

Powerful Official Joins Yanukovych's Party

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KIEV — Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Tigipko, seen by some analysts as a potential successor to President Viktor Yanukovich, said Tuesday that he was merging his political party, Strong Ukraine, with Yanukovich's Party of the Regions.

A former central bank governor and successful businessman, Tigipko, 51, came in third with 13 percent of the vote in the presidential election in early 2010.

Soon after Yanukovich's subsequent run-off victory over Yulia Tymoshenko, then the prime minister, Tigipko joined his new government and has since been heavily involved in crucial negotiations with the International Monetary Fund.

"I understand that as a member of a ruling party one would be able to produce more effectively the policies that the country needs," Tigipko said at a joint briefing with Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, the formal leader of Party of the Regions.

Ukraine will hold a parliamentary election in October 2012 where the main competitors are

likely to be Party of the Regions and Tymoshenko's Fatherland party. Tigipko's party has no seats in the parliament.

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