
And the band rolls on: Rocker, comedian, actor & vlogger run for parliament in Ukraine

09/06/2019



More popular performers with little to no political experience are running for public offices in Ukraine, where comedian Volodymyr Zelensky managed to win the presidency two months ago.

This year life in Ukraine has had many moments of mixing politics with show business. Zelensky, a professional actor and comedian with no record of public service, ran an overwhelmingly successful presidential campaign against incumbent Petro Poroshenko. His landslide victory relied on bringing to life the plot of a TV series, in which he played a simple teacher who unexpectedly became president of Ukraine and used his powers to tackle corruption, indifference of officials and the power of the oligarchs.



Volodymyr Zelenskyy right before his inauguration on May 20, 2019. © Pavel Zmey / Ukrainian Presidential Press Service

The magic of the silver screen did the trick, with Zelensky riding the wave of public disillusionment with career politicians to get the president's office. Next month Ukraine will go to the ballot box again to vote in a snap parliamentary election, and there are many apparently trying to recreate Zelensky's lightning path from outsider to political heavyweight.

Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, 44

Background: singer

Experience: Vakarchuk is the lead vocalist of the highly successful rock band Okean Elzy (Elsa's Ocean) and now the head of a new party called Holos (Voice), named similarly to the musical talent show where he was one of the coaches. He isn't a total stranger to politics: in 2007 he got elected to parliament and served for about a year before resigning.

He was also a leading public supporter of the mass protests in 2013-2014, got some education in politics at Yale University and took part in some political events over the past few years. This made Ukrainian political observers speculate that he may run for the presidency, but he didn't.

Vakarchuk's message to voters has the same anti-establishment vibe as Zelensky's: the current parliament as *"a toxic swamp sucking in our future"* and Holos is out to *"destroy old politics."*

Caveat: Vakarchuk has a record of not-so-subtle campaigning for Poroshenko and against Zelensky and he wouldn't disclose where he gets the money to run his campaign.

Serhiy Prytula, 37

Background: comedian and TV host

Experience: Prytula is the latest addition to Vakarchuk's party's list of supporters. He is a comedian, actor and TV show host as well as prolific author of political posts on social media, often laced with obscenities. His position is that being a Ukrainian and staying out of politics is not an option today. *"Stop saying that sport and music are outside of politics! They're not outside but in the epicenter of it,"* he said.

Caveat: The closest thing he did to holding a public office was being a three-time host of Ukraine's selection for the Eurovision international song contest. This year the selection process ended in a major scandal which left Ukraine without a performer to represent it in Tel Aviv, and Prytula was at the center of it. The reason was that the winner of the popular vote, singer Maruv, wanted to stay out of politics, which, as was already said, is not an option for the comedian.

Yuri Koryavchenkov, 44

Background: actor and manager

Experience: Koryavchenkov is part of the president's old team in the entertainment industry, who played head of National Security Council to Zelensky's president in the TV series. He also worked as a manager at Studio-95, the producer of Zelensky's comedy skits and occasionally took to the stage with him. Known to his friends as Yuzik, Koryavchenkov campaigned for Zelensky during his presidential bid and now hopes to win a seat, representing the city of Kryvyi Rih, which is also Zelensky's hometown.

Caveat: Aside from [being friends](#) with the new president, that's pretty much all that the general public knows about Koryavchenkov. Who said 'nepotism'?

Anatoly Shariy, 40

Background: journalist and vlogger

Experience: Shariy started as an investigative journalist in Ukraine, but was forced to flee to Europe and get political asylum there, saying the government in Kiev was trying to put him into jail under bogus charges. He re-emerged in Ukrainian political life in 2014 as a video blogger highly critical of Poroshenko's government and regularly debunking untrue reports by the Ukrainian media.

Caveat: Shariy may have over 2 million subscribers on YouTube and an established, if controversial, reputation, but translating his online platform into actual ballots may be tricky. Also he doesn't hide that what he wants is access to parliament, which would allow him to "expose" Ukrainian authorities at a completely new level. *"If we win some seats, it will be the most hilarious thing after Zelensky getting elected,"* he promised.
