

Elections of the Prime Minister: another round

RESEARCH UPDATE No. 40/288, November 11, 2002

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Search for Choices

Processes are under way... Today, the above statement can serve as a brief but comprehensive description of numerous topical issues ranging from investigation of “kolchuga” tapegate and speculations about participation/non-participation of the Ukrainian President in the Prague NATO summit to elections of new Prime Minister. The latter issue attracted close attention of Ukrainian politicians. The situation got complicated due to the fact that interested parties were proposed to unanimously choose just one candidate. It should be mentioned that the so-called “parliamentary nine” nominated four candidatures to the office of Prime Minister – head of the State Taxation Administration Mykola Azarov, deputy from the European Choice group and head of the Donetsk regional state administration Victor Yanukovich supported by the Regions of Ukraine faction, acting Prime Minister Anatoliy Kinakh backed up by the Party “Trudova Ukraina” and the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United) and First Vice Premier Oleg Dubyna who enlisted support of the People’s Sovereignty group.

Not long ago, the President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma said, “As far as the parliamentary majority is concerned, what I expect is not batch of potential candidates. I will stand for a nominee whom the majority can trust”. Given the situation, MPs and representatives of the presidential administration do not have enough time to come to an agreement as to candidacy of the new Premier, for they must elect Prime Minister prior to the beginning of the new session or till November 18.

Also, the situation is aggravated by the fact that the present Ukrainian government has not yet been dissolved. Prime Minister states that efforts to form the parliamentary majority using bribes and creating preconditions for government crisis in the parliament are nothing but a deadlock, since it can adversely affect the budget process and deteriorate political crisis. There is also a subjective factor. On November 7, 2002, Anatoliy Kinakh said, “We are all human beings. And it is very difficult to work in the atmosphere of long-lasting discussions and make forecasts about the future of the Ukrainian government.”

Some Words about Chances of Candidates

Taking into consideration the atmosphere of permanent debates, today, most promising candidates are Premier Anatoliy Kinakh and Victor Yanukovich.

“Just after negotiations, Oleg Dubyna and Mykola Azarov understood that they had less chances to win as compared to the others”, leader of the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United) (SDPU(U)) Leonid Kravchuk asserted (the *Ukrainska Pravda*, November 5, 2002). Also, there are endeavors to familiarize the general public with a thesis that Oleg Dubyna and Mykola Azarov are not favorites of the race for the office of Premier. For instance, First Vice Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Hennadiy Vasilev states that actually he views only Anatoliy Kinakh and Victor Yanukovich as potential candidates for the office of Prime Minister.

In late October, in the talk-show “Same Toi” broadcasted on UT-1 channel, head of the State Taxation Administration Mykola Azarov said that he did not crave for the office of Premier. “As long as I have my duties and responsibilities, I will do my job. And should I be charged with performance of other functions, I will do my best as well”, he stressed. As for Oleg Dubyna, for the time being, he seemingly takes a wait-and-see position and keeps aloof from major political negotiations. He does have certain chances to win office of the Prime Minister but such an outcome seems unlikely.

Such candidates for the office of Prime Minister as Anatoliy Kinakh and Victor Yanukovich have both advantages and some specific drawbacks. Anatoliy Kinakh got notorious because of unsound economic policy and ineffective

work of the Ukrainian government, while Victor Yanukovich has tarnished reputation due to his close ties with the Donetsk regional clan. The parliamentary majority is unlikely to escape deeply-rooted stereotype of Mr. Yanukovich, since many MPs deem that should he be elected as the Premier, he will lobby economic interests of the Donetsk clan. Taking the above into account, some politicians and experts believe that Victor Yanukovich has much in common with a well-known and unforgettable politician from Dnipropetrovsk...

On the other hand, regardless of predictions about threat of regionalization and split of our country, participation of the Donetsk leader in the race for the office of Prime Minister can be viewed as a positive factor.

Outcomes of debates will mostly depend on the fact that whether the office of Premier will be viewed as a tool of winning the 2004 presidential elections, which, in turn, will be determined by the fact what powers will the acting (new) Prime Minister be able to concentrate and use. Answer to the above question still remains uncertain. It is hardly possible to imagine both Anatoliy Kinakh, in view of slow increase of his rating, and such famous regional leader as Victor Yanukovich as participants in the presidential campaign. However, the latter will never agree to be a scapegoat and bear responsibility for all negative developments in Ukraine's economy.

Certain advantages of acting Premier Anatoliy Kinakh can be explained, first and foremost, by some positive technological aspects of voting for his candidacy. Should he retain his office, it will be possible to avoid additional and complex voting procedures. The afore-mentioned can serve as an indisputable advantage, taking into consideration the fact that the parliamentary majority experiences problems relating to collection of 226 votes. The above advantage is often emphasized by supporters of Anatoliy Kinakh. So, in such a situation, only some ministers will lose their offices. Such a scenario was described by leader of united social democrats Leonid Kravchuk and mentioned in the statement of the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. Incidentally, the document indicates that realization of the idea to form coalition government not by means of dissolution of the present Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine but due to appointment of new members of the Cabinet will serve as an evidence of effective work of the parliamentary majority. Hence, the matter of question is formation of quasi coalition government, which implies redistribution of ministerial portfolios.

However, it is possible to assume that representatives of the parliamentary majority will not welcome such a scenario. The above conclusion is based on numerous statements and speculations about the race for the office of the Premier where Victor Yanukovich is believed to be an undisputed leader.

Ukrainian politicians from the "parliamentary nine" are almost unanimous that Victor Yanukovich has the best chances to win. In particular, this is the opinion of Dmytro Tabachnyk, representative of the parliamentary group supporting acting Prime Minister.

"He has great chances to be elected as Premier and has an advantage over other candidates", emphasized first deputy head of the Verkhovna Rada. Permanent representative of the President of Ukraine in the Verkhovna Rada Olexandr Zadorozhnyi deems that the head of the Donetsk regional state administration is the most promising candidate for office of Prime Minister. First Vice Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Hennadiy Vasilev also believes that the parliamentary majority will nominate head of the Donetsk regional state administration Victor Yanukovich for the office of Prime Minister. In his viewpoint, the above can attract members of other parties and coalitions (the Ukrainski Novyny, November 4, 2002). Most likely, he meant Our Ukraine that did not announce its official position as to elections of new Premier but initiated another round of negotiations relating to formation of the parliamentary majority.

Latest developments can serve as evidence that the parliamentary majority will nominate Victor Yanukovich. The above is also confirmed by the fact that for the first time since several months ago, President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma publicly criticized activities of the Kinakh's government. For instance, on November 8, 2002, the President announced that the Cabinet could resign because of its failure to implement the national budget. "Guys, you failed to implement the budget and allocated insufficient funds for development of science and culture. So, you must resign", stated Leonid Kuchma at the meeting with representatives of the cultural sphere (the Interfax Ukraine, November 8, 2002). The President reminded that government had insisted on approval of the 2002 budget by the Verkhovna Rada. "And now, who is to blame?" he asked. Public criticism of the Cabinet's activities can be viewed as the President's attitude to the long-lasting discussions relating to elections of new Premier. And his conclusion was not in favor of Anatoliy Kinakh. The above situation coincided in time with parliamentary negotiations on the future of

the government.

Nevertheless, for the time being, there is no order to dismiss the acting Premier. And such an order is unlikely to be given prior to official nomination of Anatoliy Kinakh's successor. Meanwhile, final stage of the race for the office of Prime Minister will not begin until parties concerned stop calculations and manage to collect necessary number of votes. Should they fail, Anatoliy Kinakh will remain Prime Minister but not for long.

Some Words about Calculation of Votes and Advantages of Alliances

A positive outcome of voting for Victor Yanukovich seems doubtful. All we can do is to assume that victory of the head of the Donetsk regional state administration is linked to the opportunity to reconcile positions of the President of Ukraine, head of presidential administration and the Donetsk group. It is believed that Victor Yanukovich can counterbalance rather strong positions of Viktor Medvedchuk. Nevertheless, today, representatives of the SDPU(U) often favorably speak about Viktor Yanukovich. For example, numerous large interviews with the Head of the Donetsk regional state administration appeared in the mass media controlled by this political force.

However, according to calculations, support of the "parliamentary nine" can prove insufficient. It also cannot be stated that the majority is unanimous about candidacy of Victor Yanukovich. For instance, according to leader of the "Democratic Initiatives" group Stepan Havrysh, his parliamentary coalition does not support any of the candidates and is not going to support any of them until the candidacy is agreed with the President, "Until the candidacy is agreed with the President, we will not hold no discussions within both our group and the parliamentary majority" (UNIAN, November 5, 2002).

Regardless of the fact that Victor Yanukovich seems to have better chances, he still needs support of MPs who do not belong to the majority. The candidate is well aware of the above and in his interview to the Internet edition Part.org.ua in late October, Head of the Donetsk regional state administration asserted, "Negotiations must be held not only with the parliamentary majority but also with all independent MPs." He seemingly meant not just deputies who did not belong to any parliamentary groups...

Should all groups within the majority give all their votes for Victor Yanukovich and should 14 MPs who do not belong to any parliamentary groups support his candidacy as well, Victor Yanukovich will receive the maximum of 237 votes. Though, this is quite risky, especially, from the viewpoint that there is no unanimity among members of the parliamentary majority. On November 8, 2002, speaker of the Ukrainian parliament Volodymyr Lytvyn argued that the prime-minister should be a person equally distanced from political and economic clans, which indicates that regional and economic positioning of Victor Yanukovich may worsen his chances for success...

Proceeding from the above, Victor Yanukovich should enlist support of the deputies outside the "parliamentary nine", first and foremost, of Our Ukraine. This political force may be interested in elections of Victor Yanukovich as Prime-Minister in view of his specific relations with leader of the SDPU(U) Viktor Medvedchuk, for it is well known that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." At least, respective agreements could be of both tactical and strategic nature provided that Victor Yanukovich does not participate in presidential race, which is possible as well. At the same time, it is known that previous efforts to reconcile positions of Our Ukraine and the Donetsk clan were in vain (in particular, it was the case during the 2002 parliamentary elections). However, there are assumptions that taking into account strengthening positions of the SDPU(U), Our Ukraine can at least allow some of its members to vote at their own discretion. For the time being, endeavors to reconcile positions did not produce any results. Speaking about possible compromises, Yuri Kostenko noted, "At first, we have to discuss the program and only then form a coalition on its basis. Later on, the government and parliamentary majority should implement that program. This is the way it is done in all democracies." Meanwhile, on November 6, 2002, member of Our Ukraine and head of the Budget Committee at the Verkhovna Rada Petro Poroshenko stated that he would recommend his colleagues to withhold from voting for resignation of acting Prime Minister Anatoliy Kinakh and elections of new Premier unless agreement on formation of the parliament coalition is reached. According to members of Our Ukraine, final decision has not yet been made. For instance, on November 8, 2002, Yuri Kostenko informed that Our Ukraine had not approved a decision not to support any of the candidates nominated by the majority and noted, "The general position of the coalition is to understand what the new government is going to do and what program it will implement."

It will be difficult for Victor Yanukovich to enlist support of the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc. For example, in late October, leader of Ukrainian communists Petro Symonenko addressed the President with an open letter and proposed to appoint Stanislav Hurenko as Prime Minister. In the viewpoint of Petro Symonenko, "cynical bargaining for the office of Prime Minister is under way." He deems that such course of events was caused by the fact that "The President of Ukraine made a deal with potential candidates for the office of Prime Minister so that to retain his positions and receive guarantees of personal security." Therefore, even despite regional solidarity, it is in the interests of the Communist Party to take no part in elections of the new Premier.

In the opinion of Olexandr Turchinov, one of the leaders of Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc, at present, appointment of the new Premier and formation of the coalition government is nothing but waste of time. On November 5, 2002, his position was promulgated in the *Ukrainska Pravda*. Olexandr Turchinov is sure that Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc will not support any of the four candidates and can vote for Victor Yanukovich only provided that the President resigns. According to leaders of the bloc, they could consider such more or less independent politicians as Horbulin, Durdinets or Plushch.

The Socialist Party has not yet finally decided whether it will support resignation of Anatoliy Kinakh and appointment of new Premier. In this respect, it should be noted that the socialists played an important role during previous elections of the Prime Minister. In the interview to Part.org.ua, one of socialists' leaders Yuri Lutsenko pointed out that members of his party would vote depending on correspondence of candidate's program with political principles of the Socialist Party. Hence, there is a possibility that socialists will support the head of the Donetsk regional state administration. It is doubtful that the Socialist Party will strain relations with other members of the opposition. However, there is an opportunity that the above positioning could be a result of sophisticated agreements.

Hence, to settle the situation, the most promising candidate representing the parliamentary majority needs not only to enlist support of his colleagues from the "parliamentary nine", which is not easy, but also pay close attention to powerful resources outside the majority. Should it be the case, assignment of ministerial portfolios and provision of existent political and business groups with economic guarantees can be a subject of an agreement. Also, present situation related to elections of the new Prime Minister differs from previous ones because the Presidential Administration allegedly delegated the function of nominating a candidate to the parliamentary majority. Although, influence of the Presidential Administration on the elections process can hardly be minimized. Anyway, this time, it is the parliament that bears major responsibility and only the future can show whether MPs are able to meet this challenge.