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Political Developments in Kyiv Oblast Prior 2019 Presidential Elections

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At first glance Kyiv oblast, with its [1 754 949](#) inhabitants, barely impresses as a valuable prize in electoral campaign. After all, the oblast consists of 9 single-member districts that translate in 9 seats at the national parliament. When compared with 17 seats allocated to Dnipropetrovsk oblast, 13 – to Kharkiv, 12 to Donetsk, or Lviv oblast, and 11 to Odessa oblast, this does not look impressive. The power struggle in Kyiv oblast might seem of limited strategic importance. Such a conclusion is, however, erroneous as Kyiv oblast has several distinctive features, which makes it central in power competition and power distribution after each election.

Firstly, the oblast is adjacent to the ultimate powerhouse of national politics, the city of Kyiv. The nine above-mentioned electoral districts comprise regional town areas which encircle the capital, set its administrative boundaries, contain its growth, limit the city's capabilities to manage logistics and to provide infrastructural services. In fact, the lack of capacities forced the mayor of Kyiv to initiate the program to [create](#) a “Kyiv metropolitan area” which should bring closer housing, transportation, and administration across the city of Kyiv and the oblast emulating the Metropolis of Greater Paris. This also should put an additional string tying political struggles on local and municipal levels together. The mayor's initiative is just one indication that **the political process in the oblast is tightly intertwined with that in the capital**: there are political spill-over effects when political favors in a town council is returned in the Kyiv Oblast Council, patronal networks rooted in tiny villages are branching out in Kyiv, behind the scene agreements initiated in regional agricultural warehouses are finalized in the capital. Giving its proximity to and relational intermingling with the capital, Kyiv oblast offers a unique set of opportunities where local politics have an exaggerated impact over national politics. This makes the oblast an important locus for political competition. Moreover, one must not forget that the oblast's 9 single-member districts when combined with 13 single-member districts allocated to the city of Kyiv constitute the single most important share of parliament seats available for political actors.

Secondly, unlike Donetsk, Lviv or Dnipropetrovsk regions, neither the city of Kyiv nor Kyiv oblast has ever become a political stronghold for any Ukrainian party. Since the dismissal of Anatolii Zasukha (2005), former Chairman of Kyiv Oblast State Administration (hereafter: OSA) who manipulated politics in accordance with presidential needs, the region has cast aside many constraints of executive control. The fall of Zasukha was an important milestone in the evolution of patronal networks in Kyiv oblast: it became a focus of several competing collective actors, unable to establish and maintain any durable control over regional political processes. Typically, a large number of parties manage to cross the electoral threshold to enter the Kyiv Oblast Council (hereafter: OC) or district councils. For instance, the current OC is [composed](#) of 8 factions: *Solidarity* (22 seats), *Fatherland* (16 seats), *Self-Reliance* (10 seats), the *Radical Party* (9 seats), UKROP (7 seats), *Our Land* (7 seats), *Freedom* (7 seats), and the *Opposition Bloc* (7 seats). On a district level, [7 fractions](#) managed to pass the 5% threshold and enter the Kyiv-Sviatoshyn District Council, [7 fractions](#) – the Fastiv District Council, [6 fractions](#) – the Bila Tserkva District Council. As a result, highly fractionalized legislatures are able to function solely when coalitions are built. Otherwise, councils remain ineffective and paralyzed. The coalitional nature of any functional council makes patronal networks, informal practices, and reciprocal favors the prime vehicles not only for political promotion and office holding but also for regional decision-making and governance. The absence of a single party domination and coalitional legislatures combined **make the regional powerplay both inclusive and highly participatory**: on a district level quite active and successful are parties virtually absent in national politics (e.g. UKROP or the *Agrarian Party*). This, in turn, amplifies the campaign innovation, personal competition, and patronal networks rivalries, for different actors consider the Kyiv oblast as a genuine entrance-point to politics.

Finally, the highly factionalized environment produced several sub-regional political strongholds. They often serve as personalized runways for a single politician or a political group. The Vasylkiv district, for instance, is almost a personal domain of Zasukha's clan: it secures a seat in the OC for Tetyana Zasukha or some loyal ally and provides a bedrock for the patronal network spreading over the region. Likewise, the Kyiv-Sviatoshyn District (and especially the town of Irpin) is under the thrall of an energetic alliance of Volodymyr Karpliuk and Anatolii Fedoruk. The duo has recently established a political party *New Faces* (and a clientelist network) with the outreach to other parts of the oblast (e.g. Pereyaslav-Khmelnytskyi and Rzhyshev). Some local strongholds are big enough to guarantee its boss a seat in the national parliament: Yaroslav Moskalenko, an ultimate power-holder at the single-member district No 96, offers a prime example (see below). The existence of personalized sub-regional strongholds contributes to further **development of patronal networks with a triple grasp over local, regional, and national politics**. As a result, any politician seeking office and influence on the national level – be it a president, an attorney-general, a mayor in the capital or a district council head – cannot ignore the realities of the political process in Kyiv oblast.

Competing Nature of Political Process in Kyiv Oblast

One distinctive feature of Ukrainian politics and policy-making is power competition between legislative and executive branches. Since the president enjoys the prerogative to appoint regional governors, they typically serve as transmission-belts of his policy and custodians of his interests in any region. This sometimes collides with intentions of local elites represented in regional councils. The rivalry between the OC and the OSA is exacerbated because each branch is controlled by different political parties. The two key rivals in the region are the same who are likely to be preparing for the showdown at the forthcoming legislative election of 2019, *Solidarity* and *Fatherland*.

The power disposition in the OC is a good starting point. Although *Solidarity* holds the plurality in the council (see above), it failed to construct a viable coalition to control the legislation. During the crucial vote for the OC Head, *Solidarity* lacked one vote to have Oleksandr Horhan elected. In a daring counter-move, *Fatherland* united the rest of the fractions and nominated Hanna Starikova, as the OC Head (November 25, 2015). Until today *Fatherland* intensively [cooperates](#) with *Freedom* to maintain the strategically advantageous status quo.

Power-struggle around the OSA was no less dramatic, although given the presidential prerogatives it was rather intra-party in nature. In March 2014 the acting president Turchynov appointed a career politician Volodymyr Shandra as governor. Shandra, who used to be a minister in the Tymoshenko government (2005-2006) and the counselor to president Yushchenko (2006-2007), was a unifying figure equally distant from both Poroshenko and Tymoshenko. His position was taken under stricter presidential control by the appointment of Lev Partskhaladze, a well-connected construction businessman with [ties](#) to both Volodymyr Klychko and Petro Poroshenko, as Shandra's deputy. The tandem Shandra-Partskhaladze was assigned a particular task: electoral *Solidarity's* success in the 2015 election. Given the mixed results (the plurality in the OC proved to be barren and city councils of 9 out of 12 essential regional towns were [lost](#) to opponents) and, supposedly, due to divided loyalties, Shandra left the office. His successor Maksym Melnychuk, although loyal to Poroshenko, had been implicated in a huge corruption [scandal](#) and was promptly dismissed (fall of 2016). Amidst the turmoil, the *Fatherland* launched its most audacious assault to control the regional executive branch: the OC prepared a note suggesting the president should appoint Konstantyn Bondarev, the head of the regional *Fatherland* cell and one of the most

powerful powerbrokers, as a next governor. To push the presidential hand, a number of manifestations and contentious gatherings were [prepared](#) to testify popular support for the new governor.

Poroshenko's response was equally sharp: on October 11, 2016, he chose Oleksandr Horhan as the Head of OSA. This appointment not only contained a sting to hurt personally Starikova, her patron Bondarev, and the *Fatherland* in general but also was an important milestone in a tentative rapprochement between the pro-presidential *Solidarity* and key regional players from the now defunct the *Party of Regions*. [Supervised](#) by the First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Vitalii Kovalchuk, this strategy was appealing to members of the *Party of Regions* eager to change political camps and abandon the anti-Poroshenko's *Opposition Bloc*. Although originally conceived to loosen the *Oppositional Bloc*'s grasp over the South and the East, the rapprochement was effective in regions where *Solidarity* lacked resources to undermine domination of other political parties. This was exactly the case of Kyiv oblast. As a matter of fact, Horhan is [reported](#) to be a client of Yaroslav Moskalenko, under whose authority he worked in the Vyshhorod District Administration. All in all, Horhan's appointment had several advantages in eyes of Poroshenko's strategists in the region.

Power competition, personal animosity and membership in competing networks set Starikova and Horhan – and generally the OC and the OSA – on the collision course. The official web page of OC was [used](#) as Fatherland's party site and shared anti-OSA propaganda. OC members demanded the governor to be removed due to infringement against the Civil Service Law explicitly [prohibiting](#) the dual mandate. OSA, in return, used personal and administrative connections with state security apparatus: it initiated an anti-corruption [investigation](#) against the OC deputies, appealed to the Security Service of Ukraine and blocked financial transactions by the OC, effectively paralyzing all economic programs introduced by the legislature. Rhetorically [blaming](#) the OSA for “economic genocide against the region”, the *Fatherland* politicians escalated the conflict and moved directly against the president: OC officially [pleaded](#) the Supreme Council of Ukraine to set the precise procedure of presidential impeachment. The burgeoning regional conflict thus spilled over and morphed into the national power struggle, underlining the connections between the political process in Kyiv oblast and national politics.

Another issue binding together local and national politics is that of subventions. In June 2018 the Minister of Finance Oleksandr Danylyuk [evoked](#) the pressure by regional interest groups in a quest for subventions as one of the reasons why he decided to leave the office. Redirected resource flows are the grease material that helps the components of patronal networks to move smoothly. According to [opinion polls](#), 48% of voters consider the economic initiatives to be the most important incentive to vote for or against a given political figure. Subventions used to galvanize economic programs are, therefore, a sure instrument to stimulate favorable vote. Thus, local politicians strive for subventions offering loyalty or at least cooperation in exchange. In Kyiv oblast two strategically important towns, Fastiv and Vasylykiv, currently out of direct control by *Solidarity*, are the biggest subvention [recipients](#). Volodymyr Sabadash (the mayor of Vasylykiv and an ex-member of the *Party of Regions*) is often courted by the Head of Kyiv oblast *Solidarity* cell Ihor Kononenko and is vocally [grateful](#) for financial assistance from the national treasury. Mykhailo Netiazhuk (the mayor of Fastiv, a member of the *New Faces* party) [boasted](#) excellent relations with the OSA. Mayoral attitude is a considerable component of regional power games, so pro-presidential actors try to improve relations and build alliances with them.

The latest reshuffling of the OSA (October 2018) suggests that the president opted for a modified strategy to deal with the *Fatherland* challenge by relying on the security apparatus and, supposedly, halting the rapprochement with the members of the demised *Party of Regions*. The veiled alliance appeared to yield little results and even threatened the interests of *Solidarity*: some former adherents to the *Party of Regions* [began](#) a creeping invasion of district administrations in the southern part of the region. Moreover, Moskalenko, one of the prominent sub-regional players, [reportedly](#) started looking for mutual comprehension with *Fatherland*. This made the presence of his protégé Horhan in the governor seat utterly redundant, so in October 2018 Poroshenko appointed a new governor, Oleksandr Tereshchuk. Tereshchuk is reputed for his [close ties](#) with the former attorney-general Vitalii Yarema. The allegations make sense since two men share the institutional background in the police forces. Given the information that Yarema is [eager](#) to become an MP using the single-member district No 98 in Kyiv oblast, and the first step by Yarema towards the goal – his newly minted [membership](#) in the Solidarity – the arrival of Tereshchuk might serve as an additional factor to ensure Yarema's victory. Besides, the appointment of a new governor crowns an overarching strategy by Poroshenko to bring closer his allies from the *Solidarity* party apparatus and those from the security services. After October 2018, Alla Shkuro, a protégé of Kononenko, became Tereshchuk's Deputy (simultaneously retaining the post of *Solidarity's* cell-chief in Obukhiv), whereas Olexandr Ostriainin, another police officer close to Yarema, became the head of OSA staff. The latest Solidarity public convention gathered above-mentioned players alongside with Ruslan Solvar, Pavlo Rizanenko, and Heorhii Tsahareishvili: *Solidarity* is preparing for the upcoming elections and is willing to use the executive branch to secure desirable outcomes.

Two biggest assets available to *Fatherland* to counter the executive domination of the opponent are (1) historical popularity of Tymoshenko and her party in Kyiv oblast and (2) well-established regional and local organizational structure. According to some [estimations](#), *Fatherland* has up to 17 000 cells all over Ukraine, exceeding the next two parties, namely *Solidarity* (1712 cells) and the *Opposition Bloc* (654). In Kyiv oblast itself, *Fatherland* [mustered](#) together 553 cells (plus 325 in Kyiv), whereas *Solidarity* has only 195 cells (plus 13 in Kyiv). Aware of the flagrant structural deficiency, *Solidarity* [spent](#) the biggest amount of money the biggest amount of money (as compared to other parties) to develop its local and regional organizational infrastructure. This, however, comes with an important caveat: the money is not invested in the party structure in Kyiv oblast. In fact, the Kyiv oblast cells [receive](#) less money than almost all other regional branches except Chernivtsi oblast and Kherson oblast. The organizational weakness and some recent moves suggest that in Kyiv oblast Poroshenko and his people will try to counter-weight the *Fatherland's* preponderance by using local patronal networks and informal alliance-building.

The Web of Networks in Kyiv Oblast

Several clarifications are necessary to comprehend the patronal networks in the region. (1) As it was noted, in Kyiv oblast no single patronal network managed to take the region under its exclusive control. Today, **three competing groups penetrate the region, and the nascent fourth is likely to challenge the triumvirate or, at least, tip the balance, if aligned with any of the major players.** (2) Another important feature is that **ever-shifting alliances blur the network boundaries** so that some individual actors simultaneously belong to several groups. (3) The complex set of opportunities produces situations when driven by political or economic considerations individual **players cooperate on one level (e.g. district) but compete on another (e.g. oblast).** (4) **Party membership and network affiliation do not necessarily coincide.** Given

these four factors combined, each web appears as a composite structure with key player/s (patron) constituting the distinct core and his clients that often belong to competing network.

Solidarity Network

Ihor Kononenko is the key figure in the regional *Solidarity* network. A business partner and a close friend of the president himself (they [served](#) at the same army regiment), Kononenko sways over the multi-level set of opportunities: as an MP he participates in national politics; through his close friend Ihor Nikonov he influences the Kyiv city mayor Klychko; through an OC [member](#) and a friend Leonid Hlynianyi (*Solidarity*) he maintains close contacts with Serhii Kniazev, the Head of National Police and a reputed political [insider](#) of Kyiv oblast; he courts district councils and [executive offices](#) and keeps an eye on the OSA with help of his [client](#) Alla Shkuro. The scope of Kononenko's regional interests focuses on Obukhiv and Vasylkiv as he [intends](#) to be reelected to the national parliament from the single-member district No 94. Here, Kononenko's interests collide with the current representative of the district Victor Romaniuk (*Popular Front*) who has already filed a [complaint](#) to attorney-general against the alleged electoral fraud by Kononenko. The feud around the district No 94 is a prolonged one, and it transgresses personal competition revealing the shifting alliances in the region. In 2014, Romaniuk wrestled the MP seat from Hlib Lirnyk, a [protégé](#) of Partskhaladze (*Solidarity*) who was also [alleged](#) to be supported by Tetiana Zasukha, a core member of a prominent family clan close to Kuchma and, later, the *Party of Regions*. Thus, a subtle competition between a member of technically pro-Poroshenko *Popular Front* (Romaniuk) and one of the closest friends of Poroshenko (Kononenko) makes the former not only galvanize his network but to cooperate with a rival clan.

The Poroshenko's network indeed branches out in several directions. Partskhaladze (although deeply involved in national politics as a Deputy Minister) supports his clientele in Kyiv oblast: he managed to put Tsagareishvili, his own [cousin](#) and a business partner as a head of *Solidarity* fraction in the OC, and to create a pro-presidential [Unity coalition](#) (*Solidarity* and its allies – the *Radical Party*, *Our Land*, and badly split *Self-Reliance*). To achieve this, individual members of other parties were wooed (e.g. Mykola Liashenko who eventually [lost](#) his party membership (UKROP) due to this transgression). Nevertheless, since Poroshenko's web often lacks its own firepower, he has to cooperate with other patrons.

The most important ally in this respect is Yaroslav Moskalenko, who is not a *Solidarity* member, but participated in the latest [meeting](#) of regional *Solidarity* chiefs (alongside with Yarema, Solvar, Shkuro, Tsagareishvili, Rizanenko, and Tereshchuk). Moskalenko's role is essential in several respects. First, he is a dominant player in the northern part of Kyiv oblast, where he created his own clientele. For instance, his client Heorhii Yerko is Head of the Borodianka District Administration, whereas his daughter Halyna Yerko is a deputy (*Solidarity*) at the OC. Another OC deputy Vitalii Karliuk (*Solidarity*) is also Moskalenko [protégé](#). Karliuk acts as an important broker, for he is [reputed](#) to cultivate ties with Kononenko. Therefore, Moskalenko and Kononenko networks share several peripheral actors so that although they belong to different political parties, they could coordinate their action. Secondly, Moskalenko enjoys additional weight inherited from the *Party of Regions*; in particular, he was an ally the former Head of the OSA Anatolii Prysiashniuk. Through him, Moskalenko retained some influence over Volodymyr Sabadash, [the mayor of Vasylkiv](#), and Viacheslav Odynets, Head of Vasylkiv District administration. Given his personal clientele and connection to a broader ex-Regional network, Moskalenko is a valuable ally. When in the height of the conflict with the OSA, the OC addressed the national parliament asking to clarify the presidential impeachment procedure, Karliuk, Yerko, Odynets, although the *Solidarity* members,

[voted](#) for the initiative. With this move, Moskalenko, aware of the imminent demise of his another client (Horhan), sent Poroshenko a clear signal that it was not in the president's interests to seek a quarrel. Recent cooperation between Tereshchuk, Kononenko, and Moskalenko suggests that the message was received. All in all, Moskalenko looks more like a natural ally rather than a competitor to *Solidarity* and its central figures in Kyiv oblast: in the national parliament his party *Our Land* has little substantial confrontation with *Solidarity* (in fact, the former criticizes the latter not for the content of reforms, especially decentralization, but for the [lack of vigor](#)); *Solidarity* has no solid figure to compete for the single-member district No 96, thus it is eager to cede it to Moskalenko who, in return, will use his sway over Vasylkiv to secure the single-member district No 94 for Kononenko. Moskalenko, thus, represents a contractable faction of the defunct *Party of Regions* eager to cooperate with Poroshenko in exchange for personal gains. Except for Moskalenko and his clients, other notable soft-liners are to be found either in *Our Land* (e.g. Oleksandr Mazurchak, Yaroslav Dobrianskyi) or the *Solidarity* itself (Ivan Stupak).

Opposition Bloc Network

A real challenge to *Solidarity* represents the orthodox wing of the former *Party of Regions* – the *Opposition Bloc*. In Kyiv oblast it emerged from a separate network of Oleksandr Kachnyi. Kachnyi is a former head of the OC and as such he had a protracted conflict with Anatolii Prysiashniuk. The rivalry runs deep, as the latter was a client of Yanukovych, whereas Kachnyi himself was [allied](#) with Yurii Boiko. Using both his office and his connections, Kachnyi developed a network which he has recently reactivated to retake several districts of the region for the *Opposition Bloc* and even try to win a few single-member districts for the national parliament. The network is especially well-rooted in the southern belt of Kyiv oblast. Among its important mid-level figures are Natalia Troyanska (Head of Tetiiv District Administration), Ruslan Maistruk (mayor of Tetiiv), Iryna Palanska (Head of Stavyshche District Council), Volodymyr Repeta (both a deputy at Stavyshche District Council and Head of Stavyshche District Administration). Most of the members of this southern branch used to work for or with the local landowner (and a former member of *Party of Regions*) Ruslan Holub, himself an old ally of Kachnyi. Another important local ally is Mykola Furdychka, a OC deputy (*Opposition Bloc*) [esteemed](#) by both Kachnyi and Boiko. An owner of many local businesses, he holds the Tarashcha district in tight control: both the Head of Tarashcha District Administration (Ludmyla Urozhai, technically an *UKROP* party member) and a quarter of the district council represent his clientele. Given these strong positions, Furdychka might wrestle the single-member district No 92 out of current MP (Guzenko, *Solidarity*). Equally promising are local prospects for *Opposition Bloc* at district elections. However, intransigent ex-Regionals are not confined to the “Deep South”: *Opposition Bloc* holds majorities in several significant district councils in the north of Kyiv oblast (most prominent is [Slavutyich](#)). In addition, another good friend of Yurii Boiko is Volodymyr Polochaninov, a businessman from Bila Tserkva, who indirectly [owns](#) local facilities providing services in water supply and sanitation (“Bila-Tserkva-Vodokanal”). Not only does this help him to influence local politics, but also gives him considerable [leverage](#) over Olha Babii (Director of “Bila-Tserkva-Vodokanal”) who is also the head of the *Self-Reliance* party in the OC. Consequently, Boiko and his allies have sway over the *Self-Reliance*, a party especially well rooted in Bila Tserkva. Finally, Kachnyi cultivates personal relations with Viktoria Liakhovets, an editor-in-chief of a regional newspaper, who closely [collaborated](#) with Anatolii Fedoruk, a mayor of Bucha. Liakhovets is, therefore, another periphery player linking two separate patronal webs.

New Faces Network

Anatolii Fedoruk is a promoter of the youngest patronal network in the region. Originally a member of the *Party of Regions*, Fedoruk enriched himself in the construction business and used the money, business connections, and political capital to find allies in nearby towns and villages. His most valuable ally was Petro Melnyk, a rector of the State Fiscal Academy in a neighboring town of Irpin, himself a member of the *Party of Regions*. However, after Melnyk had been [indicted for bribery](#), Fedoruk allied himself with Volodymyr Karpliuk, a Melnyk's client, whose ruthless landgrab and construction in and around the town of Irpin ensured lucrative deals. In 2014 Karpliuk won elections and became the mayor of Irpin thus bringing two important towns of the Kyiv-Sviatoshyn District under the duo's control. The next year they established a party *New Faces*, which continued its creeping conquest of villages and towns in the region. Today, *New Faces* controls mayoral offices in Vyshneve, Boyarka, and Fastiv, and is represented in several district councils. This network avoids geographical overextension and targets the communities around its Irpin stronghold. It aims to penetrate both legislative and executive branches. For instance, Serhii Voznyi, who used to be the head of the Kyiv-Sviatoshyn district executive branch, now seats in Kyiv-Sviatoshyn District Council, where he chairs the strategically important Housing and Land Recourses Commission. Serhii Koroliuk tried his luck simultaneously in three electoral races: to the OC, to the Boyarka City Council, and to the Kyiv-Sviatoshyn District Council. He managed to wrestle a mandate to the latter. The Boyarka mayoral office, meanwhile, went to his friend Oleksandr Zarubin, an [ally](#) of both Petro Melnyk and Anatolii Fedoruk. A father of another Kyiv-Sviatoshyn District Council deputy, Dmytro Husiatynskyi (*UKROP*), was a client of Petro Melnyk, and Husiatynskyi himself is a close associate of Zarubin.

The growing influence of the *New Faces* made them a desirable partner for three bigger patronal networks in Kyiv oblast. Since senior members of *New Faces* (e.g. Fedoruk or Husiatynskyi Sr.) previously belonged to the *Party of Regions*, they kept some ties with either Kachnyi or his allies. However, the younger generation grew more independent, which open the opportunity window for other networks. *Solidarity* granted an important office of the Deputy Head of OSA (under Horhan administration) to Yurii Denysenko, a powerful mid-level politician from Irpin with close ties to [Fedoruk](#) and [Karpliuk](#). This was not Horhan's initiative and is [considered](#) as a power-sharing deal by *Solidarity* aiming to gain extra influence by finding new allies in Kyiv oblast and thus undercut the predominance of *Fatherland* here. The recent staff changes in the OSA did not affect the bridge-building process between *Solidarity* and *New Faces*: Karpliuk is [reported](#) to be granted a free-way in the single-member district No 95 and thus a seat in the national parliament in exchange for *New Faces*' support for *Solidarity* at the regional and local elections. For now, only Myroslava Smyrnova (Head of the Kyiv-Sviatoshyn District Administration) is [likely](#) to challenge Karpliuk. [Patronized](#) by Artur Palatnyi (MP, *Solidarity*) she represents the smaller faction of *UDAR* party.

Fatherland Network

However, the loyalty of Karpliuk and his clients might still not be assured for *Solidarity*. To begin with, he has an overt [conflict](#) with Partskhaladze, which can considerably hinder the cooperation. Moreover, the last important network, that of Tymoshenko, is manifestly eager to improve its position in Kyiv oblast in general and not to let Karpliuk join the Poroshenko's network in particular. In October 2018 the Head of OC Starikova (*Fatherland*) [announced](#) that she appointed Nataliia Semko, a Karpliuk's client, as her Deputy. Starikova often visits Irpin, ostensibly due to her official duties, but probably to negotiate the clauses of cooperation between *New Faces* and *Fatherland*. Yulia Tymoshenko herself was [a guest of honor](#) in the Karpliuk's stronghold. Most

importantly, however, is that Karpliuk [cultivates](#) friendship with the Head of *Fatherland* regional cell Konstantyn Bondarev.

Bondarev is the ultimate decision-maker, strategist, and the focal point for patronal links in Kyiv oblast. Bondarev's preponderance is manifold. First, together with Oleksandr Tymoshenko (spouse of Yuliya Tymoshenko), he [provides](#) vital logistics for financial transactions by *Fatherland*. He owns the *Veles* bank, a useful conduit to funnel money into the *Fatherland's* coffers: in 2016 the party received 7.5 million in private donations, allegedly paid by citizens. More likely, the money was transferred by associate business and political clients. The [half of transactions](#) were effectuated from the Kyiv oblast through infrastructure controlled by Bondarev.

Secondly, Bondarev established a region-wide patronal network. Among his clients are the Head of OC Hanna Starikova (had been working as his [assistant](#) for 7 years), the OC deputies Volodymyr Khakhulin and Oleh Kyshchuk, an important sponsor recently [accused by SSU](#) in money-laundering. The extent of Bondarev's clientele should not come as a surprise; after all, his father Anatolii was an associate of Bohdan Gubskiy, who in the early 2000s, alongside with Hryhorii Surkis and Viktor Medvedchuk, nearly succeeded in establishing exclusive control over the Kyiv oblast. Since Bondarev has inherited some clientele from his father, now he effectively uses it to further the interests of *Fatherland*.

Thirdly, Bondarev enjoys partnerships and good relations outside his own party *Fatherland*. Volodymyr Polochaninov, a partner of Yurii Boiko, is also [a good friend to Bondarev](#), which might explain why *Fatherland* used to cooperate with *Self-Reliance* in the OC. Moreover, Bondarev is [reported](#) to cultivate good relations with Oleksandr Kachnyi, Volodymyr Maibozhenko (head of *UKROP* in the region), and Mykola Starychenko (head of the *Radical Party* in the region). Therefore, in case of need, he might construct a huge situational alliance to oppose *Solidarity*.

Except for Bondarev, other *Fatherland* actors contribute to the network development. Starikova [befriends](#) Olha Babii; Viktor Svitovenko provides [patronage](#) to another OC deputy Halyna Boiko. However, a bigger opportunity could arise from frictions within the *Solidarity* network itself. According to [reports](#), the actual MP representing the single-member district No 92, Vitalii Hudzenko (*Solidarity*), lost favor in the eyes of Poroshenko and might be drifting toward *Fatherland*. Should the rearrangement of alliances be finalized, Hudzenko will definitely bring his clientele (most importantly Serhii Kaplun and Volodymyr Kuzmenko, the power brokers in Volodarka district, and Oleh Balahura who [controls](#) the Tetiiv district and local cells of *Freedom* party) to *Fatherland*. This would improve the party prospects for local councils and the OC elections. However, the issue of Viktor Svitovenko, who used to be the preferred candidate of the *Fatherland* for the single-member district No 92, is bound to arise.

A struggle over another single-member district No 93 might serve as a catalyst for alliance shifts in the region: its representative Oleksandr Onyshchenko (*Solidarity*) fled the country after a personal and very public conflict with Poroshenko. Nowadays, neither *Solidarity* nor *Fatherland* nor *Oppositional Bloc* has presented its candidate for the district. Still, the void is unlikely to persist: the biggest town here is Myronivka, an economic center of Yurii Kosiuk agribusiness empire. He will not tolerate turmoil here, but the question who will guarantee the order remains open.

Conclusions

- Kyiv oblast has a strategic position in power competition because of deep interdependencies between the capital and its immediate surroundings, as well as because of tight connections of local politics with national politics and power distribution. National political players occupy personalized sub-regional strongholds and participate in a multi-level competition, where losses in national politics are counter-balanced by gains in regional politics and vice versa. These two factors raise the significance of the oblast beyond the proportion of its representation.
- Kyiv oblast is also stands aside as no single network managed to take the region under its exclusive control. Today, three competing power nodes penetrate the region (largely controlled by the three national parties *Solidarity*, *Fatherland*, *Opposition Bloc*), whereas the nascent fourth (locally born *New Faces*) is likely to challenge the triumvirate or, at least, tip the balance if aligned with any of the major players. In addition, some individual sub-regional players remain influential.
- The absence of a dominant party makes the regional powerplay both inclusive and highly participatory: parties virtually absent in national politics (e.g. UKROP or the *Agrarian Party*) are quite successful on a district level. This amplifies the campaign innovation, personal competition, and patronal networks rivalries, for different actors consider the Kyiv oblast as a genuine entrance-point to politics.
- Two major competitors are Poroshenko's and Tymoshenko's political machines. The former enjoys control over regional and district executive branch and has resources to buy loyalties or subsidize alliances. The latter has the best-developed party organizational structure, controls the legislative branch (OC), and enlists some of the best-connected brokers.
- Smaller players have their own agendas, which influence both politics and policy in the oblast. In particular, *Opposition Bloc*, which established its stronghold in the south of Kyiv oblast, is intent to recapture district councils and enlarge its representation in the OC. Locally built *New Faces*' strategy is to use its patrons' influence in the Kyiv-Sviatoshyn District to enter the national parliament. To achieve these ends, these players are eager to build temporary alliances within the oblast's multi-level set of opportunities.
- Highly factionalized and competitive environment prevented formation of stable coalitions. The ever-shifting alliances blur the network boundaries so that some individual actors simultaneously belong to several groups, individual players cooperate on one level (e.g. district) but compete on another (e.g. oblast) and even party membership and patronal network inclusion do not necessarily coincide. Single-member districts are important bargaining chips inducing cross-network cooperation.
- The upcoming presidential elections (March 2019) are bound to have impact upon the results of legislative elections, because they might change the control over executive branch in the region thus bringing additional leverage to any key competitor. However, as for March 2019, it is likely that *Solidarity* will take most of single-member districts in Kyiv oblast, whereas the party-list proportional representation gives good prospects to *Fatherland*.