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of Ukrainian Politics**

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With the election of a new parliament and the imminence of a coalition government, Ukraine's political culture has come into its own. By the contemporary standards of the former Soviet Union, two striking phenomena were on display: a fully democratic election between full blooded alternatives and a self-confident electorate that showed itself quick to punish and slow to trust. By contemporary Euro-Atlantic standards, all the 'criteria' were met. Hence the verdict of the former American Ambassador to Ukraine, Carlos Pascual: 'Ukraine has come into the mainstream of European politics'.

But these contemporary standards risk misleading us. The real lesson of the 26 March elections is that Ukraine is returning to itself: to its heritage of de-centralisation, pluralism, distrust of power and loathing of absolutism; and to the attributes and faults bred by this heritage: compromise, bargaining, manoeuvre, manipulation and the avoidance of clear choices. The 'new' coordinates of Ukrainian politics—a tempered presidency, a stronger parliament, a demanding electorate and an inquisitive (nay, inquisitorial) mass media—fit a much older pattern, and for this reason they are unlikely to change. Therefore, no one should be waiting impatiently for the emergence of what both Russia and the West like to call a 'clear political course'. A *distinctive* course there is bound to be, but it is most unlikely to bring comfort to the technocrats in Brussels or the geopoliticians in the Kremlin. In both places it is time for a little confusion and a lot of thinking.

Thinking in Russia must proceed from a premise that can no longer be denied: 'Ukraine is not Russia'. Disenchantment with Yushchenko has not dissipated the 'orange virus'. Rather, it has led to a regrouping of Orange forces. During the first round of the 2004 elections—well before there was any Yushchenko presidency to be disillusioned about—Viktor Yanukovych secured 36.31 per cent of the vote. On 26 March 2006 he secured 32.1 per cent. In the third round of the 2004 elections, when Yanukovych represented all 'blue' forces', he secured 43 per cent. The combined total of all blue forces on 26 March—including those which failed to clear the 3 per cent barrier—was also 43 per cent (and of this, the once mighty Communist Party secured a mere 3.66 per cent).

The first challenge for the Kremlin is to come to terms with the fact that the Party of Regions is not Ukraine's natural 'party of power', but a distinctly regional force. The greater challenge is to come to terms with the political forces that comprise the majority in Ukraine: forces who do not believe that Ukrainians and Russians are one and the same people, but a different, albeit closely related people. The route to cooperation with these forces lies not in stressing 'common' history and heritage, but acknowledging and respecting what makes Ukraine Ukraine. Yet once this process is underway, the temptation will be to replace 'brotherly relations' with 'pragmatism', i.e. toughness. It is a temptation best resisted, because whenever Russian politicians have yielded to it, the results have been very different from what they expected.

Very soon, these points of principle are bound to prove relevant in practice. Should she return to the premiership, it is possible that Yulia Tymoshenko will renounce the 4 January Russo-Ukraine gas accord. If she does, the bad news from Russia's

point of view is that many business circles in eastern Ukraine will support her. The good news is that she will need to sustain the support of parliament through this or any other bold course of action. In these untidy but not necessarily unpromising conditions, it would seem prudent for the Kremlin to temper its own version of pragmatism—‘the firm promotion of national interests’—with the Western version of pragmatism: *reasonableness* and the effort to ensure that one’s own national interests are compatible with the legitimate interests of others.

Like Russia, the West will have to live with indeterminacy and its two inseparable companions: inconsistency and contradiction. Despite its Orange majority, indeterminacy exists in Ukraine because, beyond a commitment to democracy, Orange does not define a consensus. Indeed, it can no longer mask disharmony and distrust. President Yushchenko was not prepared for a result which put his party, *Nasha Ukraina*, a distant third in the poll, but the fact remains that no coalition can be formed without it. His response to this state of affairs is both clever and desperate: delay. On impeccably Euro-Atlantic grounds, he is insisting that the Orange forces first agree to a coalition and the policies underpinning it and only then to the distribution of posts. Yet few in the country will be impressed by this. Prior to the election—when Yushchenko assumed that his party would trump Tymoshenko’s—he not only agreed that the premiership should go to the strongest party, he actually proposed this himself. The 4 April statement of *Nasha Ukraina* points out that, under the provisions of the new constitutional arrangement, the delay can last up to two months. But even if it only lasts days, what then: a cohesive government, a supportive president and a disciplined parliament? In time we might be able to count on two out of the three. In the meantime, Euro-Atlantic institutions will need to think carefully about what they can and cannot do.

But they will need to think imaginatively as well as carefully. Today the coordinates of the EU elite consensus are liberal democracy, market deregulation, a rules governed approach to business and financial stability. The emerging Ukrainian consensus could well be founded upon liberal democracy, social justice, social welfare and, as uninvited corollaries, financial indiscipline, economic uncertainty and lack of business confidence. Must that consensus exclude Ukraine from the ‘European project’? Can the EU shape, let alone change that consensus without providing clear signals that Ukraine is welcome to join that project when it is capable and willing?

The fact that attitudes inside NATO about Ukraine are more positive and proactive than those inside the EU does not require comment. But these attitudes need to come to terms with the reality of an Orange coalition that has reached no consensus about NATO membership and with a country whose citizens, on present form, are ill-disposed towards it. From the start, NATO enlargement has been a demand driven process. NATO is not in the business of recruiting new members. Will Ukraine’s government now take the lead in reshaping public perceptions and sentiment? Or will the imperatives of political struggle defer that essential task once again? Ukraine’s answer to this question will decide when, and indeed whether Ukraine joins MAP [Membership Action Plan] and the demanding process of accession begins. NATO cannot answer it. Russia will be unpleasantly surprised if it tries to do so.

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