



COSA: Russia—March 4, 2019

(U) Russian Interference in the Ukrainian Presidential Election

(U) Russia is very likely to be actively interfering in the Ukrainian elections in order to stop NATO expansion along the Russian border and prevent the reelection of current President Poroshenko. Russia has long used interference as a mechanism to reinforce its presence in the area, therefore it is likely this interference will continue on into the upcoming presidential election. For Russia, Ukraine and the Black Sea are strategic areas that will stop the expansion of NATO moving closer to the Russian border.

(U) Incumbent Petro Poroshenko is likely to make the runoff election, as he is viewed as the candidate that is believed to best solidify Ukraine's economy, defense sector, and international relations. While 44 candidates are registered to run in the Presidential Election, only five candidates – Petro Poroshenko, Yulia Tymoshenko, Volodymyr Zelensky, Anatoly Hrytsenko, and Yury Boyko – have gained enough public support to be elected.^{i ii} Each candidate has been accused of corruption through the funding and control of oligarchs (Poroshenko^{iii iv}, Zelensky^v, Boyko^{vi}), acceptance of pro-Russian values (Boyko^{vii}), an untrustworthy past in government (Tymoshenko^{viii}, Posroshenko), or preceding ties to Russian film businesses (Zelensky^{ix}).

- (U) Poroshenko has prevented a mass influx of negative propaganda throughout major television networks and promoted his own campaign agenda through successful ties to the country's major oligarchs – who control 76.25% of the major television channels, according to Analyst Oleksandra Iwaniuk.^{x xi}
- (U) President Poroshenko's political platform has gained much international support and provides the best future for Ukrainian citizens, according to an interview with the President. His political agenda is to closely cooperate with the U.S. and NATO, reform Ukraine's finances to increase international business and grow the economy, and increase international alliance through the energy, healthcare and defense sector.^{xii xiii}
- (U) Tymoshenko, Zelensky, Hrytsenko, and Boyko's standing in the polls will ultimately fall due to a lack of experience and their reputation of corruption. The candidate's limitations hinder their campaigns from overcoming Incumbent Poroshenko's strong influence over the country.^{xiv}

(U) Russia is very likely to interfere with Ukraine's Presidential election in March. This is due to the importance Ukraine has to Putin's approval ratings and presidency, its historical value as a past soviet country, and Putin's strategy to stop further NATO expansion along the Russian border. Despite Ukrainian efforts to stop interference by Russia, Russia is likely to interfere in the upcoming Ukrainian election through mechanisms such as disinformation and propaganda.

- (U) In March 2014, Putin's approval ratings hit a record high of 86% following the annexation of Crimea, suggesting the Russian government remains interested in interfering and meddling within Ukraine, according to Foreign Affairs.^{xv}
- (U) Rising fears about interference in the upcoming election has brought election monitors from Canada to conduct a bilateral election observation mission against Russia



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and is committed to keeping the monitors in place until March 2019, to insure immediate stabilization and monitor election fraud and irregularities.^{xvi}

- (U) Ukraine's parliament passed a bill earlier this month banning any Russian citizen from being an official observer for all of the upcoming elections in order to minimize threats of Russian interference, after concerns were raised about members of the election monitoring mission being citizens of Russia.^{xvii xviii}

(U) Re-election of incumbent President Poroshenko would likely lead to the advancement of economic ties with the European Union and possible association with NATO. Opposition candidate Yulia Tymoshenko, likely to contest Poroshenko for a spot in the runoff, would most likely support Russian interests. However, dark horse candidate Volodymyr Zelensky is currently leading in the polls, but has yet to present a comprehensive campaign platform.

- (U) Based on opinion polls since New Year, Volodymyr Zelensky is the most likely candidate to win the 2019 Ukrainian Presidential election. Without a defined campaign platform, it is unknown how his election would affect US interests.^{xix}
- (U) Incumbent Petro Poroshenko's election to the Ukrainian Presidency would be the best-case scenario for US interests.^{xx} Poroshenko's administration has a history of seeking closer ties with the West. This includes soliciting NATO membership and economic deals with the EU, as well as buying arms from the United States.^{xxi}
- (U) Yulia Tymoshenko's election to the Ukrainian presidency would be the most detrimental to US interests. Achieving her main goal of ending the Ukrainian Civil War would have to be negotiated on Russian terms, resulting in a more advantaged position for the Kremlin.^{xxii}



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