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THE UKRAINIAN AND BELARUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

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PRECIS

1. GENERAL. These essays address the impact of the recent presidential elections in Ukraine and Belarus on European security. Addressing different aspects of the problem, they complement each other in their analysis of these elections for Ukraine specifically and for the region generally. In drawing short-term and long-term implications, they make a coherent argument for concern over political developments in Russia's western borderland and support US and Western engagement in crisis management and resolution now. A first step to that process is consultations with the governments of Central and Eastern Europe.

2. RESULTS OF THE UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL RUNOFF ELECTION, 10 JULY 1994: AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT, by William M. Connor. Initial analysis of the dynamics and implications of the Ukrainian Presidential runoff elections has been off the mark because it accepted the conventional wisdom of dividing Ukraine politically between Eastern and Western Ukraine. On the basis of the voting pattern, the author has divided Ukraine into four distinct zones: Western, Central, Eastern, and Southern Ukraine. The winner, Leonid D. Kuchma, upset the incumbent (and first elected) President of Ukraine, Leonid M. Kravchuk, in the runoff after placing second to Kravchuk in the first round of voting and trailing in public opinion polls going into the second round elections. Kuchma carried east and south decisively, lost the west in a similar fashion, and held a solid base in the center. Kuchma now must solve Ukraine's economic problems and some of the same problems which faced Kravchuk, address the issue of Ukrainian statehood, and manage relations with the Crimean Republic. Western Ukrainian reaction(s) to Kuchma's policies will have serious implications for Ukrainian stability.

3. UKRAINIAN AND BELARUS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: PRELUDE TO A CRISIS IN THE WESTERN BORDERLANDS OF RUSSIA, by Jacob W. Kipp, Ph. D. Analyzing the election results of the runoff elections in Ukraine and Belarus', Dr. Kipp finds that a possible outcome is the "gray area or buffer zone," against which President Clinton spoke in Poland on 7 July 1994, due to internal instability of the two countries rather than to external threat. The two elections were similar in the response of the populations to the economic crises in both countries, crime and corruption, and the desire for closer ties with Russia. The election

results differed in the role of ethno-nationalism and regionalisation of issues in Ukraine. There exists the possibility of a new "Curzon Line" along the western borderlands of Russia. Immediate consultations with NATO partners and Eastern European countries towards a common policy to deal with borderland crisis are in order.

10 JULY 1994: AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT

On 11 July 1994, Leonid D. Kuchma, an industrial manager and former prime minister of Ukraine after independence, won the run-off election for President of Ukraine over the incumbent (and first elected) President, Leonid M. Kravchuk, a former Communist Party apparatchik. He is to be sworn in on 19 July 1994. The overall tally was 52% for Kuchma against 46% for Kravchuk, and nearly 70% of registered voters participated. (See Table 1) This outcome represented an upset because Kravchuk had won the preli-minary round in the Presidential elections on 26 June with 38% of the vote to 31% for Kuchma. Moreover, the latest poll taken before the election had Kravchuk ahead of Kuchma by 51% to 45%.[1](#)

The major issue of the campaign was the economic performance of Ukraine. Under Kravchuk, the Ukrainian economy had fallen far behind that of Russia; at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian economy had appeared stronger than that of Russia. Indeed, the rise of opposition to Kravchuk and strikes in the industrial, pro-Russian Eastern Ukraine, caused Kravchuk to call early parliamentary (March-April 1994) and presidential elections (June-July 1994). Allied to the economic issue were the issues of relations with Russia and of the nature of the Ukrainian state: citizenship based on living within the territorial boundaries of Ukraine versus citizenship based on Ukrainian national criteria; and centralized versus federal organization of the state. Finally, widespread, organized crime, and associated corruption, was an issue.[2](#)

Kuchma first entered the public eye in October 1992 as a surprise selection as prime minister. Prior to this, he had been director of the largest ICBM construction plant in the Former Soviet Union (FSU). Parliament gave him special powers as prime minister to govern from October 1992 to May 1993. However, he could not overcome the entrenched special interests in the presidential apparatus (separate and distinct from the government) or in the Supreme Rada (Parliament), whose members were elected when Ukraine was still part of the Soviet Union, and his special powers were not renewed in May 1993. He resigned in September 1993 because of challenges to his authority from Parliament and President Kravchuk and moved into opposition to Kravchuk's government. He campaigned on a policy of economic improvement in Ukraine, based upon closer relations with Russia and joining the Economic Union of the CIS. His election has drawn praise from Vladimir Zhirinovskiy of Russia. But the leader of the Rukh party, a Ukrainian nationalist party which has its strength in the western Ukraine, and the leader of the Crimean Tatars, a small but significant ethnic minority in the Crimean Republic, have criticized Kuchma.[3](#)

While a casual reading of the voting results by *oblast* (equivalent to our states) would lead to claiming an East-West split between the candidates,[4](#) a more careful breakdown would show four regions: Western (8 oblasts), Central (5 oblasts, one city), Eastern (7 oblasts), and Southern (5 oblasts, one city). (See Figures 1 and 2) Of these, the Western voted heavily for Kravchuk, the Central represented the most balance between Kravchuk and Kuchma, and the Eastern and

Southern went heavily for Kuchma, the Eastern more so than the Southern. The Eastern and Southern region oblasts which voted heavily for Kuchma (more than 60%) contain nearly 60% of the nation's population, while the Western region oblasts which voted heavily for Kravchuk (more than 60%) contain only about 20% of the nation's population.⁵ In addition to their voting for president in the election runoff, the regions differ in their attitudes about three key issues: Ukrainian nationalism; nature of the state; and effects from the economic decline.

Ukrainian nationalism. The West is the most nationalistic and anti-Russian of the regions. The Center is most accommodating of both. The South is pro-Russian but, with the exception of the Crimean Republic, less than the East, and the East, with a significant Russian and Russianized Ukrainian population, is the most pro-Russian. The Galician region of Western Ukraine and the Crimean Republic starkly illustrate this split in Ukraine. In the referendum for Ukrainian independence in December 1991, the Galician region of Western Ukraine gave the highest support (nearly 100%) while the Crimean Republic gave the lowest (only 54%)⁶; in the presidential runoff election, the Galician region voted nearly 90% for Kravchuk while the Crimean Republic voted nearly 90% for Kuchma.⁷

Nature of Ukrainian state. The West and the Center tend to favor a centralized state, with the West favoring citizenship based on ethno-nationalism and the Center favoring citizenship based on territoriality. The East and South have favored a federal state and citizenship based on territoriality or even dual citizenship. The oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Eastern Region as well as the Crimean Republic voted in favor of greater autonomy, dual citizenship, and Russian as an official language during an official public opinion poll conducted during the Parliamentary elections in March.⁸

Effects of economic decline. The East and the South have been hardest hit by the economic decline of Ukraine, while the West has suffered least. Indeed, opinion polls taken nearly a year before the parliamentary and presidential elections identified the economic crisis and regionalization of its effects. Nearly two to three times as many citizens in the Western region felt their personal economic situation much better or somewhat better from the previous year than did citizens in the East and South. Further, the West expressed the highest confidence in the market or "mixed" (market/planned) forms of economy while the East and South significantly favored the command or planned forms.⁹

Surprises

Foremost among the surprises was the election of Kuchma overall. Apparently both Volodymyr Lanovoi and Oleksandr Moroz, presidential candidates in the June elections, threw their support to Kuchma in the runoff. Next was the decisiveness of the vote for Kuchma in the eastern provinces. The pro-Kuchma vote substantially exceeds the proportion of the minority Russian population in those oblasts. Then, the vote for Kuchma in Odessa oblast, signifying Kravchuk's loss of the entire south including areas with overwhelming Ukrainian majorities, underscored the importance of the economic issue in deciding the election. Several of these areas [Mikolayiv and Kherson for example] were closely tied to the military-industrial complex and had suffered a decline in economic fortunes since the end of the Union. Finally, for the first time, the Central

region showed a divide along the Dnieper River, with the Left Bank oblasts of the region supporting Kuchma and the Right Bank ones supporting Kravchuk.[10](#)

Implications

Any analysis which uses an Eastern Ukraine-Western Ukraine structure for its model cannot be regarded as valid. At the least, the situation involves four distinct regions. Currently, Kuchma has showed strength in the two regions with nearly 60% of the population, while the opposition showed strength in the region with only 20% of the population. Some of that strength is more a negative vote against the failed economic policies of his predecessor than a vote for him. That part of his support could evaporate with further economic decline.

Kuchma's platform involved accommodation with Russia including: economic union, the outright sale of the Black Sea Fleet [BSF] to Russia, and leasing of bases to Russia. Since Kravchuk's government had already agreed with Russia on the sale of the BSF and in principle to leasing bases to Russia, the sticking point, Russian insistence on an indefinite lease for exclusive use of facilities, may leave Kuchma no more chance for success than Kravchuk achieved. Thus, Kuchma must convince Russia to back off the lease issue as a quid pro quo for economic union and closer participation in CIS.

Kuchma may be better able than Kravchuk to work with the largest parliamentary party, the neo-Communists, and the centrist, independent members in Parliament to achieve economic reform. Also, he may now use the Presidential apparatus to achieve reform without parliamentary involvement. He will have to replace Kravchuk's people with his own, and that process will take time, with attendant loss of continuity and momentum.

However, since another part of Kuchma's platform involved closer economic relations with Russia, such relations may lead to Ukraine joining Russia's market rather than the EC. Ukraine's economic reforms will be those to fit into the Russian economy rather than into the EC. This would undermine US and Western policies for this part of the world for integrating the Central and East European economies into a general European market.

A deadlock in government, including within Parliament, could arise between eastern and western Ukraine as well as between nationalists and the former apparatchiks. Kuchma's power as President, to rule by decree without Parliament, can overcome this in the short term. In the long term, however, he will have to keep his support in the East and South, build support in the Center, especially the Right Bank oblasts which voted for Kravchuk, and bring the Western region to cooperate on some of his program. As the election figures show, moreover, the West is relatively isolated both geographically and politically, so they will have some incentive to cooperate with Kuchma if he reaches out to them.

Kuchma's policy of accommodation with Russia involves striking a delicate balance between nationalist and pro-Russian factions in Ukraine. A pro-Russian accommodation carries serious risks for him and for Ukraine, risks which he has already acknowledged. In steering a course between accommodation with Russia and support of Ukrainian independence, Kuchma faces his most serious challenge in dealing with the aspirations and claims of the government of Crimea

to sovereignty and even independence. Crimea is also a problem for Ukraine externally, with Russia, over the following: basing rights for the BSF and over the BSF itself; and the ethnic relations among Russians (the majority), Ukrainians, and Tatars. Accommodation such as federalism, independence for Crimea and the eastern oblasts, or voluntary incorporation of Crimea and the eastern oblasts into Russia could lead Western Ukraine, particularly Galicia, to decide to make its own way as a sovereign state. The core problem with such an outcome is that Galicia's claim to independence will rest upon Stalin's annexations at the end of the Second World War and will be subject to challenge by ethnic minorities, i. e., the Polish, Hungarian, Slovak, and Romanian populations, living in the that region who form natural irredentas. In short, a weak Ukrainian-Galician state will face not only the probable antagonism of a restored Russian-East Ukrainian state but also that of bordering national states with significant minorities within Galician territory.

For analysis of the regional and long-term significance, see Dr. Jacob W. Kipp's article, ["Ukrainian and Belarus Presidential Elections: Prelude to a Crisis in the Western Borderlands of Russia."](#)

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Region/Oblast	Kravchuk	Kuchma
Western		
Volyn	84	14
Zakarpats'ka	70	25
Ivano-Frankovs'k	94	4
Lviv	94	4
Rivne	87	11
Ternopil'	95	4
Khmelnitsky	57	39
Chernivtsy	62	35
Central		
Vinnitsia	54	42
Zhitomir	56	42
Kiev	58	38
Kirovograd	46	50
Cherkassy	51	46

Kiev(City)	60	36
Eastern		
Dnipropetrovsk	30	68
Donets'k	18	79
Luhansk	10	88
Poltava	37	59
Sumy	29	68
Kharkiv	26	71
Chernihiv	25	72
Southern		
Crimean Republic	9	90
Zaporozhia	27	71
Mikolayiv	45	53
Odessa	29	67
Kherson	32	65
Sevastopol(City)	7	92
Table 1--Breakdown of Voting by Oblasts within Regions 11		

ENDNOTES

1. RFE/RL Daily Report No. 133, 15 July 94, "Kuchma Presented With Presidential Certificate"; Petro Dziubaniuk, "Leonid Kuchma mozhe vyjty vpered za kil'kisty holosiv, ale prezidentom oboranyj ne bude," Ukraina BB, Internet, 6 Jul 94; RFE/RL Daily Report No. 128, 8 July 94, "Poll Shows Kravchuk Edging Out Kuchma." [BACK](#)
2. Kathleen Mihalisko, "Ukrainians and Their Leaders at a Time of Crisis," RFE/RL Research Report 2:31 (July, 1993), pp. 54-57; Taras Kuzio, "The Ukrainian Economy 1993-1994: Policies, Crises and Reform," Ukrainian Business Review 2:2 (Summer, 1994), pp. 11-13; Kuzio, "Ukrainian Parliamentary Elections. Mar/Apr 1994," UBR 2:2, pp. 26-27. [BACK](#)
3. Kuzio, "Ukrainian Economy," pp. 10-11. [BACK](#)
4. Misha Glenny, "Ukraine's Great Divide," New York Times, 14 July 1994, p. A23, for example. [BACK](#)

5 .Mihalisko, p.54. [BACK](#)

6 . Jaroslaw Martynuk, "Ukrainian Independence and Territorial Integrity," RFE/RL Research Report 1:13 (27 March 1992), pp. 65- 68. [BACK](#)

7. Ukrainian Republican Party Information-Press Service, Ukraina Bulletin Board, Internet, 12 July 1994, "Facts on the Second Round Presidential Election of Ukraine." [BACK](#)

8. Martyniuk, pp. 66-68; Kuzio, "Ukrainian Parliamentary Elections," pp. 23-27; Ian Brzezinski, "Interview," Ukrainian Business Review 2:2 (Summer, 1994), pp.28-29; Glenney, p. A23. [BACK](#)

9. Mihalisko, pp. 55-57; Glenney, p. A23; Kuzio, "Ukrainian Economy," pp. 11-12. [BACK](#)

10. Dominique Arel and Andrew Wilson, "Ukraine Under Kuchma: Back to 'Eurasia'?", RFE/RL Research Report 3:32(19 August 1994), p. 3.[BACK](#)

11. "Facts on the Second Round Presidential Elections of Ukraine." [BACK](#)