

Ukrainian economist Vitrenko fights for the right to run for President

With Presidential elections in Ukraine barely two months away, twenty current and former MPs, other officials, and media personalities have officially registered their candidacies to attempt to unseat the unpopular President Petro Poroshenko. Not among them is the economist Dr Natalia Vitrenko, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine (PSPU), whose party remains unable to operate, including to file candidates, because the Ministry of Justice has failed to register legally mandated changes to its official documents—despite a July 2018 court ruling in the PSPU's favour (“Court victory for political rights in Ukraine”, AAS, 11 July 2018). The PSPU case gives the lie to any claims that the 2014 US- and EU-backed coup in Ukraine led to greater democracy.

Vitrenko was a registered candidate for the Presidency in 1999 and 2004, receiving 11 per cent of the vote in her first try, despite the interruption of her campaign by an assassination attempt.

On 25 January 2019 in Kiev, the PSPU held a Second Stage of its XXXII Extraordinary Congress (PSPU) (first session—3 Oct. 2018), with 27 of the 33 elected delegates to the Congress present. The primary purpose of this second session was to consider the comments of the Ministry of Justice on the PSPU documents. The meeting also elected an 18-person Central Committee and a Control and Auditing Commission. Vitrenko was re-elected chairman of the PSPU, with Vladimir Marchenko as her first deputy and L. Shesler as deputy chairman. Other items on the agenda included a report by Vitrenko titled “Ukraine in 2018: A Black Hole in Europe”, and adoption of a resolution condemning Poroshenko's intervention in Ukrainian Orthodox Church affairs.

In an appeal addressed to Minister of Justice P.D. Petrenko, the XXXII Extraordinary Congress of the PSPU demanded that its documents be processed without delay and the Party's new Program and Charter registered, so that the PSPU can nominate and run its leader, Dr Vitrenko, in the Presidential election scheduled for 31 March 2019. This appeal and a PSPU statement based on Vitrenko's report, both issued on 25 January, are printed below.

Appeal to Minister of Justice P.D. Petrenko

Dear Pavel Dmitriyevich,

The delegates of the XXXII Congress of the PSPU hereby request that you immediately process the documents of the Second Stage of the XXXII Extraordinary Congress of the PSPU, among which are amendments to the Party's Charter, Program, and governing bodies, and other resolutions required by Ukrainian laws and adopted by our congress.

We believe that your subordinates are applying illegal discrimination in respect to the PSPU, having already three times rejected the documents of our congresses, as was recognised by the decision of the Kyiv Administrative Appeals Court dated 4 July 2018.

This behaviour violates the rights of the citizens of Ukraine who are associated with each other in the PSPU. Our rights are guaranteed by Articles 34 and 29 of the Constitution of Ukraine and Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The violation of our rights blocks the PSPU from taking part in elections. The election campaign for the Presidency of Ukraine began today. The PSPU intends to take part in the election of the



Natalia Vitrenko addresses the Extraordinary Congress on 25 January 2018, on her party's fight to be allowed to run candidates in the upcoming Ukrainian election. Photo: vitrenko.org

President of Ukraine, nominating its candidate to participate in this election—the Party's leader, Dr of Economics, Academician, People's Deputy of Ukraine of the II and III convocations, Candidate for the Presidency of Ukraine in 1999 and 2004 Natalia Mikhailovna Vitrenko.

For our intentions to be carried out, requires your prompt processing of the documents of the XXXII Extraordinary Congress of the PSPU, Second Stage, dated 25 January 2019. These materials have undergone expert evaluation by the Ministry of Justice several times. They have been corrected in accordance with comments from the Ministry of Justice.

We therefore request that you instruct the relevant officials to process our documents immediately, and thereby ensure the preconditions for the participation of the opposition PSPU in the 31 March 2019 election to the Presidency of Ukraine, upholding the rights of PSPU members, which are guaranteed by the Constitution of Ukraine and by international law. This is also important for ensuring that the citizens of Ukraine may freely express their preferences in the March 2019 Presidential election.

Ukraine in 2018: a black hole in Europe

What follows is a translation of a statement issued by the XXXII Extraordinary Congress of the PSPU, based on the report delivered by Natalia Vitrenko.

The Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, at its congress, has taken stock of the lamentable socioeconomic and political outcome of the capitalist reforms implemented in Ukraine, beginning with the breakup of the USSR and lawfully leading to today's socioeconomic catastrophe. This process was accelerated by the (*de facto* Nazi) *coup d'état* of 2014. As the PSPU had warned, the Euro-maidan revolution and its ideas (Russophobia, the policy of moving towards EU and NATO membership, purging the ranks of officials, decommunisation, making heroes of the Hitler-collaborators from the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists and Ukrainian Insurgent Army) have led to civil war, the loss of Crimea, deindustrialisation, an exodus of workers, and to poverty and an absence of rights for the majority of the population. Ukraine's GDP today is less than 40 per cent of 1990 GDP, while the actual loss of population exceeds 20 million. Losses from the

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domestic and foreign policy of Ukraine since 1991 are more than double the losses from the Hitlerite occupation during the Great Patriotic War. Ukraine has turned into a black hole, crawling across the Eurasian continent.

Ukraine finished 2018 with the disgraceful status of the poorest country in Europe. This is the evaluation of International Monetary Fund analysts, based on the real income and expenses of our country's population and the size and growth rates of the economy. Ukraine's per capita GDP in 2018 was US\$2820, which is only one-quarter the average level worldwide, one-twentieth the level of developed countries, and only half the level even of developing countries. GDP growth of 2-3 per cent in recent years (with 3 per cent projected for year-end 2018) has been recorded not because of any strengthening of the real sector of the economy and not as a result of a rising positive balance of trade. These factors only deteriorated during the year, while the "growth" was caused by increases in banks' net profits and in cash transfers from abroad by labour migrants. Bank profits grew by 700 per cent in the first 10 months of 2018, compared with the same period of 2017, while money transfers from labourers abroad totalled US\$11 billion (approximately 10 per cent of GDP, as against 8.3 per cent in 2017). During those same 10 months of 2018, the rate of growth of industrial output, compared with the same period in 2017, fell to 1.5 per cent [after higher rates earlier in 2018]. The negative balance of trade increased by 67 per cent in the same period (reaching US\$8 billion by the most conservative estimates).

The state statistics agency assures us that inflation in 2018 was only slightly above the planned level: 10 per cent rather than the 7.4 per cent indicated in the government budget. But this is simply a numbers game, which erases reality by monitoring a large number of products, many of which not only poor people but even those with a middle-level income practically do not consume. Therefore the "borscht index" is much more accurate; this is a cost comparison for the ingredients of borscht. In the past year, it almost doubled, rising by 27.7 hryvnias to the level of 56.6 hryvnias. That is because prices rose steeply on basic staples: onions by 93 per cent, carrots by 55 per cent, beets by 50 per cent and potatoes by 30 per cent. Only buckwheat groats, eggs, apples and sugar became a little bit less expensive during the past year. The Euromaidan government, meanwhile, raises residential utility rates substantially every year.

What working people or pensioners saw their income increase at such a pace? Thus the government reports on wage and pension increases, mockingly calling them an improvement of the conditions of life, when the facts show that the opposite is the case. While reporting that average wages have risen (now standing at 8,711 hryvnias, or US\$320.90 per month), the government says nothing about the fact that before the [2014] coup average wages were US\$408.60, so there has been a 21.5 per cent decline! In the past five years the minimum pension has decreased by 47 per cent (from US\$118.80 to US\$53.20 per month). Foreign researchers such as those who compile the Human Development Index make particular note of the deterioration of the quality of life for senior citizens in Ukraine. Mortality continues to be nearly double the birth rate.

Taking into account the lawlessness reigning in the country, the authorities' Nazi ideology, and the protection by law enforcement agencies of Nazi parties and movements, it is clear that intolerable conditions of life have been

created in Ukraine for the majority of the population. That is why labour migration occurs (more than 10 million people have left Ukraine), and the county has been swept by crime, drug addiction, prostitution, hostile "raider" takeovers, and corruption. Take even just the fact that, while the authorities were carrying on loudly about fighting corruption, court decisions led to the confiscation by the government of a grand total of five thousand US dollars from corrupt persons in all of 2018!

The XXXII Extraordinary Congress of the PSPU declares: a change in domestic and foreign policy is needed to ensure the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and prosperity of Ukraine. This could be achieved through democratic elections. But under the political dictatorship exercised by the USA, and with political repressions, the central media being owned by oligarchs under control from the West, financial charges and prices for political advertising that are unaffordable for non-oligarchy parties, the use of vote fraud techniques, and terrorisation by Nazi militants enjoying official protection, democratic elections are impossible. The authorities are cynically trampling on the rights of citizens to freely express their preferences through elections, as is guaranteed under international law. This is a problem not only for the citizens of Ukraine, but for the entire world community.

The Progressive Socialists regret that we must warn about an inevitable deterioration of the situation in the country, the danger of Nazi pogroms, "raider" takeovers of Orthodox churches, the breakdown of all life-sustaining systems for the population, a continued decline of the standard of living for the majority of the population, an acceleration of labour migration and capital flight, an ever worse deprivation of people's rights, and the extinction of the country.

Without question, such a Ukraine is a threat for Europe, and for the world community as a whole.

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