

ICPS newsletter



Statement by ICPS regarding the situation in Ukraine

ICPS has made a number of statements with regard to the tumultuous events in Ukraine that have arisen in response to the announcement of the results of the run-off of the presidential election, which most people in Ukraine and outside the country believe were falsified

Against depriving Ukrainian people of the democratic freedom of choice

The International Centre for Policy Studies supports the national protest action against abuses that have prevented a democratic election from being held in Ukraine.

We support declarations of non-confidence towards the Central Electoral Commission because of its unacceptable disregard for the testimony of thousands of Ukrainians about violations of our voting rights. The CEC justifies its inaction with reference to the letter of the law, which does not oblige the Commission to investigate.

The CEC, the President and the executive branch—all those whom the people of Ukraine entrusted to run the country in the between-election period and to organize a democratic electoral process in accordance with Ukraine's Constitution—have violated the law and crossed a fine line by either organizing or ignoring mass violations of election norms.

ICPS is a non-partisan organization and as such did not support any of the candidates in this presidential election. However, our work is directed at enshrining in Ukraine the principles of an open society and thus has meaning only in a democracy. We insist on the upholding of democratic rights and freedoms in Ukraine, the main one of which is the right to the free expression of the people's will through democratic elections. ■

November 23, 2004

The situation in Ukraine has nothing to do with ethnic issues

Vladimir Nikitin, Deputy Director of the ICPS, has issued a statement refuting

attempts to present the situation Ukraine as an ethnic conflict between "Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine" and "Ukrainian-speaking Western Ukraine." His statement reads:

"This statement is my stand against any attempts to transform the political confrontation in Ukraine into an ethnic one, to say that Ukrainians are in conflict with Russians. Interpreting the situation as an inter-ethnic conflict is a way to provide grounds for Russian intervention under the slogan, 'Let's protect our brothers!' and to start talk about making Ukraine a part of the Russian Federation. Today, a political nation is emerging in Ukraine, and treating this process as an ethnic problem is simply a way of hiding this obvious reality."

As Mr. Nikitin said, the ethnic question was not the basis of people's choice: the choice was between two political systems: a democratic one or a totalitarian one. ■

November 25, 2004

Russia has made a major strategic error

President Vladimir Putin should have seen it coming, but he evidently did not, says Denis Trifonov, ICPS defence consultant. Ukrainians have risen up against the Moscow-backed government of Viktor Yanukovich, disputing the election results they view as rigged. Most voters already regarded the current regime as anything but legitimate. All Western governments have refused to certify the election results. Russia's international image has taken a direct hit as the world watches President Putin acting as the lone advocate for Mr. Yanukovich, a man with two jail terms

and proven ties to the Donetsk criminal clan.

The election campaign in Ukraine gave Russia a chance to re-affirm its commitment to strong ties with the US and the EU, and to highlight the positive aspects of its agenda in the CIS. As Moscow presses on with integration into the Western-dominated economy, builds better relations with NATO, and talks about a visa-free regime and free trade area with the EU, it is not clear how its interests might be served by a policy of backing undemocratic, deeply corrupt regimes along the lines of Belarus.

Viktor Yushchenko, the opposition candidate and widely seen as the real winner in the current election, has never indicated he would pursue a pro-EU and pro-NATO policy at the expense of ties with Russia. Indeed, as many analysts have pointed out in the past, direct Russian investment to Ukraine livened considerably during Mr. Yushchenko's stint as premier. Russia does indeed have a huge stake in Ukraine's economy, but the premise that its interests would suffer if Mr. Yushchenko comes to power is flawed and ignores reality on the ground. At the end of the day, the man who has aggressively shut Russian business out of Ukrainian markets is Mr. Yanukovich, who has been operating on behalf of the fiercely protectionist lobby of Donetsk industrialists that stands behind him.

In short, Russia has made a serious strategic error. While it is still not too late for Mr. Putin to acknowledge his mistake, to withdraw his overt support for Yanukovich, and to side with the Western community, the long-term damage to Ukraine's relations with Russia has been done. Few in Moscow have grasped just how much real influence Russia has lost in Ukraine as a result of its clumsy and irrational policy. ■

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