

Political parties in Ukraine: “electoral parties” or “voting machines”?

analysis of the essence and main principles of the political parties in Ukraine in the context of classical and modern types of political parties is presented in this article. On the example of Ukraine, the methodology of political parties of the transiting countries is being considered. Attention is concentrated on the characteristics of electoral functioning of the political parties.

Keywords: electoral parties, party of success, perceptive (voting) party system, cartel parties, virtual parties, voting machines.

Partie polityczne Ukrainy: „partie wyborcze” czy „maszyny do głosowania”?

W artykule przeanalizowana została istota i podstawowe zasady partii politycznych na Ukrainie w kontekście klasycznego i współczesnego typu partii politycznych. Na przykładzie Ukrainy rozpatrzona została metodologia analizy partii politycznych w państwach przechodzących transformację. Główna uwaga skoncentrowana jest na cechach funkcjonowania wyborczego partii politycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: partie wyborcze, partie sukcesu, percepcyjny (votingowy) system partyjny, partie wirtualne, maszyny do głosowania.

Політичні партії України: “електоральні партії” чи “машини для голосування”?

У статті аналізується суть та головні принципи політичних партій в Україні в контексті класичного та сучасного типів політичних партій. На прикладі України, розглядається методологія аналізу політичних партій перехідних держав. Головна увага концентрується на характеристиках електорального функціонування політичних партій.

Ключові слова: електоральні партії, партії успіху, перцептивна (воутингова) партійна система, віртуальні партії, машини для голосування.

Political pluralism and real multiparty system in classical political theory are considered as the essential features of a democratic political system. For twenty years of existence Ukraine has transformed from a totalitarian one-party country into a multiparty system country. Currently, over 200 political parties are registered in Ukraine representing different ideological positions – practically all shades of political spectrum. Having gone all the way from being ‘a poor relation’ of power, political parties of Ukraine have transformed into the main actors on the political arena. However, Is it suffice to say that party democracy as the basis of democratic political regime exists in Ukraine? Can we talk about Ukrainian political parties as the fully-fledged political institutes or modern electoral parties or are they just the machines of voting? Ukrainian researchers of political parties are trying to answer these seemingly simple questions.

Methodological Framework

It is ironical, but for 20 years of Ukraine’s political science and despite the fact that dozens of scientific articles and monographs have been written and published, a lot of dissertations have been defended, we are still observing very little progress in the development of a coherent and adequate in relation to Ukrainian realities theory of political parties.

We are caught in a vicious circle and according to M. Duverger, the developer of the theory of political parties – general theory of political parties may be established only after a deep study of the past is made, but these studies cannot be really profound until a general theory of parties is formed.

It is absolutely clear that methodological basis of the modern Ukrainian theory of political parties cannot be marked as marxism-leninism and the use of classical Western theory of political parties developed to characterize political parties that operate in qualitatively different terms is not entirely justified either. Unconditional use of Western theory of political parties, unfortunately, does not give appropriate tools for an adequate analysis of Ukrainian political parties. It is primarily due to the object of the analysis that is significantly different.

Are the Ukrainian parties defined as the classical parties?

The debate taking place among scientists regarding the merits of Ukrainian political parties prompted us to examine compliance of the features of the Ukrainian parties with generally accepted ones that have been once formed by M. Weiner and J. La Palombara. The conclusion may be reached that almost none of the features of classical political parties

selected by the scholars are evident in the Ukrainian realities. Based on the classical definition, we may state that Ukrainian political parties are not really consistent with these criteria¹.

Just a few of numerous political parties of Ukraine have clear and understandable ideology, which determines their activity. So, out of existing parties only 30 have programs which include references to certain ideology serving the basis for their activities². Moreover, not infrequently contradictions can be found in the names, programs and activities of the Ukrainian political parties. Another frequent phenomenon of Ukrainian politics is politicians changing their views and, accordingly, their parties or parliamentary fractions.

This shows that ideological basis of the activity of Ukrainian political parties perform a rather instrumental than principal role. It is even strange to observe various party unions (coalitions) which often combine representatives of different parties (sometimes even ideologically polar political forces) – for example a party of large Ukrainian capital – the Party of Regions (PR) and the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU).

Political parties of Ukraine are mostly parties of leader's type. This means that sympathy or antipathy to leaders mostly form the attitude of average Ukrainians to the party. The belief in political leaders is caused by the dominating type of political culture of the population, when party ideologies, according to Mr. Duverger, acquire some of the features of religion bringing a significant irrational component into politics (i.e. belief).

In case of proportional election system with closed lists, people actually vote for political leaders and do not influence the list of candidates for deputies. Average members of many parties also have insignificant and only mediated influence on forming the lists. Eventually, this leads to the end of voters – their party connection. Therefore, the trust to both political parties and the bodies of power which include the elected representatives is lost.

If we analyze dynamics of the formation of political parties in Ukraine we may easily notice the tendency to rapid growth of their number right before parliamentary election. So, in 1997 (one year before election) 10 political parties appeared, in 2001 – 11 parties, in 2005 – 24 parties and 12 parties – in 2011. Now there are more than 242 political parties registered in the Ministry of Justice³.

It is of interest that after defeat in the election few of them live until the next election.

Among the existing political parties there are not more than 20 which, either independently or being the member of some block, have participated in at least three

¹ Шведа Ю. Чи не є "закон диспаритету" М. Дюверже "розетським каменем" української парталогії? // Політичний менеджмент.- 2012.- № 4-5, с. 57-65. (Shveda Y. Is M. Duverger's "disparity law" the rosetta stone of Ukrainian partyology? // *Political management*. - 2012.- № 4-5, p. 57-65).

² Політичні партії України. В 3 т. / Уклад.: Ю. Шайгородський. - К.: Український центр політичного менеджменту.- 2005.- Т. 1. (*Political parties of Ukraine. Volume 3. / Compiler: Y. Shajgorodsky. - K.: Ukrainian centre of political management. - 2005. - V. 1., p. 20.*)

³ Реєстр політичних партій в Україні. [Електронний ресурс].- Режим доступу: <http://www.drsvu.gov.ua/party> (*Register of political parties in Ukraine. - Electronic resource.*)

parliamentary elections⁴. The new edition to the Law of Ukraine «About election of people's deputies of Ukraine», which denies blocks of political parties and the right to participate in the election, is quite likely to decrease in number. Simultaneously, the previously existing practice when parties participated in the election as members of a block did not favor strengthening of organizational structures of political parties⁵.

Another widely accepted practice of the political parties' activity is the phenomenon of the so-called re-branding of parties. It consists in the re-forming of old parties rather than forming the new ones with the aim of participating in the election. The reformation may consist in changing the name or leadership (e.g. S. Tigipko's party «Strong Ukraine» or N. Korolevska's party «Ukraine – ahead! »). After parliamentary election is over, they do not spark any interest and stop existing or exist in the so-called «frozen» state.

The number of political parties in Ukraine and weakly structured organizations are not numerous. Sociological surveys were held by the Center during November 25th – December 5th 2001 and during June 19-25th 2008. They showed that only 4,9 % and 4,7 % of the participants positioned themselves as the members of political parties (which is 1-1,5 million people, i.e. only 4-5 % of adult population of the country)⁶.

According to census taking place on March 26th 2005, the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine registered 126 parties. 39 of them had registered centers in all regions of Ukraine (31 %), 63 (50 %) had registered centers in most regions of Ukraine, and only 6 parties (4,76 %) had registered regional centers in less than a half of regions of Ukraine and only 18 political parties (14,3 %) did not have any registered centers in any region of the country.

With the implementation of proportional election system in 2006, Ukrainian political parties have tried to register only regional organizations (as it is legally provided) and have not attended to develop their local networks. Even the most developed political parties have only been able to develop their organizational network to the level of districts.

Therefore, the system of party representation is useful for those parties and blocks, which do not have a developed organizational infrastructure (quality structuring on the local level), but have a good financial basis for holding a powerful advertising campaign or economic influence in separate regions (parliamentary elections demonstrated regional character of support of different parties and blocks).

⁴ Колодій А. Праві, ліві та центр у політичному спектрі України: ретроспектива років незалежності // Czechy, Polska, Ukraina. Partie i systemy partyjne. Stan i perspektywy / Pod. red. Krzysztofa Kowalczyka i Łukasza Tomczaka. - Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek. - 2007. - S. 68-100. (Kolodij A. Rights, lefts and centists in political spectrum of Ukraine: reproduction of years of Independence // Czech, Poland, Ukraine. Parties and party systems. Contest and perspectives / Ed. by K. Kowalczyk and L. Tomczak. - Torun: Adam Marszałek Issue. - 2007. - p. 83).

⁵ Офіційний сайт ЦВК. - [Електронний ресурс]. - Режим доступу: <http://www.cvk.gov.ua> (Official site of Central electoral commission of Ukraine - Electronic resource).

⁶ Якименко Ю. Громадська думка як фактор еволюції партійної системи України. - Центр Разумкова. - 2001. - [Електронний ресурс]. - Режим доступу: http://www.uceps.org/upload/yakymenko_parties_public_op.pdf (Yakymenko Y. Public opinion as a factor of evolution party system of Ukraine. - Razumkov's Center. - 2001. - Electronic resource).

Apart from that, a significant part of local centers of political parties are fictitious. So, a check of the Ministry of Justice showed that 46 political parties have violated legislation in some way; as a result the registration of 37 political parties was canceled. The most frequent violations included the absence of representation at the place of juridical address and the absence of local juridical organizations in most regions of Ukraine.

The Supreme Court of Ukraine annulled the registration of 28 political parties which could not provide the formation and registration of their local organizations in most regions during 6 months from the registration date. In 2008 the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine checked the activity of only 4 political parties, which led to their getting the warning; in 2009 the same warning was made to 20 political parties⁷. The level of awareness of the population about the activity of political parties speaks for itself.

So, according to the surveys held by Razumkov's Center in December 2009, only 42,1% of respondents were aware of something about the activities of local organizations of parties in their regions; other 50,6 % heard nothing about their activities⁸.

It is clear that such «electoral approach» to political parties does not favor their transformation into effective and authoritative institutes of political system. That is why, in December 2001, 74,9 % of respondents claimed that Ukrainian political parties did not fulfill their functions in the society, while in April 2003 this number constituted 77,5 %⁹.

According to the results of sociological survey held by Razumkov's centre, the percentage of respondents who completely distrust and rather distrust political parties fluctuated between 79.5 % and 64.8 % in the period 2001-2009, and the percentage of respondents who trust or rather trust political parties constituted from 12,4 % to 22,5 %¹⁰.

On condition of restricted membership basis and low level of support, the absence of state financing and considerable commercialization of politics (especially elections) political parties of Ukraine have actually remained devoid of serious resources. This objectively pushed them to 'co-operation' with large capital. Soon enough most of them found themselves dependent on certain financial-industrial groups.

Another proof of rising commercialization level is expenses for preparation and organization of elections. So, organization of parliamentary election in March 1998 cost 248 million UAH, in March 2002 – 172,2 million UAH, in March 2006 – 512 million UAH

⁷ Україна. Національний звіт щодо законодавства і регулювання діяльності політичних партій / Підготував Д. Ковриженко.- [Електронний ресурс].- Режим доступу: http://parlament.org.ua/upload/docs/Final%20Country%20Report%20Ukraine%20-%20ukrainian_.pdf (Ukraine. National report about the law and regulation of political parties activity / Reported by D. Kovryzhenko.- Electronic resource).

⁸ Політичні партії і партійна система України очима громадян // Національна безпека і оборона. – 2010. – № 5, с. 64. (Political parties and party system of Ukraine: observations of the citizens // National security and defence. – 2010.- № 5, p.64).

⁹ Громадяни України про внутрішньополітичні процеси // Національна безпека і оборона. – 2003. – № 3, с. 20. (Citizens of Ukraine about inner political processes // National security and defence. – 2003.- № 3, p.20).

¹⁰ Соціологічне опитування: Чи довіряєте Ви політичним партіям? (динаміка, 2001-2009). – Центр Разумкова. – [Електронний ресурс].- Режим доступу: http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=82 (Sociological investigation: Are you trust of political parties? (dynamics, 2001-2009).- Razumkov's Center.- Electronic resource).

and early elections in September 2007 – 347,3 million UAH¹¹. General sum of election funds of the parties (blocks) at the 2002 election constituted 32,4 million UAH, in 2006 – 553,6 million UAH, and in 2007 – 581,4 million UAH. It is important to remark that according to the data provided by public organization of the Committee of Voters of Ukraine, the expenses of the party's election fund constitute only 25-30 % of all money spent during the election campaign¹². According to the data provided by the project «Public monitoring of financing electoral campaign 2002», about 40 % of general expenses of political parties for electoral campaign were taken from the shadowy funds. Experts estimate that real expenses for electoral campaign in 2002 constituted 52,9 million UAH, in 2006 – 10 billion USD, in 2007 – 1-1,5 billion USD¹³.

According to the magazine “Kommersant-Ukraine”, throughout the election campaign in 2012 in the multi-mandatory county more than 600 million of UAH have been officially spent (officially declared costs of the campaign). The lion's share of them was spent by five parties that overcame the electoral threshold (218 million – by the Party of Regions, 107 million – by the union “Batkivshchyna”, 72 million – by the CPU, 33,7 million – by the Party “UDAR” and 23,2 million – by the union “Svoboda”)¹⁴.

This indicates that the greatest opportunity to gather funds necessary for the conduct of elections and, thus, to be represented in Parliament is to have the parliamentary parties, especially the ruling ones – while political parties that do not have significant financial resources in fact automatically find themselves in the role of outsiders in the competition. Interestingly, this situation takes place in Ukraine in the absence of public funding of political parties and a developed system of membership fees. Therefore, it is clear that the predominant sources of political finance in Ukraine are “plutocratic” and then it's obvious whose interests will be defended by the fractions of these parties in parliament.

That is why, sociological survey held in December 2001 showed that 45 % of respondents thought that political parties served the interests of financial and business structures; 30,5 % of respondents were convinced that they serve the interests of political leaders. In April 2003 the numbers of respondents to the same questions constituted 55,7 % and 45,6 % accordingly¹⁵. The lack of transparency of political financing leads to actual merging of political forces with representatives of shadow and criminal business, which, in its turn,

¹¹ Шаповал В. Парламентські вибори в Україні 2007 року // Вісник ЦВК. – 2008. – № 3, с. 31. (*Shapoval V. Parliamentary election in Ukraine 2007 // Bulletin of Central election commission. - 2008. - № 3, p.31.*)

¹² Парламентські вибори – 2007 стали найдорожчими в історії України // Газета “24”. – 2007. – 24-29 жовтня. [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://www.newsru.ua/ukraine/29oct2007/vzbirfond.html>. (*Parliamentary elections of 2007 were the most expensive elections in the history of Ukraine // Newspaper “24”. - 2007. - 24-29 October. - Electronic resource.*)

¹³ Паламарчук Р. Як оцінити потребу політичної партії у фінансових ресурсах? // Молодіжна альтернатива. – 2004. – Частина 2, с. 56. (*Palamaruk R. How to evaluate how many finance resources need political party? // Youth alternative. - 2004. - Part 2, p.56.*)

¹⁴ Отчитались за кампанію // Коммерсантъ України. – № 185 (1675). – 15 ноября 2012. (*Reported on campaign // Kommersant of Ukraine. - № 185 (1675). - 15 November 2012.*)

¹⁵ Громадяни України про внутрішньополітичні процеси // Національна безпека і оборона. – 2003. – № 3, с. 20. (*Citizens of Ukraine about within political processes // National Security and Defense. - 2003. - № 3, p.20.*)

hinders democratic transformations in Ukraine. On the other hand, when coming to power, the respective political forces get access to the sources of illegal income and the possibility of legalizing «dirty money». This is reflected in the results of the expert survey held by Razumkov's Centre in 2009. The question «To what extent do people's deputies defend the interests...?» was answered in the following way: 95,7 % of experts stated that people's deputies defend the interests of a large business, 87 % – of a shadow business.

Moreover, the same Centre held a nationwide survey on the 20-28th of July 2009, according to which, 39,3 % of respondents stated that political parties are fully corrupted. Other 72,9 % think that concealing sources of financing by political parties (blocks) testifies to their being corrupted; 72,5 % of respondents think that corruption is manifested in selling and buying places in electoral lists of political parties (blocks)¹⁶.

The level of corruption in Ukraine has increased by 18% over the past two years. Unfortunately, new post-revolutionary government has not managed to overcome or at least reduce the level of corruption. What is more – it had even increased! So, for the last two years (2013-2015), the level of corruption in Ukraine has increased by 18%. This is evidenced by the comparative analysis of the level of corruption in Ukraine, conducted by Transparency International, Gallup International and the Razumkov's Centre. The analysis showed that despite the new people coming to power, corruption permeates all aspects of life. As for the politics in general, the level of corruption here has increased to 9.6% (from 43.4% to 53%), and among the Ukrainian political parties to 6.7% (from 38.3% to 45%)¹⁷.

Are the Ukrainian parties considered as the electoral parties?

Among the functions of Ukrainian political parties there is probably one that is consistent with the functions of electoral parties – a classic one. It is known that in modern foreign partology this function of parties is considered as a determining one (along with the function of leadership).

Therefore, J. Sartori notes that "the party is a political group that is present in the electoral process and is able to push through the elections the candidates for public office." According to K. Janda, "a party is an organization, which seeks to obtain political position through its legitimate representative." J. Lance and S. Ersson recognize parties as political parties only of those organizations that are represented in the electoral statistics¹⁸.

¹⁶ Політична корупція: специфіка, масштаби і шляхи протидії в оцінках експертів // Національна безпека і оборона. – 2009. – № 7, с. 48. (*Political corruption: peculiarities, scale and ways of counteractions (observations of experts of National Security and Defense. - 2009. - № 7, p. 48).*)

¹⁷ За два останніх года уровень коррупции в Украине вырос на 18 %. [Електронний ресурс].- Режим доступа.- <http://Prokurorska-Pravda.Today/News/Za-dva-poslednich-goda-uroven-korupcii-v-Ukraine-vyros-na-18>. (*The level of corruption has increased to 18 % in Ukraine for the last two years – Electronic resource.*)

¹⁸ Романюк А., Шведя Ю. Парті та електоральна політика.- Львів.- 2005, с. 46. (*Romaniuk A., Shveda Y. Parties and electoral politics.- Lviv.- 2005, p. 46.*)

On this basis, many of the researchers see similarities between Ukrainian political parties and the so-called “election parties,” whose main activity is actually reduced to the polls. However, such comparison is not entirely correct.

Modern political parties indeed owe their emergence to the emergence and spread of universal suffrage, and their main function was structuring and mobilizing of votes of the electorate. No wonder, the first mass party that emerged in 1861 with a simple and clear name: “Liberal Society for voters’ registration.” However, these organizations that appeared first as a class party underwent complex evolution and institutionalization before they were formed into modern electoral parties. On the basis of such transformation, profound changes in the social structure, political culture, methods of political communication have been made.

Ukrainian political parties have been formed and still operate in conditions of unformed social structure, when the determining social and political interests are not formalized; their electoral function is determined not by the needs and requirements of the basic social group (class) but by the wish to obtain access to power through the elections. In this way, elections are not presented as the instrument of realization of party’s program but as the field of competition among well-organized groups for access to the distribution of public goods. In this sense, M. Weber’s description of political parties as “portfolio hunters” is quite compelling.

The existence of political parties oriented on the victory in elections (the so-called parties of success or electoral-professional parties) implies the existence of real (competitive) elections as a legal mechanism of struggle for power. As far as today’s elections can be considered, real (competitive) elections are under question.

As an expression of certain social interests, political parties can put forward their political spokesmen only in case of the existence of perceptual (or voting) party system in society, that is the type of it that is set to form the government through the mechanism of competitive racing of parties. The availability of large number of parties competing in elections is necessary but is not a sufficient condition for the existence of this type of party system.

It is clear that quite often specific political actors arise in a non-competitive environment with its distinctive factors, which can hardly be compared by merely one name with those that have emerged and are in liberal democratic regimes.

In the Ukrainian realities, incentives to competition as a mechanism for access to political decision making and power resources are replaced by positive incentive not to compete. Since the state acts as a player in the political elections, it offers political parties, which have the appropriate capital to solve their problems in exchange for loyalty. Thus, elections turn into not the competition for power, but into the fair of requirements of business in relation to the authorities, where parties act as a kind of mediator – “brokers”.

In our situation, both the purpose and the style of political competition are completely different. If, in the developed democracies, such “broker” may have its own separate interests

that are different from those of the clients' and because of the weak institutionalization and autonomy of parties, their individual (that is, public) interests in these auctions are scarce. If political parties in modern democracies have turned to agencies of maximizing votes (including their favor), they are only agencies of representation of the interests of capital in relation to the government in that case.

Pursuing the business logic that focuses primarily on maximization of the benefits of the business, which stands behind the political parties, is not interested in a permanent "investment" in political parties and they agree to put funds only during the election – thereby turning the party into a simple "voting machine" or electoral projects.

Despite the amorphous nature of the organizational structure of modern electoral parties – their main organizational unit is the election committees, whose activities is if not constant then periodical (from elections to elections). Ukrainian political parties in the overwhelming weight have so called "empty organization," that is one that is based on national party leader, has access to the media and advertising and has no virtually structures and a developed membership base locally.

These parties usually either appear shortly before the elections or just before the elections the so called rebranding of existing parties takes place. The result of the participation of political actors in the electoral competition is virtualization of political life, and thus, the emergence and existence of the so-called virtual parties. This policy itself obtains features of political performance, a kind of show – which has so little to do with real life.

Without institutionalized parties, there cannot be any institutionalized competition among them. In democratic countries elections are a form of popular control over the state by choosing one or another party. In quasi-democratic states elections are a competition for loyalty to the regime of relevant private interests organized as a competition of political parties.

According to S. Mainwaring, in some democracies of "the third waves" with weak party systems, it was rather personalism or interests of elites than socio-political division that formed the electorate of parties that contributed to further weakening of these new democracies¹⁹. S. Lipset notes that in new democracies, political elites can influence the nature of the parties – for good, as it was in post-revolutionary United States, or for evil, as in post-revolutionary France and Latin America of the nineteenth century²⁰. We think that modern Ukrainian political elite may also relate to the latter.

If, in the end you still want to ask yourself a question of what the political parties are, this question was very aptly answered by R. Rose and T. Maki, who said: "We can talk about the institutionalization of the party in the event if it participated in more than three

¹⁹ *Mainwaring Scott P.* Rethinking Parties in the Third Wave of Democratization: The Case of Brazil. - Stanford. - 1999, p. 56.

²⁰ *Lipset S. M.* The indispensability of political parties // *Journal of Democracy.* - Washington. - 2000. - V.11. - № 1, p. 54.

national elections. If a party failed to achieve this, it cannot be regarded as a formed party. It is ephemeral”²¹. Unfortunately, the majority of parties in Ukraine today are such presented.

Conclusion

Central methodological problem of Ukrainian partyologists is if we have to deal with political parties which are only being formed and are trying to develop into independent subjects of political life (protoparties) or with pseudoparties (simulacras) which only serve political interests of economically dominant groups. The answer to this question will determine a further direction of the development of Ukrainian theory of political parties. Most of the fatherland and foreign experts believe that public funding of political parties could be the first step in their transformation into real and effective institutions of representative democracy. The discussion about it within the Ukrainian politics goes along, however, the political elite of Ukraine still lacks the political will to take this step. Until it is not reached, Ukrainian political parties will remain as the political factions of various financial and political groups, a voting machine, but not as the electoral parties.

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