

# Post-Soviet Stages of Ukraine's Party System Development (1989-2013)

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*In the article, various approaches are summarized to build an integral chronological scheme of the evolution of Ukraine's party system. Special attention is paid to the forms of political participation and the phenomenon of party leadership. In the result of research, nine stages of Ukraine's party system development are distinguished (six post-Soviet and three modern), and the specific features of the stages of the post-Soviet period are highlighted.*

*Keywords: political parties, party system, political participation, party affiliation, party leadership*

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## Introduction

Political parties are among the most important institutes in any political system, especially if one is going through drastic changes. A substantial body of literature has explored patterns of Ukraine's party system institutionalization. There are three main approaches in methodology: to analyze parties among other state, political and social institutes of Ukraine (Yakushik, 1992: 31-32; 1997), to concentrate on the Ukrainian party system (Rybiy, 2013; Yakymenko, 2017), to compare party systems in different post-Soviet states (Meleshevich, 2007).

The most important factors of the convenient segmentation of political history in peaceful times, wherein events within the period might consist of relatively similar characteristics, are determined by electoral cycles. "No single factor is more propitious for the successful institutionalization of party systems than continuously having elections that are the principal route to state power" (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995: 460). In the times of turmoil, however, other events – non-conventional, extraordinary and often violent – are becoming the decisive points for the party system evolution. These events, as well as elections, are determined by different aspects of political participation and parameters of party leadership practiced in this society.

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In the political history of contemporary Ukraine, we distinguish two periods: post-Soviet and modern. First started in the late Soviet time – in the end of 1980s, was determined by the post-Communist transformation and finished in the beginning of 2014 with the forceful break of existed political traditions. Second was largely determined by the ruination of political and social patterns practiced in the previous decades. In these two periods, the party system of Ukraine has different logic of development. That is why it seems appropriate to examine Ukraine's party system development in two parts, concentrated on the evolution of its essential features in the regarded period. So, in this article, nine stages of Ukraine's party system development are classified. Six of them, belonging to the post-Soviet period, are presented based on the role and activities of the political parties examined as mechanisms of political participation.

## 1. 1989-1991

The primary democratization of Ukraine was the result of informal negotiations between the rapidly losing influence and popularity republican government and the main proto-party networks formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, both on the communist (mainly) and dissident soil. These socio-political networks became the main mechanism for the political participation of elite groups in the late Soviet period. Moreover, they became a kind of 'incubators', in which the political class of independent Ukraine had been formed.

At the end of Soviet times, two currents existed in the Ukrainian anti-communist movement – national-democratic and national-radical. The first was represented by the *People's Movement of Ukraine for Perebudova – Rukh*, the second by the *Ukrainian Inter-Party Assembly* (later the *Ukrainian National Assembly*). Some researchers considered this as the beginning of the alternative (to the CPSU) political spectrum formation: "At first, everyone is united by confrontation and the only goal with a negative connotation – to overcome the anti-democratic regime. With the advancement along this path, ideological demarcation, separation is taking place" (Kalkaman & Bryndak, 1997: 98).

The main motivations for party-building were:

- a) the fight against the CPSU (its monopoly on power);
- b) the struggle for sovereignty (independence) of Ukraine;
- c) the commitment to the institutionalization of society expressed by politically active citizens;
- d) the democratization, introduction of the elements of civil society.

At this stage, the formation of political parties took place 'from below' and followed three main paths:

- a) organizational transformation of informal public organizations (the Ukrainian Helsinki Union was turned into the *Ukrainian Republican Party*);
- b) creation of party structures on the basis of social movements with the preservation of the latter and subsequent separate functioning ("Green World" – the *Green Party of Ukraine*, "Democratic Ukraine" – the *Party of Ukraine's Democratic Revival*);
- c) creation of the party 'from scratch' – by the initiative group determined its ideology and program principles.

In that time, political participation became more and more autonomous. Citizens chose independently the forms of political activity, and these forms often turned out to be non-conventional – far beyond the limits established by the Soviet legislation and tradition, thus undermining the foundations of the official political culture.

The first in the modern Ukrainian history electoral cycle of free and fair, in general, elections marked the important regional distinctions in the patterns of political participation. In Kyiv and Galicia (Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil regions), opponents of the regime received the majority of votes. In other regions, the *Communist Party of Ukraine* retained, though largely formally, the status of the dominant political force.

## 2. 1991-1994

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the spontaneous declaration of Ukraine's independence meant a radical change in the rules and norms of political participation and hence in the requirements for political leaders. In this period, political parties with different ideologies appeared on the Ukrainian political scene, forming a rather wide spectrum of the party system. However, the establishment of a great number of parties had a small impact on the patterns of political participation.

The prohibition of the Communist Party, along with the preservation of the old power structures – the system of councils ('soviets' in Russian, 'radas' in Ukrainian) – and the formation of new ones (the presidential vertical) created a situation where a wide layer of the state-administrative elite actually assumed the role of the ruling party. A vivid reflection of this phenomenon was the work of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the first (twelfth) convocation, where the majority was held by the non-party 'Group 239', which consisted of the former communists. The phenomenon, called the 'party of power' (Wilson & Yakushik, 1992: 164), has not been sufficiently studied in Ukrainian political science, although a thorough analysis of it could significantly complement the modern political history of Ukraine.

The emergence of 'neo-communists' took place in the general line of the post-communist tendencies – the *Socialist Party of Ukraine* united in its ranks that part of the second and third echelons of the CPSU elite, which was able to quickly accept the new rules of the political game and played it effectively enough. Some of the 'neo-communists' later joined the *Communist Party of Ukraine*, which was restored in the fall of 1993. After its restoration, a significant number of former members of the CPSU left the ranks of the Socialist Party, which began to turn from a left into a center-left party.

In general, the left parties have become a factor in political process continuity, increasing the organic nature of the political system of post-Soviet Ukraine. At the same time, the fact that the strong opposition forces consolidated before the 'party of power' was a factor of potential social destabilization. However, due to the indecisiveness of the left parties' leaders and their tendency to compromise, the influence of this factor never reached a critical level.

Representatives of the nomenclature, at that time, often preferred non-public forms of political participation, limiting themselves to a ritual demonstration of loyalty to the new regime. Party leadership was not a necessary condition for political influence. Moreover, it often implied additional risks, and the prospects for such public activity were very vague.

In this situation, political parties functioned not as the main mechanism of political participation, but as one of the auxiliary ones. Their leaders, with rare exceptions, were unknown to the masses and practically did not influence political and social processes taking place in

Ukrainian society. “Multi-party leads to the formation of many parties of different political orientations, approximately equal in influence, which cannot solve their tasks independently. The small-party structure increases political uncertainty, negatively affects the activities of various political structures” (Zhuravsky, 2000).

Another feature of that time was the creation of parties by ambitious businessmen, who thus wished to establish themselves in Ukrainian politics in addition to the state top officials and regional or sectoral clientele networks. This is how the *People's Party of Ukraine* of Leopold Taburyansky, the *Liberal Party of Ukraine* of Igor Markulov, the *Ukrainian Party of Solidarity and Social Justice* of Eduard Lashutin, and the *Union Party* of Lev Mirimsky appeared on the political arena.

The underdevelopment of civil society, the low level of group interests differentiation, and the lack of need for political self-organization among the vast majority of the population led to the fact that in 1991-1994 the multi-party system functioned primarily as a decorative attribute of democracy, supposed to certify the similarity of post-Soviet Ukraine to ‘civilized countries’.

Under the conditions of the economic collapse and public frustration, the political participation reduced mainly to celebrations (new holidays were added to the Soviet ones, and all of them, even religious, at that time, somehow had a political connotation) and various protests, for the most part lacking proper organization and clear political goals. After the collapse of the USSR, the level of political mobilization in Ukrainian society and the political activity of citizens decreased significantly. The development of Ukraine went according to the inertial scenario. Political leaders did not want to turn the tide, preferring to resolve the accumulated contradictions through the national elections.

### **3. 1994-1997**

In 1994 parliamentary, presidential and local elections took place, which may be the most free and fair in all Ukrainian history. This was “a period of further development of the multi-party system, ideological and organizational self-determination of political parties” (Romaniuk & Shveda, 2005: 237). The adoption of new electoral legislation, as well as the legislative regulation of the activities of political parties, played an important role in the development of the party system. This created the prerequisites for qualitatively new political, legal and socio-economic foundations of the party building in Ukraine (Kuzio, 1993).

The parties at that time did not have the necessary social basis. They were formed to a large extent artificially – from above, not from below. Special importance was attached to formal legal features (charter, program, registration, and proper holding of congresses) and self-promotion, rather than gaining authority and influence in the general population and reflecting the interests of certain social groups. The main goal of the activities of most Ukraine's parties was their full inclusion in the political system of the new state and “their performance of the entire range of functional duties inherent in these political institutions in societies with an established form of democracy” (Romaniuk & Shveda, 2005: 242).

There was a gradual increase in the status of party leaders. First of all, this concerns the political forces represented in the Verkhovna Rada of the second (thirteenth) convocation. Thanks to the parliamentary election, some politicians managed to confirm their self-proclaimed leadership and gained a certain influence on socio-economic processes.

The overwhelming majority of candidates to the parliament framed their programs not on the platforms adopted by the party congresses, but on bright appeals and attractive promises.

Olexandr Dergachov noted: "The elections to the Verkhovna Rada of 1994 were the first to take place under conditions of a multi-party system, but in fact not yet on a real multi-party basis. They were held under the majority system; political parties had the right to nominate candidates for deputies on an equal footing with groups of voters, labor collectives and public organizations. It is important that a significant number of party activists chose not to advertise their party affiliation during the election campaign" (Dergachov, 2002: 8-9). Mykhailo Svystovych shared this point of view: "Under the majoritarian system, people vote not so much for an ideology as for a person. Party membership, of course, is also paid attention to, but it (especially in non-politicized regions) is not decisive" (Svystovych, 2005).

"The 1994 elections revealed a discrepancy between the formally national status of political parties in Ukraine (since, by law, the registration of regional parties by the Ministry of Justice was impossible) and their real electorate, limited to certain regions" (Ragozin, 2002: 46). In general, they marked a fairly clear division between West and East, where the forms of political participation were very different from each other. At the same time, Ukraine's Center appeared as a macro-region ambivalent in terms of political participation.

The elections contributed to the further development of the party system, the emergence of new parties (they were often created by splitting or merging of existing structures, and the main factors in these perturbations were not the ideologies, but personal, corporate or group ambitions), the professionalization of political activities. However, most parties remained practically unknown at the national level and had no influence on political processes.

None of the political forces had the necessary potential to form a stable majority in the Verkhovna Rada. The situation was complicated by the lack of political parties influence on the formation and function of the executive power. "The development of parties and the party system was negatively influenced by the idea of a non-party government, according to which the cabinet should be non-partisan and engage in economic activities" (Ragozin, 2002: 46).

The structuring of the parliament on the principle of party factions laid the foundation for the further development of Ukraine's party system as a key institute of the political system. In contrast to the previous artificial increase in the number of political parties, a tendency to reduce their number appeared, both due to the strengthening of parliamentary parties and the unification of political organizations that lost the elections. So, in 1996, the *People's Democratic Party* and the *Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United)* appeared on the political arena, and in 1997 – the *Reforms and Order Party*.

On the other hand, the parties formed earlier underwent ideological and organizational consolidation. Party leaders strengthened their positions, the internal opposition either recognized their dominance or created its own party project. The brightest example of this trend was the *Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine*, founded in 1996 by Natalia Vitrenko, united members of the SPU dissatisfied with the 'right-wing bias' of the party leadership, headed by Oleksandr Moroz.

#### **4. 1997-2004**

The beginning of the fourth stage in the evolution of the Ukrainian party system is chronologically linked with the elections of the Verkhovna Rada of the third convocation (March 1998), which were held on the mixed system with half of the parliament elected by party lists. This was the time of political parties consolidation, mobilization of their electoral base, and formation of electoral blocs. There was a gradual process of stabilization in the

atomized party system through its transformation into a pluralistic one. "Contenders for seats in the Verkhovna Rada willy-nilly have to fight at the level of ideologies, at the level of party programs and team play" (Hrabovskyi, 1998).

The parliamentary elections of 1998 led to a significant increase in the influence of political parties. Party representation in the legislature has sharply increased as well as the level of factional discipline. The 2002 elections only reinforced this trend. The issues of forming a permanent parliamentary majority and a government based on party support began to be debated. Projects for the reform of the political system appeared, suggesting an increase in the political responsibility of the parties. Sociologists noted the significant impact that the parliamentary elections of 1998 and 2002 and the presidential elections of 1999 and 2004 had on the development of Ukraine's party system (Bekeshkina, 2003; Vyshniak, 2003). In general, the influence of political parties on the system of public administration gradually increased both at the national and regional level.

One of the most important trends of this stage was the consolidation of the state-administrative elite in the party format. The 'party of power', which has grown excessively, was structured not only by shadow methods, but also through the creation of public 'superstructures' in the form of political parties. The main function of this kind of parties is to provide public support for presidential and government initiatives, both at the legislative level and in the context of their practical implementation on the ground. Some of the parties of the 'pragmatic center', first of all the PDP and the SDPU(U), managed to form numerous regional organizations and rally thousands of local deputies. As a result, "in 1996-1998, society witnessed the arrival under the 'roof' of political parties of a number of powerful shadow groups" (Doroshenko, 2000). The first party 'superstructures' over political and economic groups arose starting from the 1998 elections, "with the introduction of the mixed electoral system, the institutional significance of parties increases" (Lisnychuk & Sushko, 2005: 16).

It is symptomatic that the legalization of influential forces of shadow politics occurred, as a rule, in the form of the left centrist parties (*Hromada [Community]*, the SDPU(U), *Labor Ukraine*, *Bat'kivshchyna [Motherland]*, the *Party of Regional Revival of Ukraine*). The left center was seen throughout the 1990s as the easiest and fastest way to gain electoral support. Social populism was put at the forefront, and issues of strategic importance (economic reforms, foreign policy priorities, social problems, humanitarian conflicts, and security aspects) were deliberately relegated to the background. Party leaders articulated these controversial issues exclusively during election campaigns to mobilize targeted electoral groups. It should be marked that all the above-mentioned parties gradually shifted to the right, revealing their true nature.

At that time, pragmatic, technological approaches dominated in the party building. There was an ideological devaluation, financial and information resources came to the fore, as well as informal relationships with the authorities. The real influence of the parties was determined not so much by electoral support, but by the proximity to the Presidential Administration.

Experts from the National Institute for Strategic Studies identified four main trends in the development of the Ukrainian party system at this stage.

1. The leading role in politics was played by parties created in 1989-1993 (CPU, SPU, Rukh). "None of these political forces can be considered an all-Ukrainian frontman for reformist and, moreover, democratic ideas".

2. A common feature of the 2002 parliamentary elections winners was the stable and well-defined electorate. There was a consolidation of political forces in the main segments of political spectrum.

3. The absence of a sufficiently powerful political base for democratic reforms determined the possibility of manipulations through the implementation of appropriate political propaganda projects.

4. The lack of ideological content and the general underdevelopment of the party system entailed a certain exaggeration of the significance and role of political leaders (Hal'chyns'kyi, 2003: 94-95; Palamarchuk et al., 2003: 65-66).

At that time, the professionalization of political activity applied not only to a fairly narrow circle of party functionaries, but to a significant number of owners of at least a minimal administrative, organizational, intellectual, financial, or media resource. All of them could find a place for themselves in the Ukrainian political market. Party participation involved a huge number of paid agitators, observers at polling stations, etc.

Political participation became less autonomous and more mobilized. The concepts of 'administrative resource' and 'political technologies' entered into the discourse. Many politicians and experts viewed voting as an act of exchanging a 'correctly' completed ballot for a certain combination of material (financial payments, infrastructure development, food packages) and non-material (promises, direct coercion, intimidation) incentives.

Parties fought for votes more and more aggressively. The clear division of the parties on power and opposition appeared. At the same time, the practice of interparty migration continued, at the highest level as well. Ukrainian politicians demonstrated ideological flexibility, which fully corresponded to the political behavior of their voters.

Party leaders gradually became paramount public figures. Though the level of their influence, with the exception of those personally close to the head of state, was much lower than the level of popular recognition, they, step by step, began to form the mainstream of political discourse.

The alliance between the rights and the centrists against the lefts, which existed in the Verkhovna Rada of the second and third convocations, became irrelevant. The right nationalist parties, which lost their influence and popularity since the mid-1990s, got a chance for political revival with Viktor Yushchenko, who became their charismatic leader. On the other hand, the left forces relatively failed in the 2002 parliamentary elections. These factors led to the temporary tactical rapprochement between the left and right opposition in confronting the president.

The increase in regional differences of political participation was reflected in the course of two parliamentary and two presidential campaigns. In the 1998-1999 electoral cycle, certain specifics of political participation existed in almost every region. In the cycle of 2002-2004, two groups of regions emerged, forming the political confrontation 'West and Center against South-East'. Political parties, their leaders and frontmen played a crucial role in this demarcation, splitting the country by campaigning on the issues of language, history, features of socio-economic development, and geopolitical orientations.

Since 2001, there has been a gradual transition from the atomized party system, with the actors avoiding long-term cooperation and the ad hoc parliamentary majority to a bipolar system. The politicum was no longer structured by the relations of party leaders and their sponsors with the non-party (above-party) head of state, but by their relations with each other.

The 'Orange Revolution', determined by the mentioned above tendencies, was both their culmination and a response to their challenges. It became the point of change in the principles of the party system functioning.

## 5. 2005-2010

The fifth stage in the development of Ukraine's party system began with the political reform that radically changed the 'game rules'. Political parties received real levers of influence and became one of the most important and influential political institutes. Their dominant role was ensured by the proportional system of parliamentary and local elections with the closed-list voting in a single multi-mandate constituency and the monopoly to form the government – through the majority in the Verkhovna Rada. So, parties (in fact, their leaders) had become the key actors in the political system of Ukraine. The deputies at all levels became the representatives of not the voters, but the party leaders and their staff, who determined the agenda of the legislature, the government, and the local self-government.

As a result of the 'Orange Revolution', the political system of Ukraine became more open, and the level of mobilization of political participation decreased. Citizens appeared to be more independent in choosing forms of their political activity. However, with the total dominance of parties in the political space, such freedom of choice can be considered rather arbitrary.

Parliamentary elections of 2006 and 2007 recorded the formation of party coalitions with broad resource bases and strong support (so-called 'mega parties'), as well as the clear structuring of political alternatives along several axes of confrontation. Political ideologies revived, but mainly as simulacra – certain party rituals with the leaders in the role of quasi-priests.

During the entire period, Ukrainian citizens demonstrated a fairly stable electoral behavior. Accordingly, the division of Ukraine into two political macro-regions – the Center-West and the South-East, formed in the previous period, remained. Moreover, proportional elections of local councils on closed lists, which played into the hands of the most powerful parties, had become a factor of the institutionalization of regional differences through the party-factional structuring of local governments and their inevitable politicization. At the same time, the internal differences that existed in each of the macro-regions often manifested themselves in conflicts, including public ones, between political forces belonging to one ideological trend. The most intensive among them was the confrontation between *Our Ukraine* and the *Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc*, which, nevertheless, were forced to cooperate at the national level.

The party system of Ukraine developed according to the classical algorithm of social evolution: regardless of the number of parties in the politicum, two directions were gradually taking shape. Vyacheslav Malyarchuk supposed that this stage in the party system formation should end with its establishment as a full-fledged political institution. In particular, he noted: "During the Orange Revolution, for the second time in the recent history of Ukraine, domestic political life acquired signs of a quasi-two-party system. As in the early 1990s, less significant disagreements between political forces lost their meaning for a certain period against the backdrop of the need to overcome a dangerous socio-ethical split and resolve pressing socio-political problems. However, if the political confrontation on the eve of the collapse of the USSR led to the transition of Ukrainian society to a polarized multi-party system, and the corresponding institutional effects limited the influence of parties on the political process, now the development of the multi-party system has a fundamentally different perspective: recent political events in Ukraine created the preconditions for a rapid transformation of the national party system, similar to the modern European democracies" (Malyarchuk, 2005). As further Ukrainian history showed, such a scenario was too optimistic. However, it cannot be denied that in the mid-2000s, Ukraine had a certain 'window of opportunity' for the consolidation of democracy, which was neglected by political elites, primarily the party leaders.

## 6. 2010-2013

The sixth stage in Ukraine's party system evolution began with the abolition of the political reform by the Constitutional Court (Decision, 2010) after new president Viktor Yanukovych consolidated his power. The return to the 'game rules' existed in 1996-2004 led to dramatic changes. The restoration of the impressive presidential powers, in particular, the subordination of the Cabinet of Ministers to the head of state, meant that political parties, including pro-presidential, lost most of their levers of influence on the executive.

The abolition of the political reform was continued with the new frame of parliamentary elections (On Elections, 2011). The return to the mixed system deprived party leaders of the exclusive right to form the lists of candidates. At the same time, voters got, at least in theory, more options for political participation, including those besides the mechanisms of political parties.

The abolition of electoral blocs and increase in the threshold for parliamentary election to 5% gave a serious blow to small parties and started a party consolidation trend, that looked very similar to corporative mergers and acquisitions. The *Party of Regions* adopted the strategy of absorbing the satellites, considering only the *Communists* as independent allies. As about all other like-minded politicians, its leaders were ready to issue party tickets and secondary positions, at most – to promote them to parliament as non-partisans.

The opposition preferred more flexible forms of inter-party relations. However, the main trend gradually became more and more noticeable in this camp as well. Unlike the previous stages, when the opposition was quite clearly divided into left and right, in the early 2010s, its diversification was determined mainly not by ideological or program differences, but by ambitions of the leaders, who permanently struggled for intraspecific dominance.

Along with the political and legal factors, psychological ones should also be considered. The leaders of the *Party of Regions*, and first of all, Viktor Yanukovych, were quite authoritarian personalities who adhered to the appropriate style of leadership. They built rigidly their own party and, consciously or not, tried to spread such practices to the entire Ukrainian society. Naturally, these led to an ever-increasing tightening of the 'game rules', including inter-party relations.

The *Party of Regions* established itself in the hegemon status. In modern Ukraine, none party had such a volume of power at all levels. It actually turned into an official 'party of power', with the party apparatus as a public superstructure and the bulk of the state-administrative elite. At the same time, there was an invisible, but very important division into the party itself (functionaries and the top of activists), power as such (bureaucrats), and the Family (Viktor Yanukovych's inner circle). Other political parties were forced to choose their own positioning in relation to the PR, deciding whether to be its satellites, formal opponents, or enemies. In fact, the *Party of Regions* as a dominant party was a façade of the neo-patrimonial pyramid, with Yanukovych and his Family at the top, desiring to monopolize power and property.

The influence of party leaders significantly decreased in favor of the head of state. Party leaders were forced, as under Leonid Kuchma, to correlate their actions with the position of the President's Administration, which became the main control platform for Ukrainian politics again. Moreover, they ceased to be 'inviolable', removed from the protection of selective justice. Politics ceased to provide immunity from legal troubles and became a high-risk area. This applied to both the opposition and ruling parties. Among the high-ranking prisoners were not only the leaders of *Bat'kivshchyna* and *People's Self-Defense*, but also

representatives of the *Party of Regions* or the chairman of the completely pro-presidential *Left Forces Union*.

At the same time, the political participation of Ukrainian citizens retained a high degree of autonomy, as shown by the local elections of 2010 and subsequent snap elections in a number of districts. The tightening rules of the political game did not immediately limit their political space. Unlike party leaders, 'ordinary people' kept sufficient freedom to choose the forms of their own political activity. This phenomenon was demonstrated in 2012 at the election of the Verkhovna Rada of the seventh convocation. The predictable victory of the opposition forces by the party lists was supplemented by the unexpected victories of candidates from *Bat'kivshchyna* and *Svoboda [Freedom]* in single-mandate constituencies. The administrative resource and the bribery of voters were effective only where they served as additional incentives – in the rivalries of candidates represented parties in their common strongholds, or in the struggle of the 'party of power' nominees (both official and informal) with independent businessmen.

The parliamentary election clearly recorded the above-mentioned trend of electoral consolidation: on the one hand, all five parties entered the Verkhovna Rada overcame the barrier with a large, at least two-fold margin; on the other hand, only three of the sixteen outsiders got over 1% of the votes (Election, 2012: 4). There were critically few independent deputies. Most of the self-nominated candidates, who won in the constituencies, hurried to join the *Party of Regions*. Others preferred to cooperate with the PR faction on the most important issues without formally joining. The *Communist Party of Ukraine*, in fact, chose the same strategy, abandoned the official partnership that had place in previous years, but remained a pro-government political force.

In general, the change of the electoral system affected the balance of power, but did not change the clear division in the Ukrainian politicum with intensified tendencies of polarization and antagonism. The post-Soviet logic of political development was exhausted. The common political and social background weakened and could not play an integral role. The post-Soviet period of Ukrainian political history came to an end.

## Conclusions

The modern period of Ukraine's party system development started in 2014 and can be divided into three stages, marked by Volodymyr Zelensky's rise to power (2019) and the Russian invasion (2022). In general, during this period role of political parties declined gradually. A lot of parties were forbidden, others were marginalized, while different activist groups became more influential with the growing impact of non-conventional activities.

Since 2019, the president's party, *Servant of the People*, has functioned as a hegemon party supported by administrative resources. This situation was fixed after the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war when martial law was introduced and political activity was limited.

Ukrainian politics have become much more personalized, and these popular and/or influential persons have no party affiliation usually. In fact, party leaders lost their prominent political status. At the same time, political parties lost their role of the universal mechanism for political participation.

So, in 2014-2023 there were dramatic differences in party system development and functioning in comparison with the post-Soviet period of Ukraine's political history. These peculiarities will be presented in the next publication, accounting the current development.

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