Perhaps the most striking thing about the recent national election in Ukraine is just how significant a reversal of fortune it represents for Russia.

In the run-up to Sunday's polls, the Russian government expended tremendous effort to shape Ukraine's political destiny. For weeks, Moscow's narrative, conveyed via its state-controlled media and its backers in the West, was that Ukraine was a nation divided, where pro-Russian sentiment ran deep and where, left to their own devices, citizens would naturally gravitate back into Moscow's orbit.

But Sunday's election demonstrated no such thing. Rather, it saw billionaire chocolate tycoon Petro Poroshenko win a resounding 56 percent of the vote, beating out 20 other candidates to become Ukraine's fifth president. Poroshenko's strong showing obviates the need for a second electoral round and removes any ambiguity about whether Ukrainians in fact want a strong, independent polity. It also robs Russia of the argument that Ukrainians are of mixed opinion about their country's intended political trajectory, since Poroshenko made integration with Europe - which was halted last fall under pressure from Moscow - a centerpiece of his campaign.

The election was also a victory for moderation. Moscow previously had claimed that Ukraine was being overrun by fascists and far-right extremists. But Sunday's vote saw far right parties like "Svoboda" and the Right Sector win less than 2.5 percent of the overall ballot, placing them a hair's breadth away from total political obscurity. This showing is all the more striking when compared to France, Denmark and Austria, where ultra-nationalists just ran the political tables (garnering 25, 23, and 20 percent of the vote, respectively) in what some analysts have likened to an electoral "earthquake."

The real question is what Moscow will do now. Ahead of the vote, Russia encouraged separatist tendencies in places like Donetsk and Luhansk, hoping to create another Crimea scenario, or, at the very least, tilt the elections in the direction of a more pliable, subservient government in Kiev.

Now, it might resort to doing even more. Already, there are reports that Russian paramilitary forces (including the feared Chechen Vostok Battalion) are active in Eastern Ukraine, indicating Moscow has the capacity for military action if it chooses to exercise it.

That remains a real possibility. Russian president Vladimir Putin previously vowed to respect the outcome of Sunday's vote. But that was before Poroshenko's decisive electoral victory, with all that it portends, which is why Russian officials are now backpedaling and refusing to guarantee Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Poroshenko, meanwhile, is pushing back. At home, his fledgling government has already launched a military offensive aimed at quelling pro-Russian separatism in eastern Ukraine. Abroad, meanwhile, Kiev's new rulers have executed a geopolitical about-face. On May 27, just two days after Poroshenko's victory, Ukraine's Foreign Ministry officially filed paperwork with the country's parliament to begin the protracted process of exiting from the Moscow-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States. At the same time, Kiev is seeking strength in other numbers; the Ukrainian cabinet has already approved a draft agreement to create a joint military brigade with NATO members Poland and Lithuania.

These moves mark a major setback for Russia, which has revived its dreams of reconstituting its old sphere of influence of late. "For a thinking man, a neo-Soviet Union without Ukraine is nonsense," independent political analyst Sergei Shelin explains to the Moscow Times. That means Kiev's political gain is shaping up to be a strategic loss for Moscow.

None of this, of course, means Poroshenko's success is assured. The problems facing his hastily-assembled government are legion, from a lack of control over the country's south and east (where pro-Russian separatists and Russian-supported irregulars continue to operate) to glaring economic inequalities caused by Ukraine's rapacious oligarchs. But on the question of the country's larger strategic direction, Sunday's vote should be recognized for what it is: a resounding rejection of the Russian "model," and a decisive vote in favor of a future with the West.