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Newsletter for the international community providing views and analysis from the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc (BYUT)

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Opposition to government mounts

Ukraine's parliament reconvened on September 5 after the summer recess. Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich addressed the assembly and reiterated his support for EU integration, although he tempered his words considerably: "The new government sees its task as making [Ukraine] a strong, self-sufficient, and therefore interesting partner for Brussels in the negotiation process with the European Union (EU), instead of the beggar that Ukraine has been until now."



Those observers who doubt Mr Yanukovich's commitment to EU integration view this sentiment in the light of the talks Mr Yanukovich had in Russia over support for the Kremlin's rival economic bloc – The Single Economic Space. At best they see Mr Yanukovich's two-track approach will slow progress to full EU membership and at worst derail it altogether.

The new premier went on to call for the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc (BYUT) to cooperate with the government to develop the country.

Yulia Tymoshenko, BYUT leader, dismissed Mr Yanukovich's call, saying that her party would not be a "comrade" but would lead a "real opposition."

Mrs Tymoshenko went on to say that her party is holding negotiations with disaffected representatives of the Socialist party and Our Ukraine to create a broad opposition coalition.

There remain many disenchanted deputies in both parties who believe that the principles of Maidan were betrayed. In the Socialist Party alone, 12 out of 74 members of its political council voted against joining the Party of Regions coalition and three party secretaries resigned from their posts, including Yosyp Vynskiy who, in a recent interview, declared that the Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz, who defected from the Orange coalition, had no political future. "He has no future. He made his choice. He exchanged his future for the position of chairman of the Verkhovna Rada," said Mr Vynskiy.



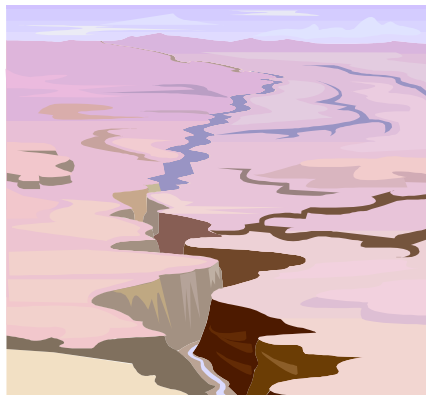
▲ Yulia Tymoshenko pledges to lead a real opposition.

Our Ukraine member Volodymyr Stretovich called on Our Ukraine to enter into opposition. "I consider that the best variant is not joining the coalition," said Mr Stretovich, "election is election. Defeat is defeat. We must honestly say that the main slogans have not been realised. Bandits have not been imprisoned, corruption has not been extirpated."

Mrs Tymoshenko revealed that BYUT was preparing "dozens of useful bills" and that the combined opposition will be a force to be reckoned with. "We remain faithful to our electorate and to the principles of Maidan. We will pursue what is right and just. The government will be put under a microscope and scrutinized at every turn. We want a healthy, vibrant and independent Ukraine at the heart of Europe. We will not stand by idly and watch corruption prosper," she said.

Cracks appear in governing coalition

The Ukrainian parliament's summer recess has done nothing to dampen the inter-factional fighting in the alliance that saw the pro-presidential Our Ukraine Bloc throw its hand in with the Party of Regions, Socialist Party and Communist Party in electing Viktor Yanukovich prime minister.



Splits in the alliance are perhaps understandable given the conflicting ideologies of the governing coalition. Our Ukraine is still to officially join the coalition and to-date the rival parties cannot agree on the name of the coalition, with the Party of Regions insisting that it remain the "Anti-Crisis Coalition."

"Our Ukraine does not agree to join the current coalition but stands for the formation of a new one with a new name - the Coalition of National Unity," said Yuri Klyuchkovskyi, MP. "The coalition name change is a matter of principle for Our Ukraine as we don't see the crisis the anti-crisis coalition is aimed at."

The Party of Regions is so far holding its ground. But this is a trivial issue compared to more fundamental policy issues. Our Ukraine is insisting that the basis for the new coalition agreement should be the clauses of the Universal Agreement on National Unity inked by the parties in July. Of critical importance to the president is the immutability of Ukraine's foreign policy regarding NATO and EU membership. Referring to the proposed new coalition agreement, Roman Bessmertny of Our Ukraine said, "If the document is signed taking into account Our Ukraine's proposals, we will sign it regardless of who will be members of the coalition." Yet the latter may already be a bridge too far for those in Our Ukraine who steadfastly reject any co-habitation with the Communists.

Meanwhile, BYUT and its opposition allies are expected to be the beneficiaries from the internecine fighting. The Russian daily Kommersant suggested that half of Our Ukraine's parliamentarians may defect to an inter-factional opposition movement.

Dmytro Vydrin, of BYUT, believes that his bloc will be joined by approximately 5-6 per cent of its total amount.

The shaky governing alliance was also dealt a blow by fresh moves by the Party of Regions-led Cabinet of Ministers to limit President Yushchenko's power over parliament.

The new Cabinet of Ministers – stocked with controversial figures from Donetsk – passed an act removing the president's ability to suspend Cabinet decisions, one of the few ways in which President Yushchenko can check the Cabinet under amendments to the constitution that came into force in January this year. Ironically, the earlier constitutional amendments were foisted upon Mr Yushchenko as he fought with Mr Yanukovich for the presidency just prior to the 2004 Orange Revolution.

"This uneven coalition which promised so much is racked by intrigue upon intrigue."

The most recent move sparked a vociferous exchange, fuelled by mistrust and by Mr Yanukovich's apparent willingness to back track on electoral pledges.



Oleksandr Lavrynovych, First Deputy Cabinet Minister, responded, “although we curtailed the president’s right to issue instructions to the Cabinet, he is left with the possibility of challenging decisions made by the Cabinet of Ministers in the courts.”

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the government is dominated by a strident Party of Regions which is further curtailing the president’s powers, at a time when the president cannot dismiss the prime minister, the cabinet or even individual ministers as was previously the case.

Furthermore, the Deputy Head of the Parliamentary Law Committee, Party of Regions member Svyatoslav Piskun wants to restrict the President’s right to appoint judges. He is proposing the Verkhovna Rada instead of the president appoint judges for the first five years.

“It was naïve for Our Ukraine to think it could wrestle any credible vestige of power from the Party of Regions and come to the table as an equal. This uneven coalition which promised so much is racked by intrigue upon intrigue. Mixed messages from the various factions are making it hard to read,” said BYUT deputy leader Oleksandr Turchynov. “The Donetsk contingent wields the real power and now has Ukraine’s economic and energy levers in its hands. It is likely it will seek to consolidate its power and revert back to its authoritarian roots. We must be vigilant.”

Questions or comments? E-mail us at taras@byti.org.ua