

Klitschko's Political Fight

By [Vitaly Klitschko](#)

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On Saturday, I successfully defended my title as the heavyweight boxing champion at Moscow's Olimpiisky Sports Complex. As a 40-year-old not getting any younger, I recognize that my professional boxing career may soon end.

So what's next?

During the past seven years, I've combined professional boxing with work in the municipal legislature in Kiev, a city I grew up in and love.

During this period, I saw corrupt practices that penetrated Ukraine's post-Soviet elite. Leaders who battled publicly against each other gladly gathered behind closed doors to divide municipal property and state assets among themselves. Public hearings were formalities. While they allowed citizens to let off steam, officials made decisions blatantly contradicting public interests. When petitions against blatant misuse of public office were successful in court, executive authorities blocked their implementation.

To make a clean break with the autocracy in many Ukrainian parties, I, together with several

colleagues, founded the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms two years ago. Our goal is to build a grassroots party committed to European democratic values, basic economic freedoms and an anti-corruption platform. We unite young, self-made men and women around the country who, together with small business, finance our party activities.

Opinion polls show a continuous rise in support for the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms, from 2 percent one year ago to 12 percent recently. I am confident that this trend will continue and that our democratic alliance will become a parliamentary party after the fall elections. The true test will come on Oct. 28, when voters go to the polls to choose new representatives.

The Ukrainian mood in the run-up to this election is pessimistic. Two years ago, when President Viktor Yanukovych took office, a majority believed his promise of a better economic future. The country was moving closer toward European ties with a historic free trade agreement with European Union countries. Meanwhile, many expected a rapprochement in relations with Russia. Instead, Ukraine has isolated itself from Moscow, Brussels and Washington. Two-thirds of voters believe Ukraine is heading in the wrong direction.

The reason for official Kiev's current isolation lies in the gap between promises and deeds. During its 30 months in office, the Yanukovych administration has made four major mistakes that have resulted in a significant loss of public confidence.

First, instead of playing by the rules, the regime changed the rules to meet its political objectives. Fragile democratic procedures and separation of powers took a back seat to political ambition. Parliamentary procedures became irrelevant if they interfered with majority rule. Elections were called or canceled based on whether those useful to the regime could be kept in power.

Second, to clear a path toward absolute power, the government imprisoned popular opposition figures on trumped-up charges. Show trials were televised to scare the public into submission. Citizens who actively opposed government tax, pension and welfare policies were detained for expressing their opinions publicly. Censorship returned after years of freedom of speech and expression.

Third, oligarchs with close ties to government became filthy rich. State assets were transferred in uncompetitive, shady privatizations. State tenders and infrastructure projects were doled out to cronies. Some oligarchs doubled their net worth in two years thanks to close government ties.

Fourth, corruption in state entities, particularly in the justice system, has reached new heights. Worst of all, the people charged with ensuring public safety are among the most corrupt.

The message of our democratic alliance is simple and clear: It is time to put Ukraine's house back in democratic order. This is our five-point plan:

1. Fight state corruption at all levels
2. Return citizen control over state decision-making

3. Create fair and equal opportunities for all
4. Give local government more power
5. Promote EU standards and integration

We're not naive, and we don't believe the regime's promise to hold free and fair elections. We've documented the physical harassment of candidates and threats to their families and friends by officials throughout the country. Meanwhile, international election observers have come to Ukraine to survey the pre-election environment.

At the U.S. Democratic National Convention last week, former President Bill Clinton said: "Democracy does not have to be a blood sport. It can be an honorable enterprise that advances public interests."

I agree completely. But in Ukraine, incumbents are not ready to put their interests at risk in democratic elections. Herein lies the potential drama of Ukraine's upcoming parliamentary poll.

Vitaly Klitschko is the World Boxing Council's heavyweight champion and head of the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms.

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