



KREMLIN-LINKED FORCES IN UKRAINE'S 2019 ELECTIONS

On the Brink of Revenge?

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Executive Summary

The 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine take place against the backdrop of the continuing “hybrid war” waged by Russia, but are also marked by the visible successes of the Ukrainian leadership in strengthening the country’s defenses, reviving its economic growth and implementing pro-European policies.

For the Kremlin, the stakes in these elections are high: for years, the entire Putin policy has been aimed at bringing Ukraine back into Moscow’s “zone of responsibility.” The Russian president has an opportunity to “get even” for all the losses he suffered in Ukraine from 2004 to 2014. The timing for this is good: Ukrainians have become tired of the mobilizational agenda and of anti-Russian rhetoric, and wish above all to improve their day-to-day well-being.

In these circumstances, the Kremlin’s primary objective has been to lower President Poroshenko’s ratings and take him out of competition in the first round of the presidential elections. To secure this outcome, Moscow has been building relationships with any opposition forces that fiercely reject the current leaders.

The Ukrainian politicians most aligned with the Kremlin are Viktor Medvedchuk and Yulia Tymoshenko; both have a long history of constructive collaboration with Vladimir Putin and his closest cohorts, abstain from criticizing the Russian president, and make campaign promises that will not be possible to keep without reinstating tight connections with Moscow.

Considering the exceptional organization of the electoral process in Ukraine in 2019, Moscow is betting on the victory of the Kremlin-linked forces in both the presidential and parliamentary elections; the most likely scenario is the creation of a broad coalition against Petro Poroshenko, with a pre-agreement between the opposition forces on who will be elected president, who will be appointed as prime minister, and who will be installed as chairperson of the Rada.

If the Kremlin’s “two-step” scheme is realized, one could say that the Kremlin’s revenge would be institutionalized, and that Ukraine, even if in a “soft” form and not immediately, but rather over the course of several years, will return to Russia’s sphere of influence.

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Ukraine on the Eve of the March 2019 Elections

In 2019, for the second time, Ukraine will be holding presidential and parliamentary elections in the same year. While in 2014 they were a kind of a referendum to support a European Ukraine and an indicator of the society's unity in standing up to Russia's aggression, today their outcomes do not appear at all clear.

The past five years have been trying times for Ukraine: the annexation of Crimea, the War launched by Moscow in 2014, the creation of Russian-backed separatist "republics" in significant parts of Donetsk and Lugansk Oblasts, the loss of the larger part of the navy, and a severe reduction not only in the economic ties between Ukraine and Russia, but also of Ukraine's ability to interact with former Soviet republics. As a result of the conflict, more than 10,000 Ukrainian citizens lost their lives, nearly 1.5 million people were displaced, and the country was deprived of 25% of its industrial potential.¹ Ukraine's GDP plunged from \$183.3 billion (US dollars used throughout) (using the 2013 exchange rate) to \$90.6 billion in 2015.² The value of the Hryvnia dropped from 7.99 per \$1 in early December 2013 to 27.19 per \$1 at the end of 2016.³ Real disposable incomes fell more than 30% over the course of three years. The path towards Ukraine's integration into the EU brought fewer results than the reformers had hoped for, although the Association Agreement was signed in summer 2014 and came into full effect only on September 1, 2017, and, while the treaty on visa-free travel was enacted in 2017, EU membership is not yet on the agenda.

In spite of all, one shouldn't discount Ukraine's achievements. In recent years the country has been able to stabilize the Eastern front, reorient economic partnerships westward, and effectively clean up its banking system. From its 2015 bottom, the Ukrainian economy has grown

1. "Ukraina poterala chetvert' promyshlennosti iz-za okkupatsi Donbassa" [Ukraine has lost a quarter of its industry because of the occupation of Donbass], *Zerkalo Nedeli*, 23 March 2018, <https://zn.ua>.

2. According to Ukrainian Ministry of Finance and World Bank data, <https://index.minfin.com.ua> (accessed 22 December 2018).

3. In the period spanning 1 December 2013 through 30 December 2016, according to the National Bank of Ukraine, www.bank.gov.ua (accessed 22 December 2018).

by more than 10%; GDP grew by 3.8% in 2018.⁴ Industrial production leveled off, and economic collaboration with the EU has begun to bear fruit: in 2017 and 2018, more than 50 new industrial facilities started to operate in the country.⁵

Capital investment in the first half of 2018 set a 10-year record at 37%,⁶ while the total volume of direct foreign investment from EU countries increased to \$24.5 billion compared to \$18.2 billion in 2013.⁷ Ukraine terminated its purchases of Russia's natural gas, starting in November 2015. The National Bank's policies allowed the country to stabilize the Hryvnia exchange rate and prevent its sharp fluctuations even with foreign policy uncertainty. International reserves have been increased from \$6.42 billion as of January 1, 2015, to more than \$20 billion as of January 1, 2019.⁸ In relation to GDP, foreign debt has been reduced from more than 82% in 2016 to below 60% in January 1, 2019.⁹ In spite of many apocalyptic forecasts, Ukraine has formed constructive collaborations with international financial organizations and European donors. All of this took place despite the continuous pressure from Russia, which caused a rise of defense allocations from 14.8 to 101.1 billion Hryvnia (\$547 million to \$3 billion) between 2013 and 2019,¹⁰ thus reducing growth in Ukrainian citizens' well-being.

Of course, many critical problems that Ukraine has faced from the very first days of its independence have not yet been solved. The economy is still oligarchic and is dominated by the commodity sector (especially by the iron and steel industries), which makes it dependent on international market fluctuations. There has been no success in fighting corruption. In spite of the supreme anti-corruption court being created, the most scandalous corruption cases are basically idling for months.

4. "Rost VVP Ukrainy za 9 mesiatsev 2018 g. sostavil 3,8%" [Ukraine's GDP growth rate over nine months of 2018 tops 3.8%], Finance.ua, 26 October 2018, www.news.finance.ua.

5. "Za poslednie dva goda v Ukraine otkryli 56 novykh zavodov" [56 new factories opened in Ukraine in the past two years], TSN, 16 February 2017, <https://ru.tsn.ua>.

6. "Grojsman zaiavilo o roste investitsij na 37%" [Groysman: investments are up by 37%], Ukrinform, 11 July 2018, www.ukrinform.ru.

7. "Nazvan lider investitsij v Ukrainu" [Leading investor into Ukraine named], Slovo i dilo, 29 November 2018, www.ru.slovoidilo.ua.

8. According to the National Bank of Ukraine, www.bank.gov.ua (accessed 22 December 2018) and "Ukraina poluchila 1,4 milliarda dollarov o MVF" [Ukraine received \$1.4B from the IMF], Korrespondent, 21 December 2018, www.korrespondent.net.

9. "Gosudarstvennyj dolg Ukrainy" [National debt of Ukraine], Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, www.index.minfin.com.ua (accessed 22 December 2018).

10. Ministry of Finance of Ukraine data for 2013 and 2018. See: "Raskhody" [Expenses], Tsina derzhavi, <http://cost.ua>; and "Rozpodil vidatkov Derzhavnogo bjudzhetu Ukraïni na 2019 rik" [Distribution of expenditures of the State Budget of Ukraine for 2019], Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, www.minfin.gov.ua (websites accessed 22 December 2018).

A series of fundamental economic reforms—from the legalization of private ownership of arable land to the improvement of the taxation system—have not been carried out. Economic difficulties substantially changed the behavioral patterns of Ukrainians: in 2015–2018 at least 1.6 million people left their country, mostly for EU member states. Fatigue and frustration are dulling people's perception of Russia. While in 2014 not just the political elite but also the vast majority of the population were certain that Russia posed a threat to the existence of Ukraine, today even presidential candidates are not prepared to call Vladimir Putin an enemy. Sociological surveys indicate that over the course of the past three years the number of Ukrainian citizens who view Russia negatively have been decreasing; 48% of Ukrainians now rate their view of Russia as “good” or “mostly good.”¹¹ The business community harbors illusions about the possibilities of reestablishing Ukrainian presence in the Russian market upon resolution of the most critical disagreements; politicians continue believing that negotiations with Russia is the only path towards reclaiming Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Many widely cited Ukrainian political experts view this trend without undue dramatics. For example, Vadym Karasiiov, director of the Institute of Global Strategies, remarks that he is “not shocked by the survey results, even though we were talking about the people's attitude towards a country which Ukraine has acknowledged to be an aggressor—the thing is, we don't have a total war, the military and civil spheres are separate, so for many this is a faraway war.”¹² Institute of Sociology director Evgenii Golovakha believes that the existence of such an attitude among Ukrainian citizens should not beget the idea that the question of attitudes towards Russia might result in a political schism in Ukraine.¹³ Kostyantyn Bondarenko, director of the Ukrainian Politics Foundation, states that “the fact that 48% of Ukrainians see Russia as being not as much Putin's regime as an economic partner, common cultural field, [with] historical closeness, and genetic similarity is a positive factor—it will make it easier to recover from the horrible period of 2014 through 2018 with its bloodshed, dirt, and propaganda.”¹⁴ Even if one avoids citing the opinions of analytics

11. “Rossijsko-ukrainskie otnosheniia” [Russian-Ukrainian relations], Levada Tsentr, 10 October 2018, www.levada.ru. Note, too, that Russia also has the highest negative rating: 49% of Ukrainians consider their attitude to Russia “frosty” or “very frosty”: “Dynamika suspil'-nopolitychnykh pogliadv v Ukraïni” [Dynamics of social and political views in Ukraine], 15–31 September 2018, slide 45, Rejting, 21 May 2018, <http://ratinggroup.ua>.

12. “Pochemu pochti polovina ukraintsev khorosho odnositsia k Rossii” [Why do almost half of Ukrainians view Russia positively?], Newsbay, <https://newsbay.info> (date undetermined, accessed 21 December 2018).

13. S Dorosh, “Pochemu pochti polovina ukraintsev khorosho odnositsia k Rossii” [Why do almost half of Ukrainians view Russia positively?], BBC, 19 October 2018, www.bbc.com.

14. “Pochemu pochti polovina ukraintsev khorosho odnositsia k Rossii”, *op. cit* [12].

fascinated by the “Russian world” doctrine, it is clear that a significant part of the population desires peace and tranquility—just as normal people in any society desire—and the cost of achieving them concerns an increasingly smaller part of Ukraine’s population.

Ukraine’s primary goal and Ukrainian politicians’ primary objective should be promoting peace, strengthening the national economy, developing the Ukrainian identity, and building a nation ruled by law and capable of becoming a worthy member of the European family. However, Russia’s rulers seem to consider peaceful coexistence with an independent European Ukraine not just an undesirable, but an impossible option.

The Kremlin's Stance on "the Ukrainian Question" Before and After the Annexation of Crimea

Evaluating the Kremlin's attitude towards Ukraine should start with the point that, from Vladimir Putin's point of view, such an independent entity should not exist at all. "What was the USSR?", asked Putin himself in a conversation with Russian journalists back in 2011. "It was Russia—only it was called by another name."¹⁵ For the Russian president, independent Ukraine is a geopolitical aberration: in his opinion, "our [i.e. Russian and Ukrainian] historical, spiritual, and other roots give me the right to say that at the core we are one people",¹⁶ and therefore "I don't distinguish between Ukrainians and Russians at all."¹⁷ For an Orthodox Christian person, places relating to the Baptism of Rus' are holy; having lost Kyiv, which he calls a "part" and a "center" of the ancient Rus', Putin engages in discourse about Korsun as a place holy for all Russians, and erected a monument of Vladimir the Great next to the main entrance into the Kremlin, thus emphasizing his role as the "spiritual founder of the state of Russia." Therefore, for Putin, Ukraine is nothing but a "natural", constituent part of Russia.

It should also be noted that this "part" of Russia was detached in the course of the break-up of the Soviet Union, which Vladimir Putin considers as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of [the 20th] century".¹⁸ As to the break-up of the USSR, Putin has perceived it in the context of a global geopolitical confrontation—the result of a successful "operation" carried out by the West and aimed at destroying Russia. He has not forgotten the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski who said that "without Ukraine, Russian ceases to be a Eurasian empire; [...] However, if Moscow regains control

15. "Polnyj tekst interv'iu Putina rossijskim telekanalam" [Full text of Putin's interview with Russian TV channels], RIA Novosti, 17 October 2011, www.ria.ru.

16. "Bol'shaia press-konferentsiia Vladimira Putina" [Big press conference of Vladimir Putin], Kremlin.ru, 14 December 2017, <http://kremlin.ru>.

17. "Priamaia liniia s Vladimirom Putinyom" [Direct Line with Vladimir Putin], Kremlin.ru, 16 April 2015, <http://kremlin.ru>.

18. "Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federatsii" [Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly], Kremlin.ru, 25 April 2005, www.kremlin.ru.

over Ukraine, Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia.”¹⁹ Therefore, for the Kremlin, the loss of Ukraine has meant—and still means—a radical transformation of Russia itself. Consequently, Vladimir Putin considers such a loss unacceptable, and the greater the imminence of this loss becomes, the more rigidly he stands his ground.

In other words, at the level of fundamental “codes” [referencing the Russian concept of “*poniatii*”] by which the Kremlin lives today, Ukraine is nothing more than a part of Russia; one could call it “sovereign” but not go as far to call it independent. Its attempts to self-define itself as part of another (in this case European) union is absolutely unacceptable to Vladimir Putin—and this has been his stance not since the Revolution of Dignity, but at least since the Orange Revolution. The Kremlin won’t accept less—and will never agree to settle, and no Ukrainian politician can or should forget this. One should also remember that such an attitude towards Ukraine took shape among the Russian elite long before Putin appeared on the political scene. Back in the 1990s there were plans in Moscow to eradicate Ukrainian statehood. Even under President Yeltsin, Russian high officials, such as Mayor of Moscow Yury Luzhkov and State Duma Deputy Konstantin Zatulin, called Sevastopol a Russian city, questioning the legality and justification of the transfer of Crimea from the Soviet Republic of Russia to Ukraine in 1954, and called for “the return of Crimea and Sevastopol.”²⁰ It was not Putin who started meddling in the affairs of post-Soviet countries under the banner of protecting the rights of Russian “compatriots” and Russian-speakers abroad; the first such operations were carried out in Pridnestrovyie and Abkhazia in 1992.²¹ The idea of “splitting” Ukraine into western and eastern parts has long been a part of Russian political discourse, and the only thing that prevented Russia from bringing it to fruition in 2014 was the actions of Ukrainians who resolutely stood up in defense of their country.

Independent Ukraine is “problematic” for the Kremlin not just due to such semi-philosophical and geostrategic reasons. In the course of the past fifteen years, the Ukrainian people have twice resisted attempted abuse of

19. Z Brzezinski. *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York, Basic Books, 1997, p. 46.

20. L Piatiletova, “Potomki ne prostiat” [The descendants won’t forgive], *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, 25 July 2008, www.rg.ru; “Zatulin zhaluetsia, chto emu ne dali poobshchat’sia s pressoj v aeroportu” [Zatulin complains they wouldn’t let him talk to the press at the airport], RIA Novosti, 9 July 2009, <https://ria.ru>; “Lujkov prizval razorvat’ ‘bol’shoj dogovor’ s Ukrainoj” [Luzhkov calls for the break-off of the “big deal” with Ukraine], Pravda.ru, 5 June 2008, www.pravda.ru.

21. E. Kuznetsova, “Blizhnee zarubezh’e: vsio dal’she ot Rossii” [Russia’s “near abroad” keeps getting further away from Russia], *Rossija v global’noj politike*, vol. 2, No 5, September-October 2004, pp. 136-149.

power by their rulers. In this context, Ukraine appears to the Kremlin as dangerous proof that one part of the “single people”—the East Slavonic, Orthodox Christian population who had lived as part of the Russian Empire and the USSR for centuries—can adopt democratic values, renounce an imperial past, and become part of Europe. undermining the authoritarian doctrine that has been tested on the Russian people during Putin’s rule. It was quite logical, then, that the Kremlin managed to achieve “controllability” at the end of the 2000s with the coming to power of Viktor Yanukovich, first as prime minister, and then as president. And although Yanukovich was not a blind conductor of Putin’s will (on the contrary, at one point he tried playing his own game, preparing the Association Agreement with the EU and signing with China the memorandum on the construction of a deep-water port in Crimea), the Kremlin was certain that Yanukovich would be a guarantor of the political “stability” that by that time had been established in Russia. After the Revolution of Dignity, the Kremlin wanted to take revenge—either by eradicating Ukrainian statehood or by bringing to power in Kyiv those who would consciously or unconsciously adopt the Kremlin’s agenda.

Since 2014, the Kremlin’s strategy has been aimed at maintaining the hotbed of “controlled instability” in the east of Ukraine, the presence of which should have prevented the rapprochement of Kyiv with the EU and NATO. However, it did not bring the desired results: Ukraine did not turn into a failed state, and rejected the “federalization” plans provided for by the Minsk Agreements. In 2015, it became clear that Putin’s *blitzkrieg* had flopped; now the only chance for revenge is in the replay of the late 2000s script: influencing Ukraine’s democratic order in order to ensure the victory of a “close-to-Kremlin” candidate in the presidential elections, and later establishing control by “amenable” forces of the Verkhovna Rada.

Why is the Kremlin striving to achieve these results? First of all, one must acknowledge that, since 2014, the entire Russian political “construction” is being held up by the “Crimean factor.” The annexation of the peninsula legitimizes power in Russia more than anything else, and so Putin needs international recognition of Crimea as part of Russia as grounds for normalized relations with the West. As the first step, he needs to not only continue the Minsk process, but achieve significant progress in this direction—i.e. “trading Donbass for Crimea” and returning eastern territories to Ukraine in exchange for formal cessation of aggression and certain economic incentives. The Kremlin needs a Ukrainian government that slows down the country’s move towards Europe for the sake of “rebuilding ties” with Russia, rejects the idea of joining NATO, and acknowledges the “new geopolitical reality” that includes a Russian Crimea.

It's impossible to guess at this point what will happen next, but even getting close to such results would allow the Kremlin to proclaim that Russia had stopped "the West's offensive" that has been continuing since the second half of the 1980s.

There is a lot at stake for the Kremlin in 2019. Today, Russia is losing out in economic competition (the bet on China is apparently not working). The "breakthrough potential" in every sphere is quickly fading, and Vladimir Putin needs to reflect on how to legitimize his rule after 2024 in spite of his decreasing approval ratings caused by mounting economic hardship. Everything is ready for the new campaign: by imposing its interpretation of the Minsk Agreements, the Kremlin dictates the conditions for possible negotiations, and by corrupting diverse political forces in Ukraine it diversifies the risks of the election process. How good are the Kremlin's chances? To provide a well-founded answer to this question, one must evaluate the methods of the fight and the forces of Putin's "loyalists".

Methods of Kremlin Interference in Ukrainian Elections

Since 2016, Moscow has been accused of meddling in US, French and German elections, as well as the Brexit referendum, and aiding efforts to destabilize European politics in general. This series of interference takes its origin in Ukraine fifteen years ago when the Kremlin bet on Viktor Yanukovich in 2004. To a large degree, that decision was based on the advice of Viktor Medvedchuk, then chief of staff to President Leonid Kuchma and the top Russian leaders' confidant in Ukraine.

Ukraine has been—and remains—a post-Soviet state that possesses all the flaws inherited from both Soviet society and the early market reform era; that is why the Kremlin's tactics in Ukrainian elections differ substantially from those it has been using to meddle in electoral processes in other countries.

In contrast to the EU nations or the United States, where in recent years Russia has bet on parties and social movements close to the Kremlin, in Ukraine Moscow has not been seen as “promoting” any particular ideology. More likely, the deal here is based on building relationships with individual politicians rather than political forces, above all because the parties remain nothing more than “support groups” for influential individuals. This facilitates the task, since there is no need to organize mass mobilizations of radical force supporters. A classic example of Russia using such tactics (although with not very successful results) is the support provided in 2004 to Viktor Yanukovich, who was supposed to deliver “his” messages—which had been fully approved by the Kremlin. This approach turned out so attractive that, to this day, the Kremlin has still not found in Ukraine political forces on which it could fully rely, and so the function of “links” is still performed by politicians whom Moscow supports above all personally.

Up to recently, the Kremlin has enjoyed some advantages in Ukraine that it never possessed in the West. On the one hand, a substantial part of population is linguistically and culturally Russian, and thus considered itself to have been forcefully “Ukrainized”. Therefore, Moscow could mobilize Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine to support any pro-Russia

candidate (that is exactly what took place in the Ukrainian presidential elections of 2004 and 2010, when Yanukovych was endorsed by 93.5% and 90.4%, respectively, of Donetsk voters and 81.5% and 78.2% of Crimean voters²²). On the other hand, Ukraine was open to Russian “political technologists” and Russian television and other means of propaganda that were not subject to any limitations whatsoever until 2014. One way or another, until the beginning of the recent conflict, Ukraine was viewed by the Kremlin exclusively as a part of Russia’s sphere of interest, and its abilities to influence the process and results of Ukrainian elections appeared unlimited, even in spite of that pesky “glitch” in 2004–2005.

Until the very last moment, the Kremlin possessed formidable instruments of economic and political pressure against Ukraine, offering some concessions and handouts while applying a massive squeeze. Examples included the decrease in the price of natural gas to \$50 per 1000 m³ in the fall of 2004 in anticipation of Yanukovych’s victory, the emergency provision to Ukrainians of rights to travel across Russia without registration, and, on the contrary, the purposeful increase of gas prices in 2007 and 2009, the haggling around the Black Sea Fleet, and even the most recent 30% gas discount in the middle of December 2013. It must be specifically emphasized that, in each of those instances, there were politicians and officials in Ukraine who turned up ready and willing (probably to their personal benefit) to compromise. Think of the RosUkrEnergo corporation created by Dmytro Firtash with President Yushchenko’s blessing, the gas contract between Yulia Tymoshenko and Gazprom, with clear infringement of the economic interests of Ukraine, and the irresponsible extension of the Sevastopol Naval Base lease terms in exchange for another formal discount on natural gas.

It is also clear that also, before the Revolution of Dignity, Ukraine was a territory of Russian influence because the Russian secret services had deeply infiltrated the country, and a significant number of the highest-ranking officials during Yanukovych’s rule had Russian citizenship (usually issued in violation of Russian rules or bestowed through Putin’s secret orders). This was a major reason why Ukraine was unable to organize resistance against the annexation of Crimea, lost control of its southeast, and carried out extremely unsuccessful military campaigns in 2014. Russians who had longtime acted in Ukraine and then relocated *en masse* to Russia were a major instrument of the Kremlin’s influence in Ukrainian

22. 2004 Elections: third round data: “Ukraina. Prezidentskie vybory 2004” [Ukraine. Presidential elections, 2004], Elektoral’naia geografiia, 2004, www.electoralgeography.com; 2010, second round data: “Rezultaty vyborov 2010. Vtoroj tur” [Results of the 2010 elections. Second round], Ukrainskaia Pravda, 7 February 2010, www.pravda.com.ua.

elections throughout the 2000s, which was obviously not a factor in the other countries later affected by Russian meddling.

Following the 2014 events, Ukrainian society shook itself free of the publicly observed manifestations of Russian influence. A large-scale “cleaning” of the state apparatus has been undertaken. The Russian media lost a major share of their influence. While Russian TV channels have been banned, the rise of the autocephalous Ukrainian Church, in spite of many disagreements, is also expected to reduce the Kremlin's grip on the country. As well, Ukraine managed to decrease its economic dependence on Russia, ceasing to buy gas from Gazprom and reducing the share of total trade with Russia from 29.3% in 2012 to 11.3% in the first three quarters of 2018.²³

In these new circumstances, Vladimir Putin and his entourage use slightly different tactics. They seek to shift from focusing on one major person as their primary ally to dispersing attention between multiple players; for the first time, the Kremlin is counting not so much on the “duel” between the “big boys” of Ukrainian politics, as on the deliberate destruction of the support groups around President Poroshenko. Understanding that direct interference in favor of “pro-Russian” figures can backfire, Moscow strives instead to turn as many Ukrainian politicians as possible not into overt allies, but rather into “potentially amenable” ones. The emphasis is not on the ability of politicians to protect the interests of Russian-speakers—as it used to be—but on “securing peace in Ukraine” or “standing up against radical nationalism.” In other words, the Kremlin is trying to create an illusion that the *Putinverstehers* in Ukraine are devoted to the interests of all Ukrainians, who have become hostages of the “ruling junta” endorsed by the Americans. The Kremlin is no longer attempting to openly support those who appear most open to dialogue (for example, Yulia Tymoshenko has been named in the recently adopted Russian “sanctions lists”). Instead, its primary attention is directed at criticizing and discrediting the current leadership in anticipation that voters will turn away from Petro Poroshenko. There is no doubt Vladimir Putin has deep personal resentment for the current Ukrainian leader and views him as the least convenient partner.

23. Calculations for 2012: “Geograficheskaja struktura vneshnej trgovli Ukrainy tovarami” [Geographical structure of Ukraine's foreign trade in goods], State Export Support, <http://ukrexport.gov.ua>; for January–October 2018: “Ukraine's Foreign Trade in Goods, January–October 2018”; State Statistics Service of Ukraine; www.ukrstat.gov.ua. Accessed 23 December 2018.

Kremlin-linked Forces and Ukrainian Politics: Yesterday and Today

The ongoing election campaign led to the trading of insults and the hurling of improper accusations between the contenders. Among things being said, one can often hear the phrase “pro-Russian politician”, which indirectly underscores the ties with the aggressor country. However, we want to avoid using this term since we do not have reasons to accuse any Ukrainian politicians of betraying national interests, and we oppose the idea that “Russia” and “the Kremlin” might be addressed as synonyms, even in today’s situation. As we speak of “Kremlin-linked forces” in Ukrainian politics, we have in mind three categories of political and social leaders.

The first category refers to politicians with a well-documented history of long-term first-hand relations with Vladimir Putin or his close aides (like Dmitry Medvedev, Vladislav Surkov, Nikolay Patrushev, Gennagy Timchenko, or Konstantin Malofeyev), who have received from Russia political, financial, and/or organizational support, coordinated their actions with the Russian leadership, openly or discreetly hold Russian citizenship or have made attempts to receive it, and are connected to persons currently hiding in Russia. Individuals in this first category include former President Viktor Yanukovych, former Vice Prime Minister Serhiy Arbuzov, former Prosecutor General Viktor Pshonka, businessman and member of Yanukovych’s close circle Serhiy Kurchenko, and a number of other individuals who mostly do not now directly participate in Ukrainian politics. Among those active in Ukraine today, one can include in this category former Party of Regions officials and people close to its leaders, such as former Mayor of Kharkiv Mykhailo Dobkin, Verkhovna Rada Deputy Nestor Shufrich, former Vice Prime Minister Oleksandr Vilkul, and dozens of lesser-known politicians constantly speaking out in favor of “maintaining ties” with Russia. Most of them are currently associated in one way or another with the Opposition Bloc, which is mostly composed of former members and supporters of the Party of Regions.

The second category consists of politicians and civic leaders who have a history of close personal relationship with Putin, and who, while not possessing Russian citizenship or other formal connections to Russia,

continuously speak in favor of supporting actions publicly endorsed by Moscow. The most noticeable of such politicians is Viktor Medvedchuk, former Vice Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, Chief of Staff to Kuchma, and, according to the press, Vladimir Putin's *kum* (the Russian president participated in the baptizing of Medvedchuk's daughter Darya). He has especially strong organizational and ideological connections with Putin (it is alleged that he served as the "communication channel" between Yanukovich and Putin during the critical moments of the Revolution of Dignity).²⁴ Besides Medvedchuk, we would include in this second category Yuriy Boyko, who was recently expelled from the Opposition Bloc; Vadym Rabinovich, the leader of the "For Life" party; Serhiy Lyovochkin, and a number of other public figures, many of whom maintain a very ambiguous stance—such as the frontman of the "Ours" party, Yevhen Muraiev.

The third category includes politicians who over the course of all their career have undertaken steps or carried out actions that required substantial mutual understanding with the Russian leadership, and were clearly aimed at providing benefits to the Kremlin and politicians aligned with it. The major figure in this group is former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, with her famous 2009 "gas deal", her stance on the Black Sea fleet (in particular, in relation to the 2008 events during the Russian-Georgian conflict), her obstruction of the use of the Odessa-Brody gas pipeline in the forward-flow mode, and her sabotage of President Viktor Yushchenko's intentions to sign on behalf of Ukraine the NATO membership action plan. Tymoshenko is far from being alone in Ukraine when it comes to such long-term "playing along with the Kremlin"; however, the special attention being focused on her is based on her status as one of the obvious favorites in the upcoming elections.

In speaking of these individuals as "Kremlin-linked politicians," we do not assert that any of them, if endorsed by Ukrainian voters, will knowingly and intentionally act to the detriment of Ukraine's interests. Rather, we see two problems. On the one hand, it's likely that all politicians who have a certain record of relationship with Vladimir Putin and top Russian leaders might have entered informal agreements, which can later be used by the Kremlin as a means of blackmail, especially if one keeps in mind the grave consequences that accusations of collaboration with Russia can have on the career of any Ukrainian politician. On the other hand, all these individuals have stated more than once that they would be better able than others to come to terms with President Putin and solve their disagreements. For

24. "Ianukovich vo vremia Majdana zvonil Medvedchuku 54 raza" [Yanukovich called Medvedchuk 54 times during the Maidan], Ukrainskaia Pravda, 28 November 2016, www.pravda.com.ua.

instance, Yulia Tymoshenko said: “I am ready to negotiate with Moscow on Donbass” and “We need peace, and this peace must be achieved by means of diplomacy on the basis of the Budapest memorandum,”²⁵ while Viktor Medvedchuk declared: “I want to reestablish normal Russian-Ukrainian relations. I say openly, publicly, that we need to restore the relations between our countries. People themselves want that. They are tired of tensions which are historically unnatural for our peoples. We need peace and friendship.”²⁶ However, practically any agreements with the Kremlin that the current candidates might promise their voters would require significant concessions to Vladimir Putin—at least the “autonomization” of the Donbass separatist “republics” and some agreement on the current status of the Crimean peninsula and the Sea of Azov.

Recently, it has become more noticeable that the most Kremlin-friendly political forces are aggregating around two figures: Viktor Medvedchuk and Yulia Tymoshenko. Medvedchuk brings together those who are known for their old connections with the Party of Regions or key figures of Yanukovich's era, for their critical remarks on the pro-European agenda, for speaking up in favor of collaboration with Russia, with those acknowledging the impossibility of returning the lost territories. Among the supporters of this position are Oleksandr Vilkul's Opposition Bloc, Vadym Novynskyi's Party of Peace, Medvedchuk's own Ukrainian Choice movement, Vadym Rabinovich's “For Life” party, and Yevhen Muraiev's “Ours” party. At the beginning of November, Yuriy Boyko—Vice Prime Minister during part of Yanukovich's presidency and formal head of the Opposition Bloc since its inception—signed a coalition agreement with the “For Life” party for the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections within the framework of a project titled “Opposition Platform—For Life.” Although other leaders of the block—Vadym Novynskyi and Borys Kolesnikov—have stated that this move was Boyko's personal initiative, they invoked the process of expelling him from the Opposition Bloc and his Verkhovna Rada faction on the grounds of “betraying the voters' interests,” after “Opposition Platform—For Life” officially nominated Boyko as its presidential candidate.

25. “Tymoshenko zaiavila, chto gotova vesti peregovory s Moskvoy o Donbasse” [Tymoshenko said she was ready to negotiate with Moscow about Donbass], Politikus.ru, 14 December 2018, www.politikus.ru; “Dlia mira Ukraine nuzhny peregovory v Budapeshtskom formate i moshchnaia armija” [For peace in Ukraine, we Budapest-format negotiations and a powerful army], *Unian*, 11 July 2018, www.unian.net.

26. P. Kanygin, “Vozvrashchat' nuzhno ne territorii, a liudej” [Not territories need to be returned, but people], *Novaia Gazeta*, 13 February 2018, www.novayagazeta.ru.

So far, it's hard to say how other politicians who started their careers in the Party of Regions and continued in the Opposition Bloc or their own small parties will fare during this election year. Here, we should mention first and foremost the former Governor of the Dnipro Oblast and Vice Prime Minister Oleksandr Vilkul, Verkhovna Rada Deputy from both the Party of Regions and the Opposition Bloc Yevhen Muraiev, as well as entrepreneur and Rinat Akhmetov's partner in the MetInvest Holding Co., Vadym Novynskyi. Most politicians of this group vigorously deny their connections with the Kremlin, preferring to accuse the current Ukrainian government of being in cahoots with Russia; however, Viktor Medvedchuk continues to negotiate with all of them, hoping for the formation of a broad coalition that could become a serious political force—possibly one comparable to the Party of Regions during the period it stood in opposition. Judging by the most recent public surveys, Boyko, Vilkul, Muraiev, and Novynskyi together can receive up to 18% of votes in the first round of the presidential elections, but individually even the most popular of the four will not get more than 6.5%. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that, in the event that a coalition is formed (as happened with Yuri Boyko and the “For Life” party), personal ratings and the ratings of political forces fracture instead of adding up. This is evident from Boyko's example; in the 2014 elections he received only 0.19% of votes, but having become co-chair of the Opposition Bloc he almost immediately raised his support to 10%. Today that number is down to 4.6%, while the Opposition Bloc's Oleksandr Vilkul's rating is growing.

Viktor Medvedchuk

Viktor Medvedchuk is one of the veterans of Ukrainian politics, a person who, according to numerous indirect testimonies, has been actively collaborating with the KGB since the 1970s (when he was appointed to serve as defense attorney for a number of dissidents, he helped to make sure that their cases resulted in convictions).²⁷ In the late 1990s and 2000s he was referred to as the “grey cardinal” of Kyiv. His public career peaked in the years 1998-2005, when he was appointed deputy and then first deputy chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, and later moved to the position of chief of staff for President Kuchma. It is believed that his appointment happened largely as a result of Russian influence at the time Kuchma was under heavy pressure because of the “Gongadze affair.”²⁸ Medvedchuk's

27. “Medvedchuk ne zashchishchal, a obvinial Vasiliia Stusa v sude” [Medvedchuk did not defend, but accused Vasyl Stus in court], Zik, 22 January 2018, <https://zik.ua>.

28. We mean the case that developed after the 2000 disappearance and subsequent killing of Ukrainian journalist Georgy Gongadze, supposedly ordered by then Interior Minister Yuri

getting cozy with the Kremlin was apparently not least due to his profound admiration of Vladimir Putin and the “strong power” that was being established in Russia, which contrasted so strongly with the realities of Ukrainian politics at that time. The Kremlin reciprocated: in 2004, Medvedchuk’s daughter Darya was baptized in St Petersburg; Putin, along with Dmitry Medvedev’s wife Svetlana, participated in the ceremony.²⁹ In the early 2000s, according to eyewitness testimony, Medvedchuk took action to prevent President Kuchma being informed of the growth of Russian influence on Ukrainian politics and the infiltration by individuals with pro-Russian attitudes of the Ukrainian secret services.³⁰ As the head of one of Kuchma’s campaign offices during the 1999 presidential election and the election campaign mastermind for Yanukovych in the 2004 election, Viktor Medvedchuk is believed to have initiated the propagation of censorship in the Ukrainian press, bringing Russian political consultants to work for Yanukovych and, most likely, to have sanctioned the large-scale election fraud that triggered the 2004-2005 Orange Revolution.³¹ After that, he faded into the shadows, barely ever appearing in the public eye up until the second half of the 2000s when, following the success of the Party of Regions in parliamentary elections, Yanukovych won the position of prime minister.

For years, Viktor Medvedchuk has been an active and overt admirer of Russia and Vladimir Putin. The model of concentrated power, not limited by “formalities” such as parliamentary decisions or citizens’ opinions, appeals to him. For more than fifteen years, he has maintained a close friendship with Putin. In 2009 Putin, who was then Russian Prime Minister, wrote a flattering article about Medvedchuk in the Ukrainian magazine *Glavred*, in which he noted: “People upon whom critical decision-making depends closely need Viktor Medvedchuk, not just in Ukraine, but also in Russia.”³² In 2014, Medvedchuk negotiated with the Kremlin on behalf of Yanukovych, most likely on the prospects of opposing the Revolution of Dignity and Yanukovych’s fate. In recent years, the two politicians have often met, and neither Putin nor Medvedchuk deny this. In

Kravchenko. It was widely believed that President Kuchma stood behind the killing, which caused widespread protests against him in 2001.

29. “Viktor Medvedchuk: mne neinteresno, kto finansiruet separatistov v Donbasse (interv’iu Zh. Nemtsovoj)” [Viktor Medvedchuk: I’m not interested to know who finances separatists in Donbass (interview with Zh. Nemtsova)], DW.com, 18 April 2018, www.dw.com.

30. “Eks-razvedchik SBU rasskazal o rossijskoj piatoj kolonne, den’gakh Ianukovicha i tret’em Majdane” [Former SBU agent told about the Russian fifth column, Yanukovych’s money, and the third Maidan], 1 June 2017, <https://belaruspartisan.by>.

31. “Pinchuk na Majdane podpisyvalsja pod ‘Kuchmu get!’” [At Maidan Pinchuk signed under “Down with Kuchma!”], Podrobnosti, 20 November 2005, <http://podrobnosti.ua>.

32. “Putin napisal khvalebnuiu stat’iu o Medvedchuke” [Putin wrote a praising article about Medvedchuk], TSN, 26 August 2009, <https://ru.tsn.ua>.

addition to political benefits, he has gained the ability to run a successful oil and gas business in Russia. In 2015, NZNP Trade, owned by him through a chain of shell companies registered in Cyprus to his wife Oksana Marchenko, won the tender for the development of the Gavrikovskoe oilfield located in Russia's Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug and holding estimated reserves of 136 million tons of crude³³ (Russian experts were stunned by this, because the virtually almighty Rosneft was bidding for the site, and the local administration frantically started helping the new owners with the development of related infrastructure).³⁴ At the same time, Viktor Medvedchuk does not make any efforts to conceal the fact that he “manages this business” and pays the “due” taxes on it.³⁵ But the story doesn't stop here: after the annexation of Crimea, Medvedchuk's wife received the controlling interest in Tavriya-Invest Corporation, and the Russian authorities transferred to Tavriya-Invest the rights to offshore Black Sea gas extraction shelf plates in areas annexed from Ukraine.³⁶ Medvedchuk is always willing to tell the Russian media about his vacationing on the annexed peninsula.

A friendship, secured by a successful business, is further supported by the almost complete coincidence of views on the future of Ukraine expressed by the two parties. Putin praised Medvedchuk's ideas about the “federalization” of Ukraine during the annual “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin” broadcast on Russian TV in the summer of 2017, calling Medvedchuk “a friend of Russia.”³⁷ The latter, in turn, consistently supports the Kremlin's agenda for Ukraine: for example, he stands for the granting of autonomy to Donbass “People's republics,”³⁸ advocates “removing the issue of Crimea from the agenda” and developing Ukraine

33. “Gavrikovskoe mestorozhdenie ozhidaemo neozhidanno dostalos' NZPN Trejd” [NZNP Trade expectedly unexpectedly gets the Gavrikovskoe oilfield], Netfegaz.ru, 4 June 2015, <https://neftegaz.ru>.

34. For details, see “Gavrikovskoe neftianoe mestorozhdenie v HMAO nachnut razrabatyvat' v 2018” [Exploration of the Gavrikovskoe oilfield in Khanty-Mansi AO will start in 2018], Rogtec, 28 August 2017, <https://rogtecmagazine.com>.

35. “Medvedchuk o neftegazovom biznese zheny v Rossii: upravliaiu im ia” [Medvedchuk about his wife's oil & gas business in Russia: “I run it”], Gordon, 18 September 2018, <https://gordonua.com>.

36. Okkupanty otdali zakhvachennoe v Krymu gazovoe mestorozhdenie sviazannoj s Medvedchukom firme” [The occupants turned over the gas field captured in Crimea to a Medvedchuk-connected firm], Bez tabu, 26 October 2018, <https://beztabu.net>.

37. “Putin rasskazal o druge Rossii Medvedchuke” [Putin talks about Russia's friend Medvedchuk], *Vedomosti*, 15 June 2017, www.vedomosti.ru.

38. “Medvedchuk na piatj god krovavoj vojny manit Donbass avtonomiej” [In the fifth year of the war Medvedchuk is enticing Donbass with autonomy], Polit Navigator, 18 September 2018, www.politnavigator.net.

within its new borders³⁹ (his latest remarks on these issues were considered as undermining Ukraine's territorial integrity and led to the opening of a formal criminal case against him).⁴⁰ Finally, Medvedchuk resolutely refused to recognize that Russia is an aggressor nation, arguing that this definition—applied by the European Parliament and many international organizations—is a “propaganda cliché.”⁴¹ At the Minsk talks, Putin, through the mediation of Angela Merkel, who then raised the question with Petro Poroshenko, lobbied for the appointment of Medvedchuk as a negotiator on exchange of war prisoners. This status, on the one hand, provides him with a good “cover” in Ukraine, and, on the other, justifies the “official” nature of his contacts with the Kremlin (today, he is the only person to whom direct air-corridors for flights from Kyiv to Moscow are allocated). It is not surprising that President Poroshenko, in a heated remark, recently called Viktor Medvedchuk a “representative of Russia” at the Minsk talks,⁴² while the nationalists in Kyiv at one time tried to vandalize the office of his party (which was reported with outrage by the Russian media).

Yulia Tymoshenko

Yulia Tymoshenko has chosen a different political tactic than that of Medvedchuk. Backed by a powerful party, loyal to her, and made up mostly of people with whom she has previously worked within the government, she is banking first of all on her personal charisma, being the leader in the presidential race. Few people doubt that, if she wins the presidency, Yulia Tymoshenko will be able to turn her party into a perfect “political elevator” at the parliamentary elections and to perform large-scale blocking together with forces critical of Poroshenko and his allies. Tymoshenko's chances should not be underestimated. She masterfully establishes rapport with the electorate, especially outside large cities. She also maintains a solid support base in western regions of Ukraine and apparently has no lack of campaign funding.

39. “Putin ‘sdal’ svoego kuma. Medvedchuk khochet ostavit' Ukrainu bez Kryma” [Putin gave up his *kum*. Medvedchuk wants to leave Ukraine Crimea-less], *Glavred*, 15 June 2017, <https://glavred.info>.

40. A. Gatinskij, “General'naja prokuratura Ukrainy obvinila Medvedchuka v gosudarstvennoj izmene [Office of the Prosecutor-General accuses Medvedchuk of treason], *RBC*, 2 February 2019, www.rbc.ru.

41. “Medvedchuk zaiavil, chto ne schitaet Rossiiu agressorom [Medvedchuk does not consider Russia an aggressor], *Tsenzor.net*, 7 October 2018, <https://censor.net.ua>.

42. G. Tadataev, “Poroshenko nazval Medvedchuka ‘predstavitelem Rossii’ na peregovorakh v Minske” [Poroshenko says Medvedchuk is a “representative of Russia” at the talks in Minsk], *RBC*, 16 December 2018, www.rbc.ru.

Yulia Tymoshenko, who was the leader of the 2019 presidential race until she was recently (and most likely temporarily) overtaken by Ihor Kolomoyskyi protégé and popular Ukrainian comedian Volodymyr Zelensky, is one of the most controversial figures in Ukrainian politics. She came to power from the energy business, in which she acted as a trusted partner of Pavlo Lazarenko, who was at that time Prime Minister of Ukraine. In 1999, following two years as a Verkhovna Rada deputy, she was appointed by Prime Minister Yushchenko as Deputy Prime Minister for the Fuel and Energy Complex. Just a year later, Tymoshenko took the first stab at organizing a “global” deal with Russia: she proposed the creation of a joint venture with Russia’s Gazprom, which would own 51% of the shares, while Ukraine’s “down payment” would be made by turning over the country’s entire gas transmission system (GTS) to Gazprom.⁴³ The deal failed, and Tymoshenko was promptly accused of smuggling and tax evasion in 1996-1998. She was banished from the corridors of power for a long time. However, upon her return, she again brought up the topic of transferring the Ukrainian GTS to the joint venture with the Russians,⁴⁴ and a little later “distinguished” herself by the 2009 deal with Gazprom, made under such conditions that Oleh Dubyna, who was then in charge of Naftogaz, at first outright refused to sign the contract without a written order of the Cabinet of Ministers.⁴⁵ As a result, Ukraine overpaid Russia more than \$4.6 billion over six years, under-received more than \$10 billion in transit service payments, and was hit with penalties determined by Gazprom amounting to an astronomical \$56 billion (which, however, were not accepted by the Stockholm arbitration court following an investigation). The cost was so overwhelming that it became a reason for the 2010 extension of the agreement with Russia on the Black Sea Fleet base in Crimea.⁴⁶ In February 2008, during the Ukrainian Prime Minister’s visit to Moscow, the parties divided up the Ukrainian energy market, which resulted in blocking the work of leading Western companies in Ukraine (and, most importantly, on the Black Sea offshore oilfields). Looking back, it should be noted that the cooperation with those companies—Vanco and

43. “Pravitel'stvo namereno peredat' gazoprovody Rossii” [The government intends to turn the gas pipelines over to Russia], Korrespondent, 22 August 2000, <https://korrespondent.net>.

44. “Timoshenko proponovala ‘Gazpromu’ dostup do GTS?” [Tymoshenko proposed to Gazprom access to the GTS?], TSN, 22 February 2008, <https://tsn.ua>.

45. For details, see “Malen'koe chiornoe plat'e” [The little black dress], Lenta, 19 January 2009, <https://lenta.ru>; and “Timoshenko pod ugrozoi uvol'neniia zastavila podpisat' gazovye kontrakty” [Tymoshenko forced others to sign the gas contracts threatening dismissal], Unian, 15 July 2011, <https://economics.unian.net>.

46. “Rossiia arendovala bazu v Sevastopole za 10 let skidok na gaz” [Russia leased the Sevastopol base for 10 years of gas discounts], Rusbase, 22 April 2010, <https://rb.ru>.

Marathon Oil of the US and CBM Oil of the UK⁴⁷—would not only have given Ukraine additional leverage in relations with Russia, but also have halted the Russian invasion of Crimea, prompting the United States to protect its economic interests there.

Today, Yulia Tymoshenko is still a loyal ally of Gazprom, proposing to liquidate Naftogaz of Ukraine, allegedly due to its inefficiency, and thereby “zero out” its debt to Gazprom—which has already been confirmed by the decision of the Stockholm arbitration court. Considering how crucial the gas issues are regarded by the Russian president, we would agree with the many opinions that during their interaction they understood each other perfectly well,⁴⁸ and that Vladimir Putin has never had so “convenient” a partner in Ukraine.⁴⁹ This is confirmed by the fact that the Russian media have started a propaganda campaign in support of Yulia Tymoshenko—who is currently under Russian sanctions.

However, it was never just about money. During the early part of her career, Tymoshenko repeatedly advocated for a strong alliance with Russia; even after the Orange Revolution, she supported the Kremlin's agenda in Ukraine, both in word and in deed. Two events perfectly illustrate that. When, in August 2008, President Yushchenko ordered the blocking of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea to prevent its relocation to the shores of Georgia, Yulia Tymoshenko herself opened the fleet's passage to sea⁵⁰ (in 2008 her party abstained from voting on the Verkhovna Rada resolution condemning the Russian aggression in Georgia⁵¹). The following year, at the 2009 Munich Security Conference, she spoke out against Ukraine joining NATO, saying that it would provoke a sharp reaction from Russia.⁵² In 2014, Tymoshenko basically shifted the blame for the death of Ukrainian soldiers in the east onto Petro Poroshenko, without uttering one

47. For details, see B. Kushniruk, “Tymoshenko protiv Venko-2, ili Kto predal natsional'nye interesy Ukrainy”, [Tymoshenko vs Venko-2, or Who betrayed the national interests of Ukraine], Unian, 8 September 2012, www.unian.net.

48. “Podruga osobogo naznacheniia” [Spec Ops girlfriend], Lenta, 18 September 2012, <https://lenta.ru>.

49. “Belkovskij: Tymoshenko i Putinu khorosho drug s drugom” [Belkovskij: Tymoshenko and Putin are good for each other], Gordon, 19 September 2017, <https://gordonua.com>.

50. “Liashko nagadav, chim obernulosa dlia Ukraïni neviznannia Rosii agresorom u vijni z Gruzieiu” [Lyashko reminded what came of Ukraine's failure to recognize Russia as the aggressor in the war with Georgia], Obozrevatel', 9 August 2015, www.obozrevatel.com.

51. “Gerasimov ofitsial'no vyzval Tymoshenko na 'duel': Trebuet ob'jasnenij po faktam korruptsii [Gerasimov officially challenged Tymoshenko to a “duel” demanding an explanation on the facts of corruption], Depo.ua, 7 December 2018, www.depo.ua.

52. “Tak Tymoshenko zlila NATO i majbutne Ukraïni Putinu” [How Tymoshenko ratted out NATO and the future of Ukraine to Putin], Antikor, 23 November 2016. <https://antikor.com.ua>.

word to accuse Russia of its transgressions.⁵³ More recently, while talking about the need to stand up to Russia and move closer to the West, she has managed to avoid casting votes in the Verkhovna Rada both on breaking off the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Russia⁵⁴ and on inserting into the Constitution of Ukraine a clause about Ukraine's aspiration for NATO membership.⁵⁵ Also, she has never criticized the position of the Russian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate, nor offered any support for the attempts to achieve autocephaly for the Ukrainian Church, neither during the presidency of Yushchenko (when she flatly refused to meet with Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople who was visiting Kyiv⁵⁶), nor under President Poroshenko (when she proposed the delaying of issuance of the *tomos* to Ukraine, or even rejecting it altogether⁵⁷). True to her character, she also unremittingly avoids criticizing Vladimir Putin, often evading any directly posed questions on this subject.⁵⁸

Yulia Tymoshenko has always been tightly connected with politicians in Ukraine who are close to Putin—such as Medvedchuk, whom she repeatedly proposed should be appointed as First Deputy Prime Minister as far back as 2005, emphasizing that he “can come to agreement with anyone in Russia.”⁵⁹ During her tenure as Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko almost reached an understanding with Vitkor Yanukovich: in March 2009, on the eve of the presidential election, they agreed on the so-

53. “Iulija Timoshenko: Vinni v Ilovajs'kij tragedii visokoposadovci budut' pokarani” [Yulia Tymoshenko: The high-ranking officials responsible for the Ilovaya tragedy will be punished], *Batktivshchina*, 29 avryca 2018, <https://ba.org.ua>.

54. “Roll-call voting on the bill regarding the termination of the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation (№0206)”, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 6 December 2018, <http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua>.

55. “Roll-call voting on the bill regarding the introduction of amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine (on the state's strategic course towards the full-fledged membership of Ukraine in the European Union and in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) (№9037)” <http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua>.

56. “Pomnite, Timoshenko v 2009 byla pervoj v ocheredi lobzat' ruki ideologa ‘ru**kogo mira’ patriarkha Kirilla” [In 2009 Tymoshenko was first in line to kiss the hands of ‘Russian world’ ideologist Patriarch Kirill], *Dialog.ua*, 8 December 2018, www.dialog.ua.

57. “Tsibul'ko: Timoshenko prosila Patriarkha Varfolomeia otkazat' Ukraine v poluchenii Tomosa” [Tymoshenko asked Patriarch Bartholomew to refuse issuance of tomos to Ukraine], *Dialog.ua*, 5 December 2018, www.dialog.ua.

58. “Timoshenko stalo plokho ot ‘neydobnykh’ voprosov pro Putina, Rossiuu u Donbass” [Tymoshenko became unwell from ‘uncomfortable’ questions about Putin, Russia, and Donbass], *REAL*, 16 December 2018, <https://real-vin.com>.

59. “Iushchenko: ‘Timoshenko khotela naznachit’ Medvedchuka vitse prem'erom” [Yushchenko: Tymoshenko wanted to appoint Medvedchuk her Vice Prime Minister], *Kapital*, 13 August 2018, www.capital.ua.

called “broad coalition”, agreeing to split up and share the ruling powers in Ukraine between themselves until 2029.⁶⁰

Finally, Yulia Tymoshenko, unlike Viktor Medvedchuk or other openly pro-Kremlin politicians, is a “handshake figure” in the West—above all in Europe and the United States. However, since she is not a wealthy person (she doesn't openly admit owning any businesses either in Ukraine or Russia), her active lobbying activities in the United States (funded mainly through offshore companies) are starting to raise questions for potentially being in violation of the so-called Foreign Agents Registration Act.

One of Yulia Tymoshenko's peculiarities—largely due to her presence in the public eye for more than twenty years—is her populism, and the inconsistency and opportunism of her political discourse (she has been both a supporter and an opponent of NATO, an adherent of the Russian Orthodox Church and a “soft” supporter of liberation from the Moscow church hierarchy, both a supporter of market reforms in the agrarian sector and their main opponent, a lover and a hater of international financial institutions, all over the course of only a few years). Even if one fails to remember the gas deals, Tymoshenko's policies have cost Ukraine dearly. Attempts to regulate the petroleum products market during her first term as Prime Minister in 2005 resulted in shortage and speculation;⁶¹ changes in tax legislation in 2008–2009 worsened the investment climate; since 2000, the largest increase in Ukraine's national debt and the highest inflation rates occurred when Tymoshenko was Prime Minister;⁶² and the conflict around Ukrnafta was caused by her 2010 decree, which essentially allowed minority shareholders to control the activities of state-owned companies (which Ihor Kolomoyskyi adroitly tried to exploit in later years^{63, 64}). Today, naturally, Yulia Tymoshenko speaks in favor of financial stability, denounces oligarchs, and claims to be a proponent of a liberal competitive economy developed exclusively on the basis of innovation and cheap loans.

60. S. Leshchenko, “ShirakaGejt: kak Timoshenko i Ianukovich sobralis' pravit' vmeste do 2029 goda” [ShyrkaGate: how Tymoshenko and Yanukovych planned to rule together until 2029], *Ukrainskaia Pravda*, 24 April 2014, www.pravda.com.ua.

61. “Benzynova kryza v Ukraïni vyrishena ?” [Is the petrol crisis in Ukraine over?], *Voanews.com*, 24 May 2005, www.ukrainian.voanews.com.

62. For more details, see: S. Semionych, “Kandidat v prezidenty Ukrainy Iuliia Timoshenko—agent Kremliia” [Candidate for Ukrainian presidency Yulia Tymoshenko is an agent of the Kremlin], *Zrada.org*, 7 September 2018, www.zrada.org.

63. “Konflikt vokrug ‘Ukrnafty’ kak zerkalo ukrainskoj politiki” [The conflict around Ukrnafta as a mirror of Ukrainian politics], *Ukraina.ru*, 23 May 2016, <https://ukraina.ru>.

64. S. Leshchenko, “Zmova. Iak Timoshenko viddla Kolomojs'komu ‘Ukrnaftu’” [A conspiracy. How Tymoshenko gave Kolomoisky Ukrnafta], *Ukraïns'ka Pravda Blogi*, 24 September 2015, <https://blogs.pravda.com.ua>.

Since the group of frontrunners in the presidential polls was unexpectedly joined by Volodymir Zelensky, many Ukrainian experts attempted to explore his connections with the Kremlin as well. The most notable story uncovered till now is the information about the royalties that several Russian TV channels still pay to a firm associated with the candidate, for the dissemination of his programs inside Russia⁶⁵. Mr Zelensky responded first that he will not turn these payments down, adding later that he finally decided to cut all his ties with the mentioned Cyprus-based company that owns property rights for his shows⁶⁶—and so the case was over. It's obvious that Volodymir Zelensky hadn't have neither chances not will to establish firm ties with Russia during his previous career, so therefore I wouldn't count him as a part of the Kremlin-linked Ukrainian political figures. Moreover, Mr Zelensky, however high his approval might be, seems to be not an independent politician but rather is sponsored by Ihor Kolomoysky, who deserves credit for opposing the infiltration of Russia-backed forces further into the Ukrainian territory in 2014-2015 when he served as the head of Dnipro regional state administration.

65. "Zelenskij zarabatyvaet v Rossii na trekh kinokompanijakh" [Zelenskij makes money in Russia with three motion picture companies], *Novoe Vremia*, 17 January 2019, <https://nv.ua/ukraine>.

66. "Zelenskij raskryl pravdu o zarabotkakh v Rossii: "Ne podarim russkim nashi den'gi"" [Zelensky revealed the truth about earnings in Russia: "We will not give our money to Russians"], *Politeka*, 20 January 2019, <https://politeka.net>.

Financial and Media Assets of the Kremlin-linked Forces

The financial and media support of the upcoming presidential elections deserves its own short review. The uniqueness of Ukrainian politics is that, throughout the entire post-Soviet period, it remained the scene of struggle between oligarchic groups, and was never “cleaned up” by a group that came to power once and forever.

Petro Poroshenko, who was elected to presidency in 2014, was the first Ukrainian leader to have been on the Forbes billionaires list. With a net worth then exceeding \$1.3 billion,⁶⁷ he was perhaps the only ultra-wealthy Ukrainian who did not make his fortune by privatizing state property and controlled assets outside of the commodity sector or the national infrastructure. Partly because of this, his relationships with other Ukrainian oligarchs could hardly be qualified as smooth. For example, conflicts with oligarchic structures led to the 2015 confiscation of the Ukrainian assets of Dmytro Firtash, the infamous beneficiary of RosUkrEnergo, who had previously been detained in Austria, and to the nationalization of PrivatBank, which prior to that had been bankrupted by Ihor Kolomoyskyi, who then left Ukraine. Keeping in mind that the business of the richest Ukrainian—Rinat Akhmetov, with assets primarily in Donbass—has suffered severe losses, the influence of Ukrainian oligarchic structures today is at its lowest in several decades. Although Ukrainian business suffers from corruption, today there is nothing going on akin to the rampant enrichment of officials under Viktor Yanukovych’s rule.⁶⁸

With rare exceptions, oligarchs living in Ukraine or hiding abroad are not leaning towards the European democratic model of market capitalism; they much prefer something like the “Russian reality” on the cusp of the 1990s and 2000s (it was no accident that Akhmetov in fact “nurtured” Yanukovych, while the stratospheric rise of Viktor Pinchuk just happened to coincide with the presidency of his father-in-law Leonid Kuchma). Therefore, it is not surprising that top Ukrainian oligarchs have taken up

67. “Ukrainskij Forbes sostavil rejting bogatejschikh biznesmenov Ukrainy” [The Ukrainian Forbes rates Ukraine’s wealthiest businessmen], *Forbes Russia*, 29 May 2014, www.forbes.ru.

68. “Korruptsionnye skhemy Yanukovicha” [Yanukovych’s corruption schemes], TSN, 26 May 2014, <https://ru.tsn.ua>.

anti-presidential positions; and while Akhmetov still strives to create an illusion of “equidistance,” most oligarchs unanimously bet on Yulia Tymoshenko and on the graduates of the former Party of Regions.

At this point, it is still difficult to assess the financial aspects of the ongoing electoral campaign, although many observers have already noted Tymoshenko's huge expenditure to promote her candidacy (paid out of unknown sources⁶⁹), and some politicians have rushed to accuse President Poroshenko of using public funds for his campaign.⁷⁰ Therefore, we will focus on a well-seen tip of the “iceberg”—the situation in the Ukrainian media.

Television is playing the primary role in influencing Ukrainian voters. Overall, one should note the concentration of TV channels run by the opposition, and above all the increased influence of Viktor Medvedchuk entities in the business. The most popular TV channel, TRK Ukrayina, whose audience consistently exceeds 10% of total viewership, is controlled by Rinat Akhmetov. However, concerns about his business are forcing Akhmetov to maintain a cautious position and provide equal coverage of all the candidates, including President Poroshenko. A similar approach is practiced by Viktor Pinchuk's media group, which includes channels occupying the fourth through sixth places in popularity ratings: ICTV, Novyi, and STB. In this case, an approximately equal amount of airtime is devoted to Poroshenko and Tymoshenko, although journalists lean towards the musician Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, who is Pinchuk's protégé. In a number of polls, Vakarchuk has been identified as one of the most promising candidates, but he himself is not running.

However, remaining TV channels are certainly involved in the campaigns of Kremlin-linked candidates. These include, first and foremost, Inter TV, which competes with Ukrayina for top position. Inter is controlled by Dmytro Firtash and by Yanukovich's former chief of staff Serhiy Lyovochkin. It voices an overtly pro-Tymoshenko position, sharply criticizing the incumbent administration (this channel is especially popular among the older audience). 1+1, the third leading channel in Ukraine, is controlled entirely by Ihor Kolomoyskyi and, while he now supports Volodymir Zelensky, he also provides airtime not only to Yulia Tymoshenko, but also to a sizable pool of experts working with her

69. “Za reklamu na bilbordakh Timoshenko otdast sponsoram ukrainskuiu zemliu, porty i promyshlennost'—Chornovil” [Chornovil: To get billboard ads Tymoshenko will give her sponsors Ukrainian land, ports, and industry], Priamij, 14 June 2018, www.prm.ua/ru.

70. “Poroshenko budet finansirovat' svoiu predvybornuiu kampaniiu iz biudzheta Ukrainy—glava UKROPa” [Leader of UKROP: Poroshenko is going to finance his election campaign from the budget of Ukraine], Unian, 22 November 2018, www.unian.net.

(Kostyantyn Matviyenko, Serhiy Dacyuk, Oleksandr Abdullin, and, until recently, Russian political consultant and campaign manager Aleksey Sitnikov, who is currently banned from entering Ukraine).

In turn, Viktor Medvedchuk has consolidated control over smaller channels, most of which, nevertheless, are very influential in covering social and political issues. The most significant of these is 112 Ukraine, whose general producer is Medvedchuk's close associate Artem Marchevskiy, while its formal owner is Taras Kozak, a Verkhovna Rada deputy and member of the Opposition Bloc. It is believed that Medvedchuk also controls NewsOne which has a slightly lower viewership. Both channels constantly invite Medvedchuk, quote him extensively, and cover his "peacemaking" activities; they also steadily broadcast the pro-Kremlin agenda by providing broad coverage of events taking place in Russia. A significant portion of airtime is also devoted to Yulia Tymoshenko, her "peace plan" and economic program. Another branch of this media group is the channel ZIK. It is ranked number three among news channels, following 112 Ukraine and NewsOne—and actually surpasses them in terms of political talk shows, which are a popular TV genre in Ukraine. The top show, broadcast during primetime every Friday, has an explicitly anti-Poroshenko orientation: representatives of the close-to-Kremlin opposition dominate the show's participants, at a ratio of approximately 10 to 1. There is no doubt that ZIK is also unofficially controlled by Medvedchuk and is providing Tymoshenko with a campaigning advantage over Poroshenko in the Ukrainian media.

Viktor Medvedchuk's influence is also clearly felt in a new channel called Nash ("Our"), whose target audience is the Russian-speaking community. Nash is financed by entities connected to the Russian businessman Pavel Fuks and former People's Deputy from the Party of Regions Vilen Shatvoryan, who used to be assistant to Viktor Yanukovych Jr.⁷¹ The channel's owner is "Ours" party leader Yevhen Muraiev who, until recently, controlled NewsOne through his father (in summer 2018 he handed over the reins to Andrii Portnov, former deputy chief of Yanukovych's staff, and just a couple months later Channel 112's Taras Kozak—Medvedchuk's comrade in arms in the Opposition Bloc—was named as the new owner of Nash). Other assets in the "Medvedchuk Media Group" include several radio stations and print publications (here one should mention Vesti-Ukraine Multimedia Holding Company, the publications of which include the Russian-language daily *Vesti*, published since 2013).

71. See page of Shatvorian Vilen Grygorovych, Posikpaky.info, <https://posipaky.info> (accessed 20 December 2018).

By contrast, the incumbent president's media assets look pretty meager—only Channel 5 and Pryamoi play actively on Petro Poroshenko's side. In terms of viewership, both of these channels lag far behind the Medvedchuk-controlled 112 Ukraine and NewsOne.

It must also be noted that the political struggle in Ukraine is gradually moving online, and it is hard not to notice that the opposition politicians in Kyiv are suspiciously using technologies just recently deployed by the Russian “information spec ops” from the Olgino “Troll Factory.” The most obvious one to apply the Russian experience is Yulia Tymoshenko: she has more than 1.86 million subscribers on Facebook,⁷² compared to 104,000 in 2016 and 566,000 in 2017. According to journalist investigations, Tymoshenko can spend more than \$37 million per year just to purchase likes and reposts; similar amounts are then spent on commenting on her posts and discussions in the social media.⁷³ Just how artificial this activity is can be inferred from recent events on another “battlefront”, YouTube, which had rather sad consequences for Tymoshenko. The world's top video platform's management conducted an operation to identify and delete bots and fake subscribers. As a result, Tymoshenko's YouTube channel set a world record by losing 44% of subscribers in just one day.⁷⁴ Many similar discoveries are probably in the offing; after all, Viktor Medvedchuk is *prima facie* an even more popular social media persona, with more subscribers than music stars Ani Lorak and Svyatoslav Vakarchuk. It is doubtful, however, that Ukrainians overwhelmingly prefer Russia's close friends to Ukraine's top musicians.

72. According to Yulia Tymoshenko's official Facebook page. www.facebook.com/YuliaTymoshenko. Accessed 20 December 2018.

73. “Iulija Timoshenko tratit na raskrutku v Facebook milliony hryvnia” [Yulia Tymoshenko spends on Facebook promos millions of hryvnia], Priamiy, 5 June 2018, <https://prm.ua>.

74. “Youtube udalil botov: stranitsa Timoshenko poterjala 44% auditorii” [YouTube kicks the bots: Tymoshenko's page lost 44% of its audience] Bukvy, 19 December 2018, <https://bykvu.com>.

The “Two-Step” Strategy: Presidential and Parliamentary Elections

On its own, holding presidential and parliamentary elections in one year is not new for Ukraine; the peculiarities of 2019 have to do with the uncertainty of the political “setup.” At first glance, there is little doubt that the frontrunner in the first round and the favorite of the second will be Yulia Tymoshenko. However, it is not so simple, for two reasons.

On the one hand, in spite of the unprecedented selection (the number of candidates in recent opinion polls measuring voter attitudes to various presidential hopefuls is close to 20), many voters still have not made their choice: 56% to 67% of those polled have expressed their preferences, with only 9% firmly stating their intention to refrain from voting.⁷⁵ Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that 24% to 35% of the population is likely to go to the polls without any clear decision on whom they will vote for. This number exceeds current ratings of any one candidate, so any forecasting seems to be premature, even for the first round.

On the other hand, one should take into consideration not only the political preferences of Ukrainian citizens, but also the general expectations the population has of the upcoming elections. When asked who will be elected president of Ukraine, twice as many respondents name Petro Poroshenko as the number of those who actually plan to vote for him in the first round. This phenomenon can be explained by a number of factors. First, the addiction to stability, which is common to all post-Soviet countries, will undoubtedly benefit Petro Poroshenko; in the conditions of war and general uncertainty, a change of leadership is rarely the best option. Second, the incumbent president gets extra points for his anti-Russian rhetoric—from his harsh response to the provocations in the Kerch Strait and declaration of martial law in several parts of Ukraine, to the creation of an independent Ukrainian church. Third, the incumbent president has a fairly well-defined electoral core, is backed by a strong

75. “Pochti kazhdij 5 ukrainets ne znaet, kogo vybrat’ v prezidenty” [Nearly every fifth Ukrainian doesn’t know whom to choose for President], *Ukrainskaia Pravda*, 8 August 2018, www.pravda.com.ua.

lobby and a strong party infrastructure, and can use state resources for the campaign and draw on recent years' economic achievements. In one way or another, in spite of Volodymyr Zelensky and Yulia Tymoshenko's current marginal lead, there is no feeling at this time that Poroshenko with his 15% rating will suffer the same fate as Viktor Yushchenko did in 2010.

One of the most salient political cleavages in contemporary Ukrainian politics is the division between those who support a path away from the imperial legacy and reorientation towards European values and practices. The second is made up of those politicians who engage in populism and who are willing to sacrifice the "Revolution of Dignity" values in order to gain more power. President Poroshenko belongs to the first group (as do Anatoliy Hrytsenko, Andriy Sadovyi, Oleksandr Shevchenko, and Oleh Tyahnybok); 30–35% of voters support this group. Yulia Tymoshenko embodies pure populism, while a group of candidates from the former Party of Regions (Yuriy Boyko, Oleksandr Vilkul, Yevhen Muraiev, and a number of others) are leaning much more heavily to a Kremlin-linked political position, which is expressed in its extreme form by Viktor Medvedchuk; these candidates in aggregate are supported by 35–40% of Ukrainian citizens. President Poroshenko's administration is expressing certainty that the incumbent will proceed to round two and discussing whom he would be more comfortable to oppose: Tymoshenko or a candidate from the Opposition Bloc.

However, formulating the question that way is not entirely fitting. It can be supposed that it will be much easier for the opposition to form alliances and make agreements with each other since the scheduling of both presidential and parliamentary elections for the same year opens space for maneuver, as the pro-presidential party is obviously too weak to get a sizeable portion of the votes in the parliamentary polls. Besides, even though their parties' projects may be less influential than those of the president and pro-European parties, they are much more deeply rooted and better recognized among their supporters. In choosing to adopt an orientation towards Russia, these political forces had to have learned the most important lesson in the political history of Russia's last few decades: a masterful coordination of lackluster politicians guarantees them power for any length of time, while the "united by values" but organizationally disparate liberal camp has little chance of success.

Most likely, Poroshenko's opponents will use this particular "Russian style" method of political struggle. Supporters of both Tymoshenko and Medvedchuk are quite capable of coming to agreement with each other to orchestrate their actions in the second round. At the moment, they are consistently refraining from making any accusations against each other,

instead directing all their criticism at the president. Therefore, if Tymoshenko moves on to round two, the former “Regionals” will probably provide her with support in exchange for a solid commitment to elect Medvedchuk as next speaker of the Verkhovna Rada or appoint him Prime Minister.

Such an electoral deal is driven first of all by the relative imminence of the parliamentary elections, where such an “exchange” guarantees the creation of a strong alliance between the president and the Verkhovna Rada. In that case, the game that Yulia Tymoshenko and Viktor Yanukovich tried starting in 2009 could be played to the end, albeit with new players. In the event of Petro Poroshenko's defeat in the second round, this scenario appears practically the only feasible one, since the Poroshenko bloc was created *ad hoc*, basically as a temporary electoral association, while the “pro-European” sector of Ukrainian politics is almost empty today in terms of partisan organizations.

As far as we can tell, this setup fully satisfies the Kremlin's interests. Vladimir Putin's mistake in 2004 was his betting on one candidate who was not surrounded by any charismatic people, whereas many promising politicians turned up in the opposition camp (today, almost 15 years later, the most notable players in the field of Ukrainian politics owe their rise to the Orange Revolution). The mistake Putin made in 2013 was basically the same; he did not factor in that all the politicians would once again show up on Maidan, while all the security chiefs and bureaucrats froze around Yanukovich, who was rapidly losing the support of the population. By 2019, Putin seems to have corrected his strategy: today, almost all more or less active politicians are in one way or another involved in contacts with the Kremlin, if not driven by its agenda, while the incumbent president can rely only on those who are still faithful to idealistic pro-European concepts or are willing to continue the “hybrid” war with Russia. The Kremlin's chances of “historic revenge” in 2019 look extremely high.

This is why the approaching elections must be treated in a very special way. The outwardly calm reaction of the Kremlin to current affairs in Ukraine is not caused by Vladimir Putin's loss of interest in the political processes of the country, but rather by the belief in Moscow that they have managed to create a system of Kremlin-linked forces that will deliver them a desired outcome in almost any case.

Probable Consequences of the Revenge of Kremlin-Linked Forces

The disposition of political forces in Ukraine on the eve of the presidential and parliamentary elections is currently favorable to the Kremlin's interests.

First of all, the society has come to associate economic success and personal well-being with peace and the ending of military hostilities. The current government is partly to blame for this. Over the course of many years, it has focused on security issues and underplayed the problems of corruption and government inefficiency. A substantial part of the population is ready to forget about Crimea,⁷⁶ agree to appeasement in Donbass, and normalize relations with Russia for the sake of a speedy solution to salient day-to-day problems.

Second, the demand for populism has grown. The current government has long been following the principles of Winston Churchill who famously offered his people only “blood, toil, tears, and sweat,” and Ukrainian voters are now willing to believe those who come up with the catchiest promises and position themselves as being capable of solving any problems (e.g. lowering natural gas prices, reviewing the terms of collaboration with international financial organizations, and getting Russia to reinstate the territorial integrity of Ukraine and mutually beneficial cooperation).

Third, over the course of many years, Ukrainian politics has been split along the east/west line, which created serious internal conflict. Now for the first time ever, there's a real possibility of an unexpected alliance between the political forces inheriting the Party of Regions, with its primary electorate in the country's east, and Yulia Tymoshenko who has traditionally been popular in western Ukraine. In the current situation such an alliance, allegedly promising “constructive interaction” between the president and the parliament and seeking ways to guarantee peace and development, looks very appealing.

76. According to a poll solicited by the International Republican Institute, this issue is ranked 16th most important for the citizens of Ukraine, in “Social and Political Moods of Ukrainians: IRI Poll”, Rating Group Ukraine, 21 May 2018, <http://ratinggroup.ua>.

However, there is a problem. Both Viktor Medvedchuk and Yulia Tymoshenko have a solid track record of relationships with the Kremlin and will either conform to its agenda, or turn out to be politically dependent on Vladimir Putin.

If Putin takes revenge and a politician friendly to him appears at Ukraine's helm, the first victim of this will be the still-not-fully-established Ukrainian democracy. As already noted, the government "ping-pong," involving constant rotation of the same politicians for the purpose of subsequent eradication of political competition, have been a part of Yulia Tymoshenko's and Viktor Medvedchuk's plans throughout both of their careers. Taking into consideration the president's power in appointing heads of regional administrations and the gravity of the cabinet chief's coercive powers, one can assume that the two top leaders will create a "Putin-style authoritarian" system of government under the Kremlin's watchful eye (here it's hard not to remember the words of the murdered Russian politician Boris Nemtsov, who predicted back in 2009 that, if Yulia Tymoshenko came to power in Ukraine, she would copy Russia's "best practices" of organizing power in an attempt to become as authoritarian as Vladimir Putin⁷⁷). The scenario where two major political figures balance each other out is preferred by Vladimir Putin and reflects lessons learned by the Kremlin from the Yanukovich era.

The next consequence of Putin's revenge will be the remodeling of Ukrainian statehood. It is highly likely that Kyiv will find it possible to acknowledge Russian sovereignty over Crimea (even if in exchange for some economic concessions). The war in Donbass will end with "federalization" and legitimization of the groups now in power in the "People's republics." The reincorporation of these entities into Ukraine will become a huge challenge to the government, partly because those regions may become the source of stable electoral support for pro-Kremlin powers and the area of "crystallization" of business groups that will continue freeloading off the state funds allocated to post-war "reconstruction". Overall, in Donbass, the Ukrainian leadership will repeat Russia's experience with Chechnya, only on a much larger scale, which will substantially undermine the controllability of the state as a whole by making it a hostage of the "eastern territories," and, by extension, of the Kremlin.

77. "Nemtsov o Timoshenko: ona mozheta stat' novym Putinym" [Nemtsov about Tymoshenko: She can become the new Putin], Informator.news, 3 October 2018, <https://informator.news>.

A consequence of Yulia Tymoshenko's coming to power would likely be the implementation of an irresponsible economic policy (driven in the main by appeasement of voters), accompanied by erosion of macroeconomic stability, hikes in inflation, a fall in the Hryvnia exchange rate, the expansion of regulatory economics, and degradation of the investment climate. Actually, this is exactly what happened during her first ascent to power; economic growth fell from 12% to 2%, and Prime Minister Tymoshenko did not find anything better to say but to blame the statistics of artificially inflated data during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma.⁷⁸ Such changes will worsen the perception of Ukraine in the global arena, and drastically complicate the country's relationships with the European Union and international financial organizations.

Overall, even if Ukraine's pro-Western orientation is not formally revised, it will lose a major part of its substance. The resetting of collaboration between Ukraine and Russia and progression towards a mutually agreed status of Crimea would subvert the very concept of anti-Russian sanctions and, in the end, facilitate the reinstatement of some of the broken economic connections between Russia and the EU. The Russian market is incomparably more attractive than the Ukrainian one, so, if the obstacles to collaboration are removed, Kyiv will once again be thrown out onto the periphery of Europe's attention, where it had previously always been, except during the two post-revolutionary periods. There probably wouldn't be much regret in Europe about such a change in the Ukrainian political leadership's orientation. A certain Ukraine fatigue is already notable, so the cessation of demands to move forward on the integration agenda and the loss of saliency of additional financing and issuance of credit to Ukraine will most likely gladden the Europeans.

However, this last point will bear upon the country's policies in general, rather than the personal strategies of Ukrainian citizens. Far from accidental, in our opinion, is the emergence of two parallel trends in recent months: the increase in Yulia Tymoshenko's rating as a presidential candidate, and the increase in Ukrainians' demand for real estate in Europe. In December this demand shot upwards by a third—and in countries like Spain and Greece by 50-60% and more.⁷⁹ This activity has been increasing across all price ranges, which is evidence of a stable trend. Surveys conducted in May 2018 at the request of the International Republican Institute (IRI) showed 78% of Ukrainians saying “no” or “likely

78. O. Morozov, “Peredchuttia derzhavnogo perevorotu” [Premonition of a state coup], *Ukraïnska Pravda*, 19 September 2005, www.pravda.com.ua.

79. “Proch' iz strany: ukraintsy ishchut zhil'io za granitsej” [Out of the country: Ukrainians seek homes abroad], www.gazeta.ru, 17 December 2018.

no” to a question on whether today’s youth have a chance for a successful future in Ukraine.⁸⁰ The victory of Kremlin-linked forces in the 2019 elections and the winding-down of the pro-European democratic drive would lead to a situation where proponents of European values would make the choice, as individuals, to move to Europe, which would eventually bring the country to the brink of demographic and social catastrophe.

Revenge of the Kremlin-linked forces and the change of the “civilizational choice” can probably lead to the state’s “getting up off its knees”—at least it will appear that way to those who represent that state. However, as Russian and Soviet history has illustrated, when a country “stands up straight,” its citizens are the ones who pay the price.

80. “Social and Political Moods of Ukrainians: IRI Poll”, *op. cit.*, slide 55.

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