

THE CONFIGURATION OF CHERNIVTSI AND ZAKARPATSKA OBLAST POLITICAL PARTIES' REGIONAL BRANCHES AND THEIR IMPACT ON REGIONAL POLITICS (2013-2014)

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the public activity of the most influential political parties of Chernivtsi and Zakarpatska oblast (regions) between 2013 and 2014. The authors consider the configuration of the leading regional political forces and characterize the level of their impact on regional politics. The main attention is paid to communications of political parties' with their voters. It has been outlined that the mobility of organizational structures of opposition to once pro-governmental "Party of Regions" has provided growth of their electoral support and increasing influence on regional processes. These parties emerged like victors of the turbulent situation in Ukraine but their popularity and future are highly dependent on the prospect of peace and reforms in Ukraine.

Key words: *political parties, Zakarpattya, Bukovyna, the regional policy, political parties regional and local organizations*

Ukraine has been placed into a focus of the international attention since the crisis of 2013 revealed some profound weakness of the country and its certain vulnerability towards aggressive foreign pressure. While geopolitical reasons of the crisis and war in Eastern Ukraine remain in a focus of public and academic discourse, the regional dimension of Ukrainian policy and politics have been less attended by researchers and analysts till now. However, those regional peculiarities

of Ukraine, key aspects of its political system functioning (and malfunctioning) still require more research and academic scrutiny. Amidst some other factors the contemporaneous political reality is characterized by the activity of the various political parties, which are the product of socio-economic and socio-political processes. After all, they are one of the main tools to compete for power and public control upon society resources. Their great spectrum remains a characteristic feature of the political sphere in every region of present Ukraine. No exception is pretty similar western regions of Ukraine - Chernivtsi (Bukovyna) and Zakarpattya oblast. Both of them are the tiniest ones in the country, situated on the state borders of Ukraine, which are of crucial importance for their economic and social evolution. They are multicultural regional societies, where the proportion of the titular nation is respectively 75% and 80, 5% [Huitor 2007: 137-145], and therefore the presence of ethnic minorities and diversity of confessions are traits of the local specificity going deeply in past ages. The latter circumstance makes both regions predictable targets for foreign interferences and some local tensions and discontent. And last year's events prove that they are in a position of certain trouble and uncertainty.

Over the years 2013-2014 configuration of political party space of Bukovyna and Zakarpattya has undergone some considerable changes. Accordingly, such reformatting of the regional political landscape is greatly influencing the development of politics pertinent to these borderland and poly-ethnic territories. Taking into account the impact of those changes the article compares post-election political processes and the alignment of political forces in Bukovyna and Zakarpattya between 2013 and 2014, and analyzes the influence of regional party organizations on regional policy.

First of all, we have to state that research on key regional features of Zakarpattya and Chernivtsi regions' party space structuring, their inhabitants' electoral orientations has been launched by Ukrainian political scientists: Anatoliy Kruglashov, Vira Burdyak, Mykola Guytor, Yuriy Ostapets, Marian Tokar, and some others. However, political analysis of the influence of regional party organizations on the policy of respected territories up to the present time is left behind Ukrainian researchers' concerns (surely, foreign too). Facing with fact of this lacuna of academic outcome, the authors of the article are going to analyze the configuration of the leading political forces of Zakarpattya and Chernivtsi regions and determine the level of their public activity between 2013 and 2014.

The topic of this case study seems to be important both in theoretical and practical dimensions. In particular, it allows to consider the level of influence of regional party organizations on the regional policy and revealing the most stable relations between regional organizations of political parties and electorates throughout comparison of political processes and post-election composition of the political forces in Bukovyna and Zakarpattya between 2013 and 2014. The above mentioned determines the relevance of the topic, since it gives a chance not only to monitor the current trend and effectiveness of the activities of the most influential party branches of Bukovyna and Zakarpattya, and see the regularities of influence of the political parties of Ukraine in general on the regional political processes. Having it done one is able of making some cautious prediction on their future ability to realize their potential. Taking into account the above goals and objectives of the

article, the authors make an accent on some primary sources because the lack of relevant academic research papers on the subject. These sources include electronic resources, web-sites of the Department of Justice in Zakarpattya and Chernivtsi oblasts, data from regional councils and regional organizations of the most influential political parties (“Front Zmin”, “Svoboda”, “Udar”, “Narodna Partiya” and “Partya Regioniv”), as well as the results of the elections and electoral sociology.

Following the article goals, first of all, we are to describe these key political parties regional organizations public activities between 2013 and 2014, then analyze the party spaces composition and changes before and after Euromaydan and, finally, evaluate their impact on regional policy.

The object of study in this article is the regional party branches of Bukovina and Zakarpattya. The subject of the study includes the results of the most influential political parties’ organizations public activity in Chernivtsi and Zakarpattya oblasts. The chronological framework of the study is limited to the period of January 2013 - September 2014.

At the present stage of the Ukrainian political system evolution the true placement and role of the political parties is an important but highly controversial issue. We have to agree with the opinion of a Ukrainian political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko –, that Ukrainian voters tend to perceive political parties as an element of power and as a part of the rules of game in electoral democracy [Tsentr Razumkova 2010: 34-37]. At the same time, contemporary political parties of Ukraine do not have a clear position on regional development, as well as they lack a regular support from certain social groups. That is why, the new realities put forward some urgent problems in front of Ukrainian political parties, and amid them the task of reconstructing regional political space, as well as a challenge of proper articulation and aggregation of interests of related local communities [Bekeshkina 2001: 41-56]. Influenced by the dramatic political changes in Ukraine a significant reshaping of the regional party organizations’ balance in Bukovina and Zakarpattya over the period of 2013 and 2014 occurred. We emphasize that in the Chernivtsi and Zakarpattya societies key tendencies, which are inherent in all-national political process were reflected and at the same time, regional peculiarities manifested.

After the parliamentary elections of 2012 Zakarpatska and Chernivtsi oblast entered the "zone of expansion" of “*Party of Regions*” (*PR*). While in a previous period this party never enjoyed a mass support of voters, now a political situation seems triumphant for the party. Activities of regional organizations of that pro-governing party during the period of studies were aimed according to the leaders’ words (Oleksandr Ledida and Mykhailo Papiev - then the Heads of the Regional State Administrations) to create the necessary conditions for the implementation of the President Viktor Janukovych’s social initiatives.

At the meetings of the regional party conferences, where the outcomes of the election campaign in 2012 were wrapped up, it was noted that the party's local organizations had to become the promoters and the implementers of urgent economic reform [Papiev 2011: 1]. In order to increase their supporters in the Zakarpattya and Chernivtsi regional societies, “*PR*” pretended to represent its interest as the true interest of a wider range of citizens. Local party leaders do not hesitate to reiterate the statement that they are true representatives of the party of power on the public meetings and relays. And it means that their deeds are the

same as words. However, despite such loud and populist statements, the “*Party of Regions*” regional headquarters in fact distanced themselves from the regional community, as they did not undertake real measures to implement effective social programs, as well as they did not try to develop alternative objectives for improving the regional policy for Bukovina and Zakarpattya. And, the lack of broader support of the local voters does not provide the possibility of party’s organizations to influence the political process either on the regional level, or on the national one.

The representatives of the faction “*Party of Regions*” in Chernivtsi oblast Council (which consisted of one-third of the total number of Regional Council) basically just stated that they had the intention to support the government, civil society and business initiatives in various fields of social and economic activity. However, the deputies from “*Party of Regions*” are usually involved only in some specific activities. For instance, during January 2013 Matviy Kutsak and Mykhailo Dralyuk took part in the sports’ festival, which was organized by the Sport complex "Olympia" and top athletes of oblast. Those deputies while having greeting speeches there stressed that the pro-governing party would support any business initiatives in the sports sector to attract investment in the Ukrainian sport [Fedaka, Ilnytskyi 2011: 1 - 3]. It seemed quite obvious that such bold statement have not always been realistic and by and large propagandistic one. Similar activities of rhetoric promises are typical for the Zakarpattya regional branch of “*Party of Regions*”. The regional party leader A. Ledida has publicly said that the balance of political forces is secured and there is an open dialogue between the government and society in the region, but at the same time ordered to suppress peaceful protest in Narodna Square of the regional center Uzhgorod [Romanchuk 2013: 1 - 2].

However, the tactics of so-called "tushkuvannya" (from a Ukrainian word “dead body” – wide spread practice of attracting by threats or temptation deputies from other parties and factions into the faction of Part of Regions) did not succeed completely in a case of the Zakarpattya regional council and the majority for that party has not been established there. As a result the representatives of the pro-governing party had to constantly negotiate with the opposition deputies, in particular, with “Edynyi Tsentr” party (United Center) [Romanchuk 2013: 1].

Such tactics of the local political leadership of “PR” led to the situation that between January and March of 2013 Zakarpattya and Chernivtsi regions got the 20-th and 24-th places in the all-Ukrainian ranking of regional key areas of the social and economic development. It means that everyday life priorities of those regions and their inhabitants remained ignored by the pro-governing party. Basic problems of the regions were not outlined and no solutions were proposed. In fact, these circumstances as some local political analysts pointed out confirmed that “PR” is not an ideological party, rather a mere political project of Victor Yanukovych team [Babyuk 2012: 11].

Contrary to the “PR” activities in those two regions the influence of the opposition forces has been increasing that time. In fact, a resonant echo in the political space of Bukovina and Zakarpattya has got public activities of “Front Zmin” (Front for Changes) regional organizations. For example, since the beginning of 2013 Zakarpattya and Chernivtsi party activists, with their leaders respectively Myroslav Biletsky and Maksym Bourbak, openly requested to put an immediate end to the political repression, torture and fraud in connection with the events around the

Julia Tymoshenko suit case [Lunchenko, Biletskiy 2012: 1]. The leaders of Chernivtsi "*Front Zmin*" had been emphasizing at numerous press-conferences that while the State budget considerably cut off social benefits of the ordinary citizens, however, the spending on governmental bureaucracy increased. The Head of the "*Front Zmin*" faction in the City Council Oleksiy Kaspruk branded such governmental projects of budget as a criminal one [Kaspruk 2012: 1 - 2].

It is worth noting that the regional organization of "*Front zmin*" took an active part in opposition meetings and other public campaigns. The party's local leaders regularly organized briefings for mass-media where openly shared some critical conclusions regarding the unsatisfactory public policy of the regional authorities. For instance, Zakarpattya regional centre of this party together with the regional organizations of political parties "*Bat'kivschyna*" (*Mortheland*), "*Udar*" (*The Strike*), and "*Svoboda*" (*Freedom*) partook in a joint rally dedicated to the commemoration of Unification Day (*Den' Sobornosti*) of Ukraine in January 2013. During the rally the leader of "*Front Zmin*" M. Beletskii proclaimed that only united opposition is able to resist the Janukovych regime. Yuriy Fekete representative of the party "*Bat'kivschyna*" clarified there that "*Party of Regions*" might be stopped only by a powerful opposition force, which would have met with the irresistible support of society. Despite some growing discontent with V. Janukovych policy those public events as usually went out with limited number of their participants that proves to be a symptom of both public apathy and deficit of those oppositional political parties' mobilization resources.

Nonetheless, a relatively considerable splash of the public activity could be observed in the regional party organization of "*Udar*." They tried to implement active political communication with the electorate concerning some issues of the regional policy in 2013. The leaders of the party exploit numerous press-conferences, briefings, and other public meetings while they have been emphasizing that among the main goals of their party's activity is to destroy the all-penetrating systematic corruption, establish the public control over governmental bodies, and to transfer the real power to local communities etc. These slogans have been perceived with some hope of local inhabitants.

Additionally, during the mass cultural and patriotic actions they have promoted the European integration course of Ukraine. In January 2013, Chernovtsy activists of "*Udar*" launched a rally under the key slogan "*Chernivtsi is not a political battlefield*", "*European choice for Ukraine*". The leader of Bukovyna party's organization of "*Udar*" Roman Vanzuryak explains that the action had to draw up attention of the society to the fact that a rejection of the European integration course by V. Janukovych government does not only mean ignoring the will of Ukrainians, but it is a violation of the Constitution.

At the same time, Chernivtsi party members launched "a tent movement", where they had been educating general public telling them about Ukrainian foreign policy perspectives. When "Euromaydan" movement started in late November of 2013, "*Udar*" Chernivtsi regional organization sponsored the sociological pool, which dealt with citizens' attitudes to the EU and the Customs Union. It argued that local inhabitants support European course of Ukraine by the vast majority. Simultaneously the party unit in Zakarpattya advocated the implementation of European standards of living and brought this question up to the high priority of

their communication strategy [Kvych 2013: 3]. Those political actions are being conveyed with some social initiatives of "Udar" party organizations, likewise a proposal of granting zero tax rates for newly formed companies for a period of 3 - 5 years, which faced with a great support of Transcarpathia's society [Kvych 2013: 1 - 2]. No doubt, this symbolic step towards actual expectations of local voters seems to be a success story of political party's political communication.

Certain social initiatives were proposed by the regional headquarters of "Svoboda" political party in the same period too. For example, Chernivtsi City fraction of "Svoboda" has initiated the proposal to listen to the annual reports of the local Companies who are at City's property to the City Council in February of 2013. According to the Chairman of the regional organization Vitaliy Melnychuk because of this innovation anybody in the City would be able to identify negative trends for all related local companies, and in particular, of the largest donor of the City budget "Kalinovsky market", and later on undertake appropriate preventive measures to resolve existing problems of them.

The period of June-December 2013 is characterized with the public appearance of some new political actors, namely recently established political parties. Thus, there were three regional organizations of new political parties established in Chernivtsi oblast. In case of Transcarpathia there were four of them, e.g. "Samopomich" (Self-aid), the organizations of political parties "International'na" (International) and "My Mayemo Metu" (We have a goal). New political units seemed to be a kind of 'frozen structures' with the chance of being wake up and used in a political process somehow later.

The turning point in the public space of Bukovyna and Zakarpattya directly corresponds with the changes influenced by Euromaydan movement on all of Ukraine. The most crucial and obvious change is the "Party of Regions" in Bukovyna and Zakarpattya crisis and collapse. The clearest proof of this is that local and regional public servants and officials began to leave off this party excessively in the first week of March, 2014. Moreover, at the same time the pro-governing party's organization has decided to disband itself in Zakarpattya. The situation with this party organization happened to be slightly different in Bukovina. After the tragic bloodshed in February 2014 in Kyiv, only the Chairman of the Regional Council of Chernivtsi Oblast Mykhailo Hainicheru got away from the sinking down party's sheep. However, despite the significant mitigation of "PR" in the region, its chief representatives continued to be very influential and they did not lose their jobs instantly. So, for example 8 heads of Chernivtsi regional state administrations were members of "Party of Regions". At the same time 3 heads of Zakarpattya regional councils represented the former pro-governmental party, 6 heads were the members of the "Yedynyi Centr" and two - "Bat'kivschiyna" for a while.

Soon after some radical changes in the regional political elite came into force, Valeriy Lunchenko (earlier – MP, member "Bat'kivschiyna" faction in Ukrainian Parliament) got appointment as the new Head of the Zakarpattya Regional State Administration. Roman Vanzuryak (MP, faction of "Udar" in the Parliament) has been appointed as the Head of Chernivtsi Regional State Administration. Former heads M. Papiiev (Bukovina) and O. Ledida (Zakarpattya) were dismissed and they

maintained “anti-Maydan” political position. Moreover, O. Ledida remained the leader of the regional organization of “PR”.

Table 1. Composition of Zakarpatska and Chernivtsi oblast Councils (2010 – 2014)

No	Name of the political party	2010- 2012		2014	
		Number of party's representative in Chernivtsi Oblast Council	Number of party's representatives in Zakarpatska Oblast Council	Number of party's representative in Chernivtsi Oblast Council	Number of party's representatives in Zakarpatska Oblast Council
1	Electoral coalition “For the Motherland” (“Za Batkivshchynu”)	-	-	5	0
2	“People’s Front” (Narodnyi Front”)	23	5	15	3
3	«Our Ukraine» (Nasha Ukraina)	9	-	9	-
4	«Motherland” “Batkivshchyna”	17	7	6	9
5	“Freedom” «Svoboda»	4	-	3	-
6	“United Center” «Edynyi Tsent»	-	44	-	45
7	“Democratic Party of Hungarians” “Demokratychna Partia Uhortsiv”	-	4	-	3
8	KMKS KMKC	-	3	-	3
9	“Transcarpathia” “Zakarpattia”	-	-	-	20

Sources: Vidomchy arkhhiv Zakarpatskoi oblasti. – F.195.Op.23,ark.1 - 2; Predstavnytstvo raioniv I mist Chernivtsiv ta m. Novodnistrovska v Chernivetskyi oblsniy radi. – [Elektronnyi resurs. – Rezhym dostupu: www.cv.net.ua/bycovyna.php?event=predstav. Politychna karta Zakarpas'koi oblasti - [Elektronnyi resurs] – Rdezhy dostupu://map.oporaua.org/content/allresults/34; Politychna karta Chernivstkoii oblasti - [Elektronnyi resurs] – Rezhym dostupu: oporaua.org/books/article/1672 –polytychna – zakarpatskai – oblasti.

As a result of a new political situation, the support of voters was reoriented towards some political forces like Petro Poroshenko Block, “People’s Front”, and

“Fatherland” in 2014. Sociological polls had shown their public support before the election took place in 2014. At the same time the polls proved certain popularity of Oleh Liashko Radical Party, “Samopomich” and “Svoboda” as well. . Despite sympathies of voters before the Parliamentary election, the final results did not favor some of the latter. Most radical and populist parties did not get support of the voters finally; first of all it concerns “Svoboda” electoral results in the both regions. Radical and flavored with ethno-nationalism tones rhetoric of “Svoboda” has not been supported in both poly-ethnic regions where the interethnic relations are highly valued with locals. Another factor which affects the results of that electoral campaign is a strong influence of Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), whose priesthood agitation went hostile towards some Ukrainian parties.

Radical changes in the country have affected local Councils too, while there remained the same corps of deputies. So, in both regions Oblast Councils most numerous factions were of Peoples Front and Motherland parties respectively. At the same time, Zakarpatska oblast remained the only one in Ukraine where “United Center” got 45 deputies’ seats.

The comparison of the factions configuration provided in the Table one demonstrates the changes which occurred in the regional Council of two regions from 2010 till 2014 years. As far as the Party of regions collapsed, both Councils dismissed the representatives of that party. Simultaneously Peoples Front and Motherland factions recruited more members into their factions. Hardly possible to regard such a transformation of some deputies as their ideological preference rather a mere pragmatic choice made in order to secure their status and local influence.

The process of reformatting regional political party system has opened a new prospect for those political forces that previously had some influence on the political life of the regions after Euromaydan. The parties of the former opposition to “PR” got a chance of exercising real power both nationally and/or regionally. So, new chances have been opened for Viktor Baloha led “*Yedynyi Centr*” in Transcarpathia. Accordingly the representatives of “*Yedynyi Centr*” has been elected Mayors of three cities of the regional significance. The rotation of a leadership strengthened the position of “*Bat’kivschyna*”, “*Svoboda*”, “*Udar*”, “*Front Zmin*” and “*Narodna Partiya*” (the weakest party from this list). As for the general political standpoints for all of them, their political organizations actively denounced calls for federalization and split of Ukraine and made a statement on the definition of priorities for the stabilization of the political situation in the country and regions. These political parties initiated the signing of the Memorandum of understanding between political parties and civil society organizations named “For the development, enhancement of well-being and calm of citizens”.

The representatives of the abovementioned political forces performed activity in emerging new institutional initiatives like “*Narodna Rada*” (Peoples Council), “*Rada Maydanu*” (Maydan Council), “*Narodna Samooborona*” (Peoples Self-defense), “*Hromads’kyi Convent*” (Civic Convent). They seemed to be launched as the alternative to Janukovych “vertical of power” bodies structures, uniting opposition and civic society. Despite the very idea of their foundation and certain impact on the regional political process they did not emerge as a true center of the stable political influence in the regions of Chernivtsi oblast and Transcarpathia, and

probably all over Ukraine too. In addition, those regional political parties' organizations (their provincial, municipal and district branches) gave a support to an active volunteer movement from Bukovyna aiming to aid fighters in the Eastern Ukraine zone of military conflict (so-called Anti-terrorist operation - ATO). It is necessary to emphasize that the most systematic coordination of the civic activity in this area has been performed by the organization "Rukh Oporu", comprised of members of "Bat'kivschyna" and "Svoboda" who dealt with battalions of volunteers [Starosilskiy 2014 : 2] in early September, 2014. Chernivtsi regional organization of "Svoboda" made an appeal to local authorities with a request of making all comprehensive support to the defenders of Ukraine in Donbas region. There are a lot of facts confirming the large scale of volunteers movement moved to Eastern Ukraine with transports of humanitarian aids, gathering of financial assistance to families of killed soldiers etc. It could hardly be attributed to regional organizations of political parties only, but they played a certain role in volunteers movement also. Of course, these parties try to use their public activity in order to get more political sympathy from compatriots in both regions. The repute and symbolic capital they earned from volunteers movement has to be transformed into voters' ballots as far as Parliamentary elections of 2014 and local elections of 2015 are concerned.

Summing up the trends of political parties' regional organizations activities, we have to emphasize that the socio-political processes in Ukrainian society between 2013 and 2014 paved a way to some important changes into Zakarpattya and Chernivtsi oblast political space. At the beginning of the period under consideration, despite the obvious lack of broader electoral support "Party of Regions" played a leading role in these regions as well as nationwide. It happened because many reasons, including widespread manipulations with local elections, active propaganda, intimidation of political opponents and betrayal of some opposition parties' activists and leaders. Despite the tough grasp of power bodies with this party, ostensibly large number of party local organizations and numerous numbers of many new adherents, substantial majority in the local councils and executive bodies, the party did not provide social and political integration of two regions. A lack of stable public support and trust to "PR" was caused by an ineffective resolution of key regional problems, inconsistent political course of regional authorities, crucial growth of corruptions and other disgusting events attributed to party's leadership. The failure of widely advertized "pro-European course of President V. Yanukovich" resumed with a final disillusionment with political leaders of "Party of Regions". Logically, after bloody clashes over Euromaydan this process has been concluded with a final neutralization of its influence on the political processes in these regions and in Ukraine at all. This political situation has been used by some political parties of opposition. They mobilized their organizational structures aiming at establishment of some stable political relations with their regional voters. Accordingly, because of active participation of oppositional parties' regional and local organizations public actions of supporting Euromaydan and later defenders of Ukraine, their effective communication have been contributed to growing influence of them on the regional political processes.

A relatively better image of political parties from oppositional camp enjoyed some more advancement also from popular and sometimes mere populist social

initiatives, widely advertised by those parties alongside with their attempt at reflecting and resolving some social problems of Chernivtsi oblast and Transcarpathia. However, the leadership of the former oppositional parties as well as their political behavior remained to a greater extent under threat of reminding some mistakes and failures that once happened in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution. But now those shortages are even more dangerous as they are being strengthened with current condition of Russia's aggression and expansionism and systematic socio-economic crisis in Ukraine intertwined.

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