

Media Parties in Ukraine: a Phenomenon or an Isolated Incident

Peculiarities of origin and evolution of parties “Samopomich Union” and “Civic Movement “Narodnyi Kontrol” have been analyzed. Place and functional significance of public organizations and mass media in their activity have been determined. Place of political mimicry in practical political activity has been outlined. Correspondence of both structures to classical party indicators and an “overall/electoral” party model has been proved. The author focuses on the causes of active appealing to populism by these parties.

Keywords: political party, civic organization, mass media, overall/electoral party, political mimicry, populism.

Медіа партії в Україні: феномен чи окремий випадок

Розглянуто особливості утворення та розвитку партії «Об'єднання «Самопоміч» та «Громадський рух «Народний контроль». Визначено місце та функціональне значення у їх діяльності громадських організацій та ЗМІ. Окреслено місце політичної мімікрії в практичній політичній діяльності. Доведено відповідність обох структур класичним партійним індикаторам та моделі «всеохопної/виборчої» партії. Звернено увагу на причини активного залучення цими партіями популізму.

Ключові слова: політична партія, громадська організація, ЗМІ, всеохопна/виборча партія, політична мімікрія, популізм.

Traditionally, in their activity political parties actively use various means of mass media. Mass media efficiency in the course of elections and everyday political life presupposes the necessity for political parties to accumulate significant financial resources to pay for their services and considerably influences the technology of spreading political messages/positions; decision making processes and preparation and conduction of elections. This designated tendency is inherent to all democratic countries of the world and, consequently, found its way into national legislations of many countries, aimed at regulation of political parties' financial activities, especially during the election period. Ukrainian political parties

in their practice pay great attention to cooperation with mass media as well, and the majority of leading parties have their own print media, which are not always regularly issued (frequency of issuing and circulation of these periodicals considerably grows just before elections) and mainly they are spread for free or are sold at a low price. However, the analysis of the party systems and the course of the last political rally in 2014-2015 let us single out two political parties, which should be viewed as an isolated incident in comparison with other political parties of Ukraine. These parties regard their media component not only as an influential instrument in their political activity, but in fact as the organizational element of the political party itself. We are talking about such parties as “Samopomich Union” and “Civic Movement “Narodnyi Kontrol”.

While characterizing any political party the history of its origin and formation is of great importance. In his time M. Duverger singled out two main types of party origin: electoral-parliamentary and external¹. In the former case the algorithm presupposes formation of a parliamentary union, and then electoral committees, intended to elect again/reelect parliamentarians, and eventually creation of a single entity on the basis of these two units. In the latter case, parties originate on the basis of trade unions’ and various associations’ (religious, intellectual, professional and so on) activities. Therefore, the abovementioned structures and others are transforming into political parties while trying to bring their representatives into the parliament in the course of elections. M. Duverger also states that if political parties already exist in the country, then new ones can appear only externally. Both parties we are referring to in the paper must be assigned to the second model of origin and evolution. At the same time, their peculiarity lies in the fact that “Samopomich” originated from the civic organization, actively involved in various media projects, while “Narodnyi Kontrol” was a TV program and in the meantime a civic structure closely connected with the program.

The civic organization “Samopomich” started its activity in October 2004. Its main objectives were the following: promotion of people’s judicial competence; creation of self-organization centers; popularization of healthy living and organization of volunteer services. In practice “Samopomich” has chosen a “grateful” niche – articulation of Lviv inhabitants’ current problems and on this basis started putting public pressure upon authorities (such problems as water runs in the street, when light is on during the daytime, where holes on the roads are and so on). The proposed algorithm of criticism of authority as to specific/addressed issues was a safe bet. If the problem was solved – it was the organization’s or leader’s achievement, and if not – the organization “tried to solve”, “raised” an issue important for average people, but the authority was not ready to consider requests. At the beginning, the organization consisted of 2 lawyers, 1 journalist and 1 telephone operator. In spring 2005 the staff was composed of 4 lawyers, 3 journalists, 2 telephone operators, 2 experts in various spheres of city life, 1 psychologist

¹ M. Duverger *Political Parties*. – M.: Akademicheskii Proekt; Korolev, Paradigma. – 2005. – Pp. 22-29.

and 4 volunteers². The inhabitants' complaints and journalists' materials were efficiently represented in the newspaper "Post-Postup" and since September 2005 in the columns of a separate newspaper "Samopomich – Puls Mista", at Liuks-FM (radio station) and TV program "Samopomich – Puls Mista" at the Television and Radio Broadcasting Company "Liuks" (in 2005 media holding Television and Radio Broadcasting Company "Liuks" was formed). The civic organization was established upon the initiative of A. Sadovyi, who also possessed the essential shares of the media holding (after being elected the mayor of Lviv, A. Sadovyi signed his shares over to his wife K. Sadova). Immediately, many experts started discussing an instrumental character of "Samopomich" in struggle for mayoral tenure at the 2006 elections. Also, experts pointed out functional similarity of the organization with Andrzej Lepper's Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej).

After A. Sadovyi's victory at the mayoral election in Lviv in March 2006, the civic organization continued its work, which was actively covered by the media holding Television and Radio Broadcasting Company "Liuks". Just the content of materials changed. They did not oppose current city authority, but focused on separate/partial drawbacks of some officials/official structures. That is, in public/media sphere they remained oppositional towards particular civil servants and officials, excluding Lviv mayor and his inner circle. This is an interesting paradox or phenomenon, when the head of city executive authority at the same time positions himself both as an opposition to the central city institutions, regional authority and particular local level officials. Problems, solved by the city mayor with the help of "Samopomich" were also the assets of the civic organization and the mayor. At the same time, the message was formed, that the mayor together with the society fought against inactive/corrupted officials and deputies. Another peculiar activity of A. Sadovyi as mayor of Lviv was his systematic, active work with mass media, especially with those, which belonged to his own media holding. Regular speeches in a given format let him spread a profitable point of view/evaluation of social problems, form the image of an extremely open mayor, ready to communicate with mass media/civil society and all this was characterized by a complete absence of press-conferences, where he could have been asked unscheduled questions, evaluations etc. Critical publications were classified as biased articles, intrigues and immoral race for power.

In December 2012 the political party "Samopomich Union" was registered. After registration of the party, the civic organization, newspaper and hotline were still acting in the public space. Only due to the very name "Samopomich", which was actively/constantly on everyone's lips in the information sphere, they achieved synergetic effect, when the outcomes of civic structures and initiatives are transferred to the party organization. It also benefited from the word order in the official name of the party, where the main emphasis was put not on the term "party", but on the word "Union", what took into account a protracted tendency of the public

² Civic organization "Samopomich" [Electronic Resource] – Access mode: <http://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%93%D1%80%BF%D0%BC%D1%87%C2%BB>

opinion, when the level of credibility to the civic structures was high, while trust level to the party institution was rather low.

On the official party site there is a “Party Manifesto” and no statute of the party. However, the party in the ideological perspective represents itself as an adherent of Christian-Conservative values, the subdivision “Ideology” in the party Manifesto refers us to the following words: “...Be yourself. Cooperate with others. Help those in need. In unity there is strength!”³. So, behind all these statements it is hard to find classical markers of affiliation to a specific ideology. More formalized were electoral programs of Lviv mayor candidate A. Sadovyi and his party “Samopomich”. In particular, in 2014 at the early parliamentary elections the political party “Samopomich Union” represented its electoral program.⁴ It interpreted/put flesh to the abovementioned statements from the Manifesto. Despite specific statements-interpretations of the designated slogans, they, in most cases, were of universal character and could be easily interpreted in different ways. At the 2015 regular local elections a new program “Lviv 2020. A. Sadovyi and “Samopomich Union’s” Report and Priorities”⁵ was presented, and it was composed of thematic sections, concerning all main spheres of the city life. On the one hand, it included specific objectives, and on the other hand, it could be interpreted as an attempt to cover all city problems at once, without any connection to financial and logistics possibilities to solve them.

The 2014 early parliamentary elections became success for “Samopomich”, it gained 10.97% of votes and formed its faction in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. At the 2015 local elections the party brought its representatives into a large number of regional and city/town councils across Ukraine. The necessity of an institutional participation of party deputies in councils’ work at different levels determined strengthening of an organizational component, i.e. formation of regional, city and district councils. As at June 2016 its centers functioned in 13 regions, and in other regional centers worked city organizations. It should be mentioned, that the party’s leaders cautiously established new party structures and enlargement of membership. To some extent, it can be explained by the complexity of control over the regional centers from the top, and therefore, potentially unexpected losses/problems from party’s members’ actions/activity, especially within the representative institutions. There is an example of exclusion of 5 deputies from the faction “Samopomich” in August 2015 for their voting, which differed from the faction’s voting on the draft changes to the Constitution (on questions of decentralization) and subsequent consolidated voting on controversial issues speaks for strengthening of centralization processes within the faction and party.

Currently, civic organizations are still functioning alongside with various regional party organizations. Formally, they are considered as platforms for determining skillful activists, who in future would become new party members and candidates for elections at different levels. At

³ Party Manifesto “Samopomich Union” [Electronic Resource] – Access mode: <http://samopomich.ua/documents/manifest>

⁴ Electoral program of the political party “Samopomich Union” [Electronic Resource] – Access mode: <http://rada.election.com.ua/ppr-samopomich>

⁵ Lviv 2020. A. Sadovyi and “Samopomich Union’s” Report and Priorities” [Electronic Resource] – Access mode: <http://lviv2020.com>

the same time, preliminary participation in the civic organizations' work is quite a sensible filter as to the rapid increase in party membership. Close connection between the party and the civic organization under the common title in fact contributes to significant enlargement of the party functions by means of social components. Overall and systematic coverage of civic activity by mass media creates among voters a picture of party's affiliation to social work and assistance (it is difficult for ordinary people to distinguish between the parties' and civic organizations' activity), what is in high contrast with perception of other parties, which do not do that. Besides, integrated media resources significantly raise mobilization potential of the party. In this context, one should mention that any civic organization conducts work in various directions. In particular, there are such departments of organization as: working with inhabitants, working with senior citizens, social programs, promotion of healthy living, information and promotion, legal services etc.⁶. The organization publishes free weekly social periodical "Samopomich", there is a TV program "Samopomich: Puls Mista" and other types of media products. However, financing of the projects is not carried out at the party's cost⁷.

Algorithm of "Samopomich" origin and evolution was used and artistically elaborated in the course of formation of the party "Narodnyi Kontrol". The initial point, which eventually led to the party origin and development, was the figure of the journalist D. Dobrodomov. In 2010 he was the author and presenter of the journalistic investigation program "Who lives here?" on ZIK channel⁸. The program disclosed luxury life of officials, politicians and famous people in the region and district. Rather soon it became top-rated, and the figure of the presenter became well recognizable. And before the scheduled elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in 2012 it was motivated to change the format and release a new program "Narodnyi Kontrol. Hotline", which focused on particular issues raised by common people. Participation of D. Dobrodomov in the elections to the Verkhovna Rada in 2012 in the 115th electoral district in Lviv was not successful from the point of view of getting the deputy's seat, however it recorded his high rankings (the elections were won by M. Khmil, who gained 43.09%, while D. Dobrodomov got the second place with 31.13% of votes). It is quite interesting, that during the election campaign the city was full of "Narodnyi Kontrol" program advertising, signed by "the presenter" and with D. Dobrodomov's photo. In the course of the campaign he appeared on the TV only as a "journalist", but not the candidate for deputy. Alongside the TV program the civic organization was founded. In July 2015, there was a foundation meeting of the political party "Civic Movement "Narodnyi Kontrol". We may suppose that in this case the emphasis was consciously put on the words "civic movement", but not "party". Moreover, such ambiguity

⁶ Civic organization "Samopomich" [Electronic Resource] – Access mode: <http://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%DO%93%D1%80%BF%DO%BC%D1%87%C2%BB>

⁷ 2014 Financial report of the political party "Samopomich Union" [Electronic Resource] – Access mode: <http://samopomich.ua/uk-finansovyj-zvit-politychnoji-partiji-objednanya-samopomich-za-2014-rik>

⁸ In September 2012 D. Dobrodomov became a general producer of "ZIK" channel, and over a period of 2012 – 2014 – a general director of the media holding "ZIK". At the 2014 early parliamentary elections D. Dobrodomov was elected people's deputy in the 115th majority electoral district.

was registered in the Party's Statute. Thus, in paragraph 1.8 it is stated that "the full name of the Party in the Ukrainian language is: the Political Party "Civic Movement "Narodnyi Kontrol", and in paragraph 1.9 it goes, that a short name of the Party is "Civic Movement "Narodnyi Kontrol". On the official party site in the document "Conception" the stress is put on the civic component and not on the political one: "Just the very civil society becomes the main initiator of positive pressure on authoritative, political and business institutions in Ukraine. And this pressure of the community will lead to renovation of our society in favor of all citizens of the country. The main platform of our civic movement is values, established by the greatest representative shift of the Ukrainian nation in the newest history – the Revolution of Dignity". The final note of the "Conception" is the statement, that "active participants of the Revolution of Dignity, civil leaders, volunteers and journalists united their efforts in the Civic movement "Narodnyi Kontrol"⁹. Thus, from a formal point of view, the status of the political party is registered and it can always be referred to, and at the same time in an everyday, active use it is considered to be the civic movement.

Distinctive basis of the party program consisted of the following blocks: to clear authority and resist corruption for preserving sovereignty; to implement Euro-integration processes; to conduct civil control over the state government bodies' functioning; to provide justice; to strengthen community's power, to provide qualitative public services; to create new jobs by means of business deregulation, liquidate monopolies; to guarantee effectiveness of plans and actions. On the official site, in the column "About us", in the sub-column "Documents" we may find the Program "Vectors of Operation" of the political party "Civic Movement "Narodnyi Kontrol". This sub-section covers only such priorities as: 1) to resist corruption for successful implementation of reforms and assertion citizens' rights and freedoms, retention of Ukrainian sovereignty; 2) to strengthen role of civic communities and citizens' associations: NGOs, condominiums, bodies of people's self-organization and other institutions of civic society; 3) to provide new jobs by means of simplification of "doing business", reduce influence of monopolies, provide legal assistance of private ownership; 4) to provide qualitative public services by means of capable communities¹⁰.

In both documents dominate not ideological, but selective markers, which are simultaneously based on current and positive issues in the eyes of voters. The key message of the documents is fighting against corruption. This problem is also revealed in the anti-corruption plan, which occupies the central position on the official party site¹¹. Of course, fighting against corruption is quite urgent and important for Ukraine, but the proposed variant does not have any national significance, and is focused on the city format, as it was elaborated as D. Dobrodomov's program of the candidate for mayoral position in Lviv. At the same time, being a city

⁹ "Narodnyi Kontrol". Conception [Electronic Resource] – Access mode: <http://nkontrol.org.ua/pro-nas/koncepciya>

¹⁰ The Program "Vectors of Operation" of the political party "Civic Movement "Narodnyi Kontrol" [Electronic Resource] – Access mode: http://nkontrol.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/programa_1.jpg

¹¹ Anti-corruption Plan [Electronic Resource] – Access mode: <http://nkontrol.org.ua/antikorupcijnijj-plan>

program it concentrates on the issue urgent for most citizens, but does not give any idea of the conceptual vision of ways of solution to a wide range of problems in a big city, never mind the whole country. It is rather an attractive and a fine-featured image of a consecutive fighter against corruption made up for mass media.

The most in-depth party document is the “Statute”, which in fact is clearly positioned in the format of a political party and adheres to the classical composition of a party. However, the Statute does not include any information on the “Narodnyi Kontrol – TV” and “Hotline” programs’ position and functional load within the party, which, on the contrary to the statute of the party which is hidden in the column “About us” and then in the sub-column “Documents”, is on the first page of the official party site. The hotline phone number is the same for all Ukrainian citizens and every person can address them with their own problem. When a problem is recorded, it is forwarded to the region, where the complaint has been made. But the question is addressed to the program “Narodnyi Kontrol – TV”, which is broadcast on the regional television. There is a regularity, when regional party centers are strictly synchronized with broadcasting of the program “Narodnyi Kontrol – TV” on any regional channel. This means, that in none region of Ukraine the party center was not established alongside with or before the TV program creation (as to June 2016 there are 14 regional centers). The additional factor is that all TV pieces prepared at the local level must receive centralized authorization. As a result of this, the abovementioned TV program with its corresponding infrastructure is a kind of axis for a political party. It should be mentioned as well, that program monitoring proves that besides critical materials all programs are characterized by some positive features, like actions of “Narodnyi Kontrol” representatives as to the problem definition or problem settlement (in those regions, where party’s representatives entered city councils). But the main message is that “Narodnyi Kontrol” as an institutionalized community, which systematically and on regular basis fights against corruption, and thus is an active opposition towards current authorities.

As a result of the 2015 local elections the party is represented by 384 deputies. In Lviv, Ternopil and Chernivtsi regional councils were formed party centers. The results of the elections to the local authorities, in the context of coordinating deputies’ actions and control over their public position and the possibility of new elections, when in accordance with the previous law significant functional load was put on local party centers, determined party leaders’ attention to organizational elaboration. The party must create local party organizations, first of all in the regions, where there are regional party centers. However, in the sphere of public policy its main agent remains the same – the leader of the party D. Dobrodomov, who constantly appears on a screen, representing various anti-corruption messages and the TV program.

The aforementioned characteristics require conscious or subconscious confusion with the notions “party” and “union” or “civic movement” in the very titles, therewith raising the question of their correspondence with the format of a political party. For verification, we will apply indicators, proposed by J. La Palombara. He stated, that every party: first of all, is a carrier

of ideology or at least represents specific orientation, world and person perspectives. Secondly, every party is an organization, i.e. a union of people, institution quite prolonged in time. Thirdly, the aim of the party is to conquer power and pursue its own policy. Fourthly, every party tries to ensure itself people's support – up to membership or active participation in its activity¹². Both formations are organizations of some groups of people extensive in time. Despite, social orientation of the affiliated structures' activity, they are utterly aimed at power, regardless of its level. For entering representative institutions they worked out peculiar techniques for people support. Thus, civic activity and media instruments are not the end in themselves, but the means for mobilization support of potential voters. Some doubts arise as to the social indicator. It is quite clear, that according to the classical Marxist format, both structures cannot be characterized as ideological ones. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that the phenomenon of ideology is constantly transforming and in comparison with the first half of the 20th century it has undergone significant changes. We proceed from M. Freedon's approach, according to which ideology is an open construction, closely connected with political activity and mobilization, as one of its main tasks is "building bridges between political thoughts and political actions"¹³. In our case, program documents of both structures represent "specific orientation, world and person perspectives". That is why despite of various word combinations in the names of both structures, we may suppose that they correspond to classical characteristics of political parties. In the meanwhile we deal with political organizations, which consciously use a kind of mimicry of civic organizations or movements to increase the level of their support or to decrease losses, appearing as a result of mainly negative attitude towards political parties, which predominates in the Ukrainian society.

In political science there are a number of classical typologies of political parties. We suppose that in the case under the investigation, it is necessary to refer to the notion of the "overall party" / "elective party", elaborated by a German researcher O. Kirchheimer. This type of parties appeared to replace classical models of cadre and mass party, worked out by M. Duverger and combined in itself five elements: 1) party's ideological flexibility; 2) party leaders must contribute to the efficiency of the entire social system rather than identify themselves with the goals of their particular organization; 3) downgrading of the role of the individual party member; 4) deemphasizing of the class or religion party basis on the voters in general; 5) securing access to a variety of interest groups for financial and electoral reasons¹⁴.

In both cases political parties "Samopomich" Union" and "Civic Movement "Narodnyi Kontrol" are focused not on representation of group interests, but on electoral success and due to this aim they do not have any connection with certain social groups or several groups, they

¹² La Palombara J. The Origin and Development of Parties. – In: Political Parties and Political Development / Ed. by J.La Palombara, M.Weiner. – Princeton, 1966 – Pp. 424-428.

¹³ Freedon M. Ideologies and Political Theory: a Conceptual Approach/ M. Freedon. – Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. – P.76.

¹⁴ Holosov H. "Overall" parties: an old-fashioned term and modern realia [Electronic Resource] / H. Holosov. – Access mode: <http://russ.ru/Mirovaya-povestka/Vscolvatnye-partii-ustarevshij-termin-i-sovremennye-realii>

are simultaneously oriented on all population strata and tend to maximize own result/support. When referring to Ukraine it is difficult to speak about any stable social-group stratification. Old/previous social-group affiliation was formed long ago in Soviet days and for a great mass of people was characterized by inertness of identification. Transformation from the planned economy to the market variant, degradation of many spheres of traditional economy, slow development of small entrepreneurship did not contribute to formation of clear social-group affiliation, which in this case can be described as a blurred one. In this context, it is difficult to require from parties strict orientation on specific social groups.

Transition of European countries in the 60s-70s of the previous century to the model of electoral party with subsequent weakening of ideology, orientation on sectoral/specific group interests, and modification of the role and significance of party's organizational structure was to a great extent connected with rapid development/increase of the middle class in European countries. Every electorate-party had to focus not on a certain group of electorate, but on a predominant group of middle class representatives. When referring to Ukraine, the majority of modern scientists agrees that the dominating model as to other parties is also an electorate-party, which in the same way focuses on all voters. However, Ukrainian variant has one significant peculiarity. In the case when upper and middle classes, according to sociologists' evaluations, constitute an extremely small part of the society, the predominant component is represented by poor people. It has inner differences as to educational and professional characteristics and according to a number of other features (ethnic and lingual identity, confession, and place of residence, region and so on) all of them are united by a low level of income and financial welfare. In fact, this group constitutes a target audience of voters for Ukrainian political parties. Under these conditions, appealing to populism is a logical and quite expected step.

In this perspective, it is necessary to refer to another factor, namely weaknesses of intra-party democracy/crisis of party democracy, which to P. Mair's point of view contributes to populism¹⁵. He believes that crisis of party democracy is connected with a gradual loss among political parties one of their main functions – representative. Its transformation occurred as a result of: first of all, gradual reduction of ideological differences between parties, thus between their programs. Apposition of program ideas leads, on the one hand, to similarity, and on the other hand, stimulates party's orientation not on the interests of sectoral social groups, but on the entire electorate. Consequently, it causes disappearance of interrelation between specific social groups and political parties. The main difference is revealed not in their ideology and programs, but in accents, rhetoric of competitive political actors, party symbols. Secondly, organizational differences of various types of parties, which was mentioned by M. Duverger, gradually became a thing of the past. Professionalization of electoral campaigns and intensive development of political marketing lead to a kind of unification, standardization of political

¹⁵ Mair P. *Demokracja populistyczna a demokracja partyjna //Demokracja w obliczu populizmu.*/ Red. Y.Meni, Y.Sorel. – Warszawa: OFICYNA NAUKOWA, 2007. – S. 137.

parties' organizational structures, strategies and tactics of their activity. Traditional dichotomy of party construction, represented by its leaders and members, now has added another powerful third element – experts, counselors/political consultants. As a result of this, intraparty democracy acquires symbolic and ritual character, as a large number of decisions are made by top-leaders alone, on the basis of political consultants' advice/recommendations. In general, we can state that evolution of party development gradually leads to growth of professionalism of party's activity. And in this context, we trace peculiarities in the names of both parties. Professionalization concerns engaging into party's activity not only professionals in the sphere of launching election campaigns and imageology in the course of elections, what is peculiar of almost all party structures, but also active participation in the inter-election period. In fact, within this context political parties "Samopomich" Union" and "Civic Movement "Narodnyi Kontrol" pay great attention to their work with specialized civil organizations, aimed at solving social problems and rely upon mass media. Engagement of marketing professionals and cooperation with civic society put a powerful imprint on the very party structures. As a result of this, despite the "overall/electoral" format these parties must be referred to as an isolated or individual case. In the context of subsequent favorable electoral successes one can assume that the abovementioned models will be adopted by other players at the political scene.