Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 6.09.2024 www.osw.waw.pl

Ukraine: a major government reshuffle

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On 5 September, Ukraine's parliament (Verkhovna Rada, VR) appointed 10 new ministers, including two deputy prime ministers (see Appendix 1). The previous day, six ministers and the head of the State Property Fund (SPF) had tendered their resignations, with one ministry being dissolved. Additionally, five other ministerial posts remained vacant for several months.

A major government reshuffle had been anticipated since March. However, contrary to widespread speculation, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal remained in office. According to President Volodymyr Zelensky, the cabinet reshuffle was intended to bring "new energy" to the government ahead of what is expected to be a challenging autumn. In reality, however, the changes amounted to a series of personnel shifts. The primary aim seems to be to create the impression of a fresh start at a time when the organisation of parliamentary and presidential elections is not feasible (see '*President until the end of the war. Volodymyr Zelensky's term of office is extended*').

Commentary

- **The personnel reshuffle increases the government's reliance on the Office of the President of Ukraine (OPU)**, whose highly influential head Andriy Yermak, continues to consolidate power (see '*Zelensky, Yermak and Ukraine's wartime governance*'). The newly-appointed ministers – Andriy Sybiha as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oleksiy Kuleba as Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure (and Deputy Prime Minister), and Mykola Tochytskyi as Minister of Culture and Information Policy – previously served as Yermak's deputies prior to their ministerial appointment (see Appendix 2). The dismissal of Dmytro Kuleba and the appointment of Sybiha is expected to strengthen the OPU's control over Ukraine's foreign policy.The outgoing Minister of Foreign Affairs had been in conflict with Yermak, while also maintaining strong personal relationships with Western partners and enjoying popularity among the Ukrainian public.
- **No significant changes in the government's activities are anticipated, including in the realm of foreign policy. The reshuffle is unlikely to inject "new energy" into the cabinet, as** the changes largely represent a rotation – essentially a transfer of individuals between ministries or from the OPU to the government. **Furthermore**, this indicates that the cadres available to the presidential camp are limited.
- **The presidential centre of power is increasingly struggling to maintain control of the parliament and of the Servant of the People (SP) parliamentary group.** This is **evidenced** by the **disarray surrounding** the VR's initial rejection of the resignations submitted by

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, Iryna Vereshchuk, and the head of the SPF, Vitaliy Koval. Their resignations were eventually accepted the following day, after a second vote. The appointment of each new minister required the support of opposition MPs, **primarily from** the Platform for Life and Peace parliamentary group, which stems from the delegalised pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life. Following his dismissal from his **previous role**, Koval was expected to be appointed as Minister of Agriculture. However, a **faction** within the SP parliamentary group was reluctant to approve his candidacy. Vereshchuk, on the other hand, **opposed** her dismissal as Deputy Prime Minister and received backing from some MPs regarding this matter. To resolve the impasse, a meeting was organised between the president and this parliamentary group to convince the **Rada** to accept the resignations of these two officials and to appoint new ministers the following day.

- **Contrary to speculation, Deputy Prime Minister and Economy Minister Yulia Svyrydenko did not replace Denys Shmyhal as Ukraine's Prime Minister**. This may be attributed to an insufficient number of votes required to change the Prime Minister. Svyrydenko, who is closely associated with Andriy Yermak, could have further diminished the government's remaining autonomy, a move opposed by some MPs within the Servants of the People party.
- In defence of Shmyhal, a legally questionable argument was raised, suggesting that the Martial Law Act prohibits the dismissal of the government in its entirety, which would occur if the Prime Minister were replaced. This is because the legal provision in question only prohibits curbing the competence of some bodies (such as the government), rather than making personnel reshuffles in these institutions.
- **Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko has retained his position, despite accusations of incompetence in managing the sector** during a significant electricity shortage. He has also been implicated in several corruption scandals, including the arrest of his deputy in August for accepting a $500,000 bribe. The decision not to dismiss him from this key ministry contradicts the presidential camp's declarations regarding the need to bring "new energy" to the government and perpetuates a lack of transparency in this strategic sector.
- Halushchenko has retained his position in spite of a scandal involving his successful lobbying for the removal of Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, a highly respected official, as chairman of the management board of the Ukrenerho grid operator. Kudrytskyi was dismissed on 2 September. Unlike Enerhoatom (the state-controlled operator of nuclear power stations), Ukrenerho, whose CEO is an aide to Halushchenko, has never been the subject of journalistic investigations into irregularities regarding public procurement initiatives and has been highly regarded by Western donors. Kudrytskyi's dismissal, which triggered the resignations of several Western experts from Ukrenerho's supervisory board, was likely motivated by an effort to gain control over the company's finances. In 2023, the company generated a profit of more than $1 bn, and since the onset of the full-scale war, it has received €1.5 bn in financial support from Western partners in the form of grants and low-interest loans.

Appendix 1. The recent government reshuffle

Position	New minister	Former minister
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Communities, Territories and Infrastructure Development	Oleksiy Kuleba	The position remained vacant
Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and Minister of Justice	Olha Stefanishyna	Former Minister of Justice Denys Maluska; Stefanishyna used to serve as Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Andriy Sybiha	Dmytro Kuleba
Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food	Vitaliy Koval	The position remained vacant
Minister of Culture and Information Policy	Mykola Tochytskyi	The position remained vacant
Minister for the Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories	The ministry was dissolved	Iryna Vereshchuk
Minister for Veterans Affairs	Nataliya Kalmykova	The position remained vacant
Minister for Strategic Industries	Herman Smetanin	Oleksandr Kamyshin
Minister of Youth and Sports	Matviy Bidny	The position remained vacant
Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources	Svitlana Hrynchuk	Ruslan Strilets

Appendix 2. Profiles of selected new ministers

Olha Stefanishyna – Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration and Minister of Justice

Born in 1985 in Odesa, she holds degrees in law and economics. At the end of 2007, she began her career in the Department for the Adaptation of Legislation at the Ministry of Justice. In 2015 she was appointed Director of the Department for International Law at the ministry. Since March 2017, she has served as Director at the Government Office for the Coordination of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration at the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers, and from December 2017 until September 2019, she was the office's Director General. In June 2020, she was appointed Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration in the Shmyhal government.

Oleksiy Kuleba – Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Communities, Territories and Infrastructure Development

Born in 1983 in Kyiv, he holds a degree in economics. From 2010 to 2015, he was a member of the Rzhyshchiv City Council (Kyiv Oblast). From 2019 to 2020, he worked as the head of a Kyiv City Council department. In 2021 and 2022, he served as a deputy mayor of Kyiv, and from 2022 until January 2023, he was the governor of Kyiv Oblast. In January 2023, he was appointed deputy head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, responsible for regional policy.

Vitaliy Koval – Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food

Born in 1981 in Berezne (Rivne Oblast), he holds a degree in economics. From 2012 to 2017, he was the CEO of Investtreidservis, a company involved in grain trade, and between 2014 and 2019, he was the CEO of the Sanako agricultural company. From 2019 to 2023, he served as the governor of Rivne Oblast, and from November 2023 until his appointment as minister, he worked as the head of the SPF. He states that he speaks Polish.

Andriy Sybiha – Minister of Foreign Affairs

Born in 1975 in Zboriv, he holds degrees in law and international relations. From 1998 to 2002, he worked as secretary at the Embassy of Ukraine in Poland, and between 2008 and 2012, he served as a minister-counsellor at the same embassy. Since 2002, he has held various positions, including roles in the Department of European integration and the Department of Treaties and Legal Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Between 2012

and 2016, he was the Director of the Consular Service Department at the ministry. From 2016 to 2021, he was Ukraine's ambassador to Turkey. Since May 2021, he has served as Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, responsible for international affairs and in April 2024, he was appointed First Deputy Foreign Minister. He speaks fluent English and Polish.