



UKRAINE:

GREAT

EXPECTATIONS

Ukraine: Great Expectations

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This publication is a collection of briefs describing the Year 2019 elections in Ukraine, both presidential and parliamentary, their promises and consequences, economic perspectives, and great political expectations. Within a year, Ukrainian Prism together with Chatham House organized a series of public discussions in the Hague, Paris, Washington DC, Brussels and London to discuss different aspects of elections expectations, as well as have analysed political parties' elections programmes and the new Government's Action Plan. This publication is a final analysis that looks forward to what is expected after a hard year of elections.

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Summary

- The case of the 'new faces' is neither new nor unique for Ukrainian politics. Attempts to add 'fresh blood' have been made by different governments with relative success. The weak side of the 'new faces' is the lack of a uniting ideology. The strong side is the plurality of thought and internal debates.
- Presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019 led to significant restructuring within the Ukrainian political class. Being now a part of the legislative, former CSOs' activists have better chances to influence the law-making in domains of their expertise.
- The initiatives voiced by both President Zelenskyy and Prime Minister Honcharuk do not lack ambitions regarding the European integration track - the government sets an aim to comply with the EU membership criteria. It envisages approximation with all economic criteria for candidate countries, as well as joining common economic, energy, digital, legal, and cultural spaces of the EU.
- The government prioritised development of human capital and economy, European integration, security, and increased comfort of life of citizens.
- It remains to be seen if the new administration is capable of staying afloat under the multiple pressures from the foreign partners, not merely negating the previous administration's policies but offering better alternatives.
- The intensification of negotiations with Russia in order to reach progress in Donbas conflict resolution has become one of the core issues in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's both domestic and international policy. The lack of a presented road map of conflict resolution, however, raises pessimistic expectations and fears in Ukrainian society about crossing announced 'red lines' during live negotiations in the Normandy format.
- While having benefited from both conventional and new media during the election campaign, the new team in power had a rough start with some segments of the media and NGO community, but at the same time they have an ambitious agenda for transforming the legislation and the media landscape overall, focusing, among other things, on the problems that have long been discussed.
- Foreign policy was not among the priorities of both presidential and parliamentary campaigns 2019 in Ukraine. With the focus on European and Euroatlantic integration debate, all other burning issues, such as relations with neighbours, building up international support against Russian aggression, relations with diaspora, and promotion of the Ukrainian image abroad, are almost absent among the concerns of the new political establishment.

Introduction

The year 2019 became a tipping point in Ukrainian politics that brought simultaneously a greater polarisation and politicisation of the society and a unique mono-majority parliament that allowed the newly elected president to deliver without hesitations the policies he had promised. While both the president and a vast majority of members of the parliament are complete neophytes in politics, the new government is presented as a team of technocrats.

Such a combination, accompanied with the absence of a clear and coherent political programme before the elections, required a closer outlook, monitoring, and outreach that would allow the public and expert community in Ukraine and abroad to understand what the top priorities, top challenges, and so-called red lines are in the new Ukrainian politics.

The problems and threats remain the same: Russian aggression, a high level of corruption, the necessity for deregulation and economic development, gaining international support, and effective reforms aimed for European integration. Great expectations that voters and observers entrusted in the new team should result in new policies and strategies, which are important to communicate and to make sustainable.

In this report, our experts aimed to analyse consequences of the presidential and snap parliamentary elections that occurred in Ukraine in 2019, as well as perspectives for Ukrainian internal and external politics brought about by the change of political elite. A new reform agenda for economic development, the role of the civil society in delivering reforms, media as a watchdog, and a new generation of politicians, in addition to an analysis of foreign policy priorities, Donbas strategy, and European integration reforms – a brief overview of the new reality in Ukraine is presented here.

While some can insist that it is too early to analyse the new team's achievements, nevertheless, the first months in power multiplied by the de facto power monopoly allow tracking the trends and priorities set for the future. Is the European path of Ukraine irreversible? Will economic transformations top the domestic agenda? Can the new president bring peace to Donbas without compromising Ukrainian sovereignty? There are more difficult questions ahead, but without answering those, neither the Ukrainian political establishment nor Ukrainian society will be able to deliver necessary transformations and fulfil the great expectations.

New Generation Politics and What It Means for Democracy

Sergiy Gerasymchuk

New generation politics is getting trendy in Ukraine. The chances of Ukraine to become successful and to ensure irreversibility of democratic development of the country are assessed through the lens of the capabilities and political will of the new Ukrainian leadership. At the same time, there is ground for concerns caused by lack of cohesion in a new team, certain deficit of competence, and external forces aiming at undermining Ukrainian progress.

New Faces in the Ukrainian Politics

The victory of Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the 2019 presidential election in Ukraine and the victory of a brand new political party 'Sluha Narodu' (The Servant of the People) informally led by the new president brought into discourse the issue of 'political generation change', 'new faces', 'fresh blood', and 'new generation politics' in Ukraine. The people's thirst for new faces was massively utilised by Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his team during the presidential and parliamentary campaigns.

However, it is not a new invention: 'New faces' were emerging in politics under almost each president of Ukraine. A significant number of new leaders were brought to the surface by the Orange Revolution in 2004. The first months of President Victor Yushchenko's rule resulted in the rotation of about 18,000 civil servants. Yulia Tymoshenko's first government in 2005 was one of the youngest governments in the history of Ukraine.

The same was relevant for the government of Arseniy Yatseniuk in 2014, right after the Revolution of Dignity, when many reformists including those from abroad were engaged in governmental activities and shaped the political agenda in the country. Volodymyr Groysman government in 2016 also placed his stakes on a new generation of politicians. It is fair to admit that even under the rule of Leonid Kuchma (1994-2005) there was space for some new faces. In the government of that time, Prime Minister Victor Yushchenko was such an example back in 1999.

Moreover, the brand of the 'new faces', although regularly and intensively exploited by 'Sluha Narodu', does not belong to them exclusively. Svyatoslav Vakarchuk's 'Golos' party (The Voice), which for the first time participated in the parliamentary elections in 2019 and got 5.82%, also can boast overwhelmingly new faces.

New Faces – New Politics?

What makes the situation with 'Sluha Narodu' different from the previous cases as well as differentiates it from 'Golos' is the fact that their victory in the parliamentary elections was gained with an overwhelming majority of Ukrainian votes and resulted in forming an absolute majority in the parliament and a one-party government. This political force, together with the president, became a key stakeholder in the system of power.

Instead of previous broad inter-party debates, coalition consultations, and compromises among the key players, nowadays the centre of power is relocated and decision-making becomes a matter of in-party debates only.

This approach applied by the mono-majority may eventually lead to a shift to authoritarian rule and even result in the risk of usurpation of power.

Another difference: While previous presidents and heads of governments were engaging mostly professionals (with, probably, the exception of Victor Yanukovych, for whom personal loyalty was more important than professional skills of his team), 'Sluha Narodu' during the parliamentary campaign was mostly appealing to ordinary people and perceived the lack of previous political experience as a competitive advantage in the process of party's recruitment. This approach resulted in a deficit of knowledge and expertise that consequently led to the crisis of competence and 'leadership bubble' when the leaders have strong support but lack strategy, competence, and professionalism.

In attempts to ensure damage control necessitated by such a tactic, the party's leadership applies a few approaches simultaneously. First, they **search for yuppies** able to deal with the Western partners, be aware of technical assistance mechanisms and IMF procedures, be well prepared for using the tools of the Association Agreement with the EU.

Such people, who often have some professional experience, belong to the so-called technocrat caste. Second, they invest into educating 'Sluha Narodu' members of the parliament and their staff (e.g. aides and advisors), although such educational programmes may not fill all the existing knowledge gaps. Civil society institutions and Western donors are willing and capable to assist in this regard, but there is a desperate need for political will and open-minded approach from the side of 'Sluha Narodu'.

What makes the situation even more complicated, there is still a **group of those party and government leaders who rely rather on their intuition** than on competence and believe the intuitive approach can be more efficient, whereas 'professionals' are labelled as those who have discredited themselves by cooperation with the previous corrupt governments. (Regrettably, President Zelenskyy favours this group, if not belongs to it.)

It is also worth taking into consideration the **naïve group of dreamers** represented both in the parliament and in the government who promote 'good initiatives' but lack knowledge on implementing them and fail in their attempts to learn or lack support from the other groups.

Moreover, there is a group of those who believe that positive changes, in particular under the existing conditions in Ukraine, can be reached by applying a **'strong hand' approach supplemented by creativity** – the latter can cause risks to democracy since they are ready to sacrifice democratic development for the sake of efficiency. If supported by the president and other groups in the ruling party, such politicians may invigorate the aforementioned shift to the authoritarian rule or Lee Kuan Yew-style authoritarian pragmatism, a benevolent dictatorship.

In addition to the named groups, it is necessary to consider the **representatives of the Ukrainian tycoons** who infiltrated each of those groups. Ukrainian oligarchs try to regain their power and incomes by means of co-opting 'new faces' into their teams. Their interests are private, business-oriented, and often allegedly corrupt, whereas their desire to invest in Ukrainian statehood and democratic development is doubtful.

What is more, besides the internal stakeholders there are also **those inspired by external players** (including Russia). Unlike Russian explicit proxies in the Opposition platform 'For Life', they avoid being vocal; yet their impact on the process of decision-making still matters. Russia benefits from weaknesses of the 'new faces'. Each mistake of the new team gives the Kremlin arguments to mark Ukraine as an inefficient failed state and may eventually cause a decrease in the Western support and inspire further 'Ukrainian fatigue'.

The weak side of the 'new faces' is also the lack of a uniting ideology. In defining ideological pillars of the political force, 'Sluha Narodu' is guided rather by the desire to satisfy voters' demands than by strong ideological beliefs.

It is about applying populism and being guided by popular demand rather than by defining uniting ideas.

Starting from slogans of the libertarian ideology, the party leadership announced just that their ideology would be somehow between socialism and liberalism – two concepts that do not play well with each other.

All this makes the ‘new generation’ of politicians even more vulnerable. Lacking ideology and following public demand can cause fragility of state mechanisms and put under question the prospects of Ukrainian development.

Competition among the different groups within the party (both in a fight for influence and in a fight for proximity to the president) is unavoidable. That has equally positive and negative sides. The strong side is the plurality of thought and internal debates. The weak side is the lack of a systemic approach and fragility of the ruling party.

Moreover, the risk that the groups are favouring Russia or a benevolent dictatorship or serve the interests of the Ukrainian oligarchs expecting revenge will prevail. In such a case, the future of Ukraine will be defined not by its national interests but by the interests of pro-Russian, undemocratic, or business-oriented forces.

Conclusions

The case of the ‘new faces’ is neither new nor unique for Ukrainian politics. Attempts to add ‘fresh blood’ have been made by different governments and presidents with relative success and similar weak points. This factor, however, has never been decisive.

Besides, the politicians who came into power are not necessarily new. Although recruiting people without political experience was the mainstream, still there are people who have record in Ukrainian politics.

Moreover, the myth regarding the mono-majority is exaggerated. Despite the one-party rule, ‘Sluha Narodu’ lacks cohesion and faces the challenge of political infantilism. Parliamentary majority is rather vague.

The different groups of interest within the political force and the balance of their interests still matter in the process of the decision-making.

Those who will finally prevail will define the future of the Ukrainian project, and instead of being pro-Western, reform-oriented, and aimed at democratic development, Ukraine may be converted into a fragile, ineffective, oligarch-controlled failed state. That is the scenario avoiding which is a vital task for the Ukrainian elites, Ukrainian civil society, and Ukraine’s Western friends and partners. Such a task can be fulfilled by means of counteracting the competence crisis, supporting strategic thinking, ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of professionals, and by mitigation of an anti-democratic shift risk.

Perceptions Matter: How the West Sees the Elections Results

Maryna Vorotnyuk

After the presidential and parliamentary elections, Ukraine is believed to have obtained a historic chance to push forward the much-awaited reforms. Ukraine's Western partners have continuously expressed their expectations that a strong mandate that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his Servant of the People party have received will be translated into palpable and resolute reforms. Zelenskyy's seemingly sincere resolve and boldness to make ground-breaking transformations within the country and human-centred rhetoric on Donbas have resonated well in the West. The new government has been commended as the most reformist, capable, and technocratic Ukraine has ever had. Yet their record, and that of the new president, after the first months in power has been perceived as a mixed one and the concerns about monopolisation of power pile up. It is being watched closely if Zelenskyy's charisma is converted into workable policies and genuine progress.

The presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine conducted in spring and summer 2019, respectively, were praised by allies of Ukraine as competitive, fair, and free and as ones that demonstrated Ukraine's commitment to democracy.

The results of the presidential elections were read in the West as a 'reform appeal to the Verkhovna Rada'¹ and the ones that brought a strong mandate to the new president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to carry out reforms in line with Ukraine's commitments to the EU. After his Servant of the People party got unprecedented majority in the parliament², this concentration of power the new Ukrainian authorities have is referred to as a historic chance for Ukraine.

¹ EEAS. 2019. 'Statement by Parliament Delegation Head Rebecca Harms on the Ukrainian Elections', 23 April. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/61310/statement-parliament-delegation-head-rebecca-harms-ukrainian-elections_en

² That is 254 out of 424 seats in the 450-seat parliament (26 are suspended due to the occupation of Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions).

Western decision-makers see the unique ‘momentum’ in the current developments in Ukraine and frame the present approach to the reforms as a ‘bold’ one.

There is unanimity among the partners of Ukraine that ‘it is essential to use the current momentum in the best possible way’³. Hopes are expressed that under the new government Ukraine will prove to be a reliable partner; the state will shed the image of a ‘captured state’ and transit to a working model of democracy, as well as a capable military power able to resist Russian aggression.

The West’s judgment of the performance of the new Ukrainian authorities can be described as cautious optimism, similar to the one Zelenskyy’s team enjoys at home⁴. Depending on to whom one speaks, they are credited for a seemingly sincere desire to reset the power relations and transform the country, or criticised for the lack of experience, maintaining vested interests, or even eroding the post-Maidan accomplishments.

Given the ambiguity of the electoral programme of the new president, certain steps of the new team were observed with a relief. What concerns foreign and security policies, the continuity in Ukraine’s pro-EU and pro-NATO course has been taken as a good sign. It was positively perceived that the new president of Ukraine had chosen Brussels as the destination of his first visit abroad. It has been an important reassurance for the West to see some competent people placed at the key governmental positions – in the Foreign Ministry or in the office of the Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, while other appointments (such as oligarch Kolomoisky’s former lawyer, Andriy Bohdan, as the president’s chief of staff) were discouraging. In the eyes of the West, the new government’s identity is schizophrenically split: into the part that favours the ideals of change and the one that is susceptible to oligarchic influence⁵.

Reform Expectations

President Zelenskyy and the new government are operating under multiple pressures⁶. Alongside with the Russian strenuous and all-pervasive coercion, sort of a war of attrition, there are the pressures of a self-imposed agenda to deliver fast results, high, sometimes conflicting public expectations, and expectations of the Western partners. The West found President Petro Poroshenko’s administration committed to some substantial reforms but half-hearted in addressing the corruption problem. This has been the main scourge of the Ukrainian political system for years, rendering it largely dysfunctional.

3 EEAS. 2019. ‘Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the European Parliament Plenary Debate on the Situation in Ukraine’, 9 October. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/68652/speech-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-european-parliament-plenary-debate_en.

4 Pifer, S. 2019. ‘Five Months into Ukrainian President Zelenskyy’s Term, There Are Reasons for Optimism and Caution’. Brookings, 4 November. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/11/04/five-months-into-ukrainian-president-zelenskyy-term-there-are-reasons-for-optimism-and-caution/?fbclid=IwAR37TcB1FHGIBGA2EpSyKZsAWDSef8UDpThhZz4MV2V24YOW3N8g3SQnRf4>.

5 Polakowsky, Y. 2019. ‘Why Andriy Bohdan Is the Wrong Man for the Time’. Atlantic Council Ukraine Alert, 4 November. Available at: <https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/%EF%BB%BFwhy-andriy-bohdan-is-the-wrong-man-for-the-time/>.

The main pressure is to deliver the anti-corruption reforms, which have become a buzzword. These can easily be the key litmus test to assess the performance of the new authorities.

Zelenskyy's focus on anti-corruption measures as a main pillar of his electoral campaign was perceived by Ukraine's Western partners as the right diagnosis for the system. The advancement of anti-corruption policies will be the main indicator to prove the country is moving in the right direction.

The legislative pace of the new parliament has been called impressive; yet, concerns about the insufficient quality and the disregard for the parliamentary procedures have been openly voiced too. Given President Zelenskyy's charismatic and individualistic style of policy-making, concerns arise about the independence of the branches of power. It is clear that Zelenskyy and his closest circle maintain an outstanding control over all branches of power and attempt to keep the discipline and unanimity within their fraction in the parliament intact. Zelenskyy's comment during the infamous telephone talk with US President Trump in summer 2019 that the Ukrainian prosecutor general is 'his man' was seen by many as a symbol of the unhealthy monopolisation of power.

Even if the government has been labelled as the most technocratic government Ukraine has had until now, it will certainly be a cause for concern to see the president treating the government as merely executors of his wishes rather than independent policy-makers. Zelenskyy was sworn in as a president who promised to restore the rule of law, but in fact is distrustful of the norms, procedures, and institutions and tends to resort to manual control where possible.

The EU has closely followed the reforms by the government: For instance, it has supported the government's plans to open the land market in Ukraine; it has also expressed its critical position on the shortcomings of the draft law within the judicial reform⁷.

NATO allies have also reinstated their commitment to work with Ukraine towards the objective of implementing NATO principles and standards with the tools available through the Annual National Programme. Ukraine's continued quest to join NATO was reaffirmed through the clause in the statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission in October 2019 that NATO stands by its decisions taken at the 2008 Bucharest Summit and subsequent summits.⁸

6 Socor, V. 2019. 'Ukrainian President Zelenskyy Discusses War and Peace with Russia in Marathon Briefing (Part One)'. Eurasia Daily Monitor 16 (143), 16 October. Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/ukrainian-president-zelenskyy-discusses-war-and-peace-with-russia-in-marathon-briefing-part-one/>.

7 The EU-Ukraine Summit held in July 2019 provided the opportunities to outline a roadmap for the EU-Ukraine cooperation under the new authorities. See: EEAS. 2019. 'Advancing Mutual Commitment: Joint Statement Following the 21st EU-Ukraine Summit', 10 July. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/65219/advancing-mutual-commitment-joint-statement-following-21st-eu-ukraine-summit_en. Also, see the Eurointegration chapter of this report.

8 NATO. 2019. 'Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission'. Kyiv, 31 October. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_170408.htm?selectedLocale=en.

Donbas Settlement

The West expresses hopes that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will bring life to the deadlocked negotiations in the Minsk format. The exchange of prisoners between Ukraine and Russia in September 2019 was perceived as a positive step forward and was even boldly (and prematurely) called by some as a Russian-Ukrainian detente.

It brought a relief to Germany and France – Ukraine’s key partners in the Normandy format – to see the shift from what was perceived as escalating and militaristic rhetoric of former president Petro Poroshenko to Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s ‘reconciliatory’ stance on Donbas. The ‘human-centred’ approach of the latter is in accord with these states’ perception of the need to solve the Donbas conflict primarily through addressing people’s needs, alleviating human suffering, building trust and reconciliation between the people on both sides of the contact line⁹.

They exert significant pressure on Kyiv: Ukraine is expected not only to reciprocate the Kremlin’s potential positive gesture on Donbas settlement, but to generate one, to concede to the solutions that might pave the way for Russia to become more benevolent. While it is stressed that these solutions should not jeopardise Ukraine’s sovereignty and national interests, Ukraine and its partners might have a remarkably different take on what is an acceptable compromise.

Paris and Berlin might be succumbing to the desire to increasingly frame the Donbas settlement – after the ‘elections’ in the occupied territories are conducted – as Ukraine’s domestic issue¹⁰, provided Moscow demonstrates at least a slightly cooperative demeanour. The protests over the Steinmeier formula all over Ukraine were partly caused by the belief that Ukraine will be coerced into some kind of settlement detrimental to its statehood while there is a growing tide in the West to normalise relations with Russia¹¹.

The growing rift of distrust between Ukraine, on one side, and Germany and France, on the other, in the context of Normandy talks might pose an additional problem for Ukraine when the new authorities’ ingenuity will be put to test. Zelenskyy has been quite open in showing his lack of trust towards France and Germany, and this public display of his sentiments might constitute a problem in itself¹². Western moves to accommodate Russia, including restoring Moscow’s voting rights in the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly, French willingness ‘to bring Russia back to Europe’, and Germany’s stance on the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline explain the apprehensions of Ukrainians.

In this setting, the US position that elections in the occupied territories could be held only after the Russian military withdrawal, the ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’s’ forces are dissolved, and Ukraine establishes control over its side of the Ukrainian-Russian border are absolutely crucial for Ukraine. Even though US President Donald Trump has been willing to upgrade relations with Russia on several occasions, the Ukrainian problem has been intervening, including after the Kerch Strait incident in November 2018 when the Russian military detained Ukrainian vessels and took Ukrainian sailors as hostages.

Maintaining the US support as a key ally able to balance the Normandy format has been a key component of Ukrainian foreign policy.

Currently the Ukrainian-US relations appear to have been hit by a dangerous political storm. The impeachment inquiry against President Trump, who, as it appeared, was requesting Ukraine's newly elected president to investigate the Ukrainian influence in the US election in 2016 and help him expose his competitor Joe Biden, while allegedly withholding military assistance to Ukraine, dragged the latter into the limelight of the American domestic politics. Losing the US bipartisan support, becoming toxic and isolated is an imminent risk the Ukrainian political establishment has to attempt to avoid by all means.

Conclusions

Zelenskyy is expected to break the preconceptions about Ukraine as irreparably corrupt and Russia-dependent with concrete accomplishments. The concerns about the lack of experience, monopolisation of the decision-making by president's closest clique, and his slim chances to fight the influence of the vested interests on the political system due to his alleged ties to oligarch Kolomoisky are yet to be dismissed. It remains to be seen if the new administration is capable of staying afloat under the multiple pressures from the foreign partners, not merely negating the previous administration's policies but offering better alternatives.

- 9 For instance, a joint statement after the EU-Ukraine Summit in July 2019 featured the need to have an inclusive approach towards the people living in the areas not controlled by Kyiv and the desire to boost the Ukraine-EU cooperation in addressing the socio-economic and humanitarian consequences of the conflict, including the necessity to ensure the supply of water, electricity, and gas across the contact line, to facilitate the movement of people and goods, and to ensure that the people in non-government-controlled areas fully benefit from their rights as citizens of Ukraine. See: EEAS. 2019. 'Advancing Mutual Commitment: Joint Statement Following the 21st EU-Ukraine Summit', 10 July. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/65219/advancing-mutual-commitment-joint-statement-following-21st-eu-ukraine-summit_en.
- 10 Socor, V. 2019. 'Will The OSCE "Democratize" Russia's Occupation in Ukraine's Donbas?' Eurasia Daily Monitor 16 (140), 10 October. Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/will-the-osce-democratize-russias-occupation-in-ukraines-donbas/>.
- 11 Vorotnyuk, M. 2019. 'Ukrainian Protests Against the Steinmeier Formula—A View from the Ground'. Eurasia Daily Monitor 16 (145), 21 October. Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/ukrainian-protests-against-the-steinmeier-formula-a-view-from-the-ground/>.
- 12 Socor, V. 2019. 'Ukrainian President Zelenskyy Discusses War and Peace With Russia in Marathon Briefing (Part Two)'. Eurasia Daily Monitor 16 (144), 17 October. Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/ukrainian-president-zelenskyy-discusses-war-and-peace-with-russia-in-marathon-briefing-part-two/>.

Promises and Pitfalls of the ‘Year of Big Elections’: Civil Society and Civic Actors’ Attempts to Deliver Reforms in Ukraine

Ivan Gomza

Ukraine is rightly considered to be a country with a vibrant civil society and numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) that push various agendas. However, the daunting task of bringing reforms to many domains inevitably raises the questions of prioritising, effectiveness, alliance-building, and competition. Presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019 led to significant restructuring within the Ukrainian political class. Only 19.6% of MPs kept their mandates in the new parliament¹³. The executive branch also witnessed a massive arrival of actors with little previous experience in either politics or policymaking. The landslide transformations of 2019 offer new opportunities but also pose new challenges to both reforms and reform-minded civic actors. It is within these structural settings that the role of the civil society in Ukraine should be examined.

Institutionalisation

Although NGOs, CSOs, and social movements in general represent one of the preferred instruments that citizens utilise to influence governmental policy, scholars have long debated whether it indeed is as powerful as it is supposed to be. Both national¹⁴ and cross-national¹⁵ studies signal that social movements have at best a moderate effect on state policy.

NGOs, however, tend to be much more effective when they ally themselves with a political party or, at least, cooperate with a party that represents the NGO's claims within institutional settings¹⁶. In other words, institutionalisation, which is a process when CSOs 'enter formal politics and engage with authoritative institutions in order to enhance their collective ability to achieve desirable goals'¹⁷, is a significant component of CSOs' overall efficacy.

The year 2019 witnessed a notable progress in CSOs' thrust towards institutionalisation in Ukraine. The presidential race and, to an even larger extent, the parliamentary election created a set of favourable conditions that contributed to this development.

First, most of the contenders aimed to capitalise on the perennial expectations of Ukrainian voters 'to see new faces in politics'. Hence, electoral calculations made institutional political actors more receptive towards cooperation with civil society. In particular, political parties were eager to recruit notable individuals from various CSOs to bolster their own chances for success.

Two out of five parties that eventually entered the parliament were total novices (the Servant of the People and Voice parties); therefore, they badly needed human resources readily available in NGOs.

In the final account, many notable activists entered politics (e.g. Oleksandra Ustinova and Olha Stefanyshyna with the Voice, Halyna Yanchenko and Anastasiya Krasnosilka with the Servant of the People, Sofiya Fedyna and Yana Zinkevych with the European Solidarity). Being now a part of the legislative, former activists have better chances to influence the law-making in domains of their expertise. In particular, as MPs, they enjoy a more substantial sway over four crucial aspects of advocacy – agenda setting, legislative content, passage, and implementation¹⁸.

Indeed, due to a keen interest of former activists in promoting reforms in a given sphere (for instance, Ustinova¹⁹ and Krasnosilka²⁰ push the anti-corruption legislation; Stefanyshyna works to improve health care²¹, whereas Zinkevych advances bills regarding veterans²²), a somewhat quicker pace in reform delivery is to be expected.

13 «Портрет» нового парламенту: якою буде Верховна Рада України 9-го скликання? ("A Portrait of the New Parliament: What Will Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the 9th Convocation Be Like?"). 2019. OporaUA, 26 July. Available at: <https://rada.oporaua.org/analityka/zviti/23591-portret-novogo-parlamentu-yakoyu-bude-verkhovna-rada-ukrajini-9-go-sklikannya>.

14 Cornwall, Marie, Brayden King, Elizabeth Legerski, Eric Dahlin, and Kendra Schiffman. 2007. "Signals or Mixed Signals: Why Opportunities for Mobilization are not Opportunities for Policy Reform." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 12: 3, 239-254; Giugni, Marco. 2007. "Useless Protest? A Time-Series Analysis of the Policy Outcomes of Ecology, Antinuclear, and Peace Movements in the United States, 1977-1995." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 12: 1, 53-77.

15 Giugni Marco and Sakura Yamasaki. 2009. "The Policy Impact of Social Movements: A Replication Through Qualitative Comparative Analysis." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 14: 4, 467-484.

16 Giugni, Marco and Florence Passy. 1998. "Social Movements and Policy Change: Direct, Mediated, or Joint Effect?" *American Sociological Association Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements*, <https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige>; Amenta Edwin, Neal Caren, Elizabeth Chiarello, and Yang Su. 2010. "The Political Consequences of Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36, 287-307.

16 17 Suh, Doowon. 2011. "Institutionalizing Social Movements." *The Sociological Quarterly* 52, 443.

Second, there is a significant change in the activities by which NGOs aspire to influence policymaking in Ukraine. Prior to 2019, they used to focus on formation and education of ‘emerging leaders’, that is, they sought to raise a new generation of individuals who might one day try to become political operatives. (See, for example, initiatives by the Ukrainian School of Political Studies²³, Eidos²⁴, or Ukrainian Institute for the Future²⁵.) The influx of inexperienced MPs to the legislature, combined with significant public demand for better public policy, offered a new venue for institutionalisation – short-term instruction for untried deputies in law-making, parliamentary procedures, relations with the executive branch, and even basic civic education.

Despite all the derision with which the Ukrainian public met the ‘boot camps for MPs’, many CSOs (e.g. the Ukrainian School of Political Studies²⁶ and Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law²⁷) carry out such educational events. In doing this, they, presumably, want to kill three birds with one stone:

- to promulgate policies of a better quality since knowledgeable MPs are expected to make better choices and propose better laws
- to instil MPs with values and convictions partially commensurable with CSOs’ own agendas
- to forge a network of useful connections that might be advantageous for furthering NGOs’ goals. The best illustration of the latter outcome is the case of Tymofiy Mylovanov, who had assumed the post of the honorary president of Kyiv School of Economics, a private educational institution, and was first to invite newly elected MPs to a week-long study²⁸; this landed him an offer to become the minister of Economic Development

The third aspect of the ‘institutionalised turn of civic actors’ is a conscious rejection by NGOs of confrontational style when dealing with authorities. Although contentious politics remains a part of the arsenal of tools used by the civil society, many CSOs shifted towards conciliatory and non-provocative interaction with politicians, political institutions, and governmental agencies. Such NGOs as CenterUA²⁹ or Eidos³⁰ develop long-term programmes to advance fruitful cooperation between activists and local authorities. Thus, contrary to earlier studies that demonstrated CSOs’ ‘generally antagonistic relationship towards local and regional authorities’³¹, there is a reversal trend, which might be attributed to new opportunities offered by reshuffling of the political class in 2019.

To summarise, the trend towards institutionalisation became more prominent in Ukraine in 2019. The opinion of Svitlana Matvienko, head of the Agency for Legislative Initiatives, that ‘there is nothing insane if one wants to be an MP, a politician, or an executive at local administration, for this is a path towards personal growth’³² captures neatly the new mindset of the activist community.

Although it not clear whether (or for how long) the opportunities to enter institutional politics will still be around, it is undeniable that the current state of affairs provides additional advantages for civic actors to promote their agendas.

Reforms: Agendas and Challenges in 2019

Civil society in Ukraine still has many tasks to tend to. In fact, most of the reforms that have already been launched are subject to continuing struggle, because the basic feature of policies in Ukraine is reversibility. No reforms are safeguarded against abrupt governmental volte-faces, pending due to inimical court rulings, paralysis caused by bureaucratic sabotage, etc.

Consequently, the plethora of reform agendas followed by the civil society is seemingly unchanged since 2014: anti-corruption, police, prosecutorial office, healthcare system. Most of these cases can boast only mixed results. The much-celebrated police reform is now viewed with reservation, for many corrupted police officers found their way back into the system despite special examinations. The case of Kateryna Handziuk, whose murder has not been properly investigated, galvanised contentious actions against the minister of Interior and the public prosecutor during 2019. The positive trends in the healthcare system are under threat because of the policies of the new minister of Health and President Zelenskyy's opposition to them.³³

Anti-corruption is arguably the preferable domain for many CSOs due to both a pressing need for quenching corruption in Ukraine and generous subventions by public and international donors

(e.g. USAID³⁴ and the EU³⁵) who stimulate anti-corruption initiatives by civil society. Some CSOs have developed inspiring initiatives. Transparency International manages a project to assess the accountability of local governances in 100 biggest cities in Ukraine.

18 Andrews, Kenneth and Bob, Edwards. 2004. "Advocacy Organizations in the U.S. Political Process." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:1, 479-506.

19 Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. 2019. Draft Laws by MP Ustinova. Available at: <http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/pt2/reports.dep2?PERSON=21092&SKL=10>.

20 Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. 2019. Draft Laws by MP Krasnosilksa. Available at: http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc2_5_1_J?ses=10010&num_s=2&num=&date1=&date2=&name_zp=&av_nd=%CA%F0%E0%F1%ED%EE%F1%B3%EB%FC%F1%FC%EA%E0+%C0%ED%E0%F1%F2%E0%F1%B3%FF+%CE%EB%E5%E3%B3%E2%ED%E0&prof_kom=0&is_gol_kom=0&dep_fr=0&stan_zp=0&date3=&is_zakon=0&m_act=&gneu_decision_present=&sub_zak=0&type_doc=0&type_zp=0&vid_zp=0&edition_zp=0&is_urgent=0&ur_rubr=0&sort=0&out_type=&id=.

21 Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. 2019. Draft Laws by MP Stefanyshyna. Available at: http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc2_5_1_J?ses=10010&num_s=2&num=&date1=&date2=&name_zp=&av_nd=%D1%F2%E5%F4%E0%ED%E8%F8%ED%E0+%CE%EB%FC%E3%E0+%C0%ED%E0%F2%EE%EB%B3%BF%E2%ED%E0&prof_kom=0&is_gol_kom=0&dep_fr=0&stan_zp=0&date3=&is_zakon=0&n_act=&gneu_decision_present=&sub_zak=0&type_doc=0&type_zp=0&vid_zp=0&edition_zp=0&is_urgent=0&ur_rubr=0&sort=0&out_type=&id=.

22 Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. 2019. Draft Laws by MP Zinkevych. Available at: <http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/pt2/reports.dep2?PERSON=21106&SKL=10>.

23 USPS official webpage. 2018. Available at: <http://www.usps.org.ua/index.php/ua/activity-ua/curriculum-ua>.

24 Eidos official webpage. 2017. Available at: <http://eidos.org.ua/novyny/oholoshujemo-nabir-do-uchasti-u-proekti-vyscha-politychna-shkola-novi-pryntsypy-liderstva/>.

25 UIF official webpage. 2018. Available at: <https://reserve.uifuture.org/deputaty.php>.

26 USPS official webpage. 2019. Available at: <http://www.usps.org.ua/index.php/ua/news-ua/item/277-parlamentska-prohrama-ushps-deputaty-proishly-pershyi-etap-navchannia>.

The Anti-Corruption Action Centre offers citizens a tool to monitor the tax expenditure, combining accomplishments of ProZorro (open-source government e-procurement system) and mandatory publishing of income declarations for all officials. In 2019 alone, the Centre of Policy and Legal Reform organised 43 events³⁸ to address the challenges of corruption and strategies to fight it.

All resources and efforts notwithstanding, deficiencies of anti-corruption reforms are flagrant. The High Anti-Corruption Court started to work with a two-year delay, handing down its first sentence on October 30, 2019³⁹, and civic actors themselves are unsure whether it could provide the expected results⁴⁰. In addition, they signal⁴¹ to unsatisfactory results of the so-called anti-corruption infrastructure: The National Agency for Corruption Prevention proved unable to function efficiently; the specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office wages political warfare and enjoys no public trust; the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine is paralysed.

Finally, according to polls⁴², the public in general has rather contradictory notions of corruption Ukraine: Whereas 93.7% of respondents believe corruption is a pressing issue (thus making it one of top three concerns, with low wages and military action in eastern Ukraine), only 11.5% took any steps to fight it. Moreover, citizens tend to condemn corruption by top officials while simultaneously condoning (and even participating in) everyday corruption⁴³. Besides, contrary to scholarly conclusions that 'punitive measures on their own can only have a limited effect on reducing corruption'⁴⁴, the public believes that severe punishments are the best way to stifle corruption. Therefore, the plethora of anti-corruption activities by NGOs fails so far to produce tangible results in two crucial aspects: institutional consolidation of anti-corruption measures and public perception of corruption. It is advisable that civic actors focus on the latter in order to lay foundation for anti-corruption culture in Ukrainian society. As to the former, institutionalisation discussed above might be a good solution.

Finally, contrary to appearances, the landscape of reforms is not totally fixed. A good illustration of emerging agendas is the land market reform unexpectedly rose to top priorities in 2019. Paradoxically, initiated in 1992, the land reform is one of the most long-lasting initiatives in Ukraine.

27 CEDEM official webpage. 2019. Available at: <https://cedem.org.ua/events/vur-dlya-pomichnykiv-narodnyh-deputativ/>.

28 "The Kyiv School of Economics Reveals Its Teaching Programme for Servant of the People's MPs." 2019. *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 25 July. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/07/25/7221872/>.

29 CentreUA official webpage. 2019. Available at: <https://centreua.org/publicna-politika>.

30 Eidos official webpage. 2019. Available at: <http://eidos.org.ua/proekty/prozori-rady-advokasi-kampaniya-z-implementatsiji-antykoruptionsijnoho-zakonodavstva-mistsevymy-radamy/>.

31 Bader, Max. 2019. "Interim findings: Civil society against corruption in Ukraine." Include, 6 February. Available at: <https://includeplatform>

32 Matvienko, Svitlana. 2018. "Interview." *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 6 March. Available at: <https://vybory.pravda.com.ua/articles/2018/03/6/7149577/>.

33 "Скандал в МОЗ: чи продовжуватиметься в Україні медреформа Супрун?" ("MOH Scandal: Will Suprun Medical Reform Continue in Ukraine?"). 2019. *Deutsche Welle*, 27 September. Available at: <https://qrqo.page.link/6rsh1>

34 Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre. 2019. Description of "Vzayemodiya" Programme by USAID. Available at: <https://cutt.ly/jeZOHct>

35 European Union Anti-Corruption Initiative. 2019. About Programme. Available at: <https://euaci.eu/who-we-are/about-programme>

36 Transparency International. 2019. General information about "Transparent Cities" Programme. Available at: <https://transparentcities.in.ua/en/pro-nas/zagalna-informaciya>

37 DePodatky Programme's official page. 2019. Available at: <https://depodatky.org.ua/>

38 CPLR official webpage. 2019. Available at: http://pravo.org.ua/ua/news/combating_corruption/page1/

39 "Вищий антикорупційний суд виніс перший вирок. Суддя отримав штраф" ("The Supreme Anti-Corruption Court Rendered Its First Sentence. The Judge Was Fined"). 2019. *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 30 October. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/10/30/7230532/>

Despite persistence and continuing invitation by international agencies to accomplish it, the land reform has always enjoyed lesser priority on the list of civil society concerns. For instance, in a detailed analytical paper by the Reanimation Package of Reforms Coalition in 2017⁴⁵, the land reform was granted only two pages of infographics instead of a full-fledged discussion as in the cases of judicial or public policy reforms.

The deprioritised status, however, changed in 2019. The very same Reanimation Package of Reforms Coalition organised a host of events⁴⁶ to promote the lift of the moratorium on agricultural land sale. After the parliamentary election, the issue witnessed cooperation between MPs (e.g. Yulia Klymenko from the Voice, Maryan Zablotskyi from the Servant of the People), CSOs (e.g. the Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law), and officials. The hinge factor was institutionalisation again. The new minister of Economic Development, Tymofiy Mylovanov, espoused a vigorous approach to land reform, eventually advancing amendments to the law regulating the land market in Ukraine⁴⁷ supported by the president⁴⁸. Civil society participated in discussing, elaborating on, and fine-tuning the land reform, but it would not have been possible without receptiveness by the political class.

Conclusions

Both agenda setting and reform implementation are contingent upon cooperation with officials and authorities. In 2019, a significant restructuring of the political class due to presidential and parliamentary elections provided valuable opportunities for civic actors to enter institutional conventional politics, thus considerably improving their chances to further desirable transformation. However, being a necessary condition for reform success, cooperation with authorities comes with notable strings attached: In case national or local elites consider the reforms to be incongruent with their interests, they can effectively grind those reforms to a halt. Therefore, civil society should invest more effort in creating a vision of reforms in crucial spheres such as corruption or policing as a public good and convincing the elites that attainment of this public good would serve the higher strategic interest of the elites as well as that of the population.

40 Kamenev, Myhailo. 2018. "Anti-Corruption: Quo Vadis?" *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 25 June. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2018/06/25/7184364/>

41 Collective appeal by 23 CSOs to all presidential race participants. 2019. Available at: <http://anticoragenda2019.org.ua/>

42 Kyivskyi Mizhnarodnyi Instytut Sotsiologiyi. 2018. "Koruptsiya v Ukraini," Available at: <https://dif.org.ua/uploads/pdf/6343688805c078ceeea4aa6.97852084.pdf>.

43 Vybranovskiy, Roman and Maksym Kliuchar. 2019. "Corruption Blind Spots." USAID. Available at: <http://longread.uacrisis.org/blindzone>.

44 Lough, John and Vladimir Dubrovskiy. 2018. "Are Ukraine's Anti-corruption Reforms Working?" Chatham House. 19 November. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2018-11-19-ukraine-anti-corruption-reforms-lough-dubrovskiy.pdf>. See <https://rpr.org.ua/en/reforms-under-the-microscope/>.

45 For instance, see <https://rpr.org.ua/en/news/key-stakeholders-are-firm-on-the-need-of-land-market-reform-key-outcome-of-diplomatic-breakfast/> and

46 <https://rpr.org.ua/announcements/forum-life-after-kliuchovi-aspekty-zapusku-rynku-zemli-v-ukraini/>.

47 Ministry for Development of Economy, Trade and Agriculture of Ukraine. 2019. Draft to Amendments to the "Law on Agricultural Land Circulation."

48 Available at: <http://me.gov.ua/Documents/Detail?lang=uk-UA&id=95d86140-7de5-4859-821a->

48 President of Ukraine. 2019. "Volodymyr Zelenskyy Signed the Decree on Urgent Measures for Reforms Aimed at Stimulating Economic Growth and Strengthening the State." Available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/volodimir-zelenskij-pidpisav-ukaz-pro-nevidkladni-zahodi-z-p-58289>.

European Perspectives of The New Team

Hennadiy Maksak

While too vague during the electoral campaigns period, the European integration track became more clear and nuanced with the new government coming into office in September 2019. The programme of Oleksiy Honcharuk's government has a special chapter devoted to the issues of rapprochement with the EU and NATO. In some parts, it echoes the initiatives of the previous team, in some claims to be more human-centred when it comes to the benefits of the integration processes. Although the strategic course for the EU membership is preserved, it is still too early to speak about the efficiency of Zelenskyy's team in delivering on the Association Agreement implementation track.

European Vector in Electoral Manifestos during the 2019 Presidential and Parliamentary Campaigns of Volodymyr Zelenskyy

The core achievements on the Ukrainian track of the European integration were witnessed during the tenure of President Petro Poroshenko (2014-2019). Ratification and enactment of the Association Agreement, introduction of the visa-free regime with the EU have been finalised around that time. European integration was one of the prime foreign policy priorities of Poroshenko's team and he led this track himself.

In this vein, the way Volodymyr Zelenskyy designed his election platform did not allow one to clearly identify his position on European integration

or most of the other foreign policy goals for the new administration. The campaign had focused on the domestic agenda, attracting a wider electorate, those unhappy with the performance of the previous team.

Even after his landslide victory, the newly elected president in his inauguration speech mentioned only Ukraine's 'European pace', continuing this vague trend.

Some public messages during his first foreign visits gave more food for thought as to the European orientation and integration path of Ukraine. A working visit to Brussels on June 4-5, 2019, offered some specifics during the meetings with the president of the European Council, president of the European Commission, and high representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. President Zelenskyy emphasised the invariability of Ukraine's strategic course towards the EU as stated in the Constitution of Ukraine. He also noted the necessity of increasing international pressure on Russia through sanctions.

Clearer priorities emerged from the Joint Statement following the 21st EU-Ukraine summit on July 8, 2019, when the president signed the document on behalf of Ukraine.

This can be interpreted as his readiness to proactively implement the Association Agreement (AA), including the following aspects:

- Cooperation with the EU in countering hybrid threats, including through strategic communications;
- The need to reinstate criminal responsibility for illicit enrichment and ensure effective work of all anti-corruption institutions;
- Completion of the gas and electricity market reform, including finalisation of unbundling for sustainable integration with the EU energy market;
- Further harmonisation of Ukraine's legislation on digital economy with that of the EU; and
- Legislative work and practical implementation of the respective legislation by Ukrainian institutions to launch negotiations on the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA).

These priorities were largely reiterated by President Zelenskyy in his comprehensive decree of November 8, in which he obliges the government, inter alia, to secure stable international support for the Ukrainian course on gaining the EU membership. Among other presidential orders, there have been mentioned: sectorial cooperation with the EU, drafting proposals for revisiting of the AA provisions, as well as continuation of the dialogue for international and regional cooperation.

Ukraine's European Integration in the Mono Majority Parliament

The electoral manifesto of the elections winner, the political party 'Sluha Narodu' (Servant of the People, the party of President Zelenskyy), was a compilation of highlights that offer little information for analysis. In the context of relations with the EU, the Servant of the People declares its intention to pass laws that are necessary for the implementation of the Association Agreement and expansion of cooperation with the EU in other spheres. In terms of reforms in Ukraine, the party planned to conduct decentralisation in line with the EU norms, which implies delegation of powers to executive committees of local councils.

The Servant of the People party holds 254 mandates (out of 450 seats) and chairs 19 out of 23 parliament committees. Having a one-party majority in the parliament, there was no necessity to sign a coalition agreement where future policies and priorities could be fixed. So no detailed programme or action plan that could shed light on specific priorities such as the European integration was presented by the parliament.

While the new speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, Dmytro Razumkov, did not speak about the European integration as one of his priorities, focusing predominantly on the domestic reform agenda, many of the planned reforms are nevertheless a part of Ukraine's commitments under the Association Agreement. The political will of the Verkhovna Rada leadership is the only factor that determines the efficiency of Ukraine's approximation to the EU legislation for the Association Agreement implementation purposes. It is important to note in this context that First Vice Speaker Ruslan Stefanchuk has mentioned a poor quality of Eurointegration projects drafted by the previous parliament. It led to the long discussions about the necessity to save the Parliamentary Committee on European Integration in the new parliament, as ideas to just merge it with the Foreign Affairs Committee have been actively disputed.

As a result, the committee leadership was given to the opposition. As a positive development should be seen the fact that Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, previously vice prime minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and now an MP with the European Solidarity, was approved as a head of the Parliamentary Committee for Ukraine's Integration with the EU. This committee has already become among the most proactive ones in holding meetings and considering draft laws that are part of the Eurointegration track.

Governmental Agenda for Integration with the European Union

The composition of the new cabinet of ministers of Ukraine, presented at the end of August, inspires moderate optimism despite the fact that Prime Minister Oleksi Honcharuk was very modest on declaring the European integration path in his first official speech. Partly, this might be attributed to the desire to stay in line with the core messages of President Zelenskyy, which focus predominately on internal issues.

The good news is that the government keeps the position of the vice prime minister (VPM) for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. A career diplomat, Dmytro Kuleba, was appointed to this position and shortly after became the main spokesperson when it comes to Ukraine's relations with the EU and NATO. The VPM acts in tight coordination with Foreign Minister Vadym Prystayko, also a very experienced diplomat with a strong track on European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

The programme of the government, adopted by the Verkhovna Rada in October, gives a more clear vision of the European track of the new team in public offices. Besides a number of institutional and legislative initiatives connected to the AA implementation process, the medium-term document includes a separate chapter devoted to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Referring to the integration with the EU, the government sets an aim to comply with the EU membership criteria. It envisages approximation with all economic criteria for candidate countries, as well as joining common economic, energy, digital, legal, and cultural spaces of the EU

Within a five-year timeframe, the government plans for 80% of EU legal acts envisaged in the AA to be transposed into the national legislation.

Ukrainian businesses and citizens will benefit from the four freedoms of movement with the European Union, which will eventually contribute to the level of the European integration. FDI flow is also expected from EU companies and enterprises as well as continuation of the EU financial support.

As a European decentralisation initiative of a sort, the new governmental team intends to launch European integration offices in all regions of Ukraine to make European instruments and funds available to local communities.

In November 2019, during the 5th meeting of the Association Committee in Brussels, Vice Prime Minister Dmytro Kuleba voiced five priorities in the realm of Ukraine's further rapprochement with the European Union:

- **The first priority** outlines deeper sectoral integration and cooperation between Ukraine and the European Union in the fields of digital and energy markets, customs procedures, as well as in justice, freedom, and security sectors. To this end, the Ukrainian side proposes to elaborate sectorial road maps and action plans.
- **The second priority** focuses on the issues of climate change and energy efficiency, which is in line with areas of attention of the Ukrainian government. Against the backdrop of adoption of the European Green Deal, Ukraine expresses its willingness to cooperate with the EU on decarbonisation.
- **The conclusion** of the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA) **is the third priority** for deepening cooperation with the EU. Upon completion of the relevant procedures, the ACAA may facilitate Ukrainian trade with the EU.
- **The fourth priority** tackles bringing more knowledge about the benefits of the European integration to the regions of Ukraine.
- **The fifth priority** foresees reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure in the conflict-affected parts of the Donbas region.

Taking stock of the first results of the 50 days in office, the governmental team reported the adoption of 15 draft laws from the Association Agreement implementation package. Some of them are of great importance for the European integration track, among which, suffice it to mention, are the laws on intellectual property, authorised economic operators, standardisation, and so on.

Potential Roadblocks on the European Path

Obviously, Eurointegration cannot progress without proper cooperation between the parliament and the government. Traditionally the parliament stood as the least effective state body in implementation of the AA. But as was previously mentioned, due to the fact that the new political team controls both the executive and legislative branches of power, there is a real window of opportunity for fast-track adoption of 'belated' legal acts. One of the obstacles was lifted from the outset of the new government's activity. The profile vice prime minister as well as the government office for the coordination of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration have been granted the right of legislative initiative, which was not the case during the previous governments.

Kuleba is already actively cooperating with the respective committee in the Verkhovna Rada.

In this context, there is a need for re-approval by the new parliament and the government of the list of priority draft laws to be passed by the Verkhovna Rada, similar to the Roadmap for Legislative Support of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement Implementation for 2018-2019.

The next step towards effective implementation of the Association Agreement can be amending the Verkhovna Rada procedures and adopting a mechanism for a fast-track consideration of Eurointegration laws. It has been already proposed by the committee in charge to make a list of priority draft laws to implement the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement and to include these draft laws in the parliament agenda.

The new leadership of the Verkhovna Rada has proposed to introduce a plan of legislation drafting work including their prioritisation. If the plan turns out to include and prioritise Eurointegration draft laws, this will signal that President Zelenskyy and his team are serious about Ukraine's integration with the EU.

A negative development is the relatively small number of the respective committee members, where most have no previous experience in harmonising Ukrainian legislation with the EU requirements. At the same time, one has to admit that the quality of the vast number of legal acts undergoing a committee screening for compliance with the AA commitments do not meet the necessary requirements.

On the other hand, Ukraine still expects the reloading of the European intuitions after elections, which might bring some changes in approaches to Ukraine or the region of the Eastern Neighbourhood at large. A delayed start of the new European Commission is already shifting the schedule of the meeting of the Ukraine-EU Association Council, the highest bilateral body created under the AA. Although it may be considered as a purely technical issue, Kyiv pays great attention to the dynamics of political interactions with Brussels.

Conclusions

It is too early to draw definite conclusions about real plans of Zelenskyy's team in the domain of European integration. The initiatives voiced by both President Zelenskyy and Prime Minister Honcharuk do not lack ambitions regarding the European integration track. But it remains to be seen in 2020 if different groups of interest within the political team, dominant in Ukraine, will be in position to compromise and fine-tune the Association Agreement implementation process, which is far behind schedule.

Quick Economic Reforms and Fighting Corruption – Are These a Priority for the New Government?

Yuriy Vdovenko

The new government's programme includes ambitious but realistic goals and fills in the gaps of the presidential and parliamentary election campaigns. The Servant of the People Party in the parliament demonstrates tentative signs of absence of firmness, after a couple of months of having supported all initiatives without reservations. For achieving fast and tangible results in the economic sphere, the government should improve communication with the parliament and society and introduce a systematic approach to reforms instead of 'scrappy' measures.

After the 2019 presidential and parliamentary election campaigns, which were characterised by absence of details from the side of Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his Servant of the People Party, now it is time to respond to voters' expectations, which were high. The economic numbers are coming in with the new government programme, which is filling in the gaps of the election campaign.

The new team has already made the first steps for fighting corruption and delivering economic reforms, but society requires tangible and fast results. December 31, 2019, is a symbolic date for presenting achievements, as one year ago on the New Year's Eve, President Zelenskyy launched his election campaign.

Among the main directions of their work, the government prioritised development of human capital and economy, European integration, security, and increased comfort of life of citizens.

Disappointment with the slow progress of reforms, especially the fight against corruption, was a key reason for the breakdown in the popularity of the former president, Petro Poroshenko. Fighting against corruption was one of the main messages of Zelenskyy's election campaign. The most popular slogans were: 'Spring will show who stole where' and 'When spring comes, we'll start planting', using a homonym in Ukrainian for making arrests.

Cancellation of immunity for members of the parliament has been a very popular promise in all election campaigns in Ukraine. Nowadays this election promise is partially accomplished. In September, the Ukrainian parliament supported an amendment to the Constitution abolishing parliamentary immunity. The law should enter into force on January 1, 2020. Also it is worth mentioning the restarting of anti-corruption bodies and replacing of the head of the Security Service of Ukraine and prosecutor general. There are also numerous rumours about willingness to arrest some top officials. Several odious individuals have already been arrested, but nobody will guarantee whether their cases will be brought to a logical conclusion.

By November, both the government and the president have presented their first vision for reforms. The government announced their five-year plan on September 29, 2019,⁴⁹ which contains 78 goals in all spheres of relevant ministries, with clear indicators and a results-based management approach. Additionally to the government programme, on November 9, 2019, the president signed a decree 'On Urgent Measures for Reforms and Strengthening the State'⁵⁰, which contains measures aimed at pursuing structural economic reforms, introducing additional mechanisms to accelerate socio-economic development, improving well-being of the population, ensuring harmonious development of the regions, implementing European living standards, and strengthening the state.

⁴⁹ Government Programme, Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 29 September 2019.

Available at: <https://program.kmu.gov.ua/>.

Governmental Plans

Regarding economic issues, the situation is a bit different. Usually voters have social rather than economic expectations. Therefore, the government plans a 40% growth trend in the economy, creating one million new jobs, attracting USD 50 billion in foreign direct investments, and raising the living wage to USD 175. The government also aims to ensure that household utility costs do not exceed 15% of incomes.

Financial and economic goals within the new government programme are quite broad:

- Ukrainians will live in a state that is managed by public finances in a predictable manner, will receive more revenue from managing state property in their interest, and will not overpay for services and goods purchased for their benefit by the state;
- Taxpayers will have a lower tax burden and spend significantly less time filing taxes; they will be protected from financial fraud and have access to much cheaper financial resources; costs of their debt service will be reduced;
- Exporters will get lower barriers to exporting Ukrainian goods and services; honest exporters and importers and individual citizens of Ukraine will have transparent, simple, and predictable customs rules, while their economic and equitable interests will be protected;
- Ukrainians will not lose from the ban on managing their property, will have protection from abuse by monopolists, will receive safe goods and services;
- Ukrainian workers will have legal jobs and will spend less time looking for new legal jobs; intellectual property owners, such as those in creative industries and inventors, will be protected and receive fair compensation.

The top priority announced by the government is fighting against unemployment. It should be done by liberalising labour laws, simplifying the hiring and dismissal of workers, and encouraging employers to create new jobs. The unemployment rate in Ukraine should fall by half – down to 5%. There are also plans to introduce electronic training and job search systems. Some 90% of the unemployed will be partaking in employment programmes.

A crucial point of economic development is the establishment of a land market in Ukraine, whose launch is scheduled for October 1, 2020. Land reform should be beneficial to farmers who plan to continue leasing land;

mechanisms to support farmers via loans with rates that will not exceed the inflation rate will be launched. The land reform is among the most challenging ones for the government because of radical political rhetoric, opposition in the parliament, and lack of unanimous support in society.

Next year, the government is expecting to start three-year budget planning cycles, to make the state finance system more predictable. Tax burden should be reduced, tax payments should take less time, and taxpayer disputes are expected to be resolved mainly in pre-trial procedures. The government has set as a goal that Ukraine should become one of the top 25 countries with the simplest conditions for paying taxes. The share of state-owned banks in the banking market ought to be reduced by more than half – to 20%; loan interest rates will be reduced too and partial loan guarantee fund for businesses will be created.

The share of government debt to GDP should drop to 40% from the current 60% and Ukraine's credit rating should rise to level 'A' (currently, Standard & Poor's rating agency has it at 'B' after a recent increase⁵¹). As a result, the state will spend significantly less on debt servicing than at present. It also wants more than half of the state debt to be in hryvnia, and not in foreign currency as it is now. Budget deficit will be reduced to 1.5% of the GDP in 2024.

Significant emphasis is placed on the sector of state enterprises. More than 1,000 unprofitable state enterprises from all sectors will be closed. All strategic state-owned companies will be transferred to a newly created National Welfare Fund. Due to large-scale privatisation, the state's share in the economy should be reduced to 5%.

The Ukrainians' biggest demand is to improve infrastructure. The government plans to reform Ukrainian Railways, 'Ukrzaliznytsia', and allow private companies to use the Ukrainian railway system as operators. Over the next five years, it is expected to repair 24,000 kilometres of national roads. The plans in the aviation sphere include the reduction of plane ticket costs in Ukraine to the level of average European prices. The aim is also to nearly double the number of low-cost routes.

Conclusions

This short overview of government plans shows that economic reforms are a real priority for the new government. The governmental programme is built in a different vein than the previous ones, and includes a list of goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) for all ministries, even though it looks like scraps of the most urgent measures in all areas. The plans meet the requirements of the voters, but the serious challenge on this way is the implementation of the first goals by the end of 2019 and during 2020.

⁵⁰ 'Volodymyr Zelenskyy Signed the Decree on Urgent Measures for Reforms Aimed at Stimulating Economic Growth and Strengthening the State', President of Ukraine, 9 November 2019. Available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/volodimir-zelenskij-pidpisav-ukaz-pro-nevidkladni-zahodi-z-p-58289>.

The budget for 2020 demonstrates the priority areas for the new government. Although the government has a variety of goals and clear KPIs, people are not willing to wait for a long time for the living standards to be improved. From the first days, the newly elected parliament supported presidential and governmental initiatives via a so-called 'turbo-regime' when many decisions have been adopted at a very fast speed without proper discussions.

Nevertheless, the situation has changed in a couple of months and the Servant of the People Party does not demonstrate firmness, which could slow the execution of the government's plans. Therefore, the main recommendations are in the area of proper implementation and communication of the new government's programme. For achieving long-lasting effects in fighting corruption and implementing quick economic reforms, it is necessary:

- to fill in the gaps in communication with the parliament and society, providing clear explanations of high-profile decisions
- to concentrate efforts on the implementation of actual strategies and introduction of a systematic instead of a 'scrappy' approach to supporting policymaking in the public sector
- to slow down the 'turbo-regime' for making decisions that are not in line with the proclaimed goals, which will also include improved consultation mechanisms with interested parties
- to establish and use legislative and institutional protection measures to avoid unpredictable decisions that could have a negative impact on business environment and small to medium enterprise (SME) development

Facing the Fourth Estate: A Rough Start and an Ambitious Reform Agenda

Anna Korbut

While having benefited from both conventional and new media during the election campaign, the new team in power had a rough start with some segments of the media and NGO community once elected. The part of the new government that is responsible for media-related policies is comprised of media professionals with extensive background in the business, which they gained working at oligarch-owned broadcasters. They have an ambitious agenda for transforming the legislation and the media landscape overall, building on the reforms implemented under the previous administration and government after 2014. They are now working on new media legislation that may bring about profound changes in the way media – both conventional and new, such as online and social media – operate and are regulated in Ukraine. The media and expert communities are engaged in the process to some extent, although some of the proposed changes raise concerns about the impact they could have on competition in the media market, survivability of some media, and the interference of political actors in media work.

TV and Social Media are a Candidate's Best Friend

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's communication during the election campaigns in 2019 attracted a lot of attention for his use of both conventional and new media tools. Beyond the election framework, Zelenskyy's long-time presence on TV, including in his increasingly politicized comedy shows, made him one of the most recognisable figures in Ukraine's political landscape, and certainly the most recognisable 'new face'.

According to a 2018 survey⁵² by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), his rate of recognition was nearly 92% in April 2018 – compared to 29% for journalist-turned MP Serhiy Leshchenko or slightly under 8% for Maksym Nefiodov, then first deputy minister of Economy and a driver behind ProZorro, a new system for transparent public procurement.

A monitoring of the election coverage in conventional media by the National Council for Television and Radio Broadcasting⁵³ found that entertainment shows featuring Volodymyr Zelenskyy at 1+1, one of the Ukraine’s most popular TV channels, amounted to 14% of total airtime in the two months before the first round of the presidential election. The channel did not criticise him and gave him a chance to speak personally in political shows during that period.

His digital communication was impressive. Throughout both campaigns, Zelenskyy’s team focused on expanding outreach and building up direct engagement with social media users. The invitation to send proposals for his platform in early January 2019 or the launch in May 2019 of LIFT, a website for headhunting and idea hunting for Zelenskyy’s team, were just some of the many examples. His digital campaign coordinator Mykhailo Fedorov described channels of communication via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube as ‘our own media’⁵⁴.

Beyond the election campaign communications, there was no clarity on what Zelenskyy’s policies would be with regard to the media in Ukraine. Plans to de-oligarchise media and create a Russian-language public TV channel were mentioned, but without any specifics. And it was too early to judge about his future policies before the key media-related appointments took place after the parliamentary elections.

What Is New?

With the new administration, parliament, and government in place now, a number of approaches appear in their relations with the media that are different from the traditional politics vis-à-vis media framework.

Firstly, nobody in the new team in power owns media so far. While many of its representatives come from different kinds of media background, they are not known to actually own or control any TV channels, online or other outlets. At the same time, they hardly have any open conflicts or clashes of interest with most owners of major TV channels in the country, even if they speak about diminishing the influence of oligarchs and political actors on the Ukrainian media.

52 Socio-Political Sentiments of Ukrainian Residents conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in April 2018. Available at: https://www.kiis.com.ua/materials/pr/20180305_public-political%20mood/Public-political%20mood_report.pdf.

53 The monitoring covered the period from January 31 to March 31, 2019. The first round of the presidential election took place on March 31, 2019, followed by the second round on April 21, 2019. See: <https://www.nrada.gov.ua/za-try-peredyvborchyyh-misyatsi-prysutnist-kandydata-na-post-prezydenta-volodymyra-zelenskogo-v-efiri-1-1-dosyagla-14-vidsotkiv/>.

54 Ukrayinska Pravda’s interview with Mykhailo Fedorov, the coordinator of Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s digital campaign from March 2019. See: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2019/03/6/7208437/>.

Secondly, the new team in power often acts in order to be perceived as the media in itself. It seeks to create and distribute news or information without intermediaries while experimenting with different formats to attract more attention.

Examples include videos⁵⁵ of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's monologues in a Tesla car while driving around Kyiv or an 'interview'⁵⁶ with an actor from his *Servant of the People* television series to mark the first 100 days of his presidency.

After much criticism for avoiding speaking to the press properly, especially from parts of the media community, Zelenskyy finally did an interview with journalists in mid-October. However, he did so in a 14-hour press marathon at a food market in Kyiv, using the opportunity to offer a different format and attract public attention to himself and some of his messages, rather than to the substance of the conversation. Seven channels broadcasted the press marathon live on TV and on their YouTube channels.

Apart from that, the new team continues to use social media and the formats popular there to communicate with the audience. For example, Ze!President YouTube channel regularly features videos of Zelenskyy's addresses to the public on important issues, his trips to the frontline and the regions, and the way he deals with local authorities. Apart from Zelenskyy himself, the channel features videos of bloggers that talk about the same issues in short explainers or in 'myth debunking' videos. This is oriented at a wider audience that is likely to prefer form or format to nuances of the policy discussed.

Similar formats are used by other representatives of the team as they seek to increase direct engagement with the audience: For example, Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk hosts the Premier's Cup chat vlogs on YouTube on a weekly basis. These moves work to some extent: According to the latest survey by KIIS⁵⁷, Volodymyr Zelenskyy still enjoys a high level of trust at 66%, even if it is down from 73% in September. At the same time, Zelenskyy's communication is criticised by some segments of the society for the lack of detailed professional explanations of the policies that his team puts forward or that the party in the parliament votes for, such as the land sale reform, war-related security issues, etc.

55 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7MUy2gowZ8&t=243s>.

56 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJ57oGEYNiA>.

57 What Ukrainians Think of Politicians, the Work of the Authorities and the Current Developments. 2019. KIIS, 14 October. Available at: http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=898&page=1&fbclid=IwAR3VGhYvnZy1nywLrzvnl87EwZ7v8mKWRI0jywSz8B-oB_uEY1HfxvaO5kg.

58 «Зеленський захитався навіть від маленького вітереця розслідувань»: реакції на сюжет «Схем». 2019. Radio Svoboda, 18 January. Available at: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/29718016.html>.

59 Концепція майбутнього Закону про медіа. 2019. Detector Media, 13 November. Available at: <https://detector.media/infospace/article/172402/2019-11-13-kontsepsiya-maibutnogo-zakonu-pro-media/>

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Volodymyr Zelenskyy's interaction with journalists started on a rough note at the dawn of his campaign in January 2019: He then rebuffed a Radio Free Europe reporter⁵⁸ for stopping him near his office in Kyiv to ask about his business in Russia, but apologised for that incident shortly after. However, other controversies followed during and after the campaign. These ranged from Zelenskyy not showing up for the election debate at the public broadcaster before the second round of the presidential election to his press secretary shoving reporters away when they tried to speak to him after the election, to him avoiding communication with the press in the first months of the presidency.

The conduct of some other top officials from his circle or party has triggered more criticism. While doing interviews with conventional media from time to time, Chief of Staff Andriy Bohdan said in a comment, 'As our election campaign proved, we speak to society without intermediaries, without journalists', and he sued Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty investigative journalists for alleged misinformation in their reporting on him. Some Servant of the People MPs have attacked media and journalists for critical questions, reporting, or investigations about them.

Thus, instead of building up a culture of communication with the media and leading by example, some of the top representatives of the current political leadership treat the media as their opponents, trying to further undermine trust for them.

What Is Ahead?

The new team in power is proactive in discussing reforms of the media sector. This discussion focuses on the upcoming Media Law⁵⁹ that will replace a number of current laws covering the sector.

One aspect of this discussion is related to de-oligarchisation in the media. In 2015, a law on transparency of media ownership was passed mandating that broadcasters disclose their ultimate beneficiaries and ownership structure on their websites annually. This allows the audience to find out who owns the broadcaster and who may be influencing it.

The next step long discussed by media experts is requirements on financial transparency. This would allow the authorities to trace the sources of funding (among other things, the upcoming law restricts funding or ownership of media from an aggressor state) and the extent to which the media is subsidised. Oleksandr Tkachenko, Servant of the People's chair of the Verkhovna Rada Committee for Humanitarian and Information Policy and former director general of 1+1 Media, announced on November 6 that he would like to see the principle of financial fair play applied to the media in Ukraine and potential sanctioning of the media that operate with losses for a certain period. This could boost commercialisation of Ukraine's media landscape, where many people are used to getting content virtually for free. Moreover, major private broadcasters plan to switch large segments of their audiences to paid TV in 2020.

At the same time, such requirements and sanctions could hit smaller non-TV media that have been on the market for a long time, trying to stay true to the standards of journalism and hold those in power accountable, but struggling to remain profitable. Also, the new law is intended to regulate jurisdictions to limit offshoring of ownership that is common in Ukraine's biggest media.

Another focus of the reform is regulation. The new law aims at updating and streamlining the regulation in order to meet the demands of modern media landscape, i.e. to cover both conventional and digital media. As part of this law, Ukraine has to meet its commitment under the Association Agreement with the EU and harmonise with its legislation on audiovisual services. The new team has spoken of plans to merge regulators and update their functions to give them more enforcing powers, including mechanisms of fining violators, which they currently do not have.

Some in the media community are concerned about the point on the definition of 'disinformation' in the proposed law and punishment for it, including criminal liability – as was outlined during the proposal's presentation⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The Office of the President hosted the founding convention of the Council on Freedom of Speech and Protection of Journalists on September 17, 2019. See: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/v-ofisi-prezidenta-vidbulis-ustanovchi-zbori-radi-z-pitan-sv-57353>.

Public discussions of the draft law started in mid-November, engaging media experts and journalists. Since they have just started, it is too early to tell what the final legislation will look like, what purposes the new legislation will serve, and how it will be enforced. The new draft law is expected to be finalised by the end of the year.

In this context, it is important to focus on a number of other elements in Ukraine's media landscape. The new team in power should continue supporting Suspilne, a reformed public broadcaster. Amidst the growing commercialisation of the market, it is important to have a broadcaster focused on serving the public interest rather than earning profits and creating popular entertainment content over any other priorities.

Another key task is to provide protection to journalists. In September 2019, the Office of the President established the Council on Freedom of Speech and Protection of Journalists with representatives of media NGOs, journalists, and professional associations. The Council will work⁶¹ on formulating a modern concept of the freedom of speech notion, self-regulation of journalists, and the principles of their work. It should also look at problems in the work of journalists and work out ways to solve them.

Conclusions

Like in other sectors, the new team in power has a proactive approach to shaping media-related policies. It seems to focus, among other things, on the problems in Ukraine's media landscape that have long been discussed as pressing and in need of solutions. However, just like with its other policies, there is little clarity on the details of the changes and their enforcement.

Therefore, a more nuanced and clear communication of the proposed changes is needed in order to address legitimate concerns and to avoid misinterpretations and speculations. Amidst potential change of the regulatory and market environment, it might be useful to look for ways to support good-quality smaller media – print and online, nationwide and local – that operate in line with professional standards, and the production of quality domestic media products.

Finally, protection of journalists is a top priority. While the new team in power has launched some initiatives to that end and plans to include this aspect in the new media law, the implementation is what matters. That is a challenge within two realms: the realm of the judiciary and law enforcement reform, and that of the culture of communication with the media by the new team in power itself.

Donbas Settlement and New Trends in Conflict Resolution

Mariia Zolkina

After the 2019 presidential elections in Ukraine, new efforts to reset negotiations regarding Donbas conflict resolution have been taking place. The main problem of the current state of affairs lies in the field of different approaches towards the negotiations demonstrated by Russia, on the one hand, and Ukraine, on the other. Intensification of attempts to set up a new Normandy meeting comes from the Ukrainian side and faces rather visible resistance from Russia, which is more interested in bargaining, receiving as many concessions from Kyiv as possible even before the meeting. Domestic Ukrainian perceptions of possible compromises and the political future of the currently occupied territories have not changed significantly. This stability in public opinion might either limit room for manoeuvre for President Zelenskyy or serve as a political 'airbag' for him. It depends on the real priorities of the Ukrainian authorities in having the negotiations held. The development of the situation looks rather ambivalent now, mainly due to the lack of full understanding of what inviolable 'red lines' will be in practice defended by the Ukrainian president. Thus, several scenarios are possible.

A New Wave of Negotiation Efforts

The newly elected President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has started his cadence with an intensification of political and diplomatic efforts in the field of Donbas conflict resolution. Thus, major efforts have been made to ensure the organisation of the highest-level meeting in the Normandy Four format, which has not happened since 2016.

The Normandy meeting is perceived as the main instrument for pushing progress in the negotiations, with the belief that personal talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin can bring an agreement on reintegration of Donbas, although the general state of affairs as well as Russia's scenario for the conflict resolution have not significantly changed over the past years.

In particular, Moscow declares the same set of demands towards Ukraine under the general 'politics first' mode as previously. These are elections in the currently occupied territories, amendments to Ukraine's constitution regarding a so-called 'special status' without full-fledged Ukrainian control over these territories and the Russian-Ukrainian border, in the conditions of absent security guarantees, which will be hardly provided by the Russian side. At the same time, a comprehensive ceasefire, followed by demilitarisation of those districts, withdrawal of the Russian troops, and control over the border are still perceived by the Ukrainian side as integral preconditions for political settlement. Taking into account that Russia does not demonstrate any flexibility, the only way to reach an agreement seems to be respective compromises and concessions on the side of Ukraine.

The first important trend is the **uncertainty about the new red lines** for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. During previous years, the 'security first' formula was prevalent for the Ukrainian side, and that has started changing after the intensification of attempts to reach progress in negotiations with Russia. Officially, President Zelenskyy declares a comprehensive ceasefire, full demilitarisation, withdrawal of the Russian troops, and even full control over the border as his strict political preconditions for any political settlement. At the same time, there is no explanation as to which instruments Ukrainian diplomats are going to demand and insist on in order to receive guarantees for these security clauses.

The general position about what President Zelenskyy is going to present at the Normandy Four as his vision of the settlement, what compromises are not acceptable for him, and what 'red lines' are indeed inviolable are still lacking certainty.

The idea to establish some kind of an international mission or a temporary administration has been rejected by the president and Ukrainian negotiators in general at this stage, without an alternative option presented on who and how can organise, conduct, and verify all the demilitarisation stages and govern these territories until full restoration of the Ukrainian jurisdiction.

Second among the newly emerged trends is Russia's **tactics of setting preconditions** and demands to Ukraine in order to organise the Normandy meeting itself.

The whole framework of negotiations about a probable meeting looked like bargaining with Ukrainian authorities in order to receive concessions without symmetric steps and obligations from Russia. That is why setting the date of the meeting has been postponed for a significant period of time, and even reaching an agreement on the date does not mean that some new demands will not arise before the meeting or at the meeting itself.

The third significant trend lies in the field of **constructing a new political landscape for the implementation of the Minsk agreement**, in particular, the approval of the Steinmeier formula. This proposal on de-facto simultaneous implementation of both political and security provisions of the Minsk agreements was made by former German minister of foreign affairs in 2015. Nevertheless, it has never been accepted by Ukraine as the road map for the Minsk agreements, in particular due to a lack of guarantees for fulfilment of the demilitarisation clauses on the side of Russia. Confirmation of this formula on October 1, 2019, brought new variables. In fact, Ukraine has agreed to the scheme for the special status to come into force (on the day of prospective elections in the currently occupied territories on a temporary basis, which will transform into a permanent one if the final OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [ODIHR] report is generally positive).

Thus, there is a significant risk of changing emphasis in negotiations, both in the Minsk and in the Normandy format, from security to political provisions.

Neither demilitarisation of the occupied regions, nor withdrawal of the Russian troops from there has been substantively discussed and agreed upon. Entry into force of the so-called special status has been already agreed in the written form, on the other hand. Moreover, in a letter in support of the Steinmeier formula sent by all sides in September 2019, the idea of a new specific law on elections in the currently occupied districts appeared and was confirmed. In the Minsk agreements, only modalities of the future elections were mentioned, while the necessity of a specific law has never been agreed upon by the Ukrainian side.

What will this law look like and in what way will it differ from the current law on local elections in Ukraine? Will the operation of other Ukrainian official bodies be restored before such elections? Namely, the national police and judicial system are inevitable actors in the electoral process. Will the Ukrainian Central Election Commission be an organiser of these elections? Who will govern these territories before the elections? If self-proclaimed authorities, then legal Ukrainian bodies will have to cooperate with them. Anyway, there is no comprehensive road map of implementation either of the security or of the political part of the Minsk agreements.

Public Opinion in Times of Intensified Negotiations: Has Anything Changed?

Although the orientation towards compromises instead of the military way of conflict resolution has been supported by more than two-thirds of Ukrainians since 2015, only 20% are in favour of peace at any cost, while 49% believe that not all the compromises are acceptable (June 2019 public opinion poll⁶⁴).

Compromises that seem to be unacceptable for the largest share of the population in all the macroregions across the country, including frontline Ukraine-controlled Donbas, are elections on Russia's and its proxies' terms, full amnesty to illegal fighters against the Ukrainian army, and a de-facto autonomy of future local police, prosecutors, and judicial system in the occupied territories.

What compromises do you consider to be acceptable to end the war in Donbas?

	Ukraine, June 2019 ⁶⁵		Donbas, November 2018 ⁶⁶	
	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Full amnesty for those fighting against Ukrainian army	15.5	61.5	26.9	45.4
Holding local elections in occupied areas on militants' conditions	13.4	65.6	30.1	43.5
Formation of local police, courts and prosecutors' offices in occupied territories exclusively by local authorities	17.7	58.3	26.7	41.1

Intensification of the dialogue with Russia has not however led to changes in the public opinion on political future of the currently occupied territories. In particular, in October 2019⁶⁷, 56% of Ukrainians viewed the future of these districts in Ukraine according to the pre-war political and administrative status. Moreover, the number of people ready to grant these territories more independence from central authorities or full autonomy has decreased from 29% (in July 2019) to 23.5% (in October 2019). The so-called 'special status' has become unacceptable for a larger number of respondents as well.

⁶⁴ Ilko Kucheriv. 2019. "Пошуки шляхів відновлення суверенітету України над окупованим Донбасом: стан громадської думки напередодні парламентських виборів" ("Searching for Ways to Restore Ukraine's Sovereignty over the Occupied Donbas: Public Opinion ahead of the Parliamentary Elections"). Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 8 July. Available at: <https://dif.org.ua/article/poshuki-shlyakhiv-vidnovlennya-suverenitetu-ukraini-nad-okupovanim-donbasom-stan-gromadskoi-dumki-naperedodni-parlamentskikh-viboriv>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Thus, in October 2019, 56% of Ukrainians mentioned they would not support such a compromise, compared to 50% in July 2019.

As the October public opinion poll shows, people are not ready to support federalisation of Ukraine (63% are against such a measure), full amnesty (59%), rejection of the NATO membership perspective and return to the non-bloc status (54%), rejection of the European integration path (59%), recognition of annexation of Crimea in exchange for return of Donbas (70%). At the same time, there are 73% of people who are not ready for complete cession of the currently occupied territories.

Therefore, public opinion might support Ukrainian negotiators in standing for security provisions being guaranteed comprehensively before political steps. At the same time, that is a factor restraining the Ukrainian president from painful compromises, as mass rallies against the Steinmeier formula have already taken place all over the country.

Scenarios

Despite the generally proactive attitude and attempts to set up a new Normandy meeting and, in this way, to agree on some road map of the conflict resolution, the future and results of the ongoing preparations are uncertain. There are four possible basic scenarios.

Scenario 1: The meeting is held and an agreement is reached

As of now, this scenario seems to be priority number one for the Ukrainian side and represents the logic of resetting the general mode of negotiations. The main risk in this development of affairs arises from the different approaches that the Russian and Ukrainian authorities have towards preparation of this meeting. Indeed, Russia's resistance to set up the meeting even after fulfilment of its first demands demonstrated Moscow's rather low interest in the summit if it had no certainty about reaching an agreement. Thus, Russia's basic expectations are to develop and agree on the scheme of conflict resolution before the meeting, while the Ukrainian authorities seem to rely mainly upon 'live' conversation. If one were to compare the strict negotiation position of Moscow, which aims to omit concrete security obligations and responsibilities and to push Ukraine towards political settlement and a direct dialogue with self-proclaimed authorities, with Ukraine's rather flexible position, it becomes clear that any significant compromise might be based only on concessions on the side of Ukraine.

Lack of certainty about Ukrainian proposals for this meeting, namely, exactly what security guarantees President Zelenskyy will demand, creates instability within Ukrainian society, causes mass protests. At the same time, it might be a purposeful tactic of the Ukrainian president not to speak too precisely before the meeting.

In this way, he might be trying not to lose the chance to arrange the Normandy summit if his position is really resistant to the painful compromises and if he is not going to agree to them. On the other hand, he might be trying to prevent domestic protests before the meeting if his negotiation position is to reach an agreement even on Russia's terms. Anyway, the question of how the security clauses of the Minsk agreement will be guaranteed is not answered yet, while Russia's logic of how the settlement should look like is clear.

Scenario 2: No significant agreement is reached.

The Minsk process goes on

This scenario is possible if either the planned Normandy meeting takes place or it will not happen at all. The probability of this scenario increases along with Russia's growing pressure on Ukraine and the necessity for the latter to decide if it is still reasonable to fulfil new demands coming from Moscow.

If there is no ground for bilateral compromise acceptable for both sides, and there is no readiness for unilateral concessions on the side of Ukraine, the status quo will be preserved. Ukraine will have to concentrate mainly on domestic public policy towards the government-controlled part of Donbas,

as well as to elaborate a long-term policy of coexisting with the occupied territories in order to preserve links with ordinary people from the occupied territories.

Domestic policy is not a coherent and comprehensive one and there are urgent needs to be fulfilled, especially in the frontline areas. Focus on these issues will not require any progress in negotiations with Russia, but will create a basis for reintegration whenever it starts. At the same time, negotiations in the Minsk Trilateral Contact Group will be continued.

67 "Громадська думка про ситуацію на Донбасі та шляхи відновлення суверенітету України над окупованими територіями" ("Public Opinion on the Situation in Donbas and Ways of Restoring Ukraine's Sovereignty over the Occupied Territories"). 2019. Razumkov Centre, 11 October. Available at: <http://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/gromadska-dumka-pro-sytuatsiiu-na-donbasi-ta-shliakhy-vidnovlennia-suverenitetu-ukrainy-nad-okupovanymy-terytoriiamy>.

Scenario 3: Freezing of negotiations. The Minsk and Normandy processes are set on pause.

This scenario is to some extent similar to the second one, with only one difference, meaning de-facto freezing of any further attempts to push negotiations forward. That will not presuppose official termination of the Minsk agreements, but might include a search for a new, updated negotiations format or an appeal to new instruments, for instance, a return to the idea of an international mission and international administration. Concentration on domestic policy development also will take place.

Scenario 4: Withdrawal from the Minsk agreements

The idea of full withdrawal from the Minsk agreements has appeared recently and has been presented by the Ukrainian minister of foreign affairs as an alternative to complete disconnection of the Russian and Ukrainian negotiation positions, as a total failure of current attempts to reach progress. This idea is considered as the last resort out of a political deadlock, if even the current intensive efforts to reach a compromise acceptable for both sides are fully unsuccessful. This is a much stronger form or development of the previous scenario, when negotiations de facto might be stopped but no one officially will withdraw out of this format.

In the case of the most diplomatically 'bold' scenario, President Zelenskyy might be ready to reject the previous forms of conflict resolution. However, all the risks of losing a significant part of international support followed by difficulties in setting new formats and a new political framework should be taken into account here. That is why this idea to a large extent seems to be a counter-position towards Russia's demands for concessions from Ukraine. If Ukraine denies moving forward along the Minsk path, it means freezing of the status quo for a long-term period. This scenario is risky not only for Ukraine, but for Russia as well, as it will lose instruments for exerting pressure on Ukraine and for pushing a beneficial for Moscow scenario for reintegration of the currently occupied territories. That is why, at the current stage, consideration of this scenario might be both a real alternative to a possible deadlock and an attempt to create a counterweight to Russia's growing demands.

Conclusions

The intensification of negotiations with Russia in order to reach progress in Donbas conflict resolution has become one of the core issues in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's both domestic and international policy. The current state of affairs in this field differs from the previous logic of negotiations with the Russian Federation mainly because of lack of certainty and understanding of what the real 'red lines' are for the newly elected Ukrainian president and of how precisely he is going to stand up for demilitarisation, guaranteed withdrawal of the Russian troops, and return of the control over the border to Ukraine, as he declared. The lack of a presented road map of conflict resolution in these circumstances raises pessimistic expectations and fears in Ukrainian society about crossing these announced 'red lines' during live negotiations in the Normandy format.

Confirmation of the Steinmeier formula only in part of the procedure, the way the so-called 'special status' should come into force, might lead to shifting focus in the negotiations towards political settlement without a detailed security road map. Considering this new political landscape, different scenarios, varying from preserving the status quo to a full withdrawal from the Minsk agreements, look possible. The main risk arises from the position of the Ukrainian president, which is flexible and focused on reaching progress, on the one hand, and the rather hard-and-fast position of Russia, on the other. Adoption of any significant decisions in this situation is hardly possible if the Ukrainian side stands for concrete guarantees for security provisions before taking any responsibility for a political resolution. Yet, what those guarantees might look like is not clear at the moment, considering Russian resistance to accepting any direct security obligations. If no tangible progress is achieved, Ukraine might move towards the scenarios of de-facto freezing the status quo (by either continuation of the Minsk process or taking an official 'pause') or of withdrawal from the Minsk agreements entirely. In either case, stable public non-acceptance of reintegration on Russia's terms should be treated by the Ukrainian president as an additional argument not to agree to 'peace at any cost'.

In Struggle for Foreign Policy: Priorities of 2019 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections and Outlook for 2020

Hanna Shelest

Foreign policy did not become a top priority during either the presidential or the parliamentary election in Ukraine in 2019. With the focus on European and Euroatlantic integration debate, all other burning issues, such as relations with neighbours, building up international support against Russian aggression, relations with diaspora, and promotion of the Ukrainian image abroad, are almost absent among the concerns of the new political establishment. New methods of diplomatic interactions, lack of trust in diplomatic corps, tactics of short-term success instead of a long-term foreign policy strategy are the trends that negatively affect expectations for positive changes in a short-term perspective.

Presidential Tour

The president of Ukraine has the primary responsibility for managing national security and foreign policy; however, during the 2019 presidential campaign none of these issues framed a political debate or became crucial for the voters' decision. If the then President Poroshenko had placed his management of relations with the EU and NATO at the centre of his campaign, presenting himself as the main protector of the European choice and of the state against Russian aggression, his opponent Volodymyr Zelenskyy until the second round of the elections had not paid any significant attention to the topic, even allowing factual mistakes about the state of affairs.

In February 2019, the parliament adopted amendments to the constitution, committing Ukraine to seeking membership of both the EU and NATO, thus, creating a backup in case the new president would decide to reverse the Ukrainian foreign policy choice or would be weak enough to agree to the Russian intentions to neutralise Ukraine.

However, as the elections results demonstrated, Ukrainian voters have been predominantly occupied with the domestic agenda.

As a political novice, President Zelenskyy lacks knowledge of foreign policy and defence issues and is only just beginning to build ties with leaders abroad. It has started to improve after the inauguration, with professional diplomats being appointed as the minister of foreign affairs and the vice-prime minister for European and Euroatlantic integration. However, classical diplomacy was still overshadowed by the inner circle members' activities⁶⁸, especially in the spheres of relations with the USA and negotiations with Russia.

The latest developments demonstrate that the new team still does not trust career diplomats, underestimates foreign policy instruments and mechanisms, including multilateral formats. The US president impeachment inquiry demonstrated miscalculations in such methods. The absence of appointments of new ambassadors (which is a presidential responsibility), despite the promises given⁶⁹, also demonstrates that other topics besides the relations with Russia are not among top priorities of the president's agenda.

Parliamentary Debates and Executive Management

Future membership in the EU and NATO, relations with the USA and neighbouring states, promotion of Ukraine abroad and economic diplomacy, questions of relations with diaspora, cooperation with states beyond the EU and international organisations, and, most importantly, build-up of international support on countering Russian aggression are those topics that experts consider among the top priorities for the Ukrainian foreign policy. The previous parliament set a standard of more active parliamentary diplomacy, which aimed to fill some gaps or at least to support the executive branch.

An analysis made by the Ukrainian Prism in July 2019⁷⁰ of 12 political parties participating in the snap elections demonstrated that besides the issues of cooperation with the EU and NATO, other topics had little interest among the newcomers.

⁶⁸ Igor Kossov. 2019. "Who is Zelenskyy's Chief US Negotiator Andriy Yermak?" Kyiv Post, 4 October. Available at: <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/who-is-zelenskyy-chief-negotiator-andriy-yermak.html?cn-reloaded=1>.

First of all, a lack of vision about the role of parliamentary diplomacy and its instruments is evident in the political programmes. The least attention was paid to the parliamentary dimension of international organisations' work, economic diplomacy, and promotion of the Ukrainian image abroad – exactly those questions where MPs can play the most active role. The same became apparent when decisions on parliamentary committees were being made, from the initial desire to unite two committees – on foreign affairs and on European integration (responsible for the implementation of the Association Agreement, which is a domestic policy) – to the final compositions of the two committees, which are the smallest in the current parliament.

If one were to study individual dimensions, the picture presents the following:

- All parties except for two openly pro-Russian ones – the Opposition Bloc and Opposition Platform 'For Life' – are supporting Ukrainian Euroatlantic integration, however, de facto limiting it to adherence to NATO standards and interoperability reform.
- European integration is important for all parties and described predominantly within the Association Agreement implementation.
- Most of the political parties do not have their vision about priorities of cooperation with the USA. Mostly, the USA is considered as a source of diplomatic and military support. However, there are also positions such as that of leader of the Opposition Platform, Viktor Medvedchuk, who insists that Ukraine since 2014 has been under the US direct control and that it negatively influenced Ukrainian independence.
- Most of the parties see Donbas conflict settlement as primarily a domestic issue, and see the necessity to address internal challenges. There is a lack of vision on how to strengthen international support to oppose Russian aggression or to protect Ukrainian interests and sovereignty. Four political parties, including Batkivshchyna, that entered the parliament expressed an opinion of widening the negotiating format to so-called 'Budapest+', meaning including at least the USA and the UK as signatories of the Budapest Memorandum.
- Economic diplomacy also did not catch the attention of future MPs; the maximum coverage could be found on issues of improving the investment climate in Ukraine and deepening the Association Agreement with the EU.
- Poland and the Baltic States got separate attention for the necessity to continue developing strong relations and active dialogue. Most of the political parties also criticised official Budapest for their blocking of the Euroatlantic choice of Ukraine and manipulations in bilateral relations.
- Issues of possible dual citizenship, developing of relations with diaspora, and public diplomacy received limited, if any, attention. Just three of the 12 analysed parties had certain mentions of the promotion of the Ukrainian image abroad.

The same is clearly visible in the Governmental Action Plan presented in September 2019. As a coalition agreement was not signed due to the mono majority in the new parliament, the Governmental Action Plan became a road map where foreign policy priorities were expected to be set. The experts' impression was quite a gloomy one.

Among the 75 declared goals, only five are directly connected with foreign policy. At the same time, separate tasks of other ministries are also directed at achieving the goals of European and Euroatlantic integration. Three goals are for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: to ensure that Ukrainians are satisfied with how the state protects them abroad; Ukrainians freely travel the world without visas; Ukrainian business, culture, and sport receive good support abroad. These look like the tasks of a consular service, not the top priorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a time of war and active foreign policy. Two other goals are set for the vice-prime minister on European and Euroatlantic Integration and the action plan states that Ukraine should reach the standards of membership in the two respective organisations.

Outlook for the Future

Concentration predominantly on the domestic agenda will not be possible for long, as realisation of many goals depends on partners' support, guaranteed security and stability, micro financial support, investments, etc. Without clear articulation of the foreign policy priorities, presenting strategies, and understanding the necessity for active promotion of the Ukrainian interests abroad, it will be impossible to secure a circle of allies and partners ready to support Ukrainian development and security.

Ukraine cannot allow itself to concentrate only on the European agenda, as it needs both access to different international markets to promote its exports and wide support of the world's states to overcome consequences of the Russian policy. Foreign policy of Ukraine should not be three-headed, when the parliament, the MFA, and the Office of the President act in parallel, not accumulating their efforts.

69 "Кандидатури близько 20 нових послів уже погоджені з Президентом – Пристайко" ["The nominations of about 20 new ambassadors have already been agreed with the President – Prystayko"]. 2019. Ukrinform, 23 September. Available at: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/2785623-kandidaturi-blizko-20-novih-posliv-uzhe-pogodzeni-z-prezidentom-pristajko.html>.

70 "Парламентська дипломатія України" ["Parliamentary Diplomacy in Ukraine"]. 2019. Portal of the Foreign Policy. Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism", July 2019. Available at: http://fpp.com.ua/elections_vr_2019/.

To improve the support of 'Ukrainian' resolutions within different international organisations, parliamentary diplomacy should act more persistently, including groups of friendship that can facilitate support of Asian, African, or Latin American states, where Ukraine is lacking diplomatic representation. It is important for Ukraine to articulate its foreign policy position abroad by a single position, so as to persuade others that the Russian policy is unacceptable not only to the EU partners.

Ukrainian diaspora and Ukrainian migrants need better attention, as well as the promotion of cultural and public diplomacy, so as not to be perceived only as a state generating problems due to the conflict but also as a state with big potential and a reliable partnership.

Conclusions

Foreign policy did not take a proper place both in the presidential and parliamentary campaigns in Ukraine in 2019. Mistrust of classical diplomatic mechanisms, high concentration on the domestic agenda, and absence of a clear vision of the foreign policy priorities accompanied the first months of the new team. At the same time, the EU and NATO integration courses seem as irreversible strategies that are fixed as mainstream. Formulation of a clear vision of the relations with neighbouring countries, the diaspora policy, economic diplomacy goals, and tasks for promoting the Ukrainian image abroad remains among the expectations both of Ukrainian experts and foreign partners.

Conclusions

- Great expectations are always accompanied by great challenges, new transformations – by new risks. However, no state in transition can escape either of these. The year of the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine raised expectations both inside and outside of Ukraine about new developments and transformations.
- The main outlooks lay within both domestic and external agenda. The former is predominantly formulated by economic, media, and Donbas settlement questions, while the European integration perspectives and reforms are at the edge of both domestic and foreign domains. The external agenda is two-fold as it is composed of both Ukraine's unknown priorities in the sphere of foreign policy and perceptions and expectations of the foreign partners from Ukraine and the new ruling team.
- New generation politics is becoming trendy in Ukraine. Both the president and 75% of the parliament are neophytes, so a deficit of knowledge and expertise can consequently lead to a crisis of competence and a 'leadership bubble'. The intention to build policy on a strong opposition to the previous team, as well as a lack of strategy and experience, can open a window of opportunity for pro-Russian forces in Ukraine.
- Presidential party 'Sluha Narodu' (the Servant of the People) is guided rather by the desire to satisfy voters' demands than by strong ideological beliefs. It is about applying populism and being guided by popular demand rather than by defining uniting ideas. A quick turn from libertarian ideology to a mix of socialism and liberalism, as announced by the party leadership, is confusing. However, strong public support and high approval rates can provide a chance for quick implementation of reforms.
- Electoral calculations made institutional political actors more receptive towards cooperation with civil society. Desire to change the political elite brought many activists from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) to the parliament and the government with a chance to implement their initiatives. However, most of the reforms that have already been launched are subject to continuing struggle, because a basic feature of policies in Ukraine is reversibility.
- Ukraine's Western partners have continuously expressed their expectations that a strong mandate that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his Servant of the People party have received will be translated into palpable and resolute reforms. Cautious optimism expressed will need a proof of Ukraine being a reliable partner. The main pressure is to deliver the anti-corruption reform, which has become a buzzword, as well as to limit the influence of oligarchs.

- For achieving fast and tangible results in the economic sphere, the government should improve communication with the parliament and society and introduce a systematic approach to reforms instead of ‘scrappy’ measures. Privatisation of state enterprises and launch of the land market, which is scheduled for October 1, 2020, can lead to investment attraction. However, an anti-corruption reform, support of small-to-medium enterprises, and economy de-oligarchisation are still under question.
- The initiatives voiced by both President Zelenskyy and Prime Minister Honcharuk do not lack ambitions regarding the European integration track. Even if during the presidential campaign the future president’s position was unclear and under-formulated, and after the parliamentary elections there was a chance that the Parliamentary Committee on European Integration will be dissolved, the governmental programme sets an aim to comply with the EU membership criteria and envisages approximation with all economic criteria for candidate countries, as well as joining the common economic, energy, digital, legal, and cultural spaces of the EU. In this context, there is a need for re-approval by the new parliament and the government of the list of priority draft laws to be passed by the Verkhovna Rada, similar to the Roadmap for Legislative Support of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement Implementation for 2018-2019.
- The programme of Oleksiy Honcharuk’s government has a special chapter devoted to the issues of rapprochement with the EU and NATO, which in some parts echoes the initiatives of the previous team and in some claims to be more human-centred. The five priorities in the realm of Ukraine’s further rapprochement with the European Union announced in November 2019 are as follows: deeper sectoral integration and cooperation in the fields of digital and energy markets, customs procedures, justice, freedom, and security sectors; climate change and energy efficiency; the conclusion of the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA); bringing more knowledge about benefits of the European integration to the regions of Ukraine; and reconstruction of the destroyed infrastructure in the conflict-affected parts of the Donbas region.
- Like in other sectors, the new team in power has a proactive approach to shaping media-related policies, but it is still lacking details of the changes. While the new authorities perceive themselves as the media and prefer social media to traditional outlets, seeking to communicate without intermediaries, it brings a certain strain in the relations between journalists and the presidential team.
- A new Law on Media is expected soon that can address some of the questions necessary for the media landscape transformation. Amidst potential modification of the regulatory and market environment, it might be useful to look for ways to support good-quality smaller media – print and online, nationwide and local – that operate in line with professional standards and the production of quality domestic media products.

- Another tough topic for the new team in power is modalities of the Donbas conflict settlement. After the 2019 presidential election, new efforts to reset negotiations in the Normandy format have been taking place, which is perceived as the main instrument for pushing progress, with the belief that personal talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin can bring an agreement on reintegration of Donbas. However, Russia's scenario for the conflict resolution has not significantly changed over the past years. Moreover, a lack of understanding of what the real 'red lines' are for the newly elected Ukrainian president and of how precisely he is going to stand up for demilitarisation, guaranteed withdrawal of the Russian troops, and return of the control over the border to Ukraine, as he declared, brings uncertainty and stable public non-acceptance of reintegration on Russia's terms and of 'peace at any cost'.
- While Ukraine needs strong foreign support, its current stance is not so good. Ukrainian-US relations have appeared to be hit by a dangerous political storm due to the President Trump impeachment inquiry. Western moves to accommodate Russia, including restoring Moscow's voting rights in the PACE, the French willingness 'to bring Russia back to Europe', and Germany's stance on the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline explain apprehensions of Ukrainians.
- With a focus on European and Euroatlantic integration debate, all other burning issues, such as relations with neighbours, building up international support against Russian aggression, relations with diaspora, and promotion of the Ukrainian image abroad, are almost absent among the concerns of the new political establishment. A lack of vision about the role of parliamentary diplomacy and its instruments has been evident as well.
- Concentration predominantly on the domestic agenda will not be possible for long, as realisation of many goals depends on partners' support, guaranteed security and stability, micro financial support, investments, etc. Without a clear articulation of foreign policy priorities, presenting strategies, and understanding the necessity for active promotion of the Ukrainian interests abroad, it will be impossible to secure a circle of allies and partners ready to support Ukrainian development and security. To fill in the gaps in communication with media and society, providing clear explanations of high-profile decisions is needed in both domestic and foreign policy domains. Great expectations and great challenges are two indivisible components of Ukraine 2020.

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