

Ukraine: new electoral regulations are in effect

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On 17 November, the Supreme Council adopted new regulations for parliamentary elections. Thus a new mixed system has been introduced (50% seats will be won in proportional elections and 50% in single-member constituencies by absolute majority), which imposes a ban on creating electoral blocs and raises the electoral threshold from 3% to 5%. The new electoral regulations, furthermore, provide for numerous procedural changes thus significantly reducing the possibilities of abuses during elections. 366 MPs voted in favour of the regulations, including 62 of the 103 members of the BYut-Batkivshchyna faction. The nearest parliamentary elections are expected in late October 2012.

Commentary

- The most important objective motivating the amendments to the electoral regulations initiated by the Party of Regions (PR) is to ensure victory for this party in the upcoming elections and to strengthen its advantage over the opposition. It cannot be ruled out that the Party of Regions is even aiming to build a majority necessary to enable it to amend the constitution (300 MPs). The decision to restore the mixed system (which was applicable during the elections in 1998 and 2002) was based on the experiences from those times, when MPs from majority constituencies (predominantly local officials and entrepreneurs) were prone to pressure from the ruling party and thus willing to join its factions.
- For the Batkivshchyna party (considering the ban on blocs, this grouping in fact is no longer using its previous name the 'Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc') the introduction of mixed elections is unfavourable. In turn, the procedural amendments and the raising of the electoral threshold, which will eliminate its centre-right and right-wing competitors, who are fragmented and unable to unify, will serve its interests well. This is the reason why part of MPs from this grouping backed this law (party discipline did not apply). Yulia Tymoshenko's stance on this issue is not known.
- The new voting system is definitely unfavourable for small parties, so attempts to consolidate the party scene may be expected. The party Strong Ukraine led by Deputy Prime Minister Serhiy Tihipko is already uniting with the Party of Regions. The People's Party led by the parliamentary speaker, Volodymyr Lytvyn, is planning to do the same. On the other wing of the opposition, it cannot be ruled out that Batkivshchyna and the Front

for Change led by Arseniy Yatsenyuk will merge, although the ambitions of their leaders may be an impediment.

- It is too early to predict the results of the parliamentary election. However, if nothing unexpected happens, it may be assumed that most of the seats in the Ukrainian parliament will be held by the Party of the Regions and Batkivshchyna. Apart from them, seats in the proportional voting system can be won by the Front for Change, the Communist Party of Ukraine and possibly Svoboda (this is, however, less likely). The three latter parties and some other groupings may also win several seats each in single-seat constituencies.