

## Ukraine young vote elusive

<http://www.euronews.com/2012/10/23/ukraine-young-vote-elusive/>



Ukrainian politicians are finding it increasingly challenging to win votes from among the young.

Compared to their elders they are better plugged in to social networks online and the information accessible there. In the capital Kiev, students from all over the country are invited to take part in a weekly televised meet-the-candidates discussion.

Student Andriy Zasadnyuk shared his impression with euronews, saying: “I see some really independent candidates, especially among those running individually, but very few of them. Those politicians and parties that promote themselves as cutting edge have never been in government or parliament before, and basically they are no different from anyone else. I do not see them offering new ideas, and that’s frightening.”

Ukraine felt a huge shift when the Soviet Union fell apart more than two decades ago.

Political activist Ihor Lutsenko compared voters in the past with today’s – bearing in mind that the undecided make up as much as 25 per cent of the electorate.

Lutsenko said: “Young people are more focused on European values. The older generation thought more about Russia, the USSR, communists and nationalists, for instance. Now young voters are more concerned about things like the environment and lifestyle.”

Of course the priorities for many also include education, jobs and access to health care.

Kiev is in northern central Ukraine. But it is also worth taking a look at Lviv, in the west, and much closer to the border with several EU countries. Lviv is also highly active in the rapidly-developing Information Technology sector, IT. The Polytechnic University is hard-pressed to keep up with the demand for IT graduates. To get in, this year saw 20 applicants for each place available.

Ukraine's earnings from IT industry services last year far outstripped those of several EU states, with growth of more than 30 percent in the past few years. This holds out hope of a secure future for aspiring young professionals, without them joining the national brain drain.

A student told us: "I want to stay in Ukraine with a Ukrainian company, maybe with branches elsewhere. I want to do what I was trained to do."

Another student said: "There are lots of IT companies starting to do business, and demand is high. There are not enough IT specialists. So I think there's a real prospect here."

Last year the country's IT industry earned 760 million euros. It's like a different world from primary-industry-heavy eastern Ukraine.

Dmytro Fedasyuk, the deputy dean at the university said: "The prospect of future employment is what attracts young people: getting a high level of knowledge that will guarantee a good job."

Ukraine declared itself an independent democratic state when the USSR formally dissolved in 1991. But the newly sovereign country's economy went into a tailspin. In that recession, Ukraine lost 60 percent of its GDP up until 1999.

Finally things picked up, and since 2000, real economic growth has averaged seven percent per year. But before that Ukrainians had long stretches of uncertainty.

IT specialist Volodymyr Romanyuk told us: "Since the old days, the western part of Ukraine has been considered pro-European. We have always wanted to live in Europe, the EU. Geographically we lie at the centre of Europe and so it's strange to associate with Russia. That's like going back to something we were running away from for so long. We fought against that, and it's still quite difficult – we haven't overcome it yet."

### **Investigations, pressure plague candidates in majority constituencies**

Oct. 23, 2012, 8:22 p.m. | Olga Rudenko

<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/politics/investigations-pressure-plague-candidates-in-majority-constituencies-314836.html>



*Tetiana Chornovol posing with a fake leaflet. She says the leaflets' distributors beat her after she tried to stop their distribution, leaving her with scratches on her hand and face. © blogs.pravda.com.ua*

The majoritarian election system expected to make parliamentary elections more honest and transparent has instead led to dozens of violations, according to candidates and election monitoring organizations.

More than 80 candidates have already withdrawn their candidacies, due to a variety of methods used to pressure them into leaving their political races. Opora, an election monitoring organization, reported nine confirmed cases of candidate intimidation.

But there may be many more abuses – and many more to come.

“We have 35 majoritarian candidates, and not one of them has had a smooth campaign,” said Yuri Stratiuk, spokesman for the nationalist Svoboda (Freedom) party.

The dirty tactics candidates have endured in the run-up to the Oct. 28 parliamentary election include beatings, sabotaging of their public appearance events, criminal cases launched against them, firing from jobs and attacks with colored liquids meant to stain their skin and clothes.

“Any pressure is used to confront the campaigns of the competitors and to make them withdraw from the election race, or at least reduce their campaigns due to personal problems,” said Opora director Olga Aivazovskaya.

Unsafe campaign

On Sept. 19, the car of Maksym Shkuro was stopped by five strangers in the village of Muzychi, near Kyiv. The assailants pulled him out, beat him and stabbed him with a knife. Shkuro survived, but has spent several days in rehabilitation and is expected to undergo reconstructive surgery on his face.

Shkuro is an assistant for Dmitry Andriyevsky, an opposition candidate from district 222, located in Kyiv.

“There are no doubts that the attack is related to his [Shkuro’s] political activity,” Andriyevsky said. “He’s not in any business. For the last two years he did nothing but work for me.”

Observers of the election monitoring organization Mission Canada reported 35 cases of candidates and their campaign staff suffering harassment and threats, Shkuro’s case included.

Another reason to connect the assault to politics is the timing of the incident. According to Andriyevsky, Shkuro was beaten 20 minutes after strangers crashed eight campaign tents of Batkivshchyna, Andriyevsky’s party, in Kyiv.

The purpose of the attack, Andriyevsky suggests, was to scare his people and to disrupt the key figure of his campaign. As the head of Andriyevsky’s office, Shkuro coordinated his entire campaign.

Now Andriyevsky’s waiting for the results of the criminal investigation and says that his office is working even more intensely now.

**Make it dirty and green**

A brilliant green dye, familiar to everyone as a popular antiseptic, used for small wounds, was given a new purpose this election campaign. The antiseptic liquid, mostly known as zelyonka, has since become a popular weapon.

Though zelyonka attacks had happened before, it was an incident involving imprisoned ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko’s attorney Serhiy Vlasenko that popularized the act.

On July 16, in Kharkiv, a young woman poured zelyonka on Vlasenko’s face. On August 31, the assault was repeated when Vlasenko was heading to the Kharkiv airport. That time the green liquid only made contact with his clothes.

Not long after the attack on Vlasenko, Oleksander Kirsh, a Batkivshchyna candidate from district 169 in Kharkiv, was splashed in the face with zelyonka by unknown assailants during a public meeting.

Kirsh noted that the people who flung zelyonka at him were standing in the audience during his public meeting, not worrying about being filmed and photographed. This, Kirsh says, shows that they felt sure of their impunity. Kirsh blames the authorities, including Kharkiv's Governor Mykhaylo Dobkin and Mayor Hennadiy Kernes. They both released statements implying that Vlasenko's assault was a self-staged PR move, and by that, Kirsh said, assured that "it is OK to pour [zelyonka] on the opposition."

"Even if my attackers were just hooligans, it was those statements that gave them the freedom to do that," Kirsh said.

Another candidate who suffered a "green attack," was Tetyana Chornovil from district 120 in Lviv oblast. A former investigative journalist, she was hit with green paint on Sept. 13, when leaving an elevator in a residential building. Later, on Oct. 6, Chornovil was beaten when she tried to stop the distribution of fake leaflets which encouraged voters to sponsor her campaign in a rude and mocking way.

Got a job, candidate? Not anymore

When Roman Volkov, a candidate with Vitali Klitschko's Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms from district 43 in Donetsk, returned to his job as a business manager after being officially announced as a candidate, he had a call from his boss's office. On the call his boss gave him an ultimatum: abandon your political career, or resign. He chose to leave the job where he spent three years.

"She [the boss] knew I was going to be a candidate, and at first seemed not to have any problems with that," Volkov said. "I was ready to leave the job officially, but to still help with part of my duties for free. But that option didn't satisfy them anymore."

The reason for this sudden turn of events, Volkov suggested, is his boss's Party of Regions membership. He believes the decision was made by her colleagues in the ruling party.

When the Kyiv Post contacted Volkov's former boss, she refused to provide any comments on the situation.

Now Volkov is going to concentrate on his campaign and live on savings till the election it is over.

But it's much more complicated for candidates who own a business and don't just work for one. According to the Central Election Committee, every third single-mandate candidate is a businessman.

"We're so lucky that almost not one of our candidates runs any business," said Svoboda's Stratiuk. It makes it much harder to crash [their campaigns]."

One of Svoboda's candidates, Oleg Debelyi from Kharkiv, once was a businessman, but not any longer. His cafe, Alvanta, was demolished by local authorities after they ruled the construction of it was unauthorized on July 28, days before his campaign began. Debelyi states that the cafe that took him over Hr 100,000 in investments and 12 years of work was absolutely legal, and he has documents to prove it. A trial in his case is scheduled for October.

"I know that several businessmen in our districts received warnings about unauthorized constructions, but I'm the only one who had my building demolished, and the only one in politics," Debelyi said. "And they demolished my cafe right after I had given a speech against the authorities on a local market issue." He believes the demolition of his business is a direct result of his political activity.

### Candidates under investigation

Many people remember the spoof ad placed in Dniprodzerzhynsk in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in the middle August. The ad featured an old lady who claimed that she changed her will, leaving her house to her cat, after her grandson voted for the Party of Regions. The ad's author, Maksym Holosnyi, an independent candidate from district 30 in Dniprodzerzhynsk and former Party of Regions member, now can only campaign on the Internet, since he is under criminal investigation and is wanted by the police.

Through his website, Holosnyi claims that the investigation is meant to stop his political activity. The reason to believe that, according to him, is that a case of missing supplies from Yelizavetovka village council, of which Holosnyi was once the head, was opened in Nov. of 2011. It didn't move forward until late July of 2012, just days before registration of candidates began.

"They reclassified the case on July 26 and declared me wanted on July 27. How can I be declared wanted if I didn't even get an official notice of accusations first?" Holosnyi wrote on his website.

A Dnipropetrovsk oblast police office reacted to Holosnyi's statements, rejecting any connection between the criminal investigation and Holosnyi's political activity, though he didn't explain why the case was reclassified eight months after it was first launched.

Holosnyi is not the only candidate under investigation.

Vitaliy Klitschko addressed the prosecutor general of Ukraine, asking to look into the case of Vadym Krivokhatko, head of Udar's Zaporizhya regional office and majoritarian candidate, who is now in hiding after four criminal cases were opened against him.

Klitschko claims the authorities opened the cases in order to stop the candidate.

“We were the first party to publish a list of majoritarian candidates, and right after that severe pressure on them started,” Klitschko said in a statement on July 27. “The law enforcement system works for the parties in power exclusively.”

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### **Key political risks to watch in Ukraine**

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<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/politics/key-political-risks-to-watch-in-ukraine-314828.html>



*A man walks past electoral posters of opposition party Batkivshchyna (L) and pro-presidential Party of Regions (R) in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv on October 22, 2012. © AFP*

Ukrainian voters will elect a new parliament on Oct. 28 in which President Viktor Yanukovich's Party of the Regions looks likely to retain its majority, cementing his grip on power in the former Soviet republic.

Although polls show the Party of the Regions will probably come out on top, it is hard to predict the overall balance of forces in the assembly and its victory could be tainted if Western observers find the vote unfair, deepening Ukraine's international isolation.

### **ELECTION CAMPAIGN**

The elections will be first in which half of the deputies in the 450-member chamber are elected by a majority system. The other half is to be elected by a party system, as in the previous vote.

The change makes it harder to predict the outcome, even when final results are announced, as many of the elected deputies may have no formal party affiliation.

Political analysts expect the Regions to retain its majority in the end but their tactics may come under fire from Western observers who have already criticised what they see as biased media coverage and selective justice applied to opposition politicians.

Ahead of the election, the government launched a \$3 billion spending package which includes pension increases and other benefits, subsidised mortgages and compensation to depositors of the Soviet Union's state savings bank whose wealth was wiped out by hyperinflation.

Some observers have questioned the government's ability to finance that spending at a time when macroeconomic forecasts are likely to be revised downwards.

#### TYMOSHENKO AFFAIR

The EU has shelved agreements with Ukraine on political association and free trade while international meetings have been derailed since the conviction last October of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, Yanukovich's fiercest opponent.

Tymoshenko, who narrowly lost the presidency to Yanukovich, was jailed for seven years for alleged abuse-of-office in what she described as a "lynch" trial. Despite pressure from the EU and the United States Yanukovich has refused to intervene to secure her release and prosecutors have piled more charges against her for misdeeds they say go back to the 1990s.

#### LANGUAGE POLICY

In what critics said was another ploy to boost poor poll ratings, pro-Yanukovich deputies rushed through parliament a bill to upgrade the status of Russian in Russian-speaking regions traditionally loyal to him.

Brawls in parliament and street protests over the bill, which opponents say will undermine the status of Ukrainian as the state language, did not stop Yanukovich signing it into law in August.

The Regions has since pledged to officially make Russian the second state language, meaning that the sensitive and divisive issue is certain to surface again after the vote.

#### IMF, RUSSIA

Ukraine's agreement with the International Monetary Fund, signed shortly after Yanukovich came to power in February 2010, was suspended in early 2011 after the government balked at raising gas and heating prices for households for fear of losing public support.

An IMF team will visit Ukraine between Oct. 26 and Nov. 2 for talks on banking sector reforms and other policies while the Kiev government is not showing any sign of reversing policy and raising utility prices.

Russia, meanwhile, refuses to review a gas supply deal which Yanukovich's government says sets an exorbitant price for the fuel.

## ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN

The lack of IMF financing makes Ukraine, whose economy depends heavily on exports of commodities such as steel and grain, more vulnerable to external shocks such as the euro zone recession.

Economic growth has already slowed down significantly, with gross domestic product rising by 1 percent year-on-year in the first nine months of 2012, down from about 5 percent in the same period of 2011, and some analysts see zero full-year growth.

The market also believes that the hryvnia, pegged to the dollar since early 2010, is over-valued and its exchange rate could be readjusted at some point after the election.

### **Ukraine's chance to return to Europe**

By Vitali Klitschko

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/201ddaf8-1cfd-11e2-a17f-00144feabdc0.html>

Ukraine's parliamentary election this Sunday is a referendum on the [presidency of Viktor Yanukovich](#) who won power in February 2010, in a free and fairly contested democratic election. Since then, however, the rules of the parliamentary election system have been changed to favour allies he hopes will continue supporting him.

The mood among Ukrainians has also changed. Many voters who once believed in Mr Yanukovich's promise of a better economic future after the frustrating stagnation that followed the optimism spawned by the Orange Revolution of 2004, have become pessimistic. Opinion poll surveys record that two-thirds of Ukrainians now believe that the country is moving in the wrong direction.

Ukrainians are caught between what appear to be the twin objectives of Mr Yanukovich's rule: the continuation of the promotion of oligarch capitalism that further monopolises the country's economy, holding back its very real potential; and the selective use of the courts and law enforcement authorities to jail political opponents, forbid citizen protests and stifle media criticism of contentious government policies.

Further afield, diplomatic isolation from Brussels, Moscow and Washington has left Kiev vulnerable. Strategic co-operation and national interests have taken a back seat to purely mercantile deals. A historic association agreement between the EU and Ukraine that would see a deep and comprehensive free trade

agreement and open up important markets to Ukraine is in limbo. And trade wars with neighbouring Russia continue to hurt local exporters.

Sunday's [election gives Ukrainians hope](#) and a chance to return to a European path of development. However, it will not be an easy one, since the voting system is still a cause of concern among democrats.

Ukraine has a [two-ballot system](#) for choosing the members of its 450-seat parliament. One vote is for a party, which must win a 5 per cent share of the vote to secure representation; the other is for an individual candidate.

The government has chosen allies to run as “independents” in districts challenging incumbents and opposition candidates. These “independents” enjoy support from officials, whether in the form of social service personnel canvassing precincts or pledges of funds for public works. The independents also dispense care packages of sugar, buckwheat and basic medicines.

Prosecutors and election officials turn a blind eye to this. Meanwhile, opposition candidates face intimidation and denial of access to government-controlled media.

Local officials and phantom party representatives also staff precinct and district election commissions. International and local election observers have documented some commissioners residing at the same address. It is here where the fairness and integrity of the election is most vulnerable. As Joseph Stalin once noted, it's more important who's counting the vote than the number of votes cast.

It was in order to address concerns like these that two years ago my political colleagues and I founded the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms (Udar) to build a national party committed to European democratic values, basic economic freedoms and an anti-corruption platform. Our election programme also includes a call for a more empowered civic society with independent institutions and the devolving of power from central government.

If elected, we will create an anti-corruption bureau staffed not only by officials, but citizen activists and human rights watchdogs. During this campaign, more than 3,000 citizen- documented dossiers of corrupt acts by officials have been collected by Udar and civil society activists. The common factor in all of them: bribes being taken for administrative services that are essentially free.

The government has failed to secure an election environment free of coercion and intimidation. Still citizens cannot be stopped from taking matters into their own hands. During the Orange Revolution citizen activism was key to guaranteeing the integrity of the vote. It remains so today.

The writer is the leader of the Udar political party and the WBC heavyweight boxing champion

## Q&A: Ukrainian parliamentary election

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-20031821>



*A newly-formed Udar party is lead by boxing champion Vitali Klitschko*

Ukrainian voters head to the polls on 28 October to elect a new parliament. With the exception of local elections in late 2010, this is the first nationwide ballot held under President Viktor Yanukovich since he came to power earlier that year. This is also the first election since 1994 in which the opposition leader, jailed former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, is not running.

What is at stake?

The election's conduct and outcome will have a major impact on Ukraine's future. It will particularly affect its relationship with the West, where concerns are growing about the state of democracy under President Yanukovich. It will also decide whether Mr Yanukovich will be able to consolidate his grip on power, and may even pre-determine the result of the presidential election scheduled for 2015.

How is parliament elected?

MPs in Ukraine are elected for a five-year term. Half of the 450 seats are distributed through a proportional system among parties, and the other half among individual candidates in single-seat constituencies.

Who are the candidates?

Most of the better-known candidates are running on party lists. Out of more than 80 parties contesting the election, only a handful are expected to make it into the next parliament.

The most prominent are the two heavyweights and arch-rivals, President Yanukovich's Party of Regions and Yulia Tymoshenko's Fatherland. Other parties with a realistic chance of winning seats include Udar (which means "punch" in Ukrainian) led by boxing champion Vitali Klitschko, and the Communists, an ally of the ruling Party of Regions in the current parliament.

Opposition parties have made attempts to present a common front, but remain largely disunited. Fatherland and Udar agreed to coordinate their nominations for first-past-the-post races, but the process has been marred by public disagreements.

What about Yulia Tymoshenko?

Yulia Tymoshenko, a bitter opponent of Mr Yanukovych, could not run in the elections after being sentenced to seven years in jail over a gas deal with Russia. She has since been charged with new offences dating back to the 1990s, including tax evasion and theft.



*Supporters of Yulia Tymoshenko*

Mrs Tymoshenko denies the charges, saying they are part of a vendetta campaign by Viktor Yanukovych. His controversial election as president in 2004 was overturned by the Orange Revolution, in which Mrs Tymoshenko played a key part.

Mrs Tymoshenko's party, Fatherland, however, is contesting the election, with its campaigning being led by Arseniy Yatsenyuk, a former interior minister and parliament speaker.

Will the poll be free and fair?

President Yanukovych has repeatedly given assurances that the election will be conducted commendably and described it as a "test of maturity" for Ukraine. His opponents, however, complain that campaigning has been marred by violations such as misuse of state resources by pro-government candidates, intimidation of activists and an offensive against free media.

Western diplomats have voiced similar concerns. They also say that the vote's credibility has been dented by the absence of key contenders, such as Mrs Tymoshenko and Yuriy Lutsenko - the interior minister in her cabinet, who is now also behind bars.

What are the main issues?

The manifestos of the major parties bear many similarities. They all pledge reforms to spur economic growth, higher wages, pensions and other benefits, better education and healthcare.

The Party of Regions' campaign focused heavily on promoting its record as ruling party, contrasting the "stability" of the past two years with "chaos" during Mrs Tymoshenko's premiership in 2007-10. It advocates a "balanced" approach to developing relations with Russia and the West, saying neither should be given priority over the other.

Fatherland paints the election as a battle of good against evil and promises to impeach President Yanukovich. The party says it advocates European values and promises to reverse the current government's policy of raising the status of the Russian language.

In its manifesto, Udar avoids sensitive and polarising subjects, promising instead what appeals to as many people as possible, such as more empowerment to ordinary Ukrainians and a ruthless campaign against corruption.

Many candidates in single-seat constituencies tend to focus on local issues, often distancing themselves from party agendas.

What do polls say?

Recent credible polls suggest that the Party of Regions is in the lead, followed by Fatherland, Udar and the Communists, in that order. Others appear unlikely to clear the 5% threshold necessary to enter the new parliament, but may win seats in first-past-the-post constituencies.

However, the election is too close to call, mainly because there are still many undecided voters.

### **The Malaise in Ukraine**

The business community is fed up with President Yanukovich's corruption and management. Is real change on the horizon?

BY ANDERS ÅSLUND | OCTOBER 23, 2012

[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/10/23/tk\\_1](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/10/23/tk_1)



Over the past two-and-a-half years, Ukraine has been transformed, but not for the better. In February 2010, Viktor Yanukovich -- whose previous "victory" in the 2004 election was overturned in what became known as the Orange Revolution -- was elected president with a slight margin in a free and fair

election. This ex-convict from Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine has quickly consolidated power. Increasingly, his family loyalists, primarily represented by his son, the businessman Oleksandr, dominate the Ukrainian government.

On Oct. 28, Ukraine is holding critical parliamentary elections. These elections will be either the final step in Yanukovich's consolidation of power or his opponents' last chance to disrupt his family rule. This time, however, the most palpable threat to his rule comes not from the crowds on the street but the elite businessmen he has alienated.

Yanukovich was lucky to win the presidency in the first place. Ukraine was hit hard by the global financial crisis in 2008 under the tenure of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who was running against him for the presidency. The uneasy Orange coalition government led by Tymoshenko and President Viktor Yushchenko was consumed by infighting and eventually collapsed. Yushchenko now leads an officially sanctioned splinter group that is taking votes away from the real opposition.

Yanukovich already had a parliamentary majority when he came to power and was thus quickly able to appoint his government. He also managed to gain control over the Constitutional Court, which abolished constitutional amendments passed in 2004 and returned the country to its 1996 constitution, which included stronger presidential powers. Meanwhile, Tymoshenko was sentenced in a blatantly political prosecution to seven years in prison for an allegedly shady gas agreement with Russia while she was prime minister.

Yanukovich has also taken steps to increase his control over television. In particular, the stubbornly independent cable channel [TVi](#) has been refused licenses and is gradually being ousted from various cable services through pressure from the authorities. In the run-up to these elections, television is firmly in the hands of the incumbent.

But pure repression can't save the president if his support among Ukraine's most powerful business interests continues to erode. Yanukovich initially appointed a government dominated by nine big business groups, each of which was represented by one or more ministers in his cabinet, but their number has quickly dwindled. Instead, Yanukovich family loyalists now dominate the government. They control all the law enforcement bodies, the central bank, and the Finance Ministry, while the businessmen complain that they are being squeezed out by Oleksandr Yanukovich. As a consequence, Ukraine has [fallen even deeper](#) on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index to No. 152 out of 183 countries, and property rights have been further undermined.

This year, I had a chance to observe the dissatisfied Ukrainian opposition up close. Each year, Victor Pinchuk, a highly respected international Ukrainian businessman, organizes a major international conference in Yalta. In mid-September, the ninth Yalta European Strategy took place, attracting the whole

Ukrainian political elite as well as foreign luminaries including the Americans Condoleezza Rice, Newt Gingrich, Robert Zoellick, and William Daley.

Yanukovich attended as usual, but in sharp contrast to previous years, he no longer seemed to be in a mood to placate his foreign guests. Last year, he promised to work to get Tymoshenko out of prison, where she lingers still. This time, both he and the audience seemed to realize that no new promise of reform would be credible, and he ignored the issue entirely.

His loyalists displayed the same attitude. Prime Minister Mykola Azarov answered my question on the increasing sleaze and graft under his watch by claiming that [reports of corruption](#) had been exaggerated. (According to recent surveys, 59 percent of the Ukrainian public disagrees.)

But some of the VIPs in attendance were obviously not satisfied by the status quo, including First Deputy Prime Minister Valeriy Khoroshkovskiy, Economy Minister Petro Poroshenko, and Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Tigipko. All are billionaires and major business leaders. Although they all still belong to Yanukovich's party, they seemed more eager to accommodate foreign politicians and businessmen. In their remarks, they acknowledged the current governance problems in Ukraine, and all called for closer cooperation with Europe and faster economic reforms.

It's not hard to understand why these officials are turning against the president. A few days earlier at a public meeting, Yanukovich had [threatened](#) to "rip off" Poroshenko's head amid a technical dispute over the implementation of car fees. "Well, thank you. We'll operate without your help," the unfazed Poroshenko responded.

These thuggish antics won't exactly endear Yanukovich to already skeptical foreign governments. Deflecting criticism that he is too close to the Kremlin, he has claimed European integration as his main goal, and last fall Ukraine inked a major free trade agreement with the European Union, a monumental document of 1,000 pages that had been negotiated for four years. But the EU has [refused to sign](#) the documents as long as Tymoshenko remains in prison on spurious charges.

Yanukovich has threatened to turn to Russia if the EU cold-shoulders him, but his threat lacks credibility because Russian President Vladimir Putin almost refuses to see him. On July 12, Putin arrived in Crimea and lingered for hours with a group of Russian nationalist bikers from Moscow until he finally went to Yanukovich at the Livadia Palace. At the meeting, he spent 20 minutes talking to his associates, ignoring Yanukovich and avoiding all discussion of substance. Desperately seeking friends, Yanukovich is now warming up to China.

After mutual visits, the Chinese have offered several multibillion-dollar contracts, but so far none of several announced agreements between the two countries has

come to fruition. The Ukrainian business environment is so tough that not even the Chinese government wants anything to do with it, and the Chinese pose specific conditions on their workers carrying out construction work.

Domestically, the isolation is even more pronounced, thanks to Yanukovich's shortsighted habit of victimizing his country's most powerful people. There are [numerous allegations](#) of Yanukovich family loyalists seizing partial ownership of companies without payment and accepting kickbacks of up to 40 to 70 percent on major state contracts. Large sectors of the economy are closed to all but a handful of Ukrainian businessmen, notably the critical steel, gas, electricity, mining, and chemical industries.

The president is therefore at his most vulnerable moment as he heads into this October's elections. Yanukovich hopes to further consolidate his power with a constitutional majority of two-thirds of the seats, but that seems unlikely. His personal popularity is less than [20 percent](#), and his party, the Party of Regions, is at around 25 percent. With a dismal economic record, the party is running by promising political stability and appealing to ethnic Russians by promising an official status for their language. To enhance his chances, Yanukovich has changed the electoral system so that half the parliamentary members will be chosen by nationwide popular vote, and the other half by individual districts choosing a member to represent them, an arrangement that favors incumbents and rich businessmen. But this may not be enough to prevent Yanukovich's party from being punished at the polls, and there's no guarantee that the loyalists who are elected will continue to support him in the future.

A victory for the democratic Orange opposition does not seem likely either. Several Orange parties have merged into the United Opposition under the leadership of the young and skillful Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who has served as speaker, foreign minister, economy minister, and first deputy presidential chief of staff. But Yatsenyuk lacks Tymoshenko's charisma, and in any event the Yanukovich regime has rigged the system against him. Not a single businessman dares to give the opposition money; several of its leaders are in prison; it has limited media access; the authorities have set up several splinter parties -- including Yushchenko's -- to confuse voters; and the opposition faces frequent harassment, including arrests and beatings by public authorities.

Walking through the center of Kiev in September, I was struck by the near absence of political campaigning. The United Opposition is probably still too demoralized after the chaotic Orange rule of 2005 to 2010 to pull off an upset, though Ukrainian voters have repeatedly surprised their rulers by voting against them. They did so in 1994, 2005, and 2010.

A third scenario seems more plausible: a repeat of the 2002 elections, when the ruling party split into nine oligarchic party factions immediately after the vote. Poroshenko was able to laugh off Yanukovich at Yalta because he is about to re-create his own regional party with some 20 parliamentarians in Vinnitsa in

central Ukraine. Emergencies Minister Viktor Baloga is doing the same in Transcarpathia in western Ukraine. A fractured oligarchy would not amount to democracy, but it would offer some checks and balances to the current family rule. Two years after the 2002 elections, Ukraine saw a democratic breakthrough, which might be more successful next time.

Yanukovich's problem is that he uses only sticks and no carrots. The fruits of his predatory rule are being shared by too few from a narrow circle of friends and family members from his native Donetsk. He has consolidated power at an amazing speed, but he has done so by steamrolling friends and foe alike.

Therefore, his power might be at its zenith, and Ukraine may see a more pluralist system arising once again.

### **Ukraine's Revolt of the Oligarchs**

Anders Åslund

<http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/will-yanukovich-win-the-ukrainian-elections-by-anders--slund>

KYIV – Ukraine's parliamentary election on October 28 will be neither free nor fair. After eight unproductive years since the 2004 Orange Revolution, the democratic opposition is depressed and demoralized. Even so, the elections may check President Viktor Yanukovich's power.



*Illustration by Dean Rohrer*

Yanukovich came to power in February 2010, in elections that were rated free and fair (and at a time when Freedom House still ranked Ukraine as democratic). But he quickly consolidated power and turned Ukraine into a mildly authoritarian state. A dozen prominent opposition politicians have been sentenced to prison, including former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and the former interior minister, Yuri Lutsenko.

Tymoshenko, who was and remains the leader of the liberal and pro-Western opposition, was sentenced to seven years in prison for a gas deal with Russia in which she was not even accused of having benefited personally. Without her, the democratic opposition has no strong leader. But Yanukovich has not stopped there. He exerts heavy pressure on private television channels, and has blocked

licenses and cable access for the independent television channel TVi, which has exposed the most serious corruption cases of his administration. Moreover, he uses the civil service and law-enforcement authorities extensively to repress the opposition and promote his protégés.

And yet the upcoming election matters. Ukraine has a vibrant civil society and excellent free Internet media. But the opposition, which comprises half the country, is badly demoralized after five years of stalemate among the Orange Revolution's leaders, for which the largest share of blame falls on former President Viktor Yushchenko, who by almost all accounts has betrayed the democratic breakthrough that he represented. He now leads a party that supports Yanukovich, who has even allowed Yushchenko to remain in the presidential residence since leaving office.

Ukrainian voters are fickle. They voted against the incumbent powers in the presidential elections of 1994, 2004, and 2010. They may do so again. The most recent public-opinion poll suggested that Yanukovich's Party of Regions would obtain 28% of the vote, and that its only ally to surpass the 5% electoral threshold would be the communists, with 11%, giving them a total of 39%, compared to 36% for two opposition parties, Tymoshenko's Fatherland party (19%) and the heavyweight boxing champion Vitali Klitschko's UDAR (17%).

The predatory nature of Yanukovich's rule is not exactly well hidden; his family members and loyalists control the entire security apparatus and the main economic agencies. He is rightly scared by the democratic opposition, which he is emasculating by all reasonably soft means. Anticipating that his party might lose the upcoming election if Ukraine's proportional voting system were maintained, Yanukovich has reverted to the electoral system of 2002, with only half of the 450 seats to be distributed proportionally. The remaining 225 seats will be filled in winner-take-all single-member constituencies – a change that gives regional tycoons a great opportunity to buy seats.

But Yanukovich failed to anticipate that tycoons would dare to be disloyal to him. Initially, his government contained nine groups of big businessmen, but that number has fallen gradually, and even top businessmen have been marginalized by his core loyalists, who are widely rumored to be enriching themselves at the expense of both the state and private business. Unlike Russian President Vladimir Putin, Yanukovich seems to have steamrolled too many too fast, overestimating his power and narrowing his base. Indeed, he appears to have turned all of Ukraine's top oligarchs into his enemies.

Each summer, the prominent Ukrainian businessman Victor Pinchuk organizes a major international conference, the [Yalta European Strategy](#), attended by the Ukrainian elite and prominent foreigners. This September, the lesson of the conference was that Yanukovich has isolated himself not only from the West and Russia, but also from his main backers at home.

The Ukrainian tycoons are no fools. They view the upcoming election as their last chance to stand up against Yanukovich. The many parliamentarians to be elected in single-member constituencies are more likely to obey them than Yanukovich. Under the electoral system in place in 2002, the ruling party quickly disintegrated into nine oligarchic party factions. Something similar is likely to happen this time around.

The tycoons might not oust Yanukovich, but they will check his power. Their most vocal public representatives are First Deputy Prime Minister Valeriy Khoroshkovskiy and the economy minister, Petro Poroshenko, who was a major force behind the Orange Revolution.

The businessmen's main objection to Yanukovich is that he prefers to keep Tymoshenko in prison rather than obtain an Association Agreement with the European Union. The already-concluded free-trade agreement with the EU would offer Ukraine badly needed market access and increased exports, but the EU will not ratify it unless Tymoshenko is released and repression of the opposition and media ceases.

Similarly, the tycoons advocate restored cooperation with the International Monetary Fund, because they want access to credit at reasonable interest rates. But Yanukovich refuses to liberalize gas prices, a key IMF demand.

Concern that the West's pro-reform stance will push Ukraine into Russia's embrace is largely unfounded. Yanukovich's personal relations with Putin are so poor that Putin all but refuses to talk to him – other than to make preposterous demands.

The West thus has an important role to play in the election, and is providing two thousand election monitors to help to ensure a free and fair vote. Indeed, the United States and the EU, in particular, have a large stake in the outcome. Ukraine is a friendly country – one that always joins Western “coalitions of the willing.” But it is a lapsed democratic country. They must help to change that.

### **In Russia, with love? Ukraine president meets Putin as options dwindle.**

Ukraine President Viktor Yanukovich, who met with Vladimir Putin in Moscow yesterday, may have no option but to warm to Russia despite being aggravated over high Russian gas prices.

By Fred Weir, Correspondent / October 23, 2012

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2012/1023/In-Russia-with-love-Ukraine-president-meets-Putin-as-options-dwindle>



*Russian President Vladimir Putin listens to his Ukrainian counterpart Viktor Yanukovich, left, at the Novo Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow on Monday. Sergey Ponomarev/AP*

## MOSCOW

President Vladimir Putin met with his Ukrainian counterpart Viktor Yanukovich [at the Russian leader's country home Novo Ogaryovo](#) late Monday, and declared some progress toward Mr. Putin's goal of integrating Ukraine's economy with Russia's. But he gave no word addressing Mr. Yanukovich's hope of winning a reduced price for Russian natural gas exports to his post-Soviet nation.

The meeting, though one in a routine series, illustrates that Ukraine may be gradually edging toward Russia as its other alternatives wear thin. The Ukrainian economy, which has few natural resources, has suffered badly in recent years, in part due to the deepening crisis in the European Union, in part thanks to the crippling price of Russian natural gas for its extremely inefficient industry and housing stock. Yanukovich's insistence on prosecuting and jailing his main opponent, Yulia Tymoshenko, [has deeply alienated the EU](#) and further complicated any chances for economic integration with the West.

"There are some reasons to think that Ukraine and Russia's positions are drawing closer," says Mikhail Pogrebinsky, director of the independent Kiev Center of Political and Conflict Studies.

"If we don't develop our relations with Russia, Ukraine might be facing serious economic problems," he adds. "Trade turnover with Europe has been falling due to the recession, and Ukraine's government budget is in serious doubt. The only direction we can look for financial aid would be Russia. If the worst happens, and there is no money to pay pensions and other benefits, our authorities will be in trouble."

According to Russian media reports, the two leaders discussed further integration of their aviation, metallurgy, nuclear power, and space industries, all areas where Russia has been keen to restore lost Soviet-era technological synergies. Putin wants Ukraine to sign on to a former Soviet customs union, which would effectively re-unite the economies of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan,

and Ukraine. Yanukovich, who continues to hope for [the dwindling possibility of signing a Free Trade agreement](#) with the European Union, has balked.

"The talks have confirmed that the development of cooperation and partnership between Russia and Ukraine is our common strategic choice. It relies primarily on the strong bonds of friendship between the two nations, so there is no reasonable alternative to this approach," Putin told journalists after the meeting. "It's clear by now that the Russians will not give us any discounts for gas, so we have to live with that," says Dmitry Vydrin, an adviser to Yanukovich.

"The Russian leadership is interested in new economic departures, such as a free trade zone. Ukraine wants to be more selective, and we are analyzing their proposals for joint geo-economic projects. The initiative comes from the Kremlin," he says.

Parliamentary elections are due in Ukraine next Sunday, and the country's divided opposition is not expected to fare well against Yanukovich's party, which is able to deploy state resources in much the way its Russian pro-Kremlin counterpart does. With Ms. Tymoshenko in prison, ironically for signing the disadvantageous gas contract with Russia, the opposition is without its most dynamic personality.

Since coming to power almost three years ago, Yanukovich has moved away from the pro-Western stance of his predecessor, Orange revolutionary Viktor Yushchenko, and mended fences with Moscow [by shelving Ukraine's application to join NATO](#), extending Russia's lease [on the Black Sea naval base of Sevastopol](#) for 25 years, and drifting cautiously [toward greater economic integration](#) with Ukraine's giant neighbor.

But the supposedly pro-Moscow, native Russian-speaking Yanukovich has dug in his heels on giving up Ukraine's economic sovereignty by joining a Russian-led customs union, and infuriated the Kremlin by prosecuting Tymoshenko for a deal that she made personally with Putin when she was Ukrainian prime minister.

"The Kremlin wouldn't have minded that Yanukovich jailed Tymoshenko on principle, but it should have been on different grounds, something that didn't involve Putin," says Nikolai Petrov, an expert with the Carnegie Center in Moscow.

"Basically, Yanukovich is considered to be a traitor by Moscow. It had been hoped that he'd play the 'Moscow hand' for us in Ukraine, but he didn't do it.... The Kremlin doesn't like Yanukovich, but will work with him because there are no better alternatives in Ukraine," Mr. Petrov says.

The Putin-Yanukovich meeting took place amid a growing scandal over [the alleged snatching of a Russian dissident](#) wanted by Moscow authorities from the streets of Kiev.

Ukraine's police have officially denied any connection with the apparent "rendition" of Leonid Razvozhayev, who disappeared outside the United Nations High Commission for Refugees office in Kiev on Saturday and reappeared the next day in Moscow's Lefortovo prison. Russian authorities said he gave himself up voluntarily, and has "confessed" to plotting to destabilize Russia. On Tuesday, Russia's Investigative Committee announced that he has been charged with "organizing mass disturbances."

As he was being pushed into a police van outside a Moscow court Monday, Mr. Razvozhayev shouted to journalists that "They threatened to kill me. I was abducted in Ukraine and tortured for two days."

"Everyone here is discussing this case," says Vira Nanivska, director of the International Institute of Political Studies in Kiev. "Some think Yanukovich gave Razvozhayev to Putin as a 'gift,' while others say it demonstrates that Yanukovich does not control our SBU [security service]. One thing's for sure, it does show how much Russia's secret services are capable of."

### **Yulia Tymoshenko is Europe's Aung San Suu Kyi**

Ukraine's still-Stalinist judiciary was used to destroy the former prime minister. Now the United Nations will hear of her plight

Geoffrey Robertson

The Guardian, Tuesday 23 October 2012 20.30 BST

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/oct/23/yulia-tymoshenko-aung-san-suu-kyi>



*Yevgenia Tymoshenko reads a letter from her mother at an anti-government protest in Kiev on 12 May 2012. Photograph: EPA/Evgeniy Maloletka/AP*

[Yulia Tymoshenko](#), heroine of the "[orange revolution](#)" and the only woman ever to achieve prime ministerial office in the former Soviet republics, is not allowed to stand in Ukraine's current national election. For the last [15 months she has been in prison](#), convicted for actions that would not amount to a crime in any other democracy. She is subjected to the grossest invasion of her privacy (almost every movement she makes is videoed) and constantly defamed by the president

and his tame prosecutors. Europe seems to have abandoned her; but tomorrow, [at the UN's human rights committee](#), the UK can bring her situation to the world's attention.

Her innocence of any real crime is clear from the judgments at her trial and final appeal. She was [convicted of the vague charge of "abuse of office"](#) by reaching a deal with Putin which resolved a gas crisis in January 2009 that risked causing deaths in central Europe. Russia had cut off gas to Ukraine – and through it, to a number of countries – and was going to continue doing so unless transportation charges were increased. With the encouragement of the EU and Angela Merkel, Tymoshenko flew to Moscow and reached a compromise.

Her opponents thought she should have held out for better terms. The issue was fully canvassed over the next few months in the presidential election, in which she was narrowly beaten by Viktor Yanukovich (winner of the rigged 2004 election that the orange revolution overturned).

An example of functioning democracy, you might think. But not in Ukraine, where Tymoshenko was then prosecuted. It was not suggested she had made a penny out of the gas deal, or had been dishonest or criminal in any accepted sense of that word. Her crime, according to her judge, was that she had "acted in her personal interests, desiring to create for herself the image of an efficient leader of its state who could deal with the gas crisis shortly before the presidential elections". In other words, she had acted as any other populist leader in a democracy – she had resolved a crisis, then submitted herself and her conduct to the electorate. The charge had been used by the regime to silence a political opponent.

Ukraine maintains the Stalinist system whereby the prosecution service (its top officials appointed by the president) controls the courts. Its judges have no independence. This can be proven by a single statistic: the conviction rate in criminal cases is an incredible 99.8%. On his appointment, Tymoshenko's prosecutor, [Viktor Pshonka](#), declared himself "on the president's team" and his deputy appears regularly on TV to defame her. If judges rule against the prosecution in a political trial, it then prosecutes them for the offence of being untrue to their oath. They do not have tenure until they serve loyally for five years. As European human rights officials point out, this sword of Damocles makes these "P-plate judges" do whatever the prosecution wants.

The Tymoshenko trial is a classic example. Her judge, only two years in office, was plucked from a small town court and given the most important trial in Ukraine's history. He showed his colours (they were not orange) by a brutal and unnecessary decision, early in the trial, to put Tymoshenko in prison. Her sentence – seven years and an order to pay \$186m – was calculated to destroy her. And all for acting as a prime minister should, to avert a humanitarian crisis in central Europe.

Once, Stalinist systems delivered "telephone justice" – a call to the judge from the party boss. In Ukraine today, it is "megaphone justice": the president and his prosecutors publicly declared Tymoshenko guilty before her trial, and a lickspittle judge then did their bidding.

The Council of Europe has passed motions condemning her treatment but has done nothing to sanction her persecutors or to suspend Ukraine's membership. When Britain speaks at the UN, it must make clear that Yulia Tymoshenko has become Europe's Aung San Suu Kyi.

### **People First: The latest in the watch on Ukrainian democracy**

Oct. 23, 2012, 8:30 p.m. | Viktor Tkachuk

<http://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/op-ed/people-first-the-latest-in-the-watch-on-ukrainian-democracy-8-314837.html>



*People walk past an advertisement for an Ukrainian bank in the industrial city of Donetsk on Oct. 23, five days before the Oct. 28 parliamentary election. Ukrainians vote Sunday in parliamentary elections overshadowed by the absence of jailed opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko and marked by EU worries over the fate of democracy in the ex-Soviet state. AFP PHOTO/ SERGEI SUPINSKY*

Ukrainian opposition: alternative or mirror to the regime?

The political opposition in Ukraine is both an integral part of society and a reflection of its biggest problems and contradictions.

At the moment there are still no laws which regulate or protect the status and activity of the opposition despite attempts to do so, including a specific law "on opposition."

A legislative regulation of opposition rights and obligations (through a number of Verkhovna Rada committees) could substantially improve the political balance in Ukraine and prevent the monopolization of power by any one political party. In Ukraine, as compared to Great Britain for example, the leader of the opposition party or coalition has no official status, obligations or duties. They are not obliged by law to develop and promote alternative policies. This means that the legal status of the Ukrainian opposition does not involve obligation to develop political and administrative alternatives, making it a practically useless element in terms of governance and state regulation. This appears to be one of major obstacles to the establishment of a cohesive political

field and general accountability of both government and opposition. At the same time the situation fosters conditions for the development of empty populism within the opposition. Under Ukrainian legislation opposition have zero obligations and can throw as many populist promises around as they like.

As in many other countries in transition, after having declared democracy following a period of authoritarian rule, Ukraine's opposition is devoid of the abilities and instruments of influence (aside from parliament) to participate meaningfully in the political dialectic. Faced with their own impotence the opposition opts for either invisibility or radicalism in the extreme. They either strive to replace those in government completely or divide lesser governing positions and resources amongst government members and themselves. They totally disregard the development of alternative solutions and national development strategies for both the whole country and separate fields, such as internal and foreign policies, health, education and the economy. (1) By reducing parliamentary competition down to a primitive contest for national resources, instead of suggesting new development programmes for Ukraine and strategic plans of their implementation, the opposition is failing to fulfil its most basic function and thereby damages everyone - the government, the people and themselves.

Disunity of the opposition forces remains one of the major problems. One of reasons for this is that the Ukrainian political system involves excessively numerous political parties.

There are always big parties outside the governing coalition with their own vision and ambitions for the development of the country but it is very difficult for them to agree terms with other opposition parties, thereby leaving the smaller parties to barter their way into power.

Most recent example is 'United Opposition' - a coalition of 'Batkivschyna', 'Front Zmin', 'Gromadianska platforma' and others.

Ukrainian experts note the numerous conflicts between Batkivschyna and Front Zmin in many regions, the reason being that Arseniy Yatseniuk, leader of Front Zmin, is more actively promoting his own candidates to the party list for parliamentary elections, whilst also trying to attract part of the Batkivschyna electorate. One has to ask why or perhaps it has something to do with how his party is funded?

Ukrainian society faces a problem – the opposition have neither will nor power to professionally and effectively criticise the government's actions, recognise their mistakes and suggest ways to correct them, secure parliamentary and social control of the government's actions, mobilise society in case democratic norms and rights are violated, etc. Thus the opposition has no control over the regime, leading to utter instability in the social and political arenas of Ukraine.

In the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections the lack of effective control over the government's actions by the opposition, the many populist promises and the general inaction of many opposition politicians convinces the people of Ukraine that current opposition is very much made in the same mold as the regime. It is no surprise that sociologists have noticed a decrease of the level of support for the opposition after Tymoshenko was excluded from the United Opposition list as she was one of the few rallying points for real opposition. At the moment sympathies are divided as follows: 25 percent for the Party of Regions, 20-15 percent for the United Opposition, 12-14 percent for Vitali Klitschko's Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform and 7-9 percent for the Communist Party of Ukraine.

The nationalist Svoboda Party and Ukraine-Forward's Party with Natalia Korolevska are on the edge of overcoming the 5 percent barrier. Few Ukrainians believe that the present opposition can become a legitimate and constructive alternative to the current government.

A group of activists has even initiated a campaign called "referendum on Ukraine joining the USA" on Facebook; they hope to collect three million signatures in support. Many Ukrainian people want to earn respect, freedom, properly paid jobs, social security and everything they do not have in contemporary Ukraine, but few see the opposition as their road to salvation.

Despite general frustration and difficult circumstances, including various type of pressure by the government, the current Ukrainian opposition still have a chance to earn back the trust of the people and start fulfilling, at least partially, their responsibility to check and balance the government.

To start with, all opposition political parties must consolidate their efforts, to prevent large scale election fraud during the parliamentary elections on Oct. 28. Afterwards they should unite all opposition forces within a new democratic parliament. If this does not happen, we will have every reason to say that the current Ukrainian opposition are just clones of the government in power, which are intentionally undermining the democratic development of Ukraine.

People First Comment: The only real opposition to the current regime is in jail, all the rest is just a highly predictable mess of money, self-interest and the desire for power but frankly what more should we expect when all those running for election have little understanding of how democratic government works or even the role that democracy should play within the political system. In reality, Ukraine does not have a political system as the very framework of rules and legislation have been overturned so many times that nobody really understands how they should work let alone how they do work in practice. So how has Ukraine reached this impossible situation? Why is it that a majority of people no longer believe any of the parties? Why do many distrust the sociologists?

First the parties or clans have names that are not backed by any form of political ideology. The communists are not communist, the socialists are not socialist and the Christian democrats are neither Christian nor democratic. This total lack of political ideology means that the only thing they have to offer are personalities and populism and the biggest personality of all is currently behind bars.

Couple the lack of ideology with the lack of a legal requirement to develop alternative policies and the end result is obvious. You only have to look at the advertising posters to see that there is simply nothing behind the smiling faces. All the slogans would appear to have been written by the same copywriter. They say nothing, they offer nothing, simply because the opposition parties have no obligation to change anything apart from who feeds at the trough. They do not address the key concerns of the electorate and instead offer only populist platitudes and a promise to do... something... when they get into power. The TV debates are equally pathetic combining rhetoric with insults rather than dealing, even amateurly, with the real issue of the day.

One would have expected that the rump of Tymoshenko's party Batkivschyna with all their experience in power and their visits to Brussels to have recognised the need for well thought out plans and national strategies. But even Yulia believed that a national political manifesto could be written on one sheet of A4 paper.

One might consider that Klitschko, with all his international experience, would be able to offer more substance but alas he too seems to have fallen into the populist trap. The Communist Party would seem to be the most amusing of all. For the past year and a half, they have sided with the regime voting almost without exception for the regime's legislation. Yet today their slogans hark back to 1917, even offering to give the land and the factories back to the workers. Has nobody told them that 20 years ago, 92 percent of the nation voted for exactly that and today, in the democratic state of Ukraine the land and the factories are not theirs to give back.

What is interesting in this election however is the role of the oligarchs who rather than simply backing the regime are hedging their bets backing all sorts of candidates in a full spectrum of parties such as Natalia Korolevska who, not content with her own smiling face, has recruited the patriotism of football star Andriy Shevchenko, even though he has already admitted that he and his family are moving to the United States.

The statistics are beginning to show that the opposition parties could well win a large enough percentage to win the election and oust Party of Regions therefore one has to ask if: a) the Oligarchs are seeking to support the governing party by backing patsy candidates in a bid to take votes away from real opposition candidates or b) trying to get their people in place who will cross the floor as independents and join the regime or c) they are worried about the impact of the

regime's vertical power structure on their business interests and want to clip the President's wings.

In reality this country does not have a functioning political system that can be taken seriously. None of the parties are interested in the long term future of the nation or of the people. This election is simply a bid for power and access to the state budget. Where Ukraine goes after this is anybody's guess.

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### **The Seizure Of Leonid Razvozhayev**



*Leonid Razvozhayev speaks to journalists outside the police investigators' offices in Moscow on October 11.*

October 23, 2012

<http://www.rferl.org/content/the-seizure-of-leonid-razozzhayev/24748788.html>

How badly did Russian authorities want to nab Leonid Razvozhayev? To answer that question, you will need to separate the Kremlin's virtual reality from, well, actual reality.

First the virtual, I mean official, version -- courtesy of the Investigative Committee.

Razvozhayev, an aide to opposition State Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov, [surrendered to authorities](#) and voluntarily wrote a 10-page, handwritten statement admitting that he, Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov, and Udaltsov aide Konstantin Lebedev conspired to provoke mass unrest during demonstrations in Moscow on May 6.

The operation, according to Razvozhayev's alleged confession, was financed by former Georgian lawmaker Givi Targamadze.

The allegations are based on a report, "Anatomy of Protest-2," that was broadcast October 5 on the Kremlin-friendly NTV television station. (As I [blogged last week](#), NTV is quickly becoming Siloviki TV, the security services' media outlet of choice to smear opposition figures before prosecuting them.)

This official version was already in doubt even before the Investigative Committee made its announcement on October 22. Earlier in the day, reports surfaced in Kyiv that Razvozhayev, who had earlier fled to the Ukrainian capital, had been snatched off the street days earlier and had disappeared.

The same day, a [video appeared](#) on the website LifeNews.ru showing Razvozhayev being led to a car by police officers. "They promised to kill me. I was abducted in Ukraine and tortured for two days," he shouted at the camera.

And then, in the evening, the Kremlin's alternative version of reality truly crashed and burned.

Here is a [full statement](#) from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees: Kyiv (Ukraine) – The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is deeply concerned about the disappearance of Leonid Razvozhayev from Kyiv, Ukraine on 19 October 2012.

The individual approached UNHCR seeking international protection and was invited to be registered at the office of UNHCR's partner organization, an NGO providing free legal assistance in Kyiv. The legal counselor at the organization conducted a registration interview and began to provide free legal counseling to the individual. During a break in the counseling session, the legal counselor contacted UNHCR in order to discuss the situation, and meanwhile Mr. Razvozhayev said he would go to a nearby cafeteria for lunch and left his personal belongings in the office. When he did not return to the interview and the lawyer could not contact him on the phone, a missing person's report was immediately filed with the Solomiansky division of the police.

A functional asylum system requires that persons seeking international protection have confidence in a fair and equitable asylum system that will allow them to make their claim and to have their human rights, notably their physical integrity and personal data fully respected and protected by the host State. Any removal to the country of origin not respecting existing procedures may lead to the State being held responsible for a grave violation of national and international law.

UNHCR expects that the incident will be thoroughly investigated by the relevant law enforcement authorities and awaits the results of official investigation.

A report in [Gazeta.ru](#) quoted Yevgeny Golishkin, a leader of the leftist Ukrainian organization Borotba, as saying that Razvozhayev arrived in Kyiv two days

earlier and had decided to seek refugee status.

Razvozhayev fled Russia and [went into hiding](#) after he, Udaltsov, and Lebedev were [questioned on October 17](#) by agents from the Investigative Committee, which opened a criminal case against them in connection with the May 6 demonstrations.

Lebedev was kept in custody. Razvozhayev and Udaltsov, who remains in Moscow, were released and ordered not to leave the capital.

One has to wonder why the authorities went to such lengths -- and took such risks -- to seize Razvozhayev on foreign territory. Until now, he appeared to be a bit player in a case that, at least until now, seemed aimed primarily at Udaltsov.

The Investigative Committee could be seeking to broaden its list of targets in the case and considered Razvozhayev key to that effort. If that is the case, Razvozhayev's boss, Ilya Ponomaryov of the opposition A Just Russia party, could be in for a rough ride.

On October 23, [Vladimir Burmatov](#), a Duma deputy from the ruling United Russia party, called on Ponomaryov to surrender his parliamentary mandate -- and thus his immunity from prosecution -- due to his affiliation with Razvozhayev and the May 6 demonstrations.

(Thanks to Pavel Butorin of [RusPoliceWatch](#) for help compiling materials for this post.)