

President Zelenskiy dissolves Verkhovna Rada

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On 20 May, Volodymyr Zelenskiy was sworn in as the new president of Ukraine. In his inaugural address, he focussed on the need to rebuild unity of the Ukrainian nation and regain Ukraine's lost territory. The new president pledged to do everything in his power to bring the war in the Donbas to an end as soon as possible, stressing at the same time that a ceasefire could not be agreed to at the expense of even partial loss of territory. Zelenskiy said that dialogue with Russia would begin once Russia released prisoners of war.

Zelenskiy has demanded that members of the Verkhovna Rada pass three laws within 60 days, one abolishing parliamentary immunity, one introducing penalties for officials for unlawful enrichment, and one introducing a new electoral code. He has also demanded the resignation of the head of Ukraine's Security Service, the prosecutor general, and the minister of defence. Zelenskiy closed his speech by announcing that he will dissolve parliament early, which means that an election must be held within 60 days of the decree dissolving parliament being issued.

Commentary

- While the address contained appealing rhetoric, it reiterated Zelenskiy's campaign attacks on the current, now discredited political elite, which has lost favour with the public. At the same time, the speech did not present a clear vision for developing the country and dealing with the most pressing issues. This shows that the new president's main priority at the moment is to hold elections as soon as possible and form a majority supporting him in the next Verkhovna Rada, drawn from his party, Servant of the People. The basis for this plan is Zelenskiy's huge popularity. An election poll published on 16 May gave his party, which does not have any structures or staff, support of almost 40% and a fourfold advantage over the other parties. The Pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life, as well as Petro Poroshenko's Bloc and Yulia Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna, can each expect to garner around 10% support.
- A formal decree is still required for President Zelenskiy's decision to dissolve the Verkhovna Rada to take effect, and this can be expected within 1–2 days. This provision is being adopted on the grounds that the coalition of Poroshenko's Bloc and the National Front have not enjoyed a parliamentary majority since 2017. Meanwhile, art. 90 of the Constitution gives the president the power to dissolve parliament early if a coalition with a majority is not formed within one month. Although it is not specifically stated in Ukrainian law who should determine this officially, and this could give rise to a political

and legal dispute, the first comments made suggest that President Zelenskiy's decision will be acceptable to the main players. There are many indications that an unofficial consensus has now been reached concerning early elections with representatives of some parties (probably to take place in the latter half of July). It appears that Petro Poroshenko's faction is also in favour of proceeding in this direction, in order to capitalise on the mobilisation of Poroshenko's electorate that took place during the presidential campaign. At the same time, it is not very likely that the current parliament would vote to pass the three laws proposed by Zelenskiy, which he will use as ammunition to further discredit his political opponents.