



On the eve of local elections, Ukraine is more than ever on the razor's edge

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Since the beginning of the crisis UE and western countries are involved in Ukraine. The country is still facing the annexation of Crimea by Russia and a still active conflict in its Eastern territories with the separatists of the self-proclaimed Popular Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. In the wake of the former President Yanukovich flight, when the provisional government of watchdogs took power, the EU gave its support, and some Foreign ministers of some EU state-members came to Kyiv to help the new government in its first decisions. But over time, both EU and Ukraine have felt a « fatigue » toward each other. The European « Ukrainian fatigue » came from the endless delays for the reforms, the unsuccessful implementation of peace in the Donbass and Kyiv's inability to fight corruption. As for the Ukrainians, they could only feel [disillusion](#) as they expected more from European support. The election of President Zelensky gave hope both to Ukrainian people and to Western countries, but again the disillusion quickly came with the removal of the Ukrainian ministers perceived as reformers and the [resignation](#) of Smolii (the governor of the central bank who explained his decision was due to the political pressures avoiding him to properly doing his job).

It is in that context that the Covid crisis appears, leading to disastrous effects on the country's already fragile economy. In these conditions, the local elections of this autumn are particularly important. First, they arrived after the decentralization reforms launched in April 2014, in order to fulfil the European standards, and to make of this country a true representative democracy. Secondly, it will be a trial by fire for the president Zelensky who have been elected on his name and popularity as an actor but without any structured political party. Moreover, his majority at the RADA (Ukrainian parliament) has become difficult to maintain: he has now to deal with other parties in order to assure à majority vote as his party, « Servant of the People », is deeply divided, making it difficult to obtain the 226 votes needed for a parliamentary majority even with their 248 MPs.

The President's difficulties in the RADA have been pretty clear with the land law and banking law. If they passed at the first reading, it was only with 206 votes, obtained thanks to two pro-European parties: "European Solidarity", a group associated to Poroshenko, and "Voice", the rock star Svyatoslav Vakarchuk's new party. As for Mikheil Saakashvili's appointment as deputy prime minister, the majority was not obtained, despite Zelensky's best efforts. This situation makes the coming elections particularly important for the Ukrainian President.



Another risk hanging over these elections is the return of pro-Russian dialectics and activists, as well as of some oligarchs. For example Ihor [Kolomosky](#), the former owner of private bank at the origin of the banking law also called « [anti-Kolomoysk bill](#) », and owner of 1+1 TV channel where « [servant of the people](#) », the TV series which made Volodymyr Zelensky famous, was broadcasted. Ihor Kolomosky is also an opponent to the former president Poroshenko, and he was supposed to support Volodymyr Zelensky's candidacy as it helps weakening Poroshenko.

But, it appears that the relationship between the oligarch and the current president has worsened. If this degradation is not enough for people suspecting links between presidency and oligarchs it may be enough to make Kolomosky increase voters' divisions by sustaining some candidates or parties different from the president's one. Indeed, Ihor Kolomosky is powerful enough to create political parties, to use his media empire to sustain a candidate or to finance an individual's campaign.

This may be very important especially as the forecast on voting rate in favour of the president is very pessimistic, giving him an estimated support of [31.8%](#). Moreover, the abstention may be a big actor of this election, a low voter turnout will be a bad sign for the president and his party.

Another aspect of these elections is that the president's party seem to be no more able to rally a large part of the population mean the emergence of people elected because of their own personality and popularity. In this configuration, we will witness the increase of individual power which can be destabilizing for a weak central government who can be quite stressed by this eventuality.

Here, for Kyiv, the danger is to lose legitimacy and influence to the benefit of local powerful individuals of pro-Russian forces. In any case, the danger of this loss seems to be more stimulating than integrating Euro-Atlantic structures, maybe because it is more tangible than the possibility of not integrating a structure inspiring a « fatigue ». One thing is for sure: the next election will express a new political reality in Ukraine, and according to the divisions and diversities of the agendas of the actors, the reforms are clearly at risk. They might also mean less influence for the pro-UE forces in Ukraine. Something that should worry European officials a little more...