

ELECTIONWATCH

UKRAINE



Ukraine Pre-Election Watch: February 2010 Presidential Runoff Election

Since gaining its independence in 1991, Ukraine has achieved certain success in promoting democratic changes, especially in the sphere of creating independent mass media and ensuring open elections. These successes are considered direct, positive results of the Orange Revolution. The Revolution was the result of the Ukrainian people's protest against fraud during the second round of presidential elections in November 2004. This event had a profound impact upon both Ukraine's democratization processes, as well as other countries in the region, in inspiring similar democratization movements.

Despite many positive advances after the Orange Revolution, Ukraine's ability to provide effective governance and stability has been hampered by political and constitutional crises. Prior to his election to the presidency, Viktor Yushchenko agreed to a number of measures which reduced presidential powers and expanded those of the Prime Minister and the parliament. This in turn provoked conflicts between legislators, the cabinet of ministers and the President, resulting in Yushchenko's decision to dissolve parliament and call an early vote in September 2007. According to international observers, these parliamentary elections met international standards. However, certain problems remained unsolved, such as the quality of the voter list.

Since no political party received enough seats necessary to nominate the prime minister, the political parties had to form a coalition; this shaky 227-seat governing coalition of Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc (BYuT) and Our Ukraine People's Self-Defense was formed on November 29, 2007.

The first round of the presidential election was held on January 17, 2010, with 18 candidates on the ballot. The International Republican Institute (IRI), in addition to most other international organizations found that the elections met international standards. However, IRI observed several areas of the electoral process that need to be improved if Ukraine is to continue in its democratic development and instill greater transparency and public trust in the electoral process. Most importantly, rules and procedures need to be agreed on well in advance of campaigns so that all participants know the rules.

In the January 17 election, no single candidate was able to win more than 50 percent of the vote, and as a result, Victor Yanukovich, leader of the Party of Regions, and Yulia Tymoshenko, leader of the BYuT faction, will compete in a run-off election to be held on February 7, 2010.

Challenges Facing Ukraine

Even though President Yushchenko spoke of the need for constitutional reform in Ukraine

before the 2007 snap parliamentary elections, this issue remains unresolved on the eve of 2010 presidential election. The issue of separation of power between the president, prime minister and the parliament needs to be clarified in order to avoid continued confrontation between these bodies.

Ukraine's economy, which was slowly but steadily growing after 2004, suffered great losses as a result of the world economic and financial crisis. Growing unemployment coupled with decreased income of citizens has made the economy one of the key issues in this presidential campaign. It is also one of the reasons for the plummeting rating of the incumbent president which has decreased to single digits.

Ukraine is still divided into a Russian-speaking east and Ukrainian-speaking west, which makes the task of balancing various political interests even more difficult. Tymoshenko's somewhat more pro-Western orientation does not enjoy popularity in the eastern part of the country which is the most densely populated part of Ukraine. Voters in the east and south traditionally support the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich.

IRI in Ukraine

IRI's work in Ukraine began in 1994. Since that time, IRI has aided in the development of democratic political parties at the national and regional levels, and in regional-based networks of youth and women political activists. IRI has sponsored Ukrainian nongovernmental organizations to assist them in efforts to become self-sustainable. IRI has also provided a series of training programs for local elected officials from across the country to equip them with the technical skills necessary to fulfill their roles as elected representatives. In 2007, IRI opened a second office in Odessa to target the specific issues facing the region, specifically the growing Muslim Tatar population.



**JOIN OUR
MAILING LIST**



Facebook



Twitter

Email Marketing by

