

The blockade of the Ukrainian parliament

Tadeusz A. Olszański, Blokada ukraińskiego parlamentu

Since the beginning of February there has been a stalemate in the parliament of Ukraine. The opposition has prevented its activity from getting under way by blocking the speaker's rostrum, and has called for the introduction of a guarantee that members will vote in person (voting for absent members had been a common, accepted procedure). The Party of Regions (PR) agreed to introduce a personal vote, but opposed the proposed mechanism for enforcing it; the PR has demanded an end to the blockade, which according to parliamentary rules is illegal. Successive rounds of negotiations have failed to produce a breakthrough, although a search for a compromise is still continuing. According to the Ukrainian constitution, if a plenary sitting of the parliament does not take place within 30 days of the session, the president has the right (but not the obligation) to dissolve parliament and call early elections, which should take place within 60 days.

Commentary

- The likelihood of parliament being dissolved and early elections called is low. It is not in the interests of the PR, nor of a substantial part of the independent MPs. New elections would bring defeat for the ruling party and success for the other parties (including the Communists). Moreover the current situation, in which the parliament can neither dismiss the government nor pass laws, is actually beneficial for the ruling government in the medium term, as it allows them to rule without undertaking any serious reforms, which they are afraid of doing; and it also provides a convenient excuse to foreign partners for the absence of any such reforms.
- There is still a possibility of a compromise, and the parliament may even return to normal operation within the next few days. However, this will require the Party of Regions to accept the opposition's demands regarding the introduction of the personal vote. Yet even if the parliament does begin its deliberations, we must not expect it to function efficiently. The Party of Regions, even in full force and with the support of independent MPs, cannot carry a simple majority. However, after the likely introduction of personal voting, which will require all the party members to be present in the debating chamber, the PR may not be able to carry a majority even together with the Communists. On the other hand, the opposition parties (*Batkivshchyna*, *UDAR* and *Svoboda*) cannot muster a majority either, and appealing for support from the Communists would be beyond the

pale for them.

- This serious political conflict with the government has led to the consolidation and radicalisation of the opposition. This is particularly apparent in the case of *UDAR*, whose members are the main group blocking the speaker's rostrum; their leader Vitali Klichko has become the main exponent of the opposition's line. If early elections were held, the opposition parties would put forward joint candidates in all single-mandate constituencies (which is another reason why the Party of Regions wants to avoid elections). The opposition, which had initially only aimed to enforce the personal vote (and thus paralyse the Party of Regions' activities in parliament), has for the last few days sought early elections and the restoration of a purely proportional electoral law. The latter solution is also supported by the Communists, although changing the voting system would require the work of parliament to be resumed.