

A coup-in-waiting

Nov. 8, 2012, 9:01 p.m. | Kyiv Post

<http://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/editorial/fraudsters-to-jail-315806.html>

While the opposition is still fighting for contested seats in the future parliament, the current Verkhovna Rada surreptitiously railroaded through a piece of legislation that opens a new way to change the Constitution.

The law on referendum, voted by parliament on Nov. 6, regulates the procedure for approval on key issues for the nation's governance, including changes to the Constitution.

In response, two members of the opposition moved to cancel the new law because it violates the Constitution.

The law allows for fundamental decisions to be decided by popular referendum. It also says "the president of Ukraine is obliged to call an all-Ukrainian referendum by public initiative."

To do that, three million citizens have to sign a petition in two-thirds of Ukraine's 26 oblasts, with at least 100,000 signatures in each.

The parliament is also allowed to call a referendum.

This major piece of legislation comes after the president and his allies realized they cannot get 300 votes in parliament, the constitutional majority required to change the country's supreme document.

The work on rewriting changes to the Constitution was initiated by President Viktor Yanukovich in May.

Losing popularity and therefore his chances for re-election in 2015, the president is believed to favor a model where the president (or prime minister) is elected by parliament and retains the powers of head of state.

What's more, the law could pave the way for public approval to entering the Russia-led customs union, a Kremlin's goal that would spell the end to Ukraine's European dream.

Viktor Medvedchuk, the former head of President Leonid Kuchma's administration with close connections to Putin, has for months advertised the idea of people's power by referendum.

Many countries use popular initiatives to give ordinary citizens greater say over where their country is headed.

But for such a system to function, several conditions must be met: the political process must be treated with respect, public debate should be genuine and supported by an independent media and, most importantly, voting should be free and fair.

Ukraine fulfills none of these criteria, thus making the law a tool to establish a tyranny of the majority – and a dubious majority at that.

This dangerous law has been approved while most opposition leaders are still deciding what they are going to do about rigged results in a number of single-mandate districts.

But this law is a much greater threat and needs to be reversed.

Ukraine's Ruling Party Wins 30 Percent in Parliamentary Elections



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<http://en.ria.ru/world/20121108/177307310.html>

KIEV, November 8 (RIA Novosti) - Ukraine's ruling **Party of Regions** has gained **30 percent** of the vote in the October 28 parliamentary elections as all ballots in the vote on party lists and over 99 percent of election protocols in single mandate constituencies have been counted, the Ukrainian Central Election Commission reported on Thursday.

The opposition **Fatherland party**, led by jailed former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, came **second with 25.54 percent**, and world famous boxer Vitali Klitschko's **Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform (UDAR)** got **13.96 percent**. They were followed by the **Communist Party** with **13.18 percent**, and the nationalist **Svoboda (Freedom) Party** with **10.44 percent**. Other parties failed to pass the 5 percent electoral threshold.

The election to the 450-seat legislature was held in line with a mixed voting system, with half (225 deputies) elected on party lists and the other half in a simple majority vote in single mandate constituencies.

Opposition supporters protested alleged ballot rigging, while opposition leaders hinted at the possibility of pushing for early presidential and parliamentary elections.

International election observers criticized what they called the abuse of administrative resources, a lack of media freedom during the campaign season, and the opaque campaign finances of the Party of Regions and pro-government “independent” candidates.

The Ukrainian parliament on Tuesday set up an ad hoc commission to probe the reasons for the slow ballot count after voting in October 28 elections. But President Viktor Yanukovich and Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, who leads the Party of Regions, praised the elections.

The prime minister dismissed the opposition's complaints over the slow ballot count, saying the Central Election Commission had up to 15 days to announce the results.

Thirteen districts where election fraud is alleged

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<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/thirteen-districts-where-election-fraud-is-alleged-315821.html>



The Berkut special police unit visits Mykolaiv Oblast district 132 to confiscate original election-result protocols with force and teargas. (job-sbu.org)

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The following is a summary of opposition leaders’ allegations of fraud in 13 single-mandate districts, based on their appeal to the Central Election Commission. The appeal was signed by the three main opposition leaders – United Opposition-Batkivshchyna’s Arseniy Yatseniuk, the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms’ Vitali Klitschko and Svoboda Party leader Oleh Tiahnybok.

In the following five districts, new elections will be held:

Constituency 94, Kyiv Oblast

There are multiple alleged violations in this constituency, where Tetiana Zasukha, a prominent member of the pro-presidential Party of Regions, was running. She filed 28 lawsuits claiming her observers were banned from the vote count. She won all the lawsuits, despite the fact that election commissioners were not allowed to testify. There were physical fights after court hearings. All appeals were rejected by higher courts. The district election commission then canceled results from 27 precincts, involving the votes of about 0,000 residents, and pronounced Zasukha winner. The CEC ordered a new election in this constituency.



Tetiana Zasukha, a pro-presidential Party of Regions candidate for parliament, talks to an assistant in district 94. (investigator.org.ua)

Constituency 132, Mykolaiv Oblast

There were multiple alleged violations in this constituency on voting day with how ballots were handled and results counted. On Nov. 1, it was discovered that the ballots were not stored properly and mixed up. A local court ordered the confiscation of original protocols with election results, in contradiction of the law. They were confiscated by a Berkut special police unit, with use of force and teargas. The protocols turned out to be fakes. The CEC ordered a new election in this constituency.

Constituency 194, Cherkasy Oblast

Two days after voting, the computer administrator stole access codes to the voting tabulation computer and disappeared. The Party of Regions filed 15 lawsuits in precincts where the opposition candidate won. On Oct. 31, representatives of the opposition were forced out of office where the votes are counted and tabulated in the district commission, while the commission chief disappeared with originals of vote protocols, which have to be sent to CEC for cross-checking. The CEC ordered a new election in this constituency, despite results showing the oppositional candidate winning the election by more than

12,000 votes. Observers from OPORA civic network consider this decision controversial.

Constituency 197, Cherkasy Oblast

Vote counting was very slow in this constituency. On Oct. 31, 10 members of the district election commission left the room and stalled the tabulation. At intervals, electricity was switched off here, too. Electronic data was entered slowly and with multiple errors. Representatives of opposition on the commission were bullied. On Nov.5, the pro-government candidate Bohdan Hubskiy was proclaimed the winner. The CEC ordered a new election in this constituency.

Constituency 223, Kyiv

The vote count here was delayed and representatives of the pro-government candidate Viktor Pylypyshyn were reported spoiling ballots in the process. Cases of pressure and attempts to bribe some district election commissioners were recorded. Svoboda Party candidate Yuriy Levchenko won by 26 votes here, but the CEC has ordered a new election in this constituency.



District election commission members in Kyiv's district 223, where cases of pressure and attempted bribery of election commissioners were recorded. (Svitlana Tuchynska)

In eight other districts, the opposition says it has documented multiple election violations, most of which are criminal offenses under articles 157-158 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. In particular, the following violations are alleged:

Constituency 11, Vinnytsia Oblast

After the district election commission pronounced oppositional candidate Natalya Soleyko winner, five people crept onto the premises of the commission and destroyed boxes containing ballots in Soleyko's favor. Representatives of government-backed candidate Oleksandr Dombrovskiy demanded a recount of votes. After the recount, Dombrovskiy emerged as the winner. International observers were banned from the recount.

Constituency 14, Vinnytsia Oblast

The district election commission ordered a recount of votes in the constituency based on false claims of a Party of Regions candidate that the ballot boxes were damaged during transportation from the precinct election commissions. The ballots cast for the opposition candidate turned out to have been spoiled with a second mark, and were not taken into consideration during the recount. Viktor Zhrebniuk, the pro-government candidate, won as a result.



Ballot boxes were damaged during transportation from the precinct election commissions in Vinnytsia Oblast's district 14. (job-sbu.org)

Constituency 20, Volyn Oblast

On Oct. 31, representatives of Berkut, a special police unit, went to the district election commission and forced out all members of the commission representing the opposition. Oppositional candidate Roman Karpyuk lost by 428 votes.

Constituency 90, Kyiv Oblast

Representatives of the district election commission entered false data into the electronic vote counting system, and falsified paper protocols that record election results. Vitaliy Chudnovskiy, the boyfriend of Party of Regions deputy Yulia Lyvochkina, won the election as a result. Lyvochkina is the sister of Serhiy Lyvochkin, presidential chief of staff.

Constituency 183, Kherson Oblast

The Odesa Court of Appeals canceled the results of election here, although the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms candidate Andriy Putilov was winning by more than 5,000 votes. Appeals are ongoing, but in case of a recount, the opposition fears ballot spoiling and other tricks.

Constituency 211, Kyiv

The deputy head of the district election commission broke the seals on packaged ballots, which allowed the pro-government candidate to file a lawsuit demanding a recount. The court approved a recount, for which Berkut special police unit was

called in and surrounded the workers of the election commission, blocking them from the view of observers. Oppositional candidate Serhiy Teryokhin suffered minor injuries in a fight with Berkut. After a number of court cases, Teryokhin won the election in this constituency.

Constituency 214, Kyiv

After the initial ballot count, UDAR candidate Viktor Chumak won by more than 5,000 votes. Then the result of the protocol was altered and pro-government candidate Oles Dovhy took the lead. Eventually, the result was corrected by the CEC.

Constituency 216, Kyiv

The pro-government candidate is challenging the result of the vote in this constituency in court, demanding a recount. Opposition candidate Kseniya Lyapina won the election, but her allies fear that the ballot will be spoiled during the recount, as in other constituencies. Her rivals are also demanding the cancellation of results in 16 precincts, which will reverse the election result.

Fighting For Every Seat

Nov. 8, 2012, 10:08 p.m. | Oksana Grytsenko, Yuriy Onyshkiv

<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/politics/fighting-for-every-seat-315826.html?>



From left, Oleh Tiahnybok, leader of the nationalist Svoboda (Freedom) Party, United Opposition-Batkivschyna leader Arseniy Yatsenyuk and Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms leader Vitali Klitschko take part on Nov. 5 in a rally outside the Central Election Commission in Kyiv to protest election fraud. Opposition politicians have decried numerous violations in the Oct. 28 parliamentary election, but were still deciding their options and positions as of Nov. 8. The CEC and parliament said new elections should be held in five contested single-mandate districts, but many in the opposition are opposing this solution. Meanwhile, Klitschko is seeking a new national election because he alleges falsification took place nationwide.

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Two weeks after the Oct. 28 parliamentary election, Ukraine's Central Election Commission is still struggling to finish the vote count and determine the election results by the Nov. 12 deadline.

While the possibility of a repeat vote in several constituencies looks inevitable, it is still unclear which districts exactly will undergo re-runs and when they'll take place.

Half of Ukraine's 450-seat parliament is elected through a closed party list. The other 225 lawmakers are elected in single-mandate constituencies throughout the country.

Following the CEC's resolution on the impossibility of determining the results in five single mandate constituencies due to alleged fraud, Ukraine's parliament recommended the permanent election body to hold new elections there.

Yet the opposition claims its candidates won in these districts and has taken the CEC to court, trying to convince the body to acknowledge such results and not hold a new vote.

The CEC says they can't decide or schedule any re-vote before parliament amends the election law to specify the grounds for repeat elections, which it says is currently absent in the legislation.

"Now the ball is in the parliament's court. Lawmakers have to amend the existing election legislation and outline grounds for a new election in order to allow us to take a decision on new elections in certain constituencies," Andriy Mahera, deputy head of the CEC, told the Kyiv Post.

He believes the new parliament would still be legitimate with 445 out of 450 new lawmakers taking their oath, but thinks the legislation will be changed. "The current situation is beyond the legal framework," said Denys Kovryzhenko, a legal adviser at International Foundation for Electoral Systems, an election think tank.

In his opinion, the new elections in some constituencies could take place next year at the earliest.

CEC head Volodymyr Shapoval believes that to spearhead the legislative process, parliament may call an emergency parliamentary session.

Shapoval says the re-vote in some districts would be possible in March.

According to him, scheduling it for March will help finance the election, since next year's budget has yet to be adopted.

But Prime Minister Mykola Azarov said that country's budget lacked the money for repeat elections, which could pose a "direct threat for democracy in Ukraine." "Where is a guarantee that opponents will like the results of the repeat votes?"

Where is a guarantee that they won't have a desire (to hold repeat elections) for a third or fourth time?" he said at a Nov. 7 government meeting.

The ruling pro-presidential Party of Regions say they have not discussed the issue yet, but do not rule out the possibility of adopting the needed amendments in the parliament.

"But these amendments would have to be adopted in consensus with the opposition, so that we are not blamed for approving legislation allegedly in order to get our candidates elected," said Mykhaylo Chechetov, a Party of Regions lawmaker.

In its resolution adopted earlier this week the CEC outlined five constituencies – in Kyiv Oblast (94), Mykolayiv Oblast (132), Cherkasy Oblast (194, 197), and in the city of Kyiv (223) – where a new vote is needed.

Election officials believe it is impossible to determine the vote results, due to alleged tampering with the vote count and vote tabulation.

These are the hottest constituencies where the fiercest battles between government-friendly and opposition candidates took place.

Opposition candidates and the Batkivshchyna Party are challenging the CEC's decision in court by arguing that it is possible to determine the vote results based on certain district election commission protocols, and when this is impossible, based on election protocols from precinct election commissions.

Meanwhile, imprisoned former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko also said she is against holding repeat elections in disputed single-seat constituencies.

She called on Ukrainians to not recognize the election results at all, and went on hunger strike on Oct. 29.

According to the opposition's parallel vote count, their candidates won in the disputed constituencies.

"The opposition has protocols with original signatures and stamps, with credible results. I'm asking the opposition to demand that the vote count on these protocols (be recognized), and do not give a second chance to corrupt officials and forgers to sneer at the people's choice. People have already made their choice in these districts," reads Tymoshenko's statement issued on Nov. 7.

At the same time Vitali Klitschko's Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms Party, called for a whole new general election, claiming that falsification occurred in all constituencies throughout the nation.

But Klitschko wants a new national election only after the adoption of a new election law that would require all 450 members to be elected nationally through a proportional vote from an open party list.

Kyiv Post staff writer Yuriy Onyshkiv can be reached at onyshkiv@kyivpost.com. Oksana Grytsenko can be reached at grytsenko@kyivpost.com

PACE official: Parliamentary elections in Ukraine showed trend towards increased authoritarianism



<http://www.interfax.com.ua/eng/eco/126575/>

The parliamentary elections in Ukraine demonstrated a trend towards increased authoritarianism in the country, according to the head of the election observation mission of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Andreas Gross, the Tyzhden.ua online newspaper has reported.

When asked whether the nature and course of the parliamentary election campaign in Ukraine had changed compared with the last elections in 2007, he said: "If you want a short summary, I would say that we saw a trend towards the strengthening of authoritarianism."

"Today the oligarchs and money have more power than was the case in 2007, and they are controlling the public sphere," Gross said.

He also noted that Ukrainian citizens feel alienated from the voting process. "Money has become even stronger and more powerful, while citizens feel pushed away to the side and even more alienated from the process. More people, compared with 2007, don't recognize their choice in the parliament that was elected in October 2012," Gross said.

Foreign Ministry attacks messengers of bad news

Nov. 8, 2012, 10:06 p.m. | Oksana Grytsenko

<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/foreign-ministry-attacks-messengers-of-bad-news-315825.html>



Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kostiantyn Gryshchenko

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If you're a Western diplomat working in Ukraine, be warned.

Critical statements about Ukraine, even delivered in an official capacity, can result in personal retaliation from the Foreign Ministry.

Such sharp reactions have been all too common recently, particularly against foreigners who dared to criticize the Oct. 28 parliamentary elections.

When top international observer Audrey Glover said after the election that “democratic progress appears to have reversed in Ukraine” and Walburga Habsburg Douglas, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe parliamentary delegation head, chimed in with “one should not have to visit a prison to hear from leading political figures,” the ministry shot back with its own statement on Nov. 1.

The Foreign Ministry alleged that the officials were letting their personal feelings affect their professional judgment.

“Taking into account the statements of other observers, it becomes clear that the statements by Douglas and Glover are their personal thoughts – groundless and emotional, and not the result of observations of all members of the delegation,” the ministry said. “We don't understand why they refer to the visit to (imprisoned former Prime Minister Yulia) Tymoshenko in a (statement on the) democracy of the elections,” said Oleh Voloshyn, the ministry's director of information policy.

Glover, the head of the election observation mission of the OSCE's election watchdog Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, told the Kyiv Post that the mission fully supports her statements.

“Just see the preliminary statement,” she suggested, adding that her personal feelings about accusations of the ministry “don't matter.”

Oleksandr Sushko, research director at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, said that the ministry's statement is nothing more than a "manipulation."

"It's clear the written conclusion of the OSCE mission didn't contradict the statements of the observers, which were only clarifying the written document," he said.

Olga Shumylo-Tapiola, a visiting Carnegie Europe scholar in Brussels, said she could not even imagine a Western diplomat making such a statement about a highly reputable international organization.

She said Ukraine's undiplomatic statements are more regrettable considering the nation will preside over the OSCE next year, the very organization whose officials are being attacked.

"I don't think it helps the image of Ukraine, which is already bad enough in the West," Shumylo-Tapiola added.

Sushko says these outrageous comments by Ukraine's officials come as a result of pressure. "I don't think it's an improvisation of the foreign ministry or its individual officials," he said.

The ministry has in the past made numerous statements that raised eyebrows or caused indignation in the West. On Oct. 31, it slammed U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who backed the OSCE criticism, saying that the "election constituted a step backward for Ukrainian democracy."

"We are sorry that U.S. Secretary Clinton tries to connect the political disagreements she has with Ukrainian authorities regarding ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's case and assessments of elections in Ukraine," the ministry shot back in a statement, edifying that it was "fundamentally wrong" that Clinton didn't mention any positive dynamics of cooperation between the two states.

When the U.S. Senate approved a Sept. 22 resolution on Ukraine, calling on the release of political prisoners and the introduction of sanctions against those responsible, Ukraine's Foreign Ministry questioned the procedure for approval of this legal act, causing much indignation on Capitol Hill.

Former European Union Ambassador to Ukraine Jose Manuel Pinto Teixeira also got a fair share of criticism and even insults from the ministry. He gave several interviews right before leaving his office in mid-summer, criticizing President Viktor Yanukovich for reverting to "vertical power" in Ukraine.

The ministry replied that since Teixeira was serving his last days in office, his views on the political situation should not be taken into account.

“By and large, at the moment Mr. Teixeira is no longer the ambassador of the European Union in Ukraine, so his thoughts rather should excite the Republic of Cape Verde (the diplomat’s next posting) than citizens and authorities in Ukraine,” the ministry’s Voloshyn then said.

The ministry also had a public spat with former French Ambassador Jacques Faure, who sharply criticized the authorities for jailing Tymoshenko.

In September 2011, Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry made a false statement that France called off their ambassador because of those statements.



*Catherine Ashton, European Union’s representative for foreign affairs
(Courtesy)*

“I’m sorry that this kind of false and misleading information has been made up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and spread in the media,” Faure then said.

Sushko claims Ukraine’s diplomats are starting to resemble their Russian counterparts, “who always use rather brutal language in cases when somebody accuses Russia of violation of human rights.”

But Voloshyn, the ministry’s spokesman, rejected this criticism.

“The reaction of Russian authorities to the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was the following: the resolution is biased and so we are not going to take it into account. Our position is different,” he said.

“And unlike the Russian MFA, we don’t judge elections in the U.S.”

Kyiv Post staff writer Oksana Grytsenko can be reached at grytsenko@kyivpost.com.

Hostile election commissioners suggest fraud, incompetence

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Ukrainians cast their ballots at a polling station in Kyiv, Oct. 28.

© AP

I've been traveling to and have been interested in Ukraine and Ukrainian politics since 2004. I was an observer in Odessa during the October 2010 election. And of course, I am politically active at home in Arizona.

Because of my strong interest in Ukrainian politics, election observation experience, international contacts and my desire to see the people enjoy the benefits of democratic elections, I established the Foundation for Free Elections.

When President Viktor Yanukovych extended his invitation to international monitoring organizations we responded, our observers were subsequently accredited by the Central Election Commission.

I monitored the vote count in Kyiv at precinct 800077 in district 211. The commissioners and particularly the deputy were hostile, aggressive and abusive toward the observers – both domestic and international. They created an atmosphere of intimidation which did not honor the invitation of their president and their behavior was an embarrassment to all decent Ukrainians.

Their absolute disregard for election law and general incompetence was shocking. At one point when my translator inquired as to why they were not following the law, the commissioners began shouting at the observers.

At the start of the vote count, the commissioners very aggressively demanded that the observers move to an area of the room from which it was nearly impossible to monitor the proceedings and counting processes. To enforce that we stay in the area, the commissioners angrily set up a metal barrier and threatened anyone who crossed it with expulsion. The situation was reminiscent of the Berlin Wall.

Ukrainian election law allows observers to observe the entire process without barriers (including metal ones) and this was one of several blatant violations of Ukrainian law by the election commission at this polling site.

A small, but interesting incident was when we asked them to introduce themselves and they told us that their identities were “government top secrets” and we didn’t need to know. If the commissioners were abiding by Ukrainian laws and proud of their work, why do they hide their identities? This also is contrary to Ukrainian election law.

Perhaps the most shocking was toward the end when the commission chairwoman kept disappearing behind a closed, locked door with the official election stamp and protocols.

As they began sorting ballots we told them that we could not see what was going on and they responded that we didn’t need to see, but should “shut up” and listen, again they made threats of expulsion for “disturbing” their work. This aggressive behavior is contrary to the open invitation to international observers from Yanukovich and brings shame upon the electoral process.

Article 79.8 of the law states that commissioners shall facilitate the work of election observers; the commissioners at precinct 800077, district 211 however, put great effort into obstructing our work, which created a great deal of concern over just what it was that they were trying so hard to hide.

Perhaps the most shocking was toward the end when the commission chairwoman kept disappearing behind a closed, locked door with the official election stamp and protocols. The other commissioners reacted very defensively and refused observers’ efforts to enter the room. Our repeated requests to view the protocols were ignored – also contrary to Ukrainian law.

The last one I want to mention is the way the commissioners adamantly refused to properly seal the protocols in boxes for transportation to the District Election Commission.

This is an egregious violation of Ukrainian law as well.

We brought it to their attention that the boxes were not sealed properly and they told us that they did not have enough of the official seals although I had personally seen and photographed the chairwoman carrying four green fasteners in her hand after the first two had been applied to the box containing ballots.

I mentioned this and was ignored as they continued applying white tape to the outside of one of the boxes, there was absolutely no attempt to seal other box in any way whatsoever.

Very shortly after that the chairwoman, deputy and several other commissioners literally grabbed the boxes and ran from the building, jumped into a vehicle and sped off.

An observer followed as fast as he could telling them that observers had the right to accompany the transportation of protocols to the district election commission and as the commissioners ran they shouted that we could not come with them and to find our own way if we wanted to go.

People who are honest, reputable, and have nothing to hide do not behave in this way.

In my opinion, at best they were totally ignorant of the concept of democratic elections or, at worse and probably more likely, they were blatantly corrupt, perhaps a mix of both.

Marjorie Thorpe is chairperson and a member of the board of directors for the Foundation for Free Elections.

Democracy in Ukraine ‘regressing’

ARTICLE | NOVEMBER 8, 2012 - 3:23PM | BY CILLIAN DONNELLY

<http://www.neurope.eu/article/democracy-ukraine-regressing?>



AFP PHOTO / YURIY DYACHYSHYN

Democratic progress in Ukraine has taken a backward step following recent elections, a senior human rights figure has said.

Speaking to New Europe, Jean-Claude Mignon, President of the [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe \(PACE\)](#), said that reports coming out of the country following elections, which resulted in a resounding victory for President Viktor Yanukovich's Party of the regions (PR), highlights continuing problems in the country.

The election results received widespread condemnation for international organisations and observers, such as the European Parliament and the [Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#).

“I am completely in line with the opinion that has been formed by the observers”, says Mignon. “And, according to the observers, they have stated that democracy is regressing. That means, not stagnating, but actually regressing”.

Ukraine is one of the 47 members of the Council of Europe (CoE), and served chair of its committee of ministers between May and November 2011. He said that as a member of the Council of Europe, “Ukraine has made commitments, and those commitments must be respected”.

“Obviously, Ukraine is a member of the Council of Europe, and not the EU, and this is a specific example of where the EU has an international role. It is not our vocation to take sides where there is a violation of non-compliance, our role is to carry out parliamentary diplomacy”.

“The word ‘sanctions’ is not in the spirit of the Council of Europe”, he says.

He did say, however, that “certainly we have the power to denounce where countries do not respect the rules. We think that if they have voluntarily joined the Council of Europe, they should follow the principles of the Council of Europe”.

He did say, however, that the country still has a role to play in ensuring stability in the neighbourhood region, particularly in relation to Moldova, which is undergoing democratic transitions at present. In March this year, the election of a new president, Nicolae Timofti, ended a 3-year political stand-off, although the country continues to face problems with the breakaway republic of Transnistria.

The reforms in the country, says Mignon, are going well. “Moldova is respecting its commitments to the Council of Europe. I am glad to see they finally elected a president, and that the elections were in good order. Moldova is a good partner for the Council of Europe. Obviously, we want to settle the Transnistria situation, and we have made concrete proposals. I hope to go to Chisinau soon, and hopefully we can find a solution to the problem. In this respect, Romania is also helping a lot, and we would also like Ukraine to be a partner in this process”.

Jean-Claude Mignon, who was elected as president of PACE at the start of 2012, was speaking following meeting with European Parliament President, Martin Schulz. Both institutions have vowed to work closely to promote the principles of parliamentary democracy, co-operation and human rights. It was, according to Mignon, a highly satisfactory meeting.

“We decided to renew our relationship, and increase our co-operation”, he says, which we still do in many ways; through the conference of presidents, the parliamentary assembly, the chairs of committees and other personalities. We have seen that we have a lot in common”.

“The Council of Europe contains 47 member states, of which 27 are also members of the European Union, so both can work closely, especially under Ștefan Füle

and the neighbourhood policy. So, those 20 countries concerned with neighbourhood relations are also members of the Council of Europe. Our monitoring in these countries is very efficient, and the European Parliament can benefit from this work carried out by our assembly”.

In addition to increase co-operation with the European Parliament, the big issue facing the both Council of Europe and the European institutions, is the accession of the EU to the European Convention of Human Rights. Mignon says that he would like to see talks concluded before the European elections in 2014.

“Basically, some countries still have reservations on the accession”, he says. “It is mine and Martin Schulz’s job to show that these reservations have no grounds”.

Russian lawmaker: Alignment of forces in Ukraine's new parliament 'alarming'

Nov. 8, 2012, 8:06 p.m. | Interfax-Ukraine

<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/russia-and-former-soviet-union/russian-lawmaker-alignment-of-forces-in-ukraines-new-parliament-alarming-315793.html>



A senior Russian lawmaker has expressed fear that the alignment of forces in Ukraine's newly elected parliament means harder times for Russian-Ukrainian relations. © AFP

Moscow - A senior Russian lawmaker has expressed fear that the alignment of forces in Ukraine's newly elected parliament means harder times for Russian-Ukrainian relations.

"It is an alarming situation," Leonid Slutsky, chairman of the State Duma Committee for Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, said at a meeting in which the committee discussed the performance of Russian observers during the October 28 election.

He argued that the victory of the ruling Party of Regions had been predictable, but it was unexpected that nationalist party Svoboda won seats in parliament.

Adding the voting results in constituencies where candidates were running individually rather than on party lists means that "Svoboda's group may become even more numerous than the Communist group," Slutsky said. "Nor is there any

guarantee that the alliance of the Party of Regions and the Communists will be strong and make up a 100% majority."

Slutsky questioned "prospects for major Russian-Ukrainian agreements in the natural gas sphere, on frontier demarcation issues or on the Customs Union." "There will be very tough struggles. One can't hope that important decisions for Russian-Ukrainian relations will be easy to pass," he said.

However, he expressed confidence that Ukraine would not go as far as denouncing some of its agreements or repealing legislation such as the free trade law or the law giving the Russian language a limited official status.

"Domestic political developments in Ukraine and the results of the elections for the Verkhovna Rada [parliament] bring it home to all of us that we need more intensive work on the inter-parliamentary front," he said.

Censorship scandal at one of Ukraine's top news agencies

Nov. 8, 2012, 9:59 p.m. | Yuriy Onyshkiv

<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/censorship-scandal-at-one-of-ukraines-top-news-agencies-315822.html>



A UNIAN news agency employee at the workplace. According to the editors of UNIAN news agency, they are being censored and pressured by their superiors to soften news coverage of Ukraine's political leaders. © Kostyantyn Chernichkin

Editors at Ukraine's UNIAN news agency say they are being censored and pressured by their superiors to soften news coverage of Ukraine's political leadership, marking the latest controversy in the nation's deteriorating free-speech climate since President Viktor Yanukovich took office in 2010.

Six editors at UNIAN wrote an open protest letter to the agency's top manager Vadym Osadchy, accusing him of allegedly applying pressure to censor and tone down their coverage of Ukraine's leadership and to accept paid-for stories about other Ukrainian politicians ahead of the Oct. 28 parliamentary elections.

The agency's management denies the accusations while Ihor Kolomoysky, the Ukrainian billionaire who owns the agency, did not immediately respond to emailed questions.



Ihor Kolomoysky

Osadchy said that under his supervision the agency aims for the highest journalistic standards of fair coverage and accused the protesting staff of being biased themselves.

“Some employees, maintaining confidence in their right to influence the objectivity of the coverage of news, perceived the attempts to make UNIAN’s information products neutral (...) as censorship or practice of speech freedom infringement,” Osadchy told Telekritika, the media watchdog news website, in response to the allegations.

UNIAN editors wrote a joint op-ed describing in detail how the agency’s managers directed political coverage. If the allegations are true, they reveal bias and selective news coverage at one of Ukrainian top news agencies.

UNIAN’s new management arrived in May. Shortly after longtime chief editor Oleksandr Kharchenko was fired for the agency’s poor revenue performance.

“After Osadchy’s appointment (as UNIAN’s general manager), there was a lot of discussion about what not to write about, that there is too much critical coverage,” Kharchenko said, following his firing.

In the last two years Washington-based Freedom House human rights watchdog downgraded Ukraine’s media freedom climate in its ranking from “free” to “partly free.” During that time, a number of other Ukrainian media have undergone management changes and, as a result, shifted from hard-hitting and balanced news coverage to more entertainment and tabloid-like stories. TVi, known for investigative journalism, has been eliminated from some cable television plans or switched to more expensive premium-subscription plans, cutting their audience.

Moreover, most of the nation's news media outlets are owned by five wealthy men in or close to the government, including Kolomoysky, member of parliament Rinat Akhmetov, Victor Pinchuk, Deputy Prime Minister Valeriy Khoroshkovsky and Economy Minister Petro Poroshenko.

Valentyna Romanenko, one of the UNIAN website editors who co-authored the op-ed alleging censorship, told the Kyiv Post that the misunderstandings with the agency's new management started when they were appointed, but intensified closer to election day.

Viktorija Siumar, head of Kyiv's Institute of Mass Information, said that UNIAN's new management was oriented toward making more profit by the agency by running paid-for-stories. Osadchy denied the allegation and said that with the arrival of the new management at UNIAN, the agency dropped running such stories.

Last week, six UNIAN editors posted several screen shots of emails and instant messenger conversations with Mykola Kondratenko, head of Internet projects at the agency, who allegedly directly told the editors what to cover and how.

They said that a number of news stories in which Yanukovych, his ruling Party of Regions and Communist Party leader Petro Symonenko come out in a bad light were removed from the website, allegedly under management's directives.

In one of the screenshots, the dialogue on an instant messenger with an editor Kondratenko wrote to "forget about Yanukovych in a negative light at all" and added that "there is hysteria here again – Osadchy got a phone call." In that discussion he also allegedly threatened to fine people who would not obey by this rule.

Kondratenko did not respond to emailed questions.

The protesting staff at UNIAN says there was a ban on stories about the opposition, particularly news regarding some opposition candidates who ran for parliament in single-mandate constituencies in Kyiv.

"They said they wanted to have all opinions in our news stories, but then everyone could have noticed that there is no second opinion and the news (on the UNIAN website) is not balanced," said UNIAN's Romanenko.

Osadchy says there are no bans on stories about opposition politicians and denied any pressure from the authorities to done down their coverage.

The agency's management fined two editors Hr 200 (\$25) each for, as they explain, running a news story about an anti-Yanukovych protest that took place near the Presidential Administration on Oct. 26. According to the agency's management, the editors were fined because they violated the procedure of

approving the story and its headline with a chief editor before running it and has nothing to do with Yanukovich.

Siumar does not think that UNIAN was pressured by the authorities to soften their coverage of the government and the president. “It was self-censorship by managers or owners who were apparently afraid of (provoking) the anger of the country’s political leadership,” she explained.

Romanenko says the staff simply “demands to be able to work normally, that is being unbiased” in its news coverage. She also says their superiors are not discussing anything with them right now. “Probably they just want to wait out until the censorship scandal fades away after some time,” she added, saying she and her colleagues are not sure what to do if the pressure to be pro-government remains.

Kyiv Post staff writer Yuriy Onyshkiv can be reached at onyshkiv@kyivpost.com

“Another level of training”



*Photo by Kostiantyn HRYSHYN, The Day
“THE SPECIAL FORCES OF THE OPPOSITION.”
IS SVOBODA ABLE TO EVOLVE?*

<http://www.day.kiev.ua/238314>

By Ivan KAPSAMUN, The Day

Svoboda Party’s result became the main sensation of this election. Everyone is talking about it, some with delight, others – with caution. It turned out that the nationalists managed to accumulate the protest electorate of Western and Central Ukraine, which, along with Svoboda’s base electors, gave them 10.5 percent of votes. While some were considering Svoboda’s chances of clearing the 5-percent barrier, the party managed to do that in 17 oblasts and in Kyiv. In 2 more oblasts,

Kherson and Mykolaiv, the party received more than 4 percent of votes (4.7 and 4.3, respectively). And in the remaining 5 (Zaporizhia, Kharkiv, Odesa, Luhansk, Donetsk) oblasts, the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea and in Sevastopol, the result was less than 4 percent. What caused this “Svoboda phenomenon”? There are three main reasons for it.

It should also be emphasized that Svoboda’s triumph should not be treated as an absolutely unexpected one. This situation has been brewing for a few years. Besides, after the 2010 local elections, Svoboda gained power in three western oblasts: Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano-Frankivsk.

So, now about the reasons. The first one is the defeat of the national democratic movement after gaining independence. The primary goal, sovereignty of Ukraine, was achieved, but then the country was ruled again by former communists and newly-made oligarchs. The second is the failure of the national democrats after the Orange Revolution. The society and opposition managed to break Kuchma’s regime, but Viktor Yushchenko’s further rule destroyed all he hopes and expectations. The third reason the result of the Party of Regions’ ruling during the last two and a half years. Numerous anti-Ukrainian decisions have been made, which only provoked resistance and radicalization of nationally minded citizens. Among these decisions were the Kharkiv agreements, change of the stand concerning the Holodomor, and cancellation of awards given to Bandera and Shukhevych. And the last drop, of course, was the language law. Here, the government helped Svoboda so much, and the latter benefited from the law adoption more than anyone else.

Now, each Svoboda’s step will be scrutinized, especially considering the discussion of some radical stands of Svoboda members. A lot will depend on this political force’s ability to evolve, improve its image abroad and at home, in eastern and southern regions in particular.

Of course, Svoboda will now be tempted by money and captivating offers. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian parliament is far from a place that could be called a platform for discussions and center of adoption of legislative initiatives. The infamous turncoats have become the symbol of the parliament’s illness long ago.

Are Svoboda members able to withstand these trials? Rumors about their political force being financed by oligarchs have been out for a long time. The party members themselves will prove if it is true or false. The party itself can be divided into two parts: the bureaucratic wing (includes older party members, such as Oleh Tiahnybok, people that have been in politics before, and these rumors are related to some of them) and the dynamic wing (a younger generation of politicians, including Andrii Illienko, Ihor Miroshnychenko, etc.). Which of them is going to win?

We have heard, even from Svoboda itself, that they were the “special forces (riot police) of the opposition.” But we should keep in mind the specific features of this

body, because riot police cannot be called an independent structure. No matter how prepared, determined, and professional it is, it still carries out somebody else's orders. There is one more thing for Svoboda to try to avoid: participation in political technologies. In this case it is about the ruling party's technologies, not the opposition ones. There is an opinion that the Party of Regions needs nationalists in the parliament to keep their base regions in the east and south constantly scared. Maybe, that is even the reason why the language law technology was launched. Moreover, there is a scenario, according to which Tiahnybok can become Yanukovich's main opponent at the 2015 presidential elections, so that disappointed voters would reelect the incumbent president for another term. Do Svoboda members remember recent history?

We have written about this many times. The presidential election of 1999. President Kuchma very successfully used the technology mentioned above. The only difference was that back then, the communist leader Symonenko was used as a bugbear, and it was not the east and south of Ukraine that needed to be scared, but the west and center. As a result, Kuchma was reelected for another term. Today we can see that communists are not playing the same role anymore, though they showed excellent skills during these elections, especially in the pre-election campaign and advertising. Their result is even labeled the second sensation. But the paradox is that the mixed electoral system will not allow communists to have significantly more MPs in the future parliament than they have today. They did not win one single-ticket constituency, and the 50-percent proportion system (it was a 100-percent system before) will only let them have about 30 MPs in the future parliament (they are holding 25 seats at the moment).

By the way, regarding the "merits" of the communists: why was Symonenko awarded an order in Moscow? Was it an advance payment of sorts, or an award for the actual service? Let us remind that recently the head of the Communist Party of Ukraine was awarded the Order of Friendship by Russian President Vladimir Putin for his contribution to the development of friendship and cooperation with Russia.

So, does Svoboda understand the danger of their party being manipulated, the results of which may affect a totally different area? With this and other warnings and questions mentioned above we have addressed famous Ukrainians, dissidents, and Svoboda representatives, whose commentaries and answers are presented below. By the way, when commenting on this topic, the former prisoner of conscience and public figure Yevhen Sverstiuk emphasized: "We should not pay too much attention to Svoboda's victory at this time. We can only congratulate them on coming to the parliament and wish them fruitful and constructive work." Of course, we can agree here, but with just one qualification: it is very unlikely that the national democratic idea will survive if it fails one more time.

By Ivan KAPSAMUN, The Day

“SVOBODA IS YET TO GO THROUGH THE DIFFICULT TIMES”

Levko LUKIANENKO, public activist and political figure, MP in the first convocation:

“The rapid growth of Svoboda’s popularity can be accounted for by several factors. The first one is radicalization of the entire Ukrainian society caused by southern and eastern Ukraine’s frustration with the Party of Regions. The electors that once voted for Yanukovich and his team asked themselves: ‘Who should we vote for now?’ A part of the PoR supporters went over to the Communist Party due to their instinctive, deep-rooted hatred for nationalists.

Another part, which consisted of more or less patriotic people, decided to support Svoboda. Therefore, such display of support does not imply complete solidarity with Svoboda’s ideology, but rather a temporary phenomenon.

“On the other hand, the fact of Svoboda’s rapid popularity increase also signifies the awakening of national consciousness of Ukrainians, who are fond of the patriotic rhetoric of the party. They are bold, straightforward, and open. This is a positive phenomenon. Obviously, this political force corresponds to the attitudes of people who support it.

“Another important point: in this election, more than 6 million voters were young people born in 1991 and 1992, who just reached the age of 18 and voted for the first time. They are free from anti-Ukrainian, pro-Moscow and pro-imperial ideas and world outlook. They are not afraid of the KGB, the anti-Soviet agitation, and responsibility, because they understand freedom and democracy better. This turned out to be a progressive part of Ukrainian voters who were outraged by the anti-Ukrainian policies of the government.

“However, radicalization was revealed the most during the counting of votes. This is the first literally physical confrontation of such kind that radicalized the opposition forces. The Party of Regions and its supporters also resorted to drastic measures which they had never used before. Now, the PoR hired people to block the work of election commissions. These things are absolutely unacceptable in a democratic and law-abiding country.

“In general, there is no radical party in Ukraine. If there was at least one, it would cleanse Ukraine from imperial symbols: Lenin, Stalin, Soviet-era street names and so on. This is a shame for the Ukrainian people, who have been living in an independent country for 21 years, and still walk the streets named after mass murderers of Ukrainians.

“In his time, Yushchenko led the nation to the terrible disappointment that was so profound that it still continues today. Svoboda represents the segment of the Ukrainian society that overcame the disappointment and wants to fight for the

ideal of creation of an independent Ukraine, which was expected of president Yushchenko.

“Svoboda’s radical statements are mere words. When you take a look at Svoboda’s activity, you will not see anything special there. At the Verkhovna Rada, they will undoubtedly support the idea of the abolition of agreements on Russian troops in the Crimea. Perhaps, they will even amend the language law.

But this is no more than normal parliamentary activity.

“Will the Party of Regions, which has the majority of seats, bribe anyone, and will there be turncoats among current Svoboda members? In my opinion, Svoboda members are the most stable in this regard. Of course, there are no guarantees that none of the party members will be tempted, but in any case, they are the most ideologically stable people.

“Tiahnybok may appear next to Yatseniuk and Klitschko. Even though there is very little time left before the presidential election, this period will be very tense due to constant, active struggle. The number of oppositionists has increased compared to that of the sixth convocation of the Verkhovna Rada. The quality of this opposition changed too: now it is more active, bold, determined, and persistent. This indicates that the debates in the Verkhovna Rada will be heated.

Of course, the three people I named might be not the only ones. There are a lot of talented people in Ukraine who can lead the country. But the scenario in which Tiahnybok rises to this level is quite realistic.

“I think that Svoboda is yet to go through the difficult times, whether they will be internal or triggered by external influences. But everything will not go as smooth as it may seem. Firstly, the matter of formation of Svoboda as a serious political party is stipulated by the internal problems. Secondly, Russian chauvinists do not like this political force and will put spokes in their wheels. Moscow’s political elite would love to have Ukraine back under its influence. It has already infiltrated Ukrainian society with its agents and it will try to slow down the political process.

This means no easy life for Svoboda. However, the direction they officially chose is very popular among people. The number of Ukrainians who choose this way to succeed is increasing. It will provide support for Svoboda. And how should we accept the fact that only 22 percent of MPs were of Ukrainian nationality in the previous parliament? It is a mockery of the Ukrainian nation! This is not normal, and we have to fight it! It would be good for the new Verkhovna Rada session to be a little better nationality-wise.”

“OUR POLITICAL FORCE DOES NOT HOLD THE PATENT FOR THE NATIONAL IDEA”

Andrii MOKHNYK, representative of Svoboda

It is believed that the current government can involve Svoboda into some political scheming. In particular, it is predicted that Tiahnybok will be nominated as chief opponent to Yanukovich at the 2015 presidential election, so the latter can win. What can you say about this? Are you ready for this?

“It is clear that politics abhors vacuum, and every political force, including Svoboda, will have its own goals. However, we clearly declare what our goals are. Today, there is an agreement on the creation of a coalition of democratic forces in the parliament with clearly specified objectives: the removal of Yanukovich’s regime and impeachment of the president. If this happens, what kind of opponent will Yanukovich be, if he is removed from office by impeachment? In general, we have not yet formed a faction, we have not recaptured and protected all the votes: the final count is not yet announced, and they are already talking about our involvement in political games. In the current situation, our party is interested in fulfilling all the commitments that we have publicly undertaken. So, talks about some political games and Svoboda being a bugbear for eastern Ukraine are not working.”

After the party enters the parliament, a lot of tempting offers become available to its members. Are there any guarantees that Svoboda members will not become turncoats?

“We can make certain conclusions based on the present-day situation. We have been running local councils with more than 2,500 members for two years now. And during this time we have not had a single turncoat. While forming the party list and nominating candidates for majoritarian constituencies, we chose reliable party members who have experience in party work, work in local councils, and local governments. These people were tested by time, temptation, pressure, and intimidation. We have worked side by side for years. So we are ready to bear responsibility for every single member of our party who becomes an MP.

“As a political force, we understand that Svoboda will receive more nagging attention than any other party. And we are ready to do our best to keep this fair and transparent electoral list, with which we and our candidates passed to the parliament, for the next term. We have worked for 21 years to come to power and use it as a tool to implement the program to protect Ukrainians, not as a means of obtaining some preferences. This is our reputation, vision, and life. This is not some political project boosted with money. Not only party members live by our ideas, but our non-partisan friends, family members, colleagues do so, too. We cannot betray all this.”

Interviewed by Anna CHEREVKO, Ihor SAMOKYSH, The Day

Georgia, Ukraine seen as being on divergent paths

Nov. 8, 2012, 10:06 p.m. | Maryna Irklienko

<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/georgia-ukraine-seen-as-being-on-divergent-paths-315823.html>



Georgia's Gudauri ski resort was bought for \$14.5 million by Privat Group, the biggest Ukrainian investor in Georgia. The group also owns Bukovel, the upscale ski resort in western Ukraine. © courtesy

Aside from the Baltics, Ukraine and Georgia still stand out among the 15 former Soviet republics as the most democratic and Western-oriented.

During the past two decades both countries have at times followed similar paths. Ukraine and Georgia suffered through the authoritarian regimes of Leonid Kuchma and Eduard Shevardnadze, respectively and both responded with revolutions – Ukraine's Orange in 2004 and Georgia's Rose in 2003 – in attempts to secure more democratic and prosperous futures.

However, almost a decade after those peaceful uprisings brought pro-Western leaders to power, the two countries are now moving away from each other. In Ukraine and abroad, sentiment is high that Ukraine's Orange Revolution never delivered what it promised – and now the country is regressing under President Viktor Yanukovich, the villain of the 2004 revolution.

By contrast, Georgia basks in international praise for combating corruption and red tape, making the tiny Caucasus nation of 4.6 million one of the world's most business-friendly under President Mikheil Saakashvili, who nonetheless appears to have lost some of his luster and popularity in his second term.

Yet when it comes to bilateral economic relations between the allies, Ukraine – with a population nearly 10 times that of Georgia – is the dominant player.

“It's a one-way street, from Ukraine to Georgia, unfortunately,” says Viktor Kipiani, co-chairman of the Tbilisi-based Georgian-Ukrainian Business Club.



Viktor Kipiani, co-chairman of Georgian-Ukrainian Business Club.

Georgia ranks fifth as a destination for Ukrainian foreign direct investment, with \$33 million, according to the State Statistics Service website. The biggest chunk comes from Privat Group – a multinational conglomerate operating in just about every sector of the economy, from oil and gas to banking and media to sports and the food industry.

Their Georgian portfolio includes PrivatBank Georgia, renamed after the acquisition of Tao Bank in 2007 for \$25 million, and the Gudauri ski resort, purchased for \$14.5 million in 2010. Two of Ukraine’s richest men – Ihor Kolomoysky and Hennadiy Bogolyubov – are Privat Group’s primary owners.

The latest Ukrainian investment inflow is from Furshet, a large supermarket chain. They are planning to bring three supermarkets to Georgia with the first scheduled to open late this year. Having met with Furshet investors, Viktor Kipiani from the Georgian-Ukrainian Business Club says they chose the right time to come in, “because this notion (of supermarkets) had existed for two, three years here, no more.”

Kipiani thinks better conditions in Georgia would attract more investment. He said the publicity about Georgia’s successes in curbing bureaucracy and corruption raised expectations too high. “Ukrainian businessmen came to Georgia after reading newspaper articles published in Ukraine,” Kipiani said.

“But to our regret, on the spot they discovered that it was a Potemkin village.”

The reality, Kipiani said, is that progress has been made but not to the extent often described. There is room for improvement, he noted, in strengthening the independence of the judiciary and protecting private property.

Georgian investments in Ukraine mostly amounted to Bank of Georgia’s BG Capital, an investment bank, which exited the market a year ago, citing a poor investment outlook.

Kipiani explains why Ukraine is a tough place for Georgians to do business.

“The Ukrainian economy is more structured in terms of niche breakdown and therefore (businesses enter) a market with certain speculative barriers and even unwritten laws, which for a business coming from a four-million (people) market

is much harder to overcome,” Kipiani said. “There are much bigger resources here, which Georgian companies do not possess.”

Last year, bilateral trade accounted to \$860 million and reached \$460 million already in the first half of 2012, according to Georgian Embassy data. Ukraine drives most of this trade with exports of commodities.

On the Georgian side, the largest company with Georgian links in Ukraine is IDS Group, the exclusive importer of Borjomi, a naturally carbonated mineral water. The history of the popular drink dates back to 1820, when the Borjomi springs were discovered.



Andriy Kaplan, director of DisNa, which distributes Georgian wine and cognac in Ukraine.

But wine is arguably the nation’s biggest source of pride. “Georgia is recognized by experts as the cradle of winemaking, (a tradition that) started over 8,000 years ago,” says Andriy Kaplan, director of DisNa, the biggest distributor of Georgian wine in Ukraine. Their brands include Kartuli Vazi and Vardiani wines, Sarajishvili, Eristavi and Iverioni cognacs and Bazaleti sparkling wine.

Geography makes Georgia a perfect place for wine and cognac production, with more than 500 types of grapes growing in different climate zones within the country, Kaplan said. The popularity of Georgian wine in Ukraine has only increased since Soviet times.

“Competition in the Georgian wine segment exceeds competition in many other alcohol drinks segments,” noted Kaplan. This year, some 10 million bottles of Georgian wine are expected to be sold in Ukraine. And that suits wine expert Kaplan: “Wine is quite a ‘deep’ product. Together with its technology and other factors, it reflects the people who make it.”

Georgia

Territory: 69,700 square kilometers

Population: 4.6 million people as of July 2012

Government type: republic

Head of government: Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili since October 2012

GDP (purchasing power parity): \$24.86 billion in 2011

GDP per capita (PPP): \$5,600 in 2011

Main industries: steel, machine tools, electrical appliances, mining (manganese, copper, and gold), chemicals, wood products and wine.

Ukrainian-Georgian economic relations:

Trade: \$860 billion in 2011

Exports from Georgia to Ukraine: pure ethyl alcohol, water (including natural or artificial mineral waters), wine, ferroalloys and rail locomotives (units).

Exports from Ukraine to Georgia: cigarettes, coke and semi-coke of coal, bars and rods of iron, sunflower-seed oil and construction material of iron or steel.

Georgia's investment in Ukraine: no data available

Ukraine's investment in Georgia: \$33 million as of July 2012. Georgia is Ukraine's fifth largest investment destination.

Source: Georgian Embassy, State Statistics Service of Ukraine, World Factbook

Kyiv Post staff writer Maryna Irkliyenko can be reached
at irkliyenko@kyivpost.com