *ad hoc* for the elections by lobby groups, has proved to be unsuccessful. The holding of fair elections has allowed the population to exercise its right to freely express its political preferences.

The fact that the elections were internationally recognized as free and fair was an important achievement for a post-Soviet state. The way they were organized and conducted demonstrated that democratic ideals remained important both for the country’s government and for the population, who participated actively.

The Attitudes Expressed by the Population through the Elections

Although the parliamentary elections have confirmed Ukraine’s general democratic orientation, their results, i.e. the political preferences expressed by the population, have also demonstrated the dissatisfaction and disappointment of the population with the country’s political direction since the Orange Revolution. This was illustrated, first of all by the high number of votes Viktor Yanukovich received. Second, the people gave many more votes to Yulia Tymoshenko’s bloc than to the pro-presidential Our Ukraine. The competition between the policies pursued by Yushchenko and Tymoshenko, as well as their personal animosity, resulted in the dismissal of Tymoshenko from the post of prime minister in September 2005, after which her party openly became Our Ukraine’s political opponent rather than a companion-in-arms. Moreover, the personal rivalry between the president and the former prime minister intensified, and the results of the presidential election were frequently interpreted as a personal victory for Tymoshenko over Yushchenko. While Yushchenko and his party were blamed for all the country’s misfortunes, Yulia, as she is called by the people, was idealized.

9 Russian MFA Information and Press Department, *Commentary Regarding the Elections for the Supreme Rada of Ukraine*, Doc. 477-28-03-2006, at: http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcb3/d3639963c28de884c325713f004629e7?OpenDocument.

10 Data presented by the Central Election Committee, cited in: *Podrobnosti*, 27 March 2006, at: <http://www.podrobnosti.ua/power/elections/2006/03/27/299288.html>.

11 Cf. Central Election Committee of Ukraine, at: <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2006/W6P001>.

The general perception was that she had not had enough time to bring order to the country. Thus, although the orange parties received more votes in total than the official victor, it is nevertheless not possible to say that the elections validated the Orange Revolution. The members of the orange coalition have become political opponents, pursuing different political programmes and personal objectives.

Moreover, the elections reflected the general disappointment of the population with the situation in the country. Economic indicators had deteriorated. While real GDP growth was twelve per cent in 2004, it fell to 2.6 per cent in 2005.¹² Many presidential election campaign promises and, more importantly, many “Maidan”¹³ promises have remained unfulfilled. The most significant achievement following the Orange Revolution was the restoration of press freedom. However, even this turned out to be a challenge for the population and for the politicians, because the press started to carry reports of shady deals, and corruption scandals erupted, in which even the president was implicated. The very things that had been criticized during the Orange Revolution remained commonplace. As a study by the Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies (UCEPS) concludes, the new government has failed to carry out the expected reforms. Changes have been essentially cosmetic and confined to personnel. Even though the government has a new face, the content of its policies remains the same.¹⁴

The results of the parliamentary elections have thus highlighted the weaknesses of the orange coalition. Despite promised changes, the people continue to face the same problems they faced during Leonid Kuchma’s presidency – corruption and fraud. These issues have proved troublesome for the first orange government, and they will represent important challenges for the work of any Ukrainian government.

The Coalition-Building Process

The coalition-building process in Ukraine was difficult and protracted. The newly elected *Verkhovna Rada* was only able to gather for its first session on 25 May. According to the Ukrainian Constitution, the coalition had to be created by 25 June, otherwise the president would have had to dissolve the parliament and call new elections. On 22 June, that is only three days before this important deadline, the creation of the new orange coalition, with the same members as the previous coalition, was announced, after which the coalition

12 Cf. European Commission, DG Trade, Statistics, Ukraine, last updated 5 September 2006, at: http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113459.pdf.

13 *Maidan nezalezhnosti* is the Ukrainian for Independence Square, which was where the orange protests predominantly took place.

14 The results of the first year of the new Ukrainian government are evaluated in socio-economic terms in: *National Security and Defence* 9/2005, on “The New Government’s Economic Policy: First Steps and Their Effects”.

agreement was signed. President Yushchenko declared: “We are forming a new political culture, which will last for centuries.”¹⁵

Rather than lasting for centuries, however, the orange union turned out to be a somewhat ephemeral creature. As early as 11 July, a new “anti-crisis” coalition had been formed by the Party of Regions, the Communist Party, and the Socialist Party, which was seen as a traitor by the two other orange parties. The “anti-crisis” coalition nominated Yanukovych for the position of prime minister.

President Yushchenko faced the difficult choice between the two evils of dismissing the government and calling new parliamentary elections (the option promoted by Yulia Timoshenko) or endorsing the nomination of Viktor Yanukovych as prime minister. In the early hours of 3 August, just two hours after the Constitutional deadline had expired, following long and difficult deliberations and consultations, President Yushchenko announced his decision to endorse Yanukovych as prime minister. Thus, a so-called “coalition of national unity” was formed between Our Ukraine, the Party of Regions, and the Socialist and Communist Parties. A declaration of national unity was signed, which symbolically stated the intention of all signatories to pursue the basic goals and ideals of the Orange Revolution.

This coalition option was ultimately chosen by Yushchenko, because dismissing the parliament would have been a blow not only to his own party, but to the country in general. The long coalition-building process, personal rivalries, and the inability of the orange parties to reconcile their positions have undermined Ukraine’s international image. The dismissal of the parliament would not have solved the problem of political instability in Ukraine, but could have led to new difficulties. For example, it would have been hard to motivate the population to take part in new elections, not to mention the cost. Moreover, Yushchenko’s chances of coming to an agreement with his uncompromising rival, Yulia Timoshenko, were low.

President Yushchenko addressed the Ukrainian people as follows: “[...] I want to once again stress that I understand the whole complexity in the east and the west of Ukraine, regarding this nomination for the post of prime minister. I call on the country to understand that today we have a unique chance to realize all that we talked about, and to bring the country together for a political understanding.”¹⁶ He is also recorded as saying, “I appeal to the Ukrainian parliament to come to a mutual understanding. The controversies that Ukraine is experiencing today were created not by the common

15 Viktor Yushchenko, cited in: Laugh or Cry, in: *Economist*, 14 July 2006, at: <http://www.inosmi.ru/print/228801.html>.

16 Viktor Yushchenko, cited in: Jan Maksymiuk, Ukraine: President Compromises For National Unity, RFE/RL, 3 August 2006, at: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/8/413086c1-70f6-49b7-aadf-d50598e63024.html>.

people but by the parliament, which from now on has the task of resolving them.”¹⁷

On 4 August, Yanukovych's appointment as prime minister was approved by the *Rada*. The appointment of a new prime minister will, on the one hand, provide a temporary respite from the political situation and controversies of the parliamentary elections of March 2006 and Yushchenko and Yanukovych will try to reconcile the supporters of the Orange Revolution and of the opposing pro-Russian political camp.

At the same time, however, the supporters of the Orange Revolution were disappointed by the president's decision, and following the appointment of Yanukovych, black ribbons were hung on trees around the parliament. The feeling has grown that the Orange Revolution has not achieved any results, and the entire struggle was in vain. Another negative consequence could be a further lack of political clarity within the government. The new coalition includes parties with very different orientations, including the liberal and pro-Western Our Ukraine, the pro-Russian and pro-market Party of Regions, as well as Communists and Socialists. This coalition still has to prove that these parties are able to work together and to find compromises on such difficult questions as the role of the state in the Ukrainian economy and re-privatization, and Ukrainian membership of NATO and the EU. The first disagreements and splits within the coalition have already begun. On 17 October, Roman Bezsmertnyy, the official leader of Our Ukraine, announced the party's decision to go into opposition. From the beginning, many of its members did not agree with the appointment of Yanukovych as prime minister or with the general idea of the coalition. It is also unclear to what degree the Communist Party is a part of the coalition, since it signed an incomplete version of the declaration of national unity, abstaining from important points. Many members of the Communist Party did not agree to the new coalition at all. Finally, the two Viktoros have a history of difficult relations. During the Orange Revolution, they were adversaries, representing not only different political programmes, but different values. Thus, it is doubtful whether they will be able to work together effectively.

To sum up, although the period of “no government” has officially come to an end in Ukraine, it is still questionable how functional and effective the new coalition will be. Personal animosities and disagreements have already undermined the work of the first orange government, destroyed the second orange coalition, and, as they are still present in the new national unity coalition, will likely destabilize the work of any coalition or government created. The results of the parliamentary elections have demonstrated the political immaturity of the political elites in Ukraine and the instability of the political situation. The coalition-building process was accompanied by protests from

17 Viktor Yushchenko, cited in: Vladimir Solovyev/Aleksandr Sviridenko, Viktoru Yanukovichu podstavili kreslo [Viktor Yanukovych was given the chair], in: Kommersant, 6 August 2006, at: <http://www.readnews.ru/news/index.php?id=66289> (author's translation).

one party or the other, fights and bickering, mutual insults and accusations, betrayals and haggling. As long as the leaders of the parties concentrate on their own personal ambitions, mutual animosity, and grudges rather than on the development of the country, neither the formation of new coalitions nor new elections can be a remedy for the domestic political instability.

East or West?

Another problem, underlined by the parliamentary elections in 2006, is the on-going division of Ukrainian political opinion between a more Russian and a more Western orientation. Since the Orange Revolution, there has been serious debate about whether Ukraine should develop in the direction of Euro-Atlantic integration or towards closer ties and integration with Russia. This was also evident in political campaigning on the eve of the parliamentary elections. While the representatives of the parties made only ambiguous statements concerning concrete economic steps and political reforms, the geopolitical orientation of Ukraine was a top priority in all discussions.

The division of Ukraine on this issue is regional. The results of the parliamentary elections indicate that Yanukovich's Party of Regions was supported mostly in the eastern regions, while the orange parties received most of their votes in the west and south.¹⁸ Thus, the division of the country – with its eastern parts supporting closer relations with Russia, and its western and southern regions aspiring to Euro-Atlantic integration – remains as relevant as it was during the Orange Revolution.

This regional division has international implications. In June 2006, for example, there were strong protests in the Crimea following the arrival of 200 US Marine reservists to prepare for participation in the NATO exercise "Sea Breeze". Elderly Communists, Ukrainian Russian nationalists, representatives of the Party of Regions, contingents of Cossack units as well as some Russian nationalist politicians and activists sought to "protect" the territory of Ukraine from the "US invasion". While there was nothing new in the exercises, such a vigorous reaction reflects the strong politicization of Ukrainian society. The Supreme Council of the Crimea and some other areas declared the Crimea to be a NATO-free zone. There were, however, grounds for these protests. In February 2006, before the elections, the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine failed to agree on the law approving the president's decision to admit foreign troops participating in multinational military exercises to Ukraine. Despite this, at a meeting of the Council of National Security and Defence of Ukraine in the spring, it was decided to confirm the invitation to Ukraine's partners to send their military forces to participate in the joint military exercises, with the hope that the parliament would soon approve the necessary law. With the *Verkhovna Rada* unable to hold its first session until 25

18 Cf. *ibid.*

May, there was no functioning parliament to adopt the law, and the anti-NATO groups took advantage of this gap.¹⁹ Thus, the failures of the political elites to agree on compromises may have destabilizing effects on the situation in Ukraine.

These internal political clashes and the regional division of Ukraine illustrate that one of the most important questions the country faces is how to develop while negotiating its orientation between East and West. The orange government prioritized integration into the EU and NATO over closer links with Russia. Although Ukraine has not received any practical support or commitments from the EU and NATO to accept it as a member after necessary reforms are implemented, this policy aggravated relations between Russia and Ukraine.

Russia's policies towards Ukraine since the Orange Revolution have been interpreted as retaliation or punishment for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic political course and/or as a way to exert pressure on Ukraine to bring it back into the Russian zone of influence. Many of the problems in Russian-Ukrainian relations that seemed "frozen" have re-ignited with a new intensity. They include Ukraine's participation in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in the Ukrainian city Sevastopol, the demarcation of the Azov Sea and the division of its resources, the delimitation of the borders, and, finally, deliveries and transit of Russian energy, especially gas. In the winter of 2005, Russia decided to raise the price it charged Ukraine for gas from 50 to 230 US dollars per 1,000 cubic metres. In January 2006, after a long and hard-fought debate, Russia briefly cut off gas supplies to Ukraine when the latter refused to pay world market prices for its energy imports from Russia. Although an agreement signed on 2 February 2006 set the price at 95 US dollars for the year 2006, the issue had been resolved only temporarily.²⁰

One of the central messages of the electoral campaign of Viktor Yanukovich was his goal of improving relations with Russia. Among other things, he campaigned for closer relations with Russia, for Ukraine's participation in the Single Economic Space (SES), a Russian-led integration initiative, for making Russian the second official state language, and against Ukraine's membership in NATO in the near future. As the new prime minister, he has already stated that while integration into the EU remains a priority, integration into NATO should be postponed and Ukraine will not adopt the NATO Membership Action Plan, a key step on the way to membership. Moreover, even during the talks with the EU in Brussels in September 2006, Yanuko-

19 For more details see, for example, *Territoriya, svobodnaya ot vlasti?* [Territory free of power?], in: *Zerkalo Nedeli* No. 21, 3-9 June 2006, at: <http://www.zerkalo-nedeli.com/ie/print/53571>.

20 See, for example: Maksymiuk, cited above (Note 16).

vych emphasized that “a special place will be assigned to the restoration of a mutually advantageous good neighbourhood with Russia”.²¹

Although this stance has already been interpreted as a pro-Russian gesture of friendship, the domestic realities in Ukraine should not be forgotten. According to the September 2005 UCEPS surveys on the trajectory of foreign policy, a plurality of 43.1 per cent supported strengthening relations with Russia. The EU was seen as a priority by 27.1 per cent.²² The attitude of Ukrainians towards the US remains cautious: Only two per cent of the population would like to see relations with the US as a priority of foreign policy.²³ Another national poll, conducted by the Democratic Initiatives Fund in January 2006, demonstrated that while 42.6 per cent of Ukrainians support the country’s accession to the EU, 56.8 per cent support membership of the SES.²⁴ Furthermore, only 19.2 per cent of respondents supported Ukraine’s entry into NATO, while 55 per cent were against it.²⁵ Thus, the pro-Russian orientation of the new prime minister has its legitimation in the population.

At the same time, although the appointment of Yanukovich was interpreted as an opportunity to restore positive Russian-Ukrainian relations, the extent to which his government can succeed in that endeavour remains doubtful. The pro-Russian credentials of the Party of Regions can be questioned. It is strongly supported by the Donetsk and Dnepropetrovsk business clans, but they follow their own business interests first and foremost, co-operating not only with Russia, but also with European and US companies. The idea of making Russian the second official language has already been put on the back burner. Finally, despite supporting SES integration in general, Yanukovich has already declared that Ukraine will not participate in one of its basic aspects – the customs union.

Moreover, the Russian government has already demonstrated that despite the pursuit of positive relations between Russia and Ukraine, in some aspects its new policy towards its neighbour will be unchanged. Russian representatives were positive about the appointment of Yanukovich as prime minister. Most importantly for Russia, the parliamentary elections in Ukraine

21 Viktor Yanukovich, cited in: Ukraine will not play “beggar” to EU, new leader says, at: <http://euobserver.com/9/22344/?print=1>.

22 However, this does not mean that Ukrainians are ready to give up their dream of EU membership. Over 65 per cent of the population would like to see Ukraine in the EU, but this goal is perceived as a rather unrealistic one. Cf. Some 40 per cent of Ukrainians against Referendum on NATO Membership, in: *David Johnson’s Russia List* 31/2006. Moreover, the UCEPS polls also indicate that while the EU and Russia consistently dominate Ukrainians’ foreign policy priorities, they are constantly exchanging the position of top priority. In April 2005, for instance, 39.6 per cent of Ukrainians considered relations with the EU the country’s top foreign policy priority, while 34.9 per cent believed relations with Russia were more important. The “emotional component” strongly influences the opinions. Cf. EU Enlargement: Approaches and Assessments, in: *National Security and Defence* 11/2001, p. 40.

23 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 43.

24 Cf. Ukrainian news agency UNIAN, Poll shows Ukrainians favour joining CIS economic bloc ahead of EU, in: *David Johnson’s Russia List* 44/2006.

25 Cf. *ibid.*

in 2006 have indicated “the desire of [the Ukrainian] people to develop and deepen good-neighbourly and partner relations with Russia”.²⁶ Nevertheless, Russia is not ready to change its policy of increasing the price of gas sold to Ukraine. On 24 October 2006, Russia and Ukraine agreed on a new price for Russian gas of 130 US dollars per 1,000 cubic metres, instead of the current 95 US dollars. Despite Yanukovich’s optimism, this agreement was criticized in Ukraine.

While the government is composed of such different groups, whose interests are both in the “West” and in the “East”, it may be reasonable to expect the return of a “multi-vector”²⁷ foreign policy in Ukraine, instead of a strong Euro-Atlantic orientation, with the statements of different politicians reflecting different interests and objectives. Just a few days after Yanukovich’s trip to Brussels, President Yushchenko announced that the prime minister’s comments had been “mistaken” and were not in accordance “with the national interest”.²⁸ Thus, as was mentioned in the previous section, it is questionable whether the two opponents will be able to work together more successfully than Yushchenko and Timoshenko did. The coming months will be characterized by further jousting for power.

In a nutshell, the Ukrainian government continues to face the challenge of reconciling the twin priorities of its foreign policy – getting closer to the goal of Euro-Atlantic integration while maintaining and deepening positive and constructive relations with Russia. The regional division of Ukraine remains relevant and has the potential for further destabilization.

Conclusions

The parliamentary elections in Ukraine in 2006 were a significant event that drew international attention to the country. The fact that they were certified as free and fair was an important achievement after the Orange Revolution. Despite disappointments, the Ukrainian population demonstrated their political maturity and commitment.

26 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Russian MFA Information and Press Department Commentary Regarding the Elections for the Supreme Rada of Ukraine*, Doc. 477-28-03-2006 (unofficial translation from Russian), at: http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcb3/d3639963c28de884c325713f004629e7?OpenDocument.

27 “Multi-vectorism” began during the late stages of Leonid Kravchuk’s (1991-94) presidency, but it became especially conspicuous during the Kuchma period (1994-2004). This Ukrainian policy has negative connotations, because it created a situation in which the ruling elites could use either the Russian or the Euro-Atlantic vector at different times, making Ukraine’s foreign policy look inconsistent, unstable, unpredictable, and opportunistic. For more on multi-vector policy see: Taras Kuzio, *EU and Ukraine: a Turning Point in 2004?* Occasional Paper No. 47, Paris 2003; James Sherr, *The Dual Enlargements and Ukraine*, in: Anatol Lieven/Dmitriy Trenin (eds) *Ambivalent Neighbours. The EU, NATO and the Price of Membership*, Washington D.C. 2003, pp. 126-127.

28 AFP, Pro-Russian PM blows Ukraine off Western course, in: *David Johnson’s Russia List* 210/September 2006.

These achievements, however, were overshadowed by the conduct of the Ukrainian political elites, who were preoccupied with jockeying for position and settling old grudges. Not only was the international image of Ukraine further damaged, especially with a view to its NATO and EU aspirations, but its internal situation, characterized by regional differences and conflicting views on the country's future, was further complicated. In sum, the results of the elections have revealed a political situation that is rather unstable.

Moreover, the elections have reflected the dissatisfaction of the population with the government, with the level of corruption and fraud in the country's institutions, and with the negative impact of Euro-Atlantic integration on relations with Russia. Thus, even though Ukraine has taken some slow steps in the direction of democracy, it is hardly possible to say that the results of the elections have confirmed the "validity" of the Orange Revolution.

It is quite popular in Ukraine to blame Russia for Ukraine's internal failures. For example, Oleksandr Sushko, research director of the independent Institute for Euro-Atlantic Co-operation in Kiev, contends: "The Kremlin is interested in the failure of the Ukrainian model [...] Russia will do whatever it can to end this example of openness, pluralism, and transparent governance on its frontier."²⁹ Nevertheless, the major threat to Ukraine is Ukraine itself.³⁰ Ukraine's progress is *a priori* undermined by its inability to form a functional government with leaders who would concentrate more on the development of the country than on their own rivalries. It is difficult to name the winners of the parliamentary elections, since their personal and political disagreements and their past failures to find compromises and effective working formulas undermine any apparent victories. The new political situation is characterized by the struggle for power between the president and the prime minister as well as by power games between the different parties. Moreover, the new government has been challenged to find effective compromise solutions to key questions of domestic development as well as international orientation.

Finally, it is still unclear how and whether Ukraine will be able to reconcile its aspiration of Euro-Atlantic integration with co-operative relations with Russia. There are signs that the "multi-vector" policy of the Kuchma period is returning; and the Ukrainian president and the new prime minister are already speaking in different voices on key issues.

Thus, Ukraine's parliamentary elections have created many dilemmas. In this article, most of the questions raised have remained unanswered to some degree, because the answers are to be found in the future politics of Ukraine. These dilemmas demonstrate that the political process in Ukraine is not

29 Oleksandr Sushko, cited in: Fred Weir, After Ukrainian vote, Russia aims to limit West's pull, in: *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 April 2006, at: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0404/p04s01-woeu.html>.

30 Cf. Oleksandr Goncharenko, cited in: Sherr, cited above (Note 27), p. 127.

static, but dynamic, and Ukraine, with all its victories, successes, failures, disillusionments, and even crises, is developing – but in which direction? Ukraine, *quo vadis?*