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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KYIV 001727

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TAGS: PGOV PREL UP

SUBJECT: YATSENYUK: LOSING MOMENTUM IN PRESIDENTIAL BID

REF: KYIV 00437

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary for reasons 1.4(b,d)

1. (C) Summary. Presidential contender Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who saw a surge in popular support in the spring, now appears to be losing ground in the pre-election environment in Ukraine. Latest public opinion polls move him squarely to third place from the statistical tie he held for second place with Tymoshenko through the spring and summer months. His "unorthodox" campaign, which features camouflage colors and consists of billboards and military-style tents staffed by unengaged citizens that dot the streets of major cities, so far seems to lack resonance among the public. Whether or not Yatsenyuk enters the second round, his Front of Change (FC) plans to run in the next parliamentary election. End Summary.

"Unorthodox" Campaign Falling Flat

2. (C) On September 29 we met with Yatsenyuk's Front of Change (FC) deputy head of council and campaign co-manager Andriy Pyshny and head of FC international relations section Oleksandr Shcherba. Neither was able to offer more specific details on Yatsenyuk's vague campaign promises or future plans if elected president, only underscoring that there will be dirty tricks throughout and Yatsenyuk will focus on "Project Ukraine" intended to unite a divided electorate.

3. (C) Pyshny and Shcherba echoed Yatsenyuk's public warnings that the upcoming presidential election is Ukraine's "last chance" for democracy, and indicated that the campaign's "unhappy" colors are intended to convey that the country is on the verge of destruction. The "artful" design is intended to appeal to young voters, while the slogans--which convey Yatsenyuk's four central tenets (new industrialization, effective local government, healthy and educated people, and a capable army)--are intended to resonate among voters over

50. Ihor Kohut of the Agency for Legislative Initiatives told us on September 30 that he understood Yatsenyuk's tent campaign was actually designed for Former Defense Minister



and presidential candidate Anatoliy Hrytsenko, but was apparently transferred to Yatsenyuk when it became clear that

Hrytsenko did not have the resources to pay for the materials.

4. (C) When asked about voter and campaign mobilization, Pyshny claimed that FC's internet site was the starting point and that enthusiastic volunteers from this group were manning the tents. In contrast, tent workers have confirmed to us that they are being paid for their campaign work. We have also found that tent workers around Kyiv and Kherson, for example, cannot articulate if or why Yatsenyuk is the best candidate and are sometimes observed sleeping in the tents.

5. (C) Shcherba claimed that FC has strong support in western Ukraine but is also targeting voters in the more densely populated east. In a separate conversation in mid-September, Shcherba told us that Yatsenyuk had reached an electoral plateau in western Ukraine and would attempt to expand his support by targeting eastern Ukraine. Neither interlocutor was able to expound on how they plan to tailor their message across demographics beyond saying that "Project Ukraine" means that getting the vote out in "Ivano-Frankivsk is just as important as (in) Alchevsk" (i.e., in the far west as well as the far east of the country).

6. (C) Political expert Kohut, along with Ihor Zhdanov, director of the Open Policy Center, and Ilko Kucheriv, director of the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, told us that the nationalistic taglines and military aura of Yatsenyuk's campaign do not seem to fit his actual persona, and assess his chances at making it to the second round as low. Results of a recent poll by the Ukrainian Democratic Circle -- which is linked to a BYuT MP, but shows Tymoshenko losing in the second round to Yanukovych--indicate a significant downturn for Yatsenyuk, who garners 10.8 percent in the first round against Tymoshenko and Yanukovych, who earn 20.8 and 28.9 percent, respectively.

Yatsenyuk Expects a Dirty Campaign

7. (C) Pyshny repeated several times that Yatsenyuk is expecting the campaign to be nasty, and raised concerns that Ukrainian media is increasingly unwilling to appear critical toward the government. (Comment: We have not detected any clamping down on media freedoms. End Comment.) Pyshny claimed that literature offered from the campaign tents may end up being the only way for Yatsenyuk to communicate with voters.

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Favors Pragmatism with Russia...and Campaign Advice?

8. (C) When asked how Yatsenyuk would approach the Ukraine-Russia relationship, Pyshny resolutely replied, "with pragmatism." He said that the energy relationship would be the priority, adding that the current gas contract had made Ukraine a "slave" to Russia. Pyshny was unable to follow up with any details on Yatsenyuk's plans to pursue an energy consortium or redress problems with the gas contract, only remarking that there are no easy solutions in the gas relationship.

9. (C) In June, according to local media, Yatsenyuk replaced his Ukrainian-led electoral team with Russian advisors associated with Yanukovych's 2004 campaign. The Russian team is led by Vladimir Granovskiy, who worked under Party of Regions MP Andriy Klyuyev on Yanukovych's team in 2004, according to Ukrayinska Pravda. In response to a question on campaign advisors, however, Pyshny remained vague and said that Yatsenyuk relied on a wide network of political contacts and advisors and insisted that Yatsenyuk is in charge of his own decision-making.

FC Will Become an Official Party

10. (C) Pyshny explained that FC will become a formal political party in October and will participate in upcoming local council elections as well as an early Rada election if it is held. When asked how FC would approach the requirement that a party be registered for a minimum of one year in advance of participating in elections, Pyshny said this was simply a "legal formality" that would not stand in the way of FC's ability to compete in elections. Pyshny stressed that FC would register as a party out of electoral necessity but would strive to remain a grassroots civic organization in practice.

Funding

11. (C) Various political observers have told us--and press commentary speculate--that Yatsenyuk's funding may dry up. There is speculation that oligarch Viktor Pinchuk (son-in-law of former President Kuchma) may be waning in his support for Yatsenyuk.

Comment

12. (C) Comments from Yatsenyuk's campaign leaders and workers, as well as Kyiv's political experts, belie a chronic lack of substance behind his "unorthodox" campaign materials and lackluster 'volunteers.' FC members do not show any capability to deepen the message or expand their organization to effectively compete with the campaign machines of Yatsenyuk's principal rivals. Yatsenyuk's previous hope to overtake Tymoshenko and stand as the new generation "Orange" candidate against Yanukovych in the second round is faltering. As the official campaign prepares to get underway, he lacks endorsements, organization, and a clear message; and, unless something changes, his funding may dry up.
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