

Policy Brief: Ukrainian Parliamentary Elections 2019 and Future of Ukrainian Foreign Policy

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Abstract

President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky called snap elections in Ukraine 21 July 2019. Although there are 21 parties that are competing in elections, only five have enough support to enter Parliament according to public opinion polls. Most of the parties expected to become represented in next Ukrainian parliament, including the frontrunner Servant of the People party, support country's present course of integration with EU and NATO and see as their goal to deepen present integration processes. They also want to achieve restoration of countries territorial integrity through negotiations involving European powers and USA. Only exception is Opposition Platform – for Life party, which wants to change Ukraine's clear Western orientation towards "multi vector" (in reality pro-Russian) foreign policy, revise free trade agreement with EU and to negotiate peace with Donbas illegitimate leaders on terms acceptable to Russia. It can be concluded, that it is likely that the Ukraine's pro-EU and pro-NATO foreign policy course will not change significantly after the parliamentary elections.

Organisation of elections

Snap elections to the Ukrainian parliament will be held on 21 July 2019.¹ Originally scheduled to be held at the end of October, these elections were brought forward after newly inaugurated President Volodymyr Zelensky dissolved parliament during his inauguration on 21 May 2019. After Zelensky issued the decree of calling early elections, a lawsuit was filed to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, which sought to declare the decree unconstitutional and therefore illegal. The court declared the decree to be legal on 20 June 2019.²

Under current law 225 members of the Verkhovna Rada are elected by nationwide closed party-list proportional representation with 5% electoral election threshold and

¹ Указ Президента України №303/2019 Про дострокове припинення повноважень Верховної Ради України та призначення позачергових виборів <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/3032019-27121>

² Ukrainian Constitutional Court OKs Parliament's Dissolution, Early Elections. – RFE/RL 20.06.2019 <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukrainian-constitutional-court-oks-parliament-s-dissolution-early-poll/30010735.html>

the other 225 seats elected in constituencies with a first-past-the-post electoral system in one round (candidate with the highest vote total wins).³ A snap poll must have a voter turnout higher than 50%. It should be noted that 26 constituencies from 225 are suspended due to the March 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia and the occupation of parts of Donetsk Oblast and Luhansk Oblast by separatists since April 2014. As the result roughly 12 percent of voting-age citizens cannot participate in the elections, if they will not cross the frontlines to vote in Ukrainian controlled territory.

21 parties take part in the election in the nationwide party-list. On 25 June 2019, the Central Election Commission officially ended its registration process. It registered 5,845 candidates for the elections, 3,171 candidates in the single-member constituencies and 2,674 candidates in the single nationwide constituency with 21 parties.⁴

Main contenders of the election

Although formally 21 parties are participating in the elections, according to the public opinion polls only five of them have the potential of reaching 5% threshold necessary for entering parliament. According to the different polls⁵, the sovereign leader is the president Zelensky's new Servant of the People Party (party leader Dmytro Razumkov) with support of almost half of electorate (support of 40% - 48% voters). Second comes pro-Russian (led by Vadim Rabinovich, Yuriy Boyko and Viktor Medvedchuk) Opposition Platform – for Life (support of 10%-14% voters), third comes former president Poroshenko's European Solidarity (support of 8%-9% voters), with former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's All-Ukrainian Union "Fatherland" (often referred to as Batkivshchyna) holding similar (support of 6%-8% voters) support level; another newcomer party led by musician and politician Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, Voice, also has chance of entering parliament, although its popularity has recently been dropping (support of 4%-7% voters).

³ Parliament passes law on parliamentary elections. – Kyiv Post 17.11.2011 <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/parliament-passes-law-on-parliamentary-elections-117151.html>

The Law of Ukraine On Election of the People's Deputies of Ukraine. No. 4061-VI. Enacted November 17, 2011 http://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/europe/UA/ukraine-the-law-on-election-of-the-peoples/at_download/file

⁴ До Верховної Ради балотуються 5845 кандидатів. – Glavcom. News <https://glavcom.ua/news/do-verhovnoji-radi-balotuyutsya-5845-kandidativ-604913.html>; <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/news/>

⁵ Opinion polling for the 2019 Ukrainian parliamentary election. –

Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_2019_Ukrainian_parliamentary_election;

Моніторинг електоральних настроїв українців (6-10 липня 2019 року). – Rating group http://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/monitoring_elektoralnyh_nastroeniy_ukraincev_6-10_iyulya_2019_goda.html

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KIIS <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=871>

Programme positions of main political parties contending the elections regarding Ukraine's foreign relations

Servant of the People⁶

The programme of the main contender of the victory in elections is short but pro-European. Party promises to adopt the laws necessary for the implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU and the expansion of cooperation with the European Union and NATO.

It also promises to support the president's initiative to re-launch relations with Ukraine's closest neighbours in the west and to launch a "commercial diplomacy" program to promote Ukrainian goods to global markets.

Party also promises to adopt the necessary presidential laws aimed at restoring the territorial integrity and state sovereignty of Ukraine, as well as to create a system of information reintegration of the inhabitants of the occupied territories in Ukraine.

Opposition Platform – for Life⁷

This pro-Russian party promises to take steps to revise present pro-European course of the Ukraine. Party promises a return to "multi-vector foreign policy". The main foreign policy priority will be the protection of Ukraine's interests - first of all, in matters of economy, development, attraction of investments and growth of well-being of citizens.

It promises to take following steps: to ensure active neutrality of Ukraine in the military-political sphere and non-participation in any military-political alliances; termination of the policy of mutual sanctions and restoration of mutually beneficial trade and economic relations with the Russian Federation and the CIS countries; to conduct a review of the terms of Ukraine's participation in the World Trade Organization and the Free Trade Area with the European Union; and to preserve transit potential of the country, creation of a trilateral gas transportation consortium.

Regarding the conflict in Eastern Ukraine it promises to achieve results through dialogue and compromise, stop fighting, provide a political settlement of the conflict, providing security guarantees.

Main steps to achieve this goal are: provision of direct negotiations in the quadrangle Kiev - Donetsk - Lugansk - Moscow; the end of the economic blockade of the Donbas;

⁶ Слуга Народу - Передвиборна програма <https://sluganarodu.ua/program>; Что собрались изменить "слуги народа": опубликована полная программа партии Зеленского. – Obozrevatel 09.06.2019 <https://www.obozrevatel.com/politics/chto-sobralis-izmenit-slugi-naroda-opublikovana-polnaya-programma-partii-zelenskogo.htm>

⁷ Предвыборная Программа Партии "Оппозиционная Платформа - "За Жизнь". – LB.ua 12.06.2019 https://ukr.lb.ua/news/2019/06/12/429384_predvibornaya_programma_partii.html

fulfilment of the Minsk Agreements, provision of Donbas autonomous status as part of Ukraine; the adoption of the Amnesty Law, the law on elections and the law on the free economic zone in the Donbas.

It states that implementation of their plan for the settlement of the crisis in the South-East of Ukraine is a way to establish peace and return the Donbas to Ukraine, and Ukraine to the Donbas.

European Solidarity⁸

The programme of this pro-Europe party programme states that to defeat the aggressor Ukraine can do it only with the allies; and only as equal to the family of European nations, Ukraine can fully disclose its potential and ensure prosperity and justice for its citizens. So the future of Ukraine is only in NATO and the EU.

Party's goal is to achieve the political, economic, security and legal criteria necessary for applying for EU membership and obtaining the NATO Membership Action Plan in 2023 on the basis of the accomplishments.

Party programme states, that over the past five years, it has laid the foundation for the long-term prospect of joining NATO and the EU from far-flung plans and that it has the necessary experience and understanding of how to achieve the goal.

It proposes to ensure peace by strengthening international solidarity and pressure on the aggressor. It stresses that under former president Poroshenko Ukraine has created a powerful international coalition that has used a wide range of sanctions against the Russian aggressor. This unity must be preserved, and the sanction pressure must be strengthened. Work must continue to bring the attention of the world to Crimea and Donbas, and Russia must be responsible for its crimes.

This will facilitate the release of all Ukrainian citizens held hostage by Russia in their own and in the occupied territories. The state should provide support to those who have forcedly left the occupied territories.

The introduction of United Nations peacekeepers throughout the territory of the Donbas-occupied by Russia will accelerate the release and return of these territories under the sovereignty of Ukraine.

⁸ Передвиборна Програма Політичної партії „Європейська Солідарність“ <https://eurosolidarity.org/program/>

All-Ukrainian Union “Fatherland”⁹

This pro-European party stresses that the future of Ukraine is in EU and its security could only be guaranteed by NATO. Therefore, it calls for the efficient fulfilling of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement and for the work to get the membership action plan (MAP) in NATO.

Regarding Donbas and Crimea, party believes, that restoration territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine should be main priority. Also, the party calls for world support for achieving liberation of all prisoners and hostages taken by Russia.

Party wants to modify Minsk process and Normandy format, start talks by the formula Budapest + involving USA and Great Britain. They insist on considering questions the occupied Donbass and annexed Crimea in the only one package. Ukraine should also continue to be active internationally in the framework OSCE.

Voice¹⁰

The party's programme states that the basis of Ukraine's foreign policy will be the course for gaining membership in the EU and strengthening Ukraine's security by joining NATO. They promise steadfastly to adhere to the course on Ukraine's integration into the EU.

Party promises to continue along the path to NATO membership as a full member and will introduce NATO's military standards and leading world armies to strengthen Ukraine's own security and security in the region. They find that Ukraine has a unique experience of confronting Russian hybrid aggression, and Ukraine has something to teach NATO military countries.

The party also promises to build friendships with Eastern Europe - the Baltic States, Poland and others. They find that Ukraine has everything in order to become one of the regional leaders in Eastern Europe and make Ukraine the leader of the free part of the post-Soviet space and support the democratic forces in other post-Soviet countries.

The party finds that Ukraine should not give up the position on the diplomatic front: pressure on Russia's and its isolation on the world scene must be strengthened, and Ukraine should return to the European civilization and security space. The entire diplomatic arsenal should be used in order to stop the fire as quickly as possible and stabilize the situation in the Donbass, and subsequently restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Ukraine should increase pressure on Russia for illegal annexation and occupation of the peninsula for human rights violations in the occupied territories.

⁹ Передвиборна Програма політичної партії Всеукраїнське об'єднання „Батьківщина”
<https://ba.org.ua/programm/>

¹⁰ Політична Програма Партії „Голос” <https://goloszmin.org/program>

The party also stresses that Crimea is Ukraine and should not become the subject of bargaining with the aggressor country. Ukrainian policy within the state and in foreign policy should be directed in such a way that the liberation and reintegration of Crimea step by step becomes ever closer and more real.

Conclusions

Most of the parties expected to become represented in next Ukrainian parliament, including frontrunner Servant of the People party, support Ukraine's present course of integration with EU and NATO and see as their goal to deepen present integration processes. They also want to achieve restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity through negotiations involving European powers and USA. The only exception is Opposition Platform – for Life party, which wants to change country's clear Western orientation towards "multi vector" (in reality pro-Russian) foreign policy, revise free trade agreement with EU and to negotiate peace with Donbas illegitimate leaders on terms acceptable to Russia.¹¹ However, taking into account polling data showing support for different parties (and also the first policy steps of president Zelensky, who in Ukrainian political system has the main role of shaping foreign policy), it is therefore probable that Ukraine's pro-EU and pro-NATO foreign policy course will not change significantly after the parliamentary elections. Everything indicates that Servant of the People will be the biggest group in the new parliament, but it is yet unclear whether the party will manage to form an independent parliamentary majority (for which a minimum of 226 mandates is necessary). However, having other pro-European parties in parliament (for example a newcomer Voice) will allow Servant of the People to form probably smoothly a new pro-European coalition and government.

¹¹ Отношения с РФ: что обещают политические партии на выборах 2019. – Слово і Діло 09.07.2019 <https://ru.slovoidilo.ua/2019/07/09/infografika/politika/otnosheniya-rf-chto-obeshhayut-politicheskie-partii-vyborax-2019>