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ROLA PARTII REGIONÓW W ROZWOJU POLITYCZNYM WIKTORA YANUKOVYCHA (1997-2005)

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Artykuł analizuje rolę Partii Regionów w przygotowaniu i rozwoju V. Yanukovycha jako polityka na poziomie republikańskim od końca 1997 do 2005 roku. Przedstawiono etapy ewolucji Partii Regionów od regionalnego stowarzyszenia politycznego mieszkańców Doniecka do potężnej siły politycznej na poziomie ogólnoukraińskim. Badanie przedstawia podział władzy, a także określa rolę nieformalnych liderów wśród kluczowych liderów partii.

Słowa kluczowe: V. Rybak, Rada Najwyższa Ukrainy, V. Yanukovych, M. Azarov, Partia Regionów.

THE ROLE OF THE PARTY OF REGIONS IN VIKTOR YANUKOVYCH'S POLITICAL GROWTH (1997–2005)

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Abstract. The article has analyzed the role of the Party of Regions in the V. Yanukovych's formation and development as a politician of the republic level dated from the end of 1997 to 2005. It has also provided the stages of the Party of Regions evolution from the Donetsk residents' regional political association to the powerful political force of all-Ukrainian level. The study has shown the distribution of powers. It has also determined the role of informal leaders among key party leaders.

Key words: V. Rybak, The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, V. Yanukovych, M. Azarov, the Party of Regions.

РОЛЬ ПАРТІЇ РЕГІОНІВ У ПОЛІТИЧНОМУ СТАНОВЛЕННІ ВІКТОРА ЯНУКОВИЧА (1997–2005)

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Анотація. У статті аналізується роль Партії регіонів у становленні та розвитку В. Януковича як політика республіканського рівня з кінця 1997 по 2005 рр. Окреслюються етапи еволюції Партії регіонів від регіонального політичного об'єднання жителів Донецька до могутньої політичної сили загальноукраїнського рівня. У дослідженні представлено розподіл повноважень, а також визначається роль неформальних лідерів серед ключових лідерів партій.

Ключові слова: В. Рибак, Верховна Рада України, В. Янукович, М. Азаров, Партія регіонів.

Introduction. The Party of Regions played a huge role in the development and strengthening of Yanukovych's regime. This party itself has become one of the main political technologies that ensured Yanukovych's coming to power. The separate, detailed scientific research that would demonstrate the history of origin, formation, and evolutionary development of this political party does not exist. We have found studies that cover only certain aspects of the Party of Regions' existence and functioning on the Ukrainian political scene. In her article "Regional political parties in Ukraine (1991 – beginning of 2018)," Maria Karamazina identifies key periods in the development of political parties, points the key ideological foundations of these associations; and proves, in particular, that Donetsk and Luhansk political forces "were oriented on Russia and thought as an anti-Ukrainian project by their rulers" (Karamazina, 2018: 10). The important milestone in the systematization of the information on key political parties and associations is the publication of an encyclopedia, which contains the informational materials on modern Ukrainian political parties and their first leaders (founders),

elected party alliances created on the eve of the election to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of III-VI Congresses (Karmazina, 2012). This guide has also information on the Party of Regions (Karmazina, 2012: 349–353). In his article, Vladyslav Moroko, a Zaporizhzhia historian, studies the participation of the Party of Regions in electoral campaigns dated 1998 and 2002. Besides, he analyzes the vision of the Ukrainian future in program documents of this political force (Moroko, 2012).

Main part. According to the official data of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, the Party of Regions was registered on November 6, 1997 (Vidomosti shchodo zareiestrovanykh, 2021). It was found as the Party of Regional Revival of Ukraine (PRRU) at the constituent congress in Kyiv on October 26, 1997. Volodymyr Rybak, who was a mayor of Donetsk from September 1993 until April 2002, had been a head of this Party since its foundation. At first, the influence of PRRU was limited by the Donetsk city.

The second Congress of PRRU added Yuhym Zvyahilsky and Mykola Azarov to the political council on May 22, 1999 (Pro Partiiu rehioniv, 2012). Both of them were Donetsk representatives but they also were known throughout Ukraine. From September 1993 to June 1994, Zvyahilsky served as Prime Minister of Ukraine. He remained one of the most powerful people in the Donetsk region. In turn, Azarov had been a chairperson of the newly created State Tax Administration of Ukraine since October 1996. This post gave him a huge administrative resource.

Azarov was a person who took a task of making PRRU the most powerful force. He was a divergent of the uniting process, the climax of which was the announcement of four parties joining PRRU in November 2000. The press conference was held on November 16. During it, Volodymyr Rybak, the chairperson of PRRU, Valentyn Landyk, the chairperson of the Labour Party, Petro Poroshenko, the chairperson of the Solidarity Party of Ukraine, Leonid Chernovetsky, the chairperson of the Party “For Beautiful Ukraine”, and Hennadiy Samofalov, the chairperson of All-Ukrainian Party of Pensioners, announced their Parties intentions to unite to a single political force (Samokhotskyi, 2000). The unscheduled congress of PRRU approved it on November 17; and on November 18, it was approved by the united congress of five parties. The united party got the name The Party of regional revival “Labor Solidarity of Ukraine” and three co-chairpersons: Landyk, Poroshenko, and Rybak. Azarov, Zvyahilsky, Samofalov, and Chernovetsky also joined the presidium (Partiia Rehioniv, 2012). Five of the seven people named above were the representatives of the Donetsk region. In particular, Zvyahilsky was elected as People’s Deputy of Ukraine in the Donetsk region in 1990, 1994, 1998; Azarov, Landyk, Samofalov – in 1994; and Rybak – in 1998. Only two people represented other regions: Chernovetsky was elected as People’s Deputy of Ukraine in Kyiv in 1994 and 1998; Poroshenko – in the Vinnytsia region in 1998.

The congress finished the uniting process on March 3, 2001. A new name of the party – The Party of Regions (PR) – was approved there. In addition, an institute of co-chairmen was canceled. Azarov became a chairperson of the PR; Landyk, Poroshenko, Rybak, Samofalov, and Volodymyr Semynozhenko, the People’s Deputy from Kharkiv, became his deputies (Partiia rehioniv, 2001). In a few days, a deputy group “Regions of Ukraine” headed by Rybak was created in the Verkhovna Rada. In November 2001, this group was transformed into the faction “Regions of Ukraine,” becoming a party structure of PR.

However, Azarov and Rybak’s organizational efforts can be regarded as successful only partially. Compared to the initial state of PRRU, PR really looked more powerful. But it happened primarily due to the fact that leading businessmen from the Donetsk region had decided to support this party, which had a clear Donetsk origin and face. However, positions of PR remained weak in other regions. The dominance of the “Donetsk” (representatives of the Donetsk region and other figures with Donetsk roots) repelled firstly Poroshenko and then Chernovetsky. They returned to building their own party projects.

For their part, already then the “Donetsk” began to aim at getting power in Ukraine. Therefore, they sought for keeping total control over PR as their tool in the fight for power. However, they were not too self-confident at that time. So, they were striving for softening the PR’s image in some way. When Azarov became the chairperson of PR, many accusations were heard about his intention to use tax bodies to put pressure on businessmen to make them support PR. Thus, it was decided to look for a “zits-head” to replace Azarov, and it should not be among the “Donetsk.”

On December 14, 2001, IV congress of PR was held. It supported the creation of an electoral bloc “For United Ukraine!” in the parliamentary elections. At the congress, Azarov announced that he had suspended his membership in PR and resigned as a chairperson of the party. He explained it by the desire to avoid “various speculations and accusations of using administrative resources” during the election campaign (Azarov pishov, 2001). The congress elected Semynozhenko, who had held the post of Deputy Prime Minister for Humanitarian Affairs since May 30, as the chairperson of PR. The congress elected Andriy Klyuyev, who was Yanukovich’s first deputy chairperson of the Donetsk regional administration, as a first deputy chairperson of PR. Landyk, Rybak, and Samofalov kept their posts of deputy chairpersons of PR. Also, Volodymyr Pekhota, who headed the central apparatus of the party since November 2000, became a deputy chairperson of PR.

In fact, Semynozhenko as a chairperson of PR was just a decorative replacement of Azarov. Klyuyev received real leadership instruments in the party, although, of course, Azarov himself retained considerable influence on all aspects of the party life. Rybak, who was a chairperson of the Donetsk (the biggest) regional organization of PR, also had strong positions in the party.

The Parliamentary elections of March 31, 2002, gave some grounds to the “Donetsk” to claim leading positions in the government. Then PR had power only in the Donetsk region. And only in this region a bloc “For United Ukraine!” took first place (and it was just third in Ukraine in general) during the elections. The bloc’s result in the Donetsk region (36.83%) more than tripled the average result in Ukraine (11.77%) (Cherhovi vybory, 2002).

And in almost all majoritarian districts of Donetsk, candidates supported by PR won. Zvyhillsky, Klyuyev, Landyk, Rybak were among them.

The priority task for the “Donetsk” was to get control over the state. This goal was reached on November 21, 2002 when on the proposal of PR Yanukovich became a Prime Minister and Azarov was appointed the First Deputy Prime Minister – Minister of Finance. After that Azarov, Klyuyev, and Rybak began slowly to prepare Yanukovich for the role of a party leader.

On April 17, 2003, The Verkhovna Rada approved the Yanukovich government’s program of activities by 335 votes, which meant the Constitutional majority (Stenohrama plenarnoho zasidannia, 2003). In fact, this meant that PR came to power seriously and for a long time. And on April, 19 V Congress of PR was held. Yanukovich was elected as the head of PR there. At that time, the party itself remained predominantly Donetsk: it had 561,000 members, 286,000 of which, that is more than a half, lived in the territory of the Donetsk region. Congress made some changes in the PR charter. From that time, all operational issues had to be settled by a newly created political executive committee of the party, and political issues were transferred to the PR political council (Khorolskyi, 2003).

Azarov was elected as the head of the political council; Klyuyev – the secretary of the political council; and Rybak – the head of the political executive committee. This triumvirate continued to maintain control over the PR. Yanukovich’s function as the leader of PR was mainly in being a symbol of the party’s influence. However, it had its logic: the “Donetsk” planned to make Yanukovich a president, and according to the Constitution, the president cannot hold office in citizens associations (including parties), so in case of his victory in the presidential election, he would have to leave the post of the party’s leader.

At the same time, PR increased and consolidated its strengths in Parliament. The faction “United Ukraine,” which was created on May 15, 2002, on the basis of representatives of the bloc “For United Ukraine,” did not exist for a long time in the newly elected Verkhovna Rada. In fact, it became an instrument of leading positions allocation in the Parliament. In particular, on May 28 the representative of the “Donetsk” Gennadiy Vasylev obtained a position of the First Deputy Head of the Verkhovna Rada. On June 20, the faction “United Ukraine” broke up into several factions and deputy groups (Nove oblychchia, 2002). At the same time, PR created two own structures at once – the faction “Regions of Ukraine” and the group “European choice.”

The faction “Regions of Ukraine” included 35 people’s deputies (Fraktsiia, 2002). Raisa Bohatyriova headed the faction (elected to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in the Donetsk region). Ivan Kuras and Volodymyr Nakonechny (both elected from the list of the bloc “For United Ukraine!”), Ivan Bastryha (elected in the Zaporizhzhia region), Leonid Klimov (elected in the Odesa region), and Oleg Tsarov (elected in the Dnipropetrovsk region) became the authorized representatives of the faction.

The group “European Choice” included 15 people’s deputies. “Europe is chosen by the “Azarov people,” Kharkiv majoritarian representatives, and a handful of businessmen,” Ukrainian Pravda noted about the group’s composition (Deputatska hrupa, 2002). Vasyl Potapov (elected in the Kharkiv region) and Valentyn Savitsky (elected in the Zhytomyr region) became the authorized representatives of the group. In fact, it was a kind of “light version” of “Regions of Ukraine.” Thus, it was a shelter for those people’s deputies who considered it useful for their business to prove their loyalty to PR, but so far were afraid of being strongly associated with this party.

It is noteworthy that the group included deputy chairpersons of PR, Samofalov and Pekhota (both of them were elected to the Parliament from the list of the bloc “For United Ukraine!”). It clearly showed that “European Choice” is a project of PR. In September 2002, Pekhota became a chairperson of this group, and in April 2003 he became Rybak’s deputy on the post of the head of PR political executive committee.

At the time of its creation, the faction “Regions of Ukraine” and the group “European Choice” had in total 50 people’s deputies. Gradually, they expanded their ranks through defectors from other factions and non-factional majoritarian representatives implementing for it a classical combination of “carrot” and “a stick” methods. Possible problems for the business of disloyal deputies were “a stick”; and “a carrot” was various bonuses for business (benefits, licenses, favorable order, etc.) and other attractions, which had to ensure the belonging to the “party of power.”

In November 2002, the faction “Regions of Ukraine” and the group “European Choice” together nominated Yanukovich for the post of the Prime Minister of Ukraine (Ukraina ofitsiina, 2012). In a year, on November 19, 2003, “Regions of Ukraine” and “European Choice” approved the decision to unite to the single faction at the joint meeting. The next day, it was announced that the united faction “Regions of Ukraine” had 64 deputies, and its co-chairpersons were Bohatyriova and Pekhota (Fraktsiia “Rehiony Ukrainy”, 2003). Explaining the event, Pekhota declared that the creation of the united faction “Regions of Ukraine” would stimulate the parliamentary majority to work more harmonized and efficiently as well as to support Yanukovich’s government (Nova fraktsiia, 2003).

On the eve of this event, on November 18, power positions of the “Donetsk” became even stronger – Hennadiy Vasilyev changed the chair of the First Deputy Chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada to the chair of General Prosecutor. In December 2003 one more event, which proved PR strengthening, happened. Volodymyr Rybak handed over the post of the Donetsk regional party organization’s chairperson to Boris Kolesnikov, who was a head of the Donetsk regional Council at that time. Since then, PR had been openly and strongly supported by both Kolesnikov himself and his old friend Rinat Akhmetov, one of the most influential businessmen in Donetsk.

At the same time, PR began actively to build structures throughout Ukraine in the old way, which had been tested in the Donetsk region before Parliamentary elections 2020. Civil servants, state and enterprise employees headed by “regionals” were forcibly driven to the party (Dzhuvaha, 2014).

On March 16, 2004, the Verkhovna Rada passed a resolution by 239 votes, by which it approved the satisfactory work of the government on fulfillment of the Cabinet of Ministers activities program “Transparency, Efficiency, and Effectiveness” and approved a new program of the Cabinet of Ministers’ activities “Consistency, efficiency, responsibility.” (Stenohrama plenarnoho zasidannya, 2004). It confirmed that PR had already had the status of a “party of power.”

On April 14, leaders of deputy factions and groups, as well as political parties, which created the parliamentary and government coalition, unanimously adopted the decision to nominate Yanukovych as the sole candidate for the post of president at a meeting where President Kuchma was presented. The coordinator of the parliamentary majority Stepan Havrysh told journalists about it. According to him, Yanukovych himself also attended the meeting. Leaders of factions and parties – The Agrarian Party of Ukraine, The People’s Democratic Party, The Party of Regions, political parties of industrialists and entrepreneurs of Ukraine and The Labor Ukraine, The Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (united), deputy group “Democratic initiatives,” “People’s Choice,” and “People’s Authority Party” – took part at the meeting (Kuchmisty, 2004).

VI Congress of PR was held on July 4 in Zaporizhzhia. It officially nominated Yanukovych as a candidate for the presidency of Ukraine (Premier-ministr, 2004). The choice of the Congress venue showed that powerful political technologists decided to position Yanukovych as a candidate mostly from Eastern and Southern regions.

Serhiy Tihpko, who at that time headed the National Bank and the Party of Labor (Ukraine), ran the official Yanukovych’s headquarters located in the Zoryana cinema. Klyuyev ran a Yanukovych’s shadow headquarters located at address 10, Museum Lane. In fact, he also ran the PR activity, because Yanukovych was mainly involved in public events within the election campaign, and Azarov had to focus on solving current governmental problems. However, Klyuyev himself also had certain state duties – he had been holding the position of the Vice-Premier since December 10, 2003. Nevertheless, he was concentrated on not-public activities in the headquarters.

Leaders of all parts of PR structural vertical were determined to ensure Yanukovych’s victory in any way. After the victory, in which they were firmly convinced, they were waiting for various thanks in the form of posts in the executive branch, guaranteed deputy seats, business privileges, and so on.

The Orange Revolution broke the plans of PR. However, it also gave the “regionals” some grounds for revenge. One of the main components of a political compromise, which opened the way to the “third” (that is the repeated second) tour of a presidential election and Viktor Yushchenko’s victory, was a constitutional reform approved by the Verkhovna Rada on December 8, 2004. It included the transition to the parliamentary-presidential republic on January 1, 2006. Therefore, recovering from Yanukovych’s defeat in the presidential election, PR began to prepare for revenge in the parliamentary elections.

It is noteworthy that during the period between the first round of the presidential election (October 31, 2004) and the last plenary day of the Verkhovna Rada of the IV convocation (April 4, 2006) the number of PR faction’s members declined by only 4 – from 64 to 60 people. It means that strong factors that cemented the “regionals” despite their leader’s defeat were operating. One of these factors was the expectation of quick revenge in the parliamentary elections. Another factor was the transition to a strictly proportional electoral system instead of a mixed one (half-proportional and half-majority). The opportunity to enter the Parliament through single-member electoral districts was closed. Only one door remained open – party lists. This increased further the political weight of parties capable to overcome the 3% barrier in elections.

Under these conditions, PR became the center of gravity for smaller political projects. In particular, Yevhen Kushnaryov, having lost the post of the chairperson of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration, founded the New Democracy party on January 15, 2005. However, on November 19, 2005, during its II Congress, the party decided to join PR.

Kushnaryov himself became the official head of PR election campaign. At the same time, Vasyl Dzharty ran the official PR headquarters, and still the same Klyuyev – the shadow one (Karasev, 2012). It should be noted about Dzharty that he had headed the city of Makeyevka since May 1999; then from November 2002 to February 2005, he was the First Deputy Chairperson of the Donetsk Regional State Administration. After his resignation, he moved to Kyiv to work as First Deputy Chairperson of Rybak who was the Chairperson of PR Political Executive Committee. Apparently, he was just mastering the skills of an all-Ukrainian figure. Thus, Kushnaryov, as well as Yanukovych and Azarov, was particularly involved in public pre-election events. Therefore, Klyuyev played the biggest (though not advertised) role in the management of the election campaign and all PR activities.

Klyuyev was also responsible for two interrelated issues: the formation of the party’s electoral list and the financial security of the election campaign. The list consisted of three parts. The first part was Yanukovych’s personal quota. According to journalists, “Yanukovych gathered there like in a glove all those who in one way or another had helped him in the struggle for the presidency or had worked with him in the Cabinet” (Nikolaienko, 2005). He also enlisted his youngest son, Viktor Viktorovich Yanukovych, there. The second part was given to representatives of local PR organizations. The number of seats and their quantity depended on the number of votes cast for Yanukovych in the presidential election. Businesspersons and other figures (in particular, people’s deputies of the IV convocation) able to make an appropriate contribution to campaign funding represented the third part. Akhmetov got the most seats – he himself received number seven, enrolling as a president of the football club “Shakhtar” (Donetsk) and took four more leaders of this club to the PR list with him, as well as a dozen leaders of his companies and several personal assistants. Kolesnikov who received number 10, also took several people to the list with him.

Of course, Yanukovich had the last word. He personally approved the list, after it PR Political Council submitted the list for approval to the VIII Party Congress, which took place on December 3, 2005. Right at the Congress, Yanukovich made an important adjustment to the list: all candidates starting with the 88th number went one-step down (Yanukovich povede, 2005). And Dmitry Salamatin, who during Yanukovich's presidency, headed Ukroboronprom and the Defense Ministry, and later was found to be a Russian agent of influence, was recorded under number 88.

The election campaign was quite successful for PR. According to the results of voting on March 26, 2006, the party took first place, receiving 32.14% votes and 186 seats (Vybory, 2006). In particular, in the Verkhovna Rada of the IV convocation, all 52 members of the faction "Regions of Ukraine," which were included again in the PR list, became people's deputies.

An even more important result was the fact that PR managed to beat BYuT and "Our Ukraine" during the "coalition" and created an Anti-Crisis Coalition with the SPU and CPU on July 7. Thus, on August 4, a government led by Yanukovich was created. Azarov was again appointed First Deputy Prime Minister – Minister of Finance, and Klyuyev – Deputy Prime Minister. Rybak was appointed Deputy Prime Minister – Minister of Construction, Architecture and Housing, Dzharty – Minister of Environmental Protection, and so on. In total, more than 20 members of the PR faction got posts in the government and other executive bodies. Due to this, the checkpoint boundary of the PR list moved from the 186th to the 211th number.

Conclusions. Thus, the Party of Regions' role in reaching the all-republican level by representatives of the Donetsk regional elite is significant. Based on the officially registered political party, since the late 1990s, representatives of Donetsk FIGs have been given the opportunity to hold key management positions in the country. One of the first significant achievements of this political union and V. Yanukovich himself was its entry into the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the appointment of V. Yanukovich as Prime Minister of Ukraine in 2002.

For 2006, a certain consensus was reached between different influence groups within the Party of Regions. All of them received the desired bonuses during the distribution of posts and areas of responsibility. Under these circumstances, members of the Party of Regions faction had sufficient motivation to adhere to intra-factional discipline. All ordinary members were divided between curators – the deputy chairpersons of the faction, who informed them about the instructions given by the party leaders. The party was quite consolidated and ready to enter the next round of fight for the opportunity to have impact on the distribution of the state's financial flows and to lobby its members for key management posts in the highest governmental and administration bodies of Ukraine.

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