

# ICPS newsletter<sup>®</sup>

## Political parties need to revise their platforms before the 2006 VR elections

**Respondents in a study on how to improve party work in Ukraine have provided party leaders with a number of recommendations aimed at political strengthening competition. The main factor that can help adapt the country's political activity to the standards of developed democracies is active public involvement in developing party platforms, say the study's authors**

This project, called "Public Participation in the Dialog on Party Platforms," studied how to improve the work of political parties in Ukraine. The project was implemented by ICPS specialists together with six regional NGOs in Donetsk, Kolomyia, Mykolayiv, Poltava, Striy, and Vinnytsia. At a wrap-up conference that took place in Kyiv on 4 February 2005, participants approved the text of a list of recommendations addressed to party leaders on how to improve the quality of party policies in Ukraine. According to the researchers, to make their policies more civilized, political parties need to:

- Study voter interests and make sure that their platforms include responses to those questions that concern voters the most and that meet their interests.
- Identify policy priorities and clearly show the party's position on critical social issues.
- Include in the text of their platforms mechanisms, means and time limits for carrying out high-priority plans.
- Engage representatives of various interest groups and the public in debating draft platforms and make their policies a public process at all stages of formation and implementation.
- Report to voters.

"Unfortunately," the authors of the study write, "most party platforms, with rare exceptions, are populist, disconnected from the realities of life, highly similar, and not intended for the average citizen to consciously pay attention to." The researchers came to this conclusion after a selectively analyzing election platforms and

holding public hearings and debates. The main reason for the poor quality of party platforms in Ukraine appears to be that the principles of transparency and publicity are being ignored during the development of platforms and there are not enough public consultations.

The same method was used to evaluate all election platforms, based on how completely the policies reflected political, legal, socio-economic, and cultural values, national security and international cooperation. The criteria were:

- to what extent the contents of the platform correspond to the needs and interests of voters;
- how clearly the party's political strategy and priorities are defined;
- how concrete the platform is in terms of the mechanisms for implementing key plans;
- how closely specific campaign platforms correspond to the party's basic program;
- how clear the platform is to the average voter. ■

*ICPS carried out this project jointly with its regional partners: the Kolomyia Region Economic Development Association, the Mykolayiv Association of Business Employers, the Western Ukrainian Center for Human Rights and Public Initiatives (Striy), the Donetsk Institute for Social Studies and Political Analysis, the Podillia Center for Social Technologies (Vinnytsia), and the Center for Social Studies (Poltava). Financing was provided by the Ukraine Citizen Action Network (UCAN) of the Institute of Sustainable Communities (Montpelier,*

### **The new Government should not start by raising salaries and pensions**

The new Government has announced its intentions to significantly raise social benefits in order to fulfill its election promises. According to ICPS economist Natalia Martynenko, such a move will cost Ukraine's economy a great deal. Calculations by ICPS economists show that the promise to raise salaries for public sector workers, pensions for service personnel and payments to mothers for giving birth could push the Budget deficit up to at least UAH 27bn or about 6.5% of GDP, and lead to accelerating inflation and a further imbalance in the social security system.

According to ICPS specialists, the new Government should not start with increasing its social commitments, although it does make sense to establish the foundation for an effective social security system and sustainable economic growth further on. For this purpose, the Government needs to revise Budget expenditures, determining whether these expenditures correspond with the tasks it has placed before itself. There is also a need to completely switch to cash settlements with the Budget, dropping absolutely all barter schemes and mutual offsets.

Any raises in social benefits should be based on the Government's real capacity to collect taxes and/or readiness to reduce expenditures. According to Ms. Martynenko, borrowing or using privatization revenues in order to raise salaries and pensions is not an acceptable option.

*Vermont). For additional information, contact Petro Udovenko by telephone at (380-44) 246-9501 and via e-mail at pudovenko@icps.kiev.ua.*

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**icps newsletter** editor Yevhen Shulha (shulha@icps.kiev.ua). Phone: (380-44) 236-4477.

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