

Experts advise Presidential contenders: What should not be done during the election campaign

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On May 20, 2011, the Institute for Public Policy held a meeting on the topic «Recommendations of experts to presidential contenders: What should not be done during the election campaign.»

The event was attended by: Sheradil Baktygulov, a public administration expert; Askar Beshimov, the executive director of the economic research foundation «Project of the Future»; Valentin Bogatyrev, the Head of Research Consortium «Perspective»; Zoya Kazanzhi, a media expert (Ukraine); Ednan Karabaev, ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs, a political scientist; Anar Musabayeva, a political analyst; Almas Turdumamatov, a media expert; Murat Ukushov, an expert on constitutional law.

Askar Beshimov: First of all, one should not play on regionalism. Second, contenders should not make unrealistic promises. They should have strategic vision for the future of the country. Third, they should not be hypocritical: when they say something to a group of voters of one nationality and say an absolutely different thing to another group of different nationality. This will only lead to a split in our society. Fourth, it is necessary to establish normal and mutually beneficial long-term relations with other states, not trying to use external resources for the election campaign. Fifth, it is necessary to stop changing the country's legislation.

Sixth, there should not be use of administrative resources. Seventh, contenders should not cooperate with criminal structures.

Ednan Karabaev: Everything that you've mentioned will take place. Do you think the fact that you recommend will prevent them from using the criminal world? Do you think they will not promise? Of course they will. Will not they use administrative resource? They will. Will not they bribe? They will. Will not they use an external factor? They will. They will ask for money. Will not they use the religious factor? Of course they will. They will also use the regional factor. They will.□

Our main concern is that the election might serve as a catalyst for the explosion. The only thing we should recommend to the State is to strengthen inter-ethnic relations, because it is the most powerful factor, which can really lead to serious consequences.

Manipulation with election results or something similar can be forgiven. The main thing is that we should not let the situation «explode». We must preserve this fragile state. There is no difference who becomes the President. We can see what is the current political elite. What are you waiting for? A Messiah, or what? Let the President change every year or every two years. The main thing is stability, so that citizens are not afraid to live here. Why should we talk about the things that are impossible? All those risks will take place. But let them be within reasonable limits.

We must educate the next generation. Political elites, which have been engaged in destruction for 20 years, cannot refuse from using the instruments during the election campaign, which they traditionally used. And it's not that those elites are bad; they were raised in a specific environment. Therefore, we need 5-10 years of stability that will allow the new generation to gain experience.

Zoya Kazanzhi: I have often come to Kyrgyzstan since 2005, and I remember the

euphoria that was here in 2005, after the Tulip revolution. This euphoria was very similar to our own after the Orange Revolution. And there was very interesting discussion on the topic of constructing civil society here. Since then I have been tracking what is happening in Kyrgyzstan.

I listen to our current discussion, read your websites and understand that we are very similar. There are really 36 stories in the world. There is nothing new we can come up with, and in politics, there are similar stories.

In the Ukraine, there are several political talk shows. These programs are live, and many viewers watch them. In the studio of the «Schuster Life» program, there are always two categories of viewers: those born in the Ukraine since 1991 and, relatively speaking, their parents: doctors, sailors, retirees and so on. When a speaker talks, all those present in the studio click special buttons to express their support or non-support. And on the screen, one can see the level of trust to one or another newsmaker.

Quite often, people of different ages have different attitudes to what was said in the studio. The young generation has different opinions from that one of the older generation. This category lives in the information world. They are freer, they are freed from stereotypes, and they are more pragmatic and probably more cynical in their attitude toward politics and politicians. On this basis, many NGOs, political, and community leaders suggest that they should bank on the youth, the so-called «potential electorate,» because people of an older age will not change.

We shuffle people in power — at the level of cities and at the national level. They are rearranged as chess pieces, from chair to chair. But the essence does not

change. And besides, I believe that there is another danger to society — children of those in power. If their fathers have to use their brains at least a little to steal something, multiply it and turn it into a profitable business, their children do not have to use their brains as they grew up in an atmosphere where everything is already available. They come to work in the prosecutor's office and public bodies, because power is the largest and most successful business in the Ukraine. And there is no system of checks and balances. Many members of the government of the Ukraine are millionaires. On the one hand, this is good. But on the other hand, is this good in our poor country?! It is clear that nobody in the world is ready to talk about the first earned million. In the Ukraine, nobody is willing to talk about the first earned billion, because it is usually stolen money.

Here, you are talking about new political elites. And where will they come from? Who will let new people come to power? It's like in a proverb: the son of a colonel will never become a general, because the general has his own son. The power «substitute bench» is short enough. Power ities, actually, do not need any substitute bench. Power ities also do not need any competition or smart partners.

We do not make conclusions from past lessons. We regularly step on the same rake. It has become a national tradition.

Society should consider power as a management system, where the President is the top manager. He must select personnel and organize work in such a way that we, members of a large corporation, citizens of the country, could feel it on the quality of our own life.

In 2004, on the eve of the Orange Revolution, when it was clear that there was no confidence in state institutions, that people were ready for resistance, democrats and liberals relied on the head of the National Bank of the Ukraine, Victor Yushchenko. Journalists who traveled with him saw that he was a vacillatory head. When it was necessary to sign some important document, he always left for a

business trip or fell sick. But because, by default, journalists understood that he was the best of the worst, they felt that they should choose the lesser of two ills. And, not by malice, but having good intentions, journalists gave better evaluation of Yushchenko as a politician than he actually was. Vacillatory person is not the worst one! And the society, the citizens, did not have complete, unbiased information. A Russian proverb says: «Of two evils, we must choose the lesser», but an English proverb reads: «Of two evils we should choose either one.»

President Yushchenko gave the citizens of the Ukraine great hope. We really believed that new time had come, that we had chosen a European way of development.

I hope that many reporters understood that they should not make representatives of power ities smarter than they are in reality. We should not believe their words. Journalism is an independent profession, and if journalists become subjects of the political process, they are responsible for what happens, just like all other political actors in this process.

In the Ukraine, there was a discussion on the topic whether journalists were responsible for the political crisis, which erupted in the country and led to the dissolution of the parliament. Many people said that journalists were responsible for that, because they had assumed a mission to interpret the facts, to be advocates or prosecutors toward power ities. Although in reality, journalists have another function.□

In the Ukraine, on May 9, the law «On access to public information» came in force. This is a quite progressive, even revolutionary, law, because not only a journalist, but also any citizen of the Ukraine, has the right to request a topic, which interests him most of all. And within five days, the request must be answered. What is our society worried about? The first requests, as a rule, were about property of our public officials, how much they earn, what they have, because many our politicians

have various property of unknown origin.

For example, Victor Yanukovych, the President, is living in a country house, the territory of which amounts to 146 hectares. How did the President get this property? At a press conference, one Ukrainian journalist, Mustafa Hayem, asked the President Yanukovych to tell how such a large territory was owned by structures close to the President? The President replied that journalists invented this story. He said that he had only one small house. He suggested journalists to go themselves to his house and see. Journalists liked that suggestion, and, after the press conference, they came up to the Deputy Chief of the President's Administration, Anne Herman, a former journalist, who told them that the journalists could not go right away to the President's house, as there was no bus for them. But she promised that they would organize a special trip for journalists to the President's house in the nearest future. Journalists have been waiting for more than a year, and, at every opportunity, they remind the President and his Press service and Anne Herman of the promised trip. I do not think that journalists will ever go there, but the community knows quite well that the President has something to hide. Given the current technologies, this presidential residence was photographed from all possible angles, including from helicopter. So, as you can see, having new communication channels, it is difficult to hide information. In Egypt, the revolution was made for 18 days, and under pressure and enormous counter actions, people used Facebook and other social networks to inform each other.

Regarding the work of campaign headquarters, both in Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine, there is a phenomenon of bribing journalists. Headquarters create a group of loyal journalists and loyal editors, so that they could deliver only positive information and hide undesirable information.□

Naturally, everyone wants money. I recall a situation: in one American corporation, the President ousted a visitor, and the secretary asked him why he did so. The answer was: «He offered me the sum of money, which I could agree to accept».

But in a world where there is not censorship on the Internet, it is very hard to hide unwanted information. There is always someone who knows how it really was. Where is the guarantee that this «someone» will not want to share such information? In the new information world, it occurs quite often.

A friend of mine, an owner of a large media holding, said: «I earn money; my field of activities is the media business. And to successfully earn money, it is necessary that people believed me. I cannot play all these games, because people will not buy my production.»

Another important topic is non-governmental organizations. I believe that the time of flourishing NGOs is over. They did their job, becoming the foundation for the current civil society. I myself am quite actively engaged in social activities, and now we are no longer engaged in the process when we write projects and look for grants. We can solve many things ourselves. And we do solve them.

In my opinion, now civil society plays a very important role in our countries.

In Odessa, we have created a Free University — a discussion platform, where one can not only argue but also be enlightened. The most famous people of Ukraine come here to deliver lectures; there is an important exchange of views. And such a university, such a project, does much more than the entire state propaganda machine. And power ities are afraid of intelligent and educated people.

In the Ukraine, national issues are now exacerbated. If you have the problem of «north» and «south», we have many problems around «East/South» vs. «Center/West». And we can say that in the Ukraine, there emerged political

prisoners; there is a direct threat to freedom of speech. Authorities actively stamp out dissent. But the power of action, as it is well known, is equal to the power of resistance. Your politicians should take this into account. Earlier we said that the revolution in Kyrgyzstan happened after ours. Now we say that our second revolution can be after your second revolution.

People hate the power structures, and the power structures do everything possible to keep the tension in the society high.

However, the Ukraine has a paradoxical phenomenon. Ratings of the current party in power and personal ratings of the President Yanukovych are getting low. But at the same time, a large number of people are again ready to vote for the same party and at the same President. Why? Because they do not see a better alternative? Or is it because they know what to expect from the current administration, and they are predictable? I think both. Only a force that can offer an honest and realistic plan for reforming the country will probably restore trust in politics.

In the Ukraine, there is a quite diverse political spectrum. But during the last presidential election, headquarters of the winning party used quite dirty technologies aimed at shaping the electorate's peculiar attitude toward opposition. Technology — «they are all similar.»□

I have often heard the opinion that we deserve those whom we elect. Hence, we are severally liable for that. I agree, but only under the condition that there are real elections in the country, not their imitation. The last elections to local councils, which took place in Ukraine in 2010, have already been called «the General rehearsal» for the upcoming parliamentary election. They tested the technology, which allows bringing representatives of the Party in power — the Party of Regions — into public bodies.

But society is beginning to resist. Fewer state employees agree to work in election commissions, knowing that they will have to work under great pressure there. And how can one intimidate a powerless teacher? Dismiss?

Therefore, one of the tasks of the media is to show that to politicians. If your politicians understand that the more they tighten the screws, and the more they lie, the worse it all will be for them. Because if the power is harassing somebody, we perceive that this is a decent person.

Power structures change much more slowly than the society. The elites do not have time.

Politicians do not have time. Their people showing them pictures that they want to see, not what is actually happening. It is sociology as a tool of influence on the masses, and one of the pre-election technologies: they invent and publish images that can satisfy voters and so on. People no longer choose the person; they begin to choose their own lives.

Ednan Karabaev: The country will still elect; every citizen of Kyrgyzstan will do his choice based on his own preferences. I would, for example, elect any president who has three fundamental qualities: first — a feeling of time; second — understanding the psychology of people, and the third — ability to create a team and control it. If such a person exists, everything should be more or less stable.

Anar Musabaeva: Ednan Karabaev is angry about the fact that all this will be during the presidential race. Indeed, there will be manipulations with public consciousness, and the only antidote must be an intelligent society, intelligent people, civil society, media and information transparency of society. I think that maybe Ukrainian society has reached this, but, unfortunately, our society is not mature yet. Our media are

not that independent. In terms of smart civil society, we are behind, too. Nevertheless, I agree that the only antidote to such manipulation of public opinion should be the information transparency. The main warning for politicians is that their manipulation technologies will turn against them.

Zoya Kazanzhi: Now young journalists are a completely different planet. They think no worse and no better than us, those who are older. They just think differently. By the way, educational programs in Kyrgyzstan did a great job, because when I see which training programs are here, what people learn, I understand that all processes will be quicker and more effective.

Anar Musabaeva: I want to mention one moment how social networks are used by the younger generation. On TV news, they showed that the mayor's office distributed tickets for a concert of some pop-band, and teachers of some school forced students to buy them; school students gathered a number of people who disseminated information about this through a social network, journalists interviewed some people, and officials, who were engaged in this, were fired.

Zoya Kazanzhi: Now, in our societies, initiatives come not from the top, but from the bottom. There was a time when we received orders and directions how to live from above; now everything comes from below, and the ities have to respond. We must know that we are a strength, and our lives depend on us, ourselves.

Sheradil Baktygulov: I have several observations. It is clear that any election campaign implies working with emotions, nobody appeals to reason. It is necessary to attract the sympathy of voters. It is done through specific emotions, respectively. It implies working with various groups, including informal ones, which is done by a team of political technologists, which exists in any country. Kyrgyzstan is not a pioneer in this sense. But it turns out that when one works on the basis of emotional preference of each citizen, lacking the principles of national

interests, which we have already discussed, any presidential contender will be compared from inner-position categories. Here lies another extremity. The problem is not in declaring interests of Kyrgyzstan; the main thing is, which steps will be proposed by the contenders, civil society, and political technologists.□

Now, our politicians understand that interests of the country should be, at least, voiced. But the main problem is how to implement those interests. And here, Kyrgyzstan differs from the Ukraine. In the Ukraine, a presidential contender, at least, knows what he will do during 5 years. In Kyrgyzstan, a contender is concerned with three questions: How to come to power? What to do during the first year? And where to leave after? In this regards, all election rhetoric and actions are aimed at implementation of short-term tasks.□

Informally, the pre-election campaign has already started; it is limited by 2012. They will come to power and change the constitution. Nobody understands what are these actions aimed at. We see that everything is limited by 2012, not by 5-year term of the President. Thus, it is unclear what to do during the next four years.□

The majority of our population has dreams about the bright future, which are limited to the following: a house, money, a good car and that's all! Nobody thinks about prosperity of the country — it is a joint rhetoric, but it is not solidified by concrete actions. In this situation, working with informal groups is a normal process.□

There appears a question: which country-level aim is being achieved through the work with all people, with all voters? It is clear that there are various layers of the population: various groups based on professional, ethnic, and ethic features. Thus, depending on the group, it is necessary to develop specific slogans, make specific promises, etc. And what next? How the problems will be solved? It turns out that beginning with June and ending with December 2011, actions or non-actions of

each contender will lead to exacerbation of the split and alienation in the society.

Based on this, only one recommendation can be suggested: Each presidential candidate should understand that his actions might damage the situation. This is the main thing. We cannot require from them not to make promises, as it is a normal process.□

It is almost impossible to advise or recommend. One recommendation is that they should remember, when making promises, that they are also citizens of this country, and having their business skills, they can have a small shop somewhere in USA. And nothing more.□

Zoya Kazanzhi: It is not the worst option for them.□

Sheradil Baktygulov: In comparison with the profits they get in Kyrgyzstan, it will be a great difference.□

Zoya Kazanshi: Look what is going on. Your presidents flee the country, while ours stay. On the one hand, it is good that they stay, but on the other hand, it turns out that politicians protect one another.□

Anar Musabaeva: Concerning the promises, I don't agree with Sheradil. Of course, they will promise, but I think that experts can warn them: the bigger is the gap between promises and realities, the worse it is for politicians themselves.□

Sheradil Baktygulov: It is evident. Nobody is thinking about a concrete citizen. Citizens know well that politicians will come, make promises, and leave. They know

well that their interests will not be taken into account. Voters are now interested in having a small «piece of the cake.» And they will be quite satisfied with it. Such speeches will be made at official events; politicians will take into account recommendations of experts. But we know that there are also election campaign technologies.□

And real life is that each voter will try to snag their «piece of the cake.»□

Anar Musabaeva: We must work with voters, too. Otherwise, why should we need all this?□

Sheradil Baktygulov: Who will work with voters?□

Anar Musabaeva: All must work.□

Sheradil Baktygulov: That's the catch! All our elections have shown that people try to «snag» something, some profit for their families.□

There will be slogans about the interests of Kyrgyzstan; candidates will convince people that they know how to make Kyrgyzstan prosperous. There will be economic programs, and somebody will criticize these problems. All election campaigns consist of them. We all must understand why somebody invests money in working with informal groups, which aim he pursues. Does he want to become the President or to leave the country in 2012 with dozens or hundreds of millions of dollars?□

Then experts summed up the results of the meeting and made specific

recommendations.

1. Candidates should be aware that Kyrgyz people have no illusions after two revolutions. Therefore, unrealistic promises will not work out.
2. Playing with regional or nationalist factors can harm politicians themselves in the long run. They must also remember that they cannot behave in a different way in different situations, e.g. say something to one group of voters and say different things to another groups of voters, because current technologies will immediately reveal such controversial behavior.
3. Use of administrative resources will not help as it did earlier. Bribing the voter will not help much either. Presidential contenders must remember that the voter can deceive them, too. Kyrgyz voters also developed their own «people's technologies.» One should remember that the level of frustration and disappointment among people is very high; therefore, they could vote against somebody, although they promised to support him.
4. Candidates should also remember that obedient teachers, who worked at numerous elections, have also changed. Politicians should not count on them that much, as teachers also understand now the danger of falsifying the election results.
5. They should not use black PR technologies against their rivals. They should always remember that their rivals can also use such technologies against them. As a result, all can fail.
6. Obvious external support is not a positive sign today, so candidates should remember about it. People understand what support from foreign states means. PR campaign in foreign media can play a bad trick with contenders.
7. A Presidential candidate should honestly tell about his property and not to deceive voters saying that he has a 3-room apartment in a local micro-district.
8. Cooperation with criminal structures can be a life-long bondage for a politician,

as he will have to share not only power but also be «friends» with criminal families.

This meeting was organized within the project «Strengthening decision-making capacities in Kyrgyzstan,» supported by the Delegation of the European Union to the Kyrgyz Republic.□