

ICPS newsletter[®]

Ukrainians should have a choice of political platforms

Ukraine's election campaigns are based on dirty tricks and provocations because they tend to be built less around the presentation of political ideas—platforms—and more around personalities. Ukrainian campaign platforms are far from democratic norms, as they generally do not include detailed planks and indications of where budget resources will be found to attain the declared goals. On 15 October 2004, a roundtable at ICPS called "The Quality of Party Platforms Influences the Quality of Political Competition" looked at some approaches to correcting this situation

In democracies, platforms are more important than personalities

Elections are a way to reveal public attitudes towards government policy. Do the country's citizens support it? Is it time to change the political course? Ukrainian elections do not quite apply this approach: "government policy" is replaced by "the government," with the debate revolving around the candidates' personalities instead of their policies.

It makes sense for various candidates to present their policies in a clear and understandable manner, so that voters can develop an opinion about these policies. Then, opponents can point out the drawbacks of certain actions, and independent analysts can identify likely impacts. Since these principles are not much at work in Ukraine, voters are forced to base their opinions mostly on image-making tricks.

In the West, politicians tend to be quite thorough about the quality of their own platforms. When they aren't, they offer their opponents and independent analysts an opportunity to have a field day with their political reputation. Image-makers perform a complementary function, but they do not replace campaign platforms: they work *in addition* to the analysis of party platforms, the second level of a political battle.

When this normal order is abandoned and political debate is replaced by image-making and dirty tricks, elections fail to carry out one of their most important functions: to test public attitudes towards specific policies. Thus, a government fails to discover what kinds of changes are necessary and whether its politicians will gain support or face resistance.

The two front-runners in Ukraine's presidential campaign in 2004—Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich—have almost identical political platforms. They both call for lower taxes, new jobs, higher wages and pensions, better social security, and so on. However, neither focuses the specific ways of achieving these goals, neither provides an analysis of why previous reforms have failed, and neither calculates the costs to the government for instituting the policies they propose.

Meanwhile, their platforms fail to address key reforms: administrative (the government decision-making system), judicial, pension, corporate governance, or residential services.

Election campaigning should focus on policies

Detailed campaign platforms are a key way to focus the attention of experts, journalists, political opponents, and campaign participants in democratic countries. They foster critical thinking, debate and analysis and they establish the parameters for campaign debates by making them constructive, organized and professional. This reduces the need to wage campaigns based on discrediting rivals, negative advertising, and dirty tricks. Although this kind of tactic is always available, it should not be the dominant approach.

Developing platforms also mobilizes teams of experts and polishes their professional skills. A greater share of information about the policies instituted by the current administration and its alternatives can be made public, establishing an environment for more transparent policy-making.

Platforms most importantly help voters understand what, in fact, each candidate

stands for and what his possible steps will be if he wins. Platforms should actually outline key points of a candidate's policies. The press often launches the debate on how a country's economy should change, whether healthcare needs improvement, whether the issues of equality or poverty can be resolved, what the balance between security and freedom might be, or between industry and the environment. Thus, by the time it comes to casting a ballot, voters have a rational basis for their decisions, and their choices are more conscious.

Election platforms: the US pattern

John Kerry's "Plan for America" and George Bush's "Plan for a Safer World and a More Hopeful America" are built around similar problems, but their solutions and approaches differ. Platforms like these are usually about 30–50 pages long and provide detailed plans of action that the given candidate plans to implement if he wins the election.

Mr. Kerry's platform contains 15 planks: Children and Families, Civil Rights, Economy, Education, Energy, Environment, Health Care, Homeland Security, National Security, National Service, Rural America, Stronger Communities, Science and Technology, Veterans, and Women. All sections have the same structure: they start with a positive general statement praising the country or Americans in general, which establishes common ground between the candidate and voters, and stirs patriotism and pride in the country.

Next, the platform lays out some of the country's current problems. The text of John Kerry's platform directly attacks President George Bush and his Administration for the actions or inactions that have led to the specific problem, or points out certain key mistakes without specifying who made them. After that, the candidate's platform generally presents the line of action that will be undertaken by Mr. Kerry and his future Vice-President John Edwards. Sometimes the platform mentions Kerry's merits and achievements dealing with the problem during the course of his political career. For

instance, the platform shows his competence and interest in resolving a particular problem and points out to his political achievements.

Finally, the candidate's identified objectives are analyzed in more detail and the problems and steps that the would-be President will take are formulated more concretely. As a rule, there are 3–5 objectives, and each of them lists rather detailed action. Each of the 15 planks in Mr. Kerry's platform follows the same pattern.

Thus, this presidential candidate's platform is a series of draft programs and solutions to various problems that the candidate hopes to tackle if he wins. The platform

reveals fairly detailed knowledge of the country's current problems and well-grounded proposals for resolving them. For example, Mr. Kerry's platform uses statistics, economic calculations and forecasts to show what voters might expect from the proposed solutions, while the problem is not formulated in general terms, but is specific and clearly defined. Such an approach to preparing a campaign platform creates the impression of a fairly competent, well-informed candidate who is aware of what voters are facing and knows exactly what should be done about it.

George Bush's platform is also detailed and the key problems are basically the same, but

the form of presentation is different.

Mr. Bush's platform pays more attention to the achievements of the incumbent during his time in office and presents all the objectives and steps aimed at continuing his already proactive and successful efforts as well as the positive results he has obtained.

For more detail on the platforms of the two candidates in the US presidential election, visit their websites at www.johnkerry.com and www.georgewbush.com. ■

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Let's talk the future of Kyiv's transport

On 7 October 2004, the International Centre for Policy Studies and the "European Capital," a group of Kyiv City Council deputies, held a roundtable called "A vision of transport services in Kyiv." The roundtable was intended to result in the formulation of a common vision of the future of Ukraine's capital, independent analysis of the transport services market in Kyiv, and an understanding of the opinions of stakeholders as to current problems and their possible solutions

This roundtable was one of the few opportunities to hear out opinions on all sides about Kyiv's transportation problems and to agree the next steps, taking into account the views of opposing groups. Four working groups were formed to carry out the discussion among government bodies, transport services providers, independent economists, and consumers.

Common ground

Representatives of all the working groups agreed that reforming the transport market meant providing high-quality services to Kyivites and establishing equal opportunities for all participants in the market. Most participants noted key problems in the transport sector as poor quality of services (a growing number of accidents, depreciation of rolling stock, unreliable schedules, and so on) and shortcomings in the planning and management of traffic and transport in the city. The main attempt at resolving transport problems—attracting private carriers—also revealed drawbacks. Those weaknesses most often quoted by participants were shrinking infrastructure capacity and growing bottlenecks.

All participants noted the need for better administration and implementation of

available programs for reforming and developing the city's transport sector. Untangling the city center from messy traffic and fining and towing away cars that break parking rules were among the measures most often mentioned as ways to improve the situation.

Divergent interests

The government group drew attention to the need for break-even transport services and raising fares as a key means. The transport services providers were more interested in improving the rules and regulations that govern their activities. Economists mentioned the need to develop a common vision of the transport services market and its development, which they felt was lacking so far. Consumers focused on the need to enhance the role of public transit, as they were concerned about its shrinking role in Kyiv's transport services.

The roundtable registered no obvious differences of opinion about the problems and goals of Kyiv's transport services market, except for different assessments by the government and consumers in terms of the success of municipal transport sector policies. The participants mostly criticized government bodies: carriers criticized officials for

unsatisfactory regulation, consumers criticized cutbacks in public transit services, and experts knocked poor planning and management.

The three groups came up with a number of measures to improve the situation:

- limit traffic in the city center;
- expand public transit service;
- ensure more effective administration and adherence to transport rules and regulations;
- ensure break-even operation of transit providers;
- improve market regulation: introduce clearer and more transparent rules for relations between the providers of transport services and their main customer, the city.

In September–November 2004, ICPS and "European Capital," a group of Kyiv City Council deputies, held a series of roundtables to develop a common vision of the future for the Ukrainian capital. Key objectives of these roundtables were to hold public debates on what was wrong with the capital, what was behind its problems, and what could be done to establish common vision of solutions and specific measures. This roundtable was the second in a series of discussions. ■

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