



BULLETIN

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COMMENTARY

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Ukraine's Presidential Election Result

Łukasz Adamski

By securing a narrow majority of electoral support, Viktor Yanukovich triumphed over Yulia Tymoshenko in Ukraine's presidential election. His contender may feel inclined to challenge the legitimacy of the vote, an effort in all probability doomed to failure. In the coming months Yanukovich is expected to oust Tymoshenko as Prime Minister and form a favouring government.

With 48.95% of the popular vote, Yanukovich outdid rival Tymoshenko who scored slightly fewer votes, closing at 45.47%. The total of 4.4% of the ballots were cast against the two main contenders, thus giving the winner less than 50% of the votes.

The insignificant difference in the number of ballots cast for each of the candidates may push Tymoshenko to seek an appeal requesting the courts to nullify the election result. In her election night address she failed to acknowledge Yanukovich's victory. Even before the ballot her campaign team warned of Yanukovich's fraudulent plans and advertised irregularities in the elections statute. What may underlie the potential attempt to undermine the election result will not be the desire for the ballot to be run again (a scenario having little chances of success in light of positive appraisal of the vote by monitoring teams) but rather the hope to persuade Yanukovich and his Party of Regions to seek compromise with the PM currently in office. Hearing the case before the court of law could delay Yanukovich being sworn into office, which normally takes place within forty days following the election. Until such time the office of President would still be held by Viktor Yushchenko.

A vast majority of Ukraine's executive powers is vested in the hands of Prime Minister who cannot be dismissed by the President. Still, Tymoshenko's chances of keeping the office look slender. Yanukovich will seek Tymoshenko's removal from office through Parliament, which seems very likely as she leads de facto a minority cabinet. Consequently, he may seek to appoint a new government on the basis of his own Party of Regions (now in opposition), the Volodymyr Lytvyn Bloc and the Our Ukraine–People's Self-Defense Bloc (both factions formally favour the government). In the event these plans founder, Yanukovich may seek to resolve the Supreme Council of Ukraine and call new parliamentary elections. All the parties' estimated returns from these elections could potentially resemble the recent outcome of the presidential first round in which the leaders of all noteworthy parties took part. That prospect could bring the coalition of the Party of Regions and the bloc of Serhiy Tihipko, who received 13% of the popular vote in the first round of the presidential election.

Yanukovich promises an otherwise much-needed stabilization of the country, economic growth and overcoming corruption. However, prospects of the latter look grim. Yanukovich's party is strongly dependent on business circles from the east of the country which provide it with essential backing and will not hear of any changes that could complicate their political lobbying. For the same reasons, Yanukovich's promises of the country's real modernization can hardly be expected. And yet, as long as a favouring government is formed, the chances of stabilising the country and overcoming the economic crisis are real. In foreign policy, Yanukovich advocates developing relations with the EU and wants to take steps towards a free trade agreement. During his election campaign he shunned, unlike Tymoshenko, explicit declarations of the need for Ukraine's membership in the EU, although such declarations can be found in the party's programme. It can be expected that Yanukovich will seek some improvement in relations with Russia. He promised that Ukraine would quit attempts to join NATO and his tone suggests that he might be inclined to renew the agreement with Russia on the Black Sea Fleet still being stationed in Sevastopol.