

Ukraine: Prime Minister Yatsenyuk remains in power

Tadeusz A. Olszański

In the evening of 16 February, the Ukrainian parliament failed to pass a vote of no confidence in the government of PM Arseniy Yatseniuk (only 194 MPs supported the motion, out of the necessary majority of 226). Such a motion can only be resubmitted in September, during the next session of parliament. A few minutes previously, the parliament had rejected the government's annual report by 247 votes. The no-confidence motion was overturned thanks to the absence of many deputies. It was not supported by up to 40 MPs of the Poroshenko Bloc; only 8 deputies of the Opposition Bloc were in favour, and there were no votes to impeach from members representing Revival, the party controlled by Ihor Kolomoyskiy. Earlier President Petro Poroshenko had issued a statement in which he suggested the need to completely renew the composition of the government, but emphasised that this must be done by the current ruling coalition. He also requested that the Attorney-General Viktor Shokin resign, as some of the coalition's factions had demanded.

Commentary

- Everything seems to indicate that an agreement for the unpopular Yatseniuk government to remain in power was made between the President and Prime Minister during consultations which were still ongoing a few hours before the start of the debate (Volodymyr Hroysman, leading the debate, was aware that there were not enough deputies for the vote to be binding, but he ordered the vote to proceed anyway). This decision had several causes. First, there is no majority within the parliament which would allow any new Prime Minister or coalition to be appointed; another is the fear of having to call early general elections, in which the present ruling camp (the Petro Poroshenko Bloc and Yatseniuk's Popular Front) would expect to lose heavily; and the third is the Western partners' emphasis on keeping the current cabinet in power (the IMF has threatened to suspend its programme of loans if the current government collapses).
- The current solution is a compromise, which is primarily calculated to gain time. The tension between Poroshenko and Yatseniuk, and between them and the 'internal opposition' within the ruling coalition (*Samopomich* and a group of Poroshenko Bloc deputies gathered around Mustafa Nayem; *Batkivshchyna* formally withdrew from the coalition the day after the vote) remains; but now the coalition agreement can be renegotiated (the one from a year ago is dead), the government can be reconstructed, and the current economic policy can be continued until autumn. In this way, the elections

can be put off until next spring.

- Yatseniuk's government has been given a 'yellow card' in the form of the rejection of its annual report and the harsh criticism it received during the parliamentary debate, and has emerged severely weakened from this crisis. It can be assumed that there will be more ministers associated with the President after the reshuffle. But Poroshenko has gained little if anything (apart from some more time), and Yatseniuk remaining in power strengthens the position of Kolomoyskiy, with whom the President is at odds.
- It had generally been expected, if not demanded, by the public that Yatseniuk would resign. The disappointment that this failed to happen will not make the President any more popular either. Whether it will lead to major protests will depend on the pace and the manner in which the government is reshuffled, as well as on how its policy will be readjusted.

Tadeusz A. Olszański