

Merry-go-round in the Ukrainian government

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On 4 November, the Ukrainian parliament nominated four new ministers: Yulia Svrydenko was appointed first deputy prime minister and minister of the economy, Oleksiy Reznikov became minister of defence, Iryna Vereshchuk deputy prime minister and minister for reintegration of the occupied territories, and Pavlo Riabikin became deputy prime minister and minister for strategic industries. The position of the minister of ecology and natural resources remains vacant. All the candidacies were voted through with clear majorities, proving President Volodymyr Zelensky's continued control of the parliament. With the exception of the defence ministry, the changes will not have much impact on government policy, which is in fact completely subordinate to the President's Office.

Commentary

- The manner in which the ministerial reshuffle was carried out is another example of the chaotic personnel policy of President Zelensky's team. Rumours that some ministers might resign have been swirling around Kyiv since August, and were expected to affect even more ministries. Since Denys Shmyhal's government was appointed in March 2020, only seven out of 21 ministers are still in their posts, with the heads of some ministries having been replaced several times (for example, Svrydenko will be the third economy minister in succession). Apart from the defence minister, it is difficult to find clear reasons for the resignations of the others. Svrydenko's predecessor, Oleksiy Lubchenko, was appointed in May, and there had not been any signs of dissatisfaction from the President's Office with his work. It appears that these frequent and unpredictable reshuffles are aimed at building Zelensky's image as a strong leader who disciplines his officials, in order to ensure that he maintains his public support. However, the effectiveness of such a policy is limited, as the overwhelming majority of the ministers removed were largely unknown to the general public, which makes it difficult to blame them for the government's mistakes – especially that it is commonly known that they are not independent actors, but merely carry out the instructions of the President's Office.
- The most important change is the selection of Oleksiy Reznikov as defence minister. His appointment gives a chance to improve the work of the ministry, which during his predecessor Andriy Taran's term of office failed to implement any serious reforms to the defence industry or the procedures for army procurement. His reluctance to cede powers from the ministry to the Ukroboronprom holding, together with his conflict with the Ukrainian army command (which was dissatisfied with the way in which defence orders were carried out), delayed the process of modernising the army. The departure of Taran, a former professional soldier, and his replacement by a civilian with no previous links

with the military (Reznikov was the minister of reintegration from March 2020), is also intended to confirm that the Ukrainian defence ministry is under civilian management, in accordance with NATO's recommendation. According to Reznikov's initial statements, he will initiate an audit of the ministry in the near future, and will strive to reduce the bureaucracy which negatives affecting the modernisation and management of the armed forces. He sees his main task as bringing about a synergy of activities between the Ministry of Defence, the General Staff and the parliamentary defence committee, particularly with regard to purchasing arms.