



Focus on Ukraine

March 19 –25, 2012





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I. Overviews of political events of the week

**March
19**

Snap elections of the mayor of the city of Obukhiv were held on March 18. The city's residents elected the pro-government member of the Party of Regions Oleksandr Levchenko (38.6%). His opponents were candidates of the opposition – ByuT and the UDAR party – which together garnered 39.5% of the votes.

While the results of the elections seemed transparent, there are doubts because foreign observers were not allowed into the voting station.

Besides that, deputy of OU-PSD Iryna Herashchenko was thrown out of the voting station by PoR deputy Petro Melnyk. The opposition has already described these elections as a rendition for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

The Higher Special Court for the Review of Civil and Criminal Cases will review the cassation of the defense of ex-premier Yulia Tymoshenko regarding her sentence in the “gas case” on May 15, Tymoshenko's lawyer Oleksandr Plakhotniuk informed.

**March
20**

The Verkhovna Rada supported the report of the ad hoc investigative commission headed by Inna Bohoslovska regarding signs of state treason in the actions of former premier Yulia Tymoshenko during the signing of gas agreements with Russia in January 2009.

Members of parliament approved the corresponding resolution of the VR in which it was noted that on January 17-19, 2009 during the talks and signing of directives for the concluding agreements between Naftogaz Ukrainy and Gazprom, Tymoshenko concealed from the public and the government the debts of her private company to Russia's Ministry of Defense to the tune of US \$405 mn and the fact that she had a criminal case in Russia.

**March
21**

Failure to execute the order of the European Court of Human Rights on treatment of Yulia Tymoshenko in an in-patient hospital may have serious repercussions for Ukraine, the ex-premier's lawyer Serhiy Vlasenko stated. As a reminder, last week the

European court urged Ukraine to render adequate medical assistance to Tymoshenko.

**March
22**

The State Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee (STRBC) appealed to the management of state television companies with a demand to promote the social initiatives of President Viktor Yanukovich.

The STRBC submitted a letter in which it gave an instructive to create and put on the air on March 15, 2012 special programs with the participation of representatives of local bodies of government and experts to explain and discuss the social initiatives of the president. Journalists believe this directive is an obvious manifestation of censorship.



**March
23**

President Viktor Yanukovich appointed Petro Poroshenko Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

The new minister said in this position he will stand up for European values and standards and set as a priority bringing business out of the grey economy, implement a transparent system of state purchases and fight against pressure being put on entrepreneurs.

Nearly 20 members of BYuT met with Prosecutor General Viktor Pshonko and handed to him a letter demanding to close the criminal case against Yulia Tymoshenko.

The deputies are demanding to suspend the pre-trial investigation, close the criminal case concerning United Energy Systems of Ukraine and allow Tymoshenko to undergo medical examination and treatment outside the confines of the Kachaniv Penitentiary. The GPO promised to review these demands within the terms set by Ukrainian legislation.

Ukraine will participate in the NATO summit scheduled for May 20-12 in Chicago. This fact was announced after preparatory talks of Minister of Foreign Affairs Kostyantyn Hryshchenko with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. The latter said while a decision regarding enlargement will not be made at the summit, the organization's door remain open for Ukraine.



II. Analytical Reference

✓ Political institutions and democratic processes

OBUKHIV MAYORAL ELECTIONS: LESSONS FOR THE OPPOSITION

On March 19, the results of the elections of the snap elections of the mayor of Obukhiv held a day earlier were announced. Member of the φParty of Regions Oleksandr Levchenko won with 38.6% of the votes. His closest rivals were candidates of the UDAR party Anatoliy Shafarenko, who garnered 21.8% of the votes, and member of the Batkivshchyna party Hanna Starykova with 17/7% of the votes. The turnout of voters was nearly 40%.

*What was the main reason for the victory of the pro-government candidate?
Will the Ukrainian opposition learn from its lesson in the loss in Obukhiv?*

First lesson for the opposition: it must unite not only in words

Ukrainian opposition forces that are members of the Dictatorship Resistance Committee (DRC) declared their desire to form a single list of candidates in majoritarian districts for the upcoming parliamentary elections on January 22 by signing the corresponding agreement.

After that, representatives of all parties participating in the DRC and certain other opposition forces confirmed their intentions of acting as a united front in the future parliamentary elections on more than one occasion. The premature elections for the mayor of Obukhiv held due to the death of the former mayor Volodymyr Melnyk last October were an excellent occasion to test the opposition forces for the readiness for vying for seats in the upcoming parliamentary elections as a unified front.

Be that as it may, they failed the test. Members of DRC (in particular members of the Ukrainian Social-

Democratic Party, which at the time was a part of this formation) and Vitaliy Klitschko's party UDAR, which is not a member in the DRC, though its signature is on the agreement about mutual actions, nominated a single candidate for the elections in Obukhiv. In the end four candidates simultaneously represented the opposition camp in the Obukhiv elections, only two of which – Anatoliy Shafarenko and Hanna Starykova – had real chances of vying for the mayor's seat.

The results of the elections showed that together they garnered more votes than the winning candidate of the PoR. As such, the opposition forces have only themselves to blame for the loss for their inability to cut a deal. At the moment, it is difficult to say which of the two parties – Batkivshchyna or UDAR – is more to blame for their failure. On the one hand, seeing as Shafarenko is well-known among local residents and took in the most votes among all opposition candidates, he could



have been the most qualified candidate of the united opposition. On the other hand, the candidacy of Starykova was agreed to by two of the most powerful opposition parties Batkivshchyna and Front of Changes, which is why it had considerably broader political support. Aside from that, by looking

for somebody to blame for this loss, the opposition parties risk kicking themselves in the hind and once again fighting amongst each other. Accordingly, the best solution to the problem would be for all sides involved to admit their mistakes and start working on avoiding similar conflicts in the future.

Second lesson for the opposition: get down and dirty in the regions

Another reason for the failure of the opposition forces in the Obukhiv mayoral elections was the highly unproductive election campaign. First and foremost, this applies to the Batkivshchyna party and its candidate Hanna Starykova. The choice of Starykova, who lives in Kyiv and is not known among residents of Obukhiv, was rather strange.

The Batkivshchyna party tried building its pre-election campaign on Starykov's association with Tymoshenko. The fact that 17.7% of the electorate in Obukhiv voted for Tymoshenko and not for Starykova, which corresponds to the average rating of the Batkivshchyna party, proves this fact.

It is clear that if residents of Obukhiv had voted for a candidate closer to their heart or at least the pre-election campaign was targeted towards the local electorate, the chances of a victory would have been considerably higher. This can be said to a lesser degree about Shafarenko. While his name is more widely known in Obukhiv, the major accent in his pre-election campaign was placed on his ties with the leader of the UDAR party Vitaliy Klitschko.

Given the majoritarian component of the future elections to the parliament, the tactic of association

with party leaders is not likely to produce the results that opposition forces expect. For this reason, their tactic should be fundamentally modified by placing a greater accent on the capacity of their candidate to resolve local problems.

Besides that, the opposition must not forget about dishonest methods of canvassing that the current ruling party is using on a fairly regular basis. For instance, on the eve of the elections in Obukhiv another candidate of the opposition party Svoboda Valeriy Vorobets was stricken from the list for the clearly premeditated reason of the absence of all documents required for registration of a candidate.

Shafarenko's rights to conducting a pre-election campaign and equal access to the mass media were also severely limited. In addition to that, he was accused of vote-rigging and observers and people's deputies were illegally expelled from certain voting stations.

In light of this, another task the opposition is faced with is finding effective ways of counteraction to the government's strategy, which will assume much greater proportions during the parliamentary elections.



A lesson for the electorate: be responsible for your vote

Finally, Levchenko won the elections in Obukhiv thanks to the low turnout of voters. The elections in Obukhiv clearly demonstrated that the dissatisfaction of Ukrainians with political parties and hence their reluctance to go out and vote plays into the hands of the ruling party.

The unpleasant paradox is that the inertia of citizens brings to power those politicians they do not trust in. While similar cases have been observed on more than one occasion over the years of Ukraine's

independence, this trend could be particularly poignant in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Accordingly, the local residents of Obukhiv could learn a lesson from these latest elections: by giving away a part of their city or the entire country into the hands of strangers they will only enhance the total distrust of citizens in politics. Often the way out of this vicious circle is simply showing up at a voting station and giving a vote for one or another candidate.

Conclusions

In closing, while the victory of Oleksandr Levchenko in the mayoral elections in Obukhiv was not that significant, it was a symptomatic loss for the opposition forces that turned out to be incapable of putting forth their candidate. In order to not repeat this scenario in the upcoming parliamentary elections the opposition should learn a few lessons from the Obukhiv elections: concede personal and party ambitions for the sake of mutual goals, conduct a pre-election campaign in majoritarian (first-past-the-post) districts with a strong accent on local problems and solutions to them and find ways of counteracting the dishonest methods used by representatives of the ruling power.

Ukrainian citizens can also draw conclusions from the elections in Obukhiv by making a personal decision to vote or not to vote in the parliamentary elections scheduled for October with a much greater level of responsibility.



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