

Marzo 2019**Presidential Elections in Ukraine – March 31st, 2019***Miguel Ángel Cúneo***Background**

By means of Resolution of the President of the Parliament of Ukraine, Andriy Parubi, of November 28th, 2018, the date of the presidential elections was formally established at March 31st, 2019¹.

The Presidential race is on its way with a record number of 44 qualified candidates, among the 89 applications received by the Central Electoral Commission of Ukraine.

Key dates:

- *from December 31st to February 4th: Nominations.
- *February 9th: closure of the registry for candidates.
- *March 7th: last day to withdraw from the race.
- *March 31st: Election Day.
- *April 10th: first round's results.
- *April 21st: second round, in case it's necessary.
- *May 1st (tentative): final results.
- *June 3rd: Assumption ceremony of the elected president.

Candidates:

Experts and pollsters say there are six candidates who have the best chances on March 31st:

- Petro Poroshenko, President in office, 53 years-old. Candy billionaire, Petro Poroshenko is a candidate for the "Solidarity" Bloc.
- Yulia Tymoshenko, Former Prime Minister, 58 years-old. Known as "The

Veteran Populist”, she participated in the Orange Revolution: loved by some, rejected by others.

- Volodymyr Zelenskyy, TV Comediant, 41 years-old. “The Sitcom President”, high popularity.

- Yuri Boiyko, Former Minister of Energy, Former vice Prime Minister, 60 years-old. Known as “The Pro-Russian”, he accused Poroshenko of trying to cancel the election by establishing Martial Law in Ukraine, which finally lasted one month.

- Anatoly Hrytsenko, Former Minister of Defense, 61 years-old. Also known as “The Enlightened Authoritarian”, this is his third race for President.

- Oleg Lyashko, 46 years-old. He is an aggressive parliamentarian known for blocking the presidency of Parliament. This is the third time he presents himself as a candidate. He is nominated by the Radical Party. He is also known as “The Radical Populist”.²

Guide lines of the platforms of the main candidates

* Petro Poroshenko

He runs the presidential race with the mission of, above all, restoring the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, by recovering the regions held by the separatists and the

reincorporation of Crimea. To reach that goal, Poroshenko promotes the deployment of a peace-keeping mission under a mandate of the United Nations Security Council. The Ukrainian President proposes a mission with a “robust” mandate (Washington dixit), meaning that it would cover the entire territory currently held by the separatists, up to the border with the Russian Federation, as a way of being able to comply with the Minsk Agreements. On internal matters, he vows to continue with the reforms promoted by international financial institutions, especially in regard to the anti-corruption fight that, from the western point of view, has not yet been able to conclude.

As President since May 2014, he was in charge of initiating the reconstruction of Ukraine, which had by then lost Crimea and had seen the birth of a separatist movement in parts of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions (Eastern Ukraine). For this, he had the support of the Federal Republic of Germany, the United States of America, France, and the Baltic States.

* Yulia Tymoshenko

On January 22nd 2019, during a party congress in Kiev, she stated that her goal was

a great country "which I am not going to back down even one step, that is the reason why I am presenting my candidacy". Tymoshenko has shown herself in favor of NATO and the European Union, and made public her support to the Ukrainian servicemen who had been fighting against the Russia-supported separatist in East Ukraine since 2014. However, and as the analyst Taras Kuzio points out: "Tymoshenko did no favor to herself with the supposed suggestion to a US Department of State officer that, in order to successfully negotiate a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine, the negotiations should also include the US strategic rival, China. EU' officers don't feel comfortable with her either. Washington and Brussels' displeasure with Tymoshenko is a sign of her lack of wisdom about both internal and Foreign politics. The expert adds that *"during these five years since the Euromaidan Revolution, Tymoshenko's party ("Fatherland") has not been very enthusiastic on the reforms and has strongly refused some transcendental changes such as the ones attached to IMF, US and EU conditioning."*³ Among the prominent figures who have endorsed the Tymoshenko candidacy there is (Patriarch - Ed) Filaret, the leader of the main Ukrainian Orthodox community and the first speaker in the party congress that nominated

her. Another support is that of former Georgian President Mikhail Shakashvili, who was later Governor of the Ukrainian region of Odessa, but is now a critic of Poroshenko and lives abroad.

Tymoshenko held as Prime Minister during 2005 while Victor Yushenko was President and later, between 2007 and 2010, when Viktor Yanukovich was Head of State. In that year she was sentenced to prison by virtue of signing an agreement with Moscow for the provision of gas, on favorable terms to Russia.⁴

* Volodymyr Zelenskyy

In a hit television series, "Servant of the People" (Sluha Narodu), he served as a history professor who became president after fighting against corrupt politicians.⁵

When asked how he planned to resolve the conflict, he said *"We are going to find ourselves in the middle. Putin has his position, I have mine. We are going to decide something and then we are going to have a referendum"*. Oleksiy Haran, Professor of Political Science at the Mohyla Academy in Kiev, characterizes the candidate as follows: *"Zelenskyy showed that he is not fully prepared for such issues"*.⁶

According to other sources, he has condemned Moscow's policy towards his country, but is against breaking ties with Russia, especially in the artistic field. He is in favor of joining NATO and the European Union, to recover Crimea and the rebel regions of the east, but thinks that the main problem that Ukraine has to overcome is corruption.⁷

* Yuri Boyko

His party is in opposition, and he is seen as friendly with Russia or pro-Russian. He has suggested that any peace agreement must include compromises and dialogue with the separatists – a bad start for many Ukrainians who compare such a measure with capitulation – . Boyko is currently leading the Opposition Bloc, successor of the Party of Regions, which was also the political base of Viktor Yanukovich.⁸

* Anatoly Grytsenko

Grytsenko came in ninth place in the 2010 presidential election and fourth in 2014. Trained as a military aviation engineer, he spent 25 years in the Armed Forces and was Minister of Defense between 2005 and 2008 under the Presidency of Viktor Yuschenko. He founded his party "Civil Position" in 2010. Parliamentary elector in third place in 2012 by the party list of

Yulia Tymoshenko, in January 2014 left Parliament after disagreeing with the group leader Arseniy Yatseniuk. His supporters are mostly in Central and Eastern Ukraine.⁹

* Oleg Lyashko

Retired journalist, he was in Parliament in the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc between 2006 and 2010 and founded the Radical Party in 2012. Starting as a marginal figure, he gained prominence following the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, facing vigilante actions against the separatists in Donbas. He was third in the 2014 presidential election and his party won 22 seats that same year.¹⁰

International Election Observers

The Ukrainian Parliament approved, on February 7th, 2019, a law that prohibits Russian citizens from serving as monitors in Ukraine's elections. Therefore, Russia will not be able to send them –even under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

As a basis, it is pointed out that election observers can not be citizens of a country recognized by the Ukrainian Parliament as "aggressor state or occupying state". The Legislative declared Russia as "aggressor

state” in January 2015. It was announced that Moscow would raise the issue to the next session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at the end of February.

For his part, the United States Special Envoy for Ukraine, Kurt Volker, said that Ukraine “*needs OSCE observers, even if some are Russian citizens (...) to demonstrate that it adheres to democratic standards*”.¹¹

The President promulgated the Law “on amendments to some laws of Ukraine on the observation of electoral processes in Ukraine”, approved by Parliament on February 7, 2019. The approved Law amends the laws “on the election of the President of Ukraine”, “on the election of the People’s Deputies of Ukraine”, “on local elections”, and establishes that a citizen of a state recognized as an aggressor or invader by the Parliament of Ukraine cannot be an official observer of a foreign state or international organizations.¹²

Latest surveys (available by March 4th, 2019)

From February 16th to February 23rd, 2019, the Ukrainian Institute for Social Research, named after Alexander Yaremenko and the Center for Social Monitoring, carried out a public opinion survey throughout Ukraine.

Information gathering method: personalized

formal interview (face to face).

Collection of samples:

- Representative of age (population 18 years and over), gender, type of settlement and region;
- 2047 respondents;
- Standard deviation +/- 2.2%;
- The level of cooperation of the respondents was 56%.
- 80.3% of the respondents expressed their willingness to vote in the presidential elections (44.8% would definitely vote, 35.6% would prefer).
- The leader in the presidential classification is V. Zelensky, for which 19.6% of the respondents are ready to vote Yulia Tymoshenko has the support of 13.5%, P. Poroshenko - 13.1%, Y. Boyko - 7.8 %, A. Gritsenko - 6.3%, O. Lyashko 4.4%.

Concluding Remarks

The year 2019 is transcendent in the future of Ukraine since within a period of seven months there will be presidential (March 31) and parliamentary elections (in October).

From their results, it will be possible to have a panorama on: a) the situation in Donbas; b) the future of Crimea; c) orientation: in favor

of the current European (U.E.) and Euro-Atlantic (NATO) integration policy or in favor of some kind of rapprochement with the Russian Federation. Internally, it will determine the continuity of the policies of socio-economic and anti-corruption reforms that go hand by hand with financial support from international institutions and the European Union.

According to the Constitution of Ukraine, the Head of State has the primary responsibilities with regard to foreign policy, defense and security. That is why the question of recovering the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine will fall on the head of the Executive. On the other hand, the issues related to economic policy and the reforms that are carried out depend on the election of the Prime Minister, and on the support that the head of the Executive has in the Parliament.

From the perspective of Moscow, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, has made it known that he prefers to wait for the election of the new Head of State to consider the possibilities of engaging in some kind of dialogue. This dialogue would include the analysis of the deployment of a United Nations mission in Ukraine "with a robust mandate (Washington and Ukraine's version) or limited (in Putin's version)", with a view to resolving

the conflict in the Donbass region.

While everything related to this topic is the object of the Security Council of the Organization, the status of Permanent Member thereof of the Russian Federation will play a defining role in the materialization of the aforementioned mission.

The result of the elections will allow us to see where Ukraine would go in the future.

References:

- (1) Dispatch of the RFE / RL Agency on November 28th, 2018. Available online at <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukrainian-presidential-elections-set-for-march-31-2019/29625670.html?ltflags=mailer>

- (2) Article titled “Meet Ukraine’s Presidential Candidates - Who’s Who In A Crowded Field”, written by Christopher Miller, Andy Heil ly Wojtek Grojec on February 11st, 2019. Published on the website of the RFE/RL Agency. Available online at <https://www.rferl.org/a/meet-ukraines-presidential-candidates-2019/29756553.html>
- (3) Article written by Taras Kuzio on February 13rd, 2019. Published by Euroobserver. Available online at <https://euroobserver.com/opini3n/144.140>.
- (4) Dispatch of the RFE / RL Agency dated January 22nd, 2019. Available online at <https://www.rferl.org/a/ex-pm-tymoshenko-launches-bid-for-ukrainian-presidency/29724626.html?ltflags=mailer>
- (5) Article written by Robert Brinkley, Former British Ambassador to Ukraine. Published by Chatham House’s Website on September 24th, 2018. Available online at <https://medium.com/chatham-house/ukraine’s-presidential-election-six-things-you-should-know-7c5a8e49835>
- (6) Article written by Christopher Miller for the RFE / RL Agency’s Website, on January 25th, 2019. Available online at <https://www.rferl.org/a/desperately-seeking-a-postwar-president-in-ukraine/29730680.html?ltflags=mailer>
- (7) Article written by Rafael Mañueco, correspondent for the ABC Journal (Spain) at Moscow on February 23rd, 2019. Available online at <https://www.elcorreo.com/internacional/union-europea/televisi3n-presidente-ucrania-20190223231639-ntrc-html>
- (8) Article written by Robert Brinkley, Former British Ambassador to Ukraine. Published by Chatham House’s Website on September 24th, 2018. Available online at <https://medium.com/chatham-house/ukraine’s-presidential-election-six-things-you-should-know-7c5a8e49835>
- (9) Article written by Robert Brinkley, Former British Ambassador to Ukraine. Published by Chatham House’s Website on September 24th, 2018. Available online at <https://medium.com/chatham-house/ukraine’s-presidential-election-six-things-you-should-know-7c5a8e49835>
- (10) Article written by Robert Brinkley, Former British Ambassador to Ukraine. Published by Chatham House’s Website on September 24th, 2018. Available online at <https://medium.com/chatham-house/ukraine’s-presidential-election-six-things-you-should-know-7c5a8e49835>

- (11) Dispatch of the RFE / RL Agency on February 7th, 2019. Available online at <https://www.rferl.org/ukraine-moves-to-bar-election-observers-from-aggressor-state-russia/29757708.html?ltflags=mailer>
- (12) Article published by the Official website of the Ukrainian Presidency on February 26th, 2019. Available online at <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/prezident-pidpisat-zakon-yakij-zaboronyaye-predstavnikam-kra-53846>

Para citar este artículo:

Cúneo, Miguel Ángel (2019), "Presidential elections in Ukraine - March 31st 2019" [disponible en línea desde abril 2019], Serie de Artículos y Testimonios, N° 143. Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales. Dirección URL: <http://www.cari.org.ar/pdf/at143.pdf>