

# ICPS newsletter<sup>®</sup>

## Forming a coalition means forming an opposition

***There is one thing that all participants in the negotiations to set up a coalition need to be constantly reminded of: their responsibility is not just to form a Verkhovna Rada coalition and a Government. By forming a coalition based on certain principles, these political forces are also identifying the ideological contrasts that will form the basic dividing line between the Government and the opposition. This means that the Government coalition will determine the role of the political opposition and the scope of its activity***

### The opposition is part of the government

One of the greatest risks in forming a coalition is the possibility that the opposition will turn into a destabilizing and destructive force in the political system. In mature democracies, by contrast, the opposition is part of the government system that controls the coalition Government, encourages political competition, and helps increase the effectiveness of Government policies. A look at relations between the Government and the opposition in such democracies shows that there are certain regularities that affect the stability of the political system.

Firstly, the confrontation between Government and opposition must contain incentives for competition within a single political system rather than its break-up. In the majority of mature democracies, the dividing line between the political parties competing as Government and opposition tends to be economic ideology. The division into leftists and rightists most frequently reflects two primary economic interest groups: labor and capital. The confrontation of these interests as a political competition between rightist and leftist parties can be a positive phenomenon for the country's economy, working like the two pedals of a bicycle that rotate the connecting chain and move the entire mechanism.

Political parties can also represent other bipolar interests in a society: urban vs rural, state vs church, regional vs national. However, the most important thing is that the confrontation between

the Government and the opposition over differing interests not destroy the political system. It is the responsibility of the political elite to work towards consensus on those key issues that might lead to a split in the society.

Secondly, an important feature of a stable political system is having rules for political competition that make it possible for the opposition to come to power in a constitutional and democratic manner. This means that the Government makes no attempts to marginalize the opposition, to remove its positions from public discourse, or to ignore its opinions. Political guarantees for the opposition can be provided through institutionalized privileges, such as oversight of certain government bodies, distribution of offices to effectively oversee government activities, or access to the media.

If those parties that won an election try to marginalize their opponents, there is a likelihood that the political system will break up. For example, the common perception of socialist and communist parties as "agents of influence" in Europe and the reluctance to cooperate with them in the early 20th century only aggravated the political situation and set the stage for civil conflicts. Only after these parties were recognized as full-fledged participants and governments initiated constructive cooperation, did it become possible to stabilize these political systems.

In Central Europe, where, unlike most FSU countries, the fall of communism was immediately followed by a continuous process of democratization and transition to a market economy,

party systems were mostly formed by transforming the former anti-communist opposition into rightist parties—liberals and conservatives—, while the old communist parties, after going through lustration, renewal and internal democratization turned into "new leftist parties," the social-democrats. This did not happen in Ukraine because, during the same period, the country's political forces were fighting for national independence and democracy. So Ukraine's party system is only now being formed in a stable democratic environment.

### An Orange coalition preserves the slogans of the Maidan

An Orange coalition of the Block of Yulia Tymoshenko, Nasha Ukraina and the Socialist Party will automatically lead to an opposition of the Party of the Regions and the Communist Party. The main factor uniting this coalition is a common "Orange" past, with the Maidan as the symbol of democracy fighting authoritarianism, political pressure and rigged elections. The "Blue-and-white" successors of the Kuchma regime embody the latter for "Orange" voters.

Yet, this particular fault line does not exist for the Party of the Regions and its voters, as they do not see themselves as "undemocratic." That is why PR has established its opposition to BYT and NU along other, more artificial lines: Western Ukraine vs Eastern Ukraine, integration with the EU and NATO vs integration with the CEA, Ukrainian-speakers vs Russian-speakers, and unindustrialized towns vs large industrial cities. This kind of confrontation between the government and the opposition will preserve the "division" of Ukraine by geography, language and history, and foreign political orientation. Although some these differences are largely mythical, they are convenient "markers" for both politicians and voters to stake out their positions.

The threat to Ukraine's future posed by a confrontation along these lines is evident: the lack of national consensus on Ukraine's geopolitical choice, Russian intervention in support of one political force, and possible separatism. In addition, different economic views within the "Orange" coalition could hamper the effectiveness of government policies. Nasha Ukraina will insist on establishing favorable conditions for investment, enshrining ownership rights and privatizing further, whereas BYT and SPU will stand for bringing to justice opaque and unfair privatizations, increasing social outlays, increasing the role of the state as a regulator, and blocking unpopular reforms, such as land reform and reforms to social security.

### A NU-PR coalition = right vs left?

According to voters and politicians themselves, differences between the interests of leftists and rightists are not yet determining factors for voter preferences. Neither its supporters, nor its opponents view the Party of the Regions as a party of liberal, democratic ideology. So far, it remains more of a backlash project because so many Kuchma-era officials and businessmen from a single region were on this party's list.

By moving into the opposition, BYT and SPU would oppose the government, not on the basis of leftist-centrist ideology, but on the basis of fighting those who "betrayed the Maidan," against Kuchma supporters and business clans. As a result, the remaining Nasha Ukraina electorate would likely switch to BYT, while PR would lose part of their electorate to the Bloc of Natalia Vitrenko and the Communist Party if it completely reneged on key platform slogans.

"Orange" voters would see this coalition not as a way to unify the country, but as the collusion of the political and business elites of two parties in order to distribute the country's assets. The fear is that such a coalition would reinstate privileges for traditional businesses of the Donetsk clan and not encourage upgrading Ukraine's industry, that it would hamper legal reforms to improve the business environment, increase social inequality, and foster corruption.

This option is very negatively viewed by all "Orange" voters, as well as by the radically pro-Russian among "Blue-and-white" voters. Yet a coalition involving Nasha Ukraina and Regions under the slogan of unification and an opposition consisting of BYT and SPU is something that everybody should begin to think about as a desirable option. The two parties have similar economic ideologies, which would make it possible for the coalition to implement well-coordinated economic and social policies aimed at improving budget discipline, fostering investment and enlivening economic growth through favorable conditions for all types of businesses. The main opposition would consist of SPU and BYT, who position themselves as parties of the center-left.

Should this configuration be chosen, theoretically, the country could form a new dominating line of confrontation between the Government and the opposition that, as in the majority of mature democracies, would match the main public interests in the economy: capital and labor.

The experience of EU countries has shown the effectiveness of such a political dividing line for the country's economic well-being. This makes competing interest groups work in one team by allowing those who can earn money to work and supporting those who cannot. This, in turn, fosters a general enrichment of the country and growing well-being for all social groups.

### How to reformulate the main dividing line

Political parties themselves are responsible for basing the line of confrontation on issues linked to the past—democracy vs a repressive regime and Eastern Ukraine vs Western Ukraine—, instead of issues connected to the future—greater democracy and economic reforms. Nasha Ukraina, in particular, built its election campaign on the idea of fighting the comeback of the "Blue-and-whites." BYT also built on the threat that Regions would return to power and the supposed betrayal of the Maidan by a "former Orange ally."

At the same time, PR offered itself as an alternative to the lack of economic skills among the "Orange" parties and once again raised the status of the

Russian language and Ukraine's membership in NATO vs the CEA. Both BYT and the Party of the Regions based their economic planks on populist leftist slogans, which made it more difficult to identify their real economic views.

The result was the lack of competition among platforms during the election campaign, because the country's political parties did not position themselves according to their economic ideologies. So, voters identified political forces, not according to economic principles, but by geographic, value-based and cultural features. This was reflected in the results of the 2004 and 2006 elections, which demonstrated that the borders of basic ideological differences lie, not between different social groups or supporters of specific economic ideologies, but more between two regions.

On one hand, this division will continue to exist as long as real and mythical fears among the two groups of voters are connected to one or another political force—that is, as long as "Orange" voters worry that the country will return to authoritarianism, more corruption and loss of the national identity to Russia, while "Blue-and-white" voters worry about breaking up with Russia and integrating into the "hostile" North Atlantic alliance.

On the other, the future coalition has a unique chance to deliberately re-formulate the main "line of conflict" into the center of constructive competition between the Government and the opposition. In many aspects, this is like the situation in the US after the Civil War, when the country faced a choice: whether to continue the conflict between the North and the South by making it the main conflict between US parties or to overcome it by uniting the country and including the opposition in the political system and reconstructing the party system along some other lines of confrontation. This will determine the further development of the country: as a confrontation of regional interests or as a competition of different economic policies. ■

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