Ukraine's Orange Revolution Five Years On

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Ukraine will hold presidential elections in January 2010 that are likely to give the country a new president. Viktor Yushchenko, elected in January 2005 on the crest of the Orange Revolution, has only 3-4 percent support making it impossible for him to win a second term. He would therefore follow Ukraine's first President Leonid Kravchuk who also only served one term in 1991-1994. The story of how Yushchenko came to power with high domestic and international expectations that he largely failed to fulfill will be a fascinating area for future research by historians, political scientists and sociologists. This article provides an initial overview of the Yushchenko presidency; first considering whether it was part of a 'second wave' of democratic breakthroughs from 1996-2004 (the 'first wave' being in 1989-1991) and then analyzing three factors that facilitated the Orange Revolution.

Were the democratic breakthroughs and revolutions which occurred between 1996 and 2004 in post-communist states part of a 'second wave', sweeping Romania (1996), Bulgaria (1997), Slovakia (1998), Croatia and Serbia (1999-2000), Georgia (2003) and finally Ukraine (2004)? This remains an area of debate as the 'Revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine are, in some senses, fundamentally different to the five earlier cases.

Firstly, the offer of EU membership to the first five countries was crucial in bolstering support for the pro-western and pro-democratic opposition, thereby ensuring their victory in elections. In Georgia and Ukraine the EU has *never* offered membership. Secondly, Ukraine was unique in experiencing a massive Russian covert and overt intervention in the 2004 elections aimed at preventing the election of the opposition candidate Yushchenko. The EU only intervened reluctantly during the Orange Revolution, at the instigation of new members Poland and Lithuania, to facilitate round-table negotiations between the opposition and authorities.

Scholarly discussions surrounding the phenomenon of democratic revolutions have been overwhelmingly dominated by American political scientists. This has meant that the discussion has focused on the 'democratic' nature of these revolutions (e.g. electoral fraud, human rights violations, democratization) to the detriment of two factors that were at work in Ukraine and Georgia: national identity and social populism. Electoral fraud was undoubtedly crucial in acting as the 'trigger' that brought large numbers of Ukrainians on to the streets who were not opposition activists (this differentiated the Orange Revolution from the Ukraine Without Kuchma protests in 2000-2001 where it was mainly activists who took to the streets). But democratisation, human rights and electoral fraud are not sufficient to mobilise millions. zation. As seen during Mikhail Gorbachev's rule in the late 1980s, anti-Soviet mobilization only proved to be strong in the USSR and Central-Eastern Europe when nationalism and democratization fused together, such as in Poland, the Baltic states, Western-Central Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – but not in Russia outside Moscow, russified Belarus or in Central Asia. In Ukraine, nationalism was boosted by a second factor, anti-elite social populism, which helped to mobilize Ukrainians against the oligarchic regime and authorities and , specifically, candidate, Viktor Yanukovych.

The role of national identity and social populism are missing from the discussion on democratic revolutions . Countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) experienced a very different transition to that experienced in the former Soviet outer empire of Central-Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. The USSR was a totalitarian state and empire and these two factors led to what I have described elsewhere as a 'quadruple transition' consisting of democratization, creation of a market economy, state-institution building and nation-building. The 'quadruple transition' resembles post-colonial transitions found elsewhere in the world. They are more difficult than

the dual transitions of democratization and marketization that took place in Latin America and Southern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, and in Central-Eastern Europe in the 1990s -where there was no need to undertake nation and state building in most countries, and which already exhibited elements of a market economy.

The 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections were not only a contest about the future direction of Ukraine but also a contest over national identity in a regionally divided country. The 'pro-Europe' candidate, Yushchenko, won majorities in the west and centre of the country (which are predominantly Ukrainian-speaking) while the ruling regime's 'pro-Russian' candidate, Yanukovych, won majorities in the east and south (which are predominantly Russian-speaking). The majority of the participants in the Orange Revolution came from Western and Central Ukraine showing the degree to which Ukrainian-speaking national identity and civil society synthesised together. Civic nationalism therefore played a vital role in Ukraine's Orange Revolution.

The creation of market economies from the fully 'command-administrative' economies found throughout the USSR, contrasts to the transition from 'goulash (semi-market) communism' to market economies in Central-Eastern Europe. The economic transition in Ukraine, Russia and elsewhere in the CIS produced a small clique of super wealthy oligarchs (many of whom are now in exile in the UK), generated widespread public anger, anti-elite sentiments and a desire for revenge. The Ukrainian Academy of Sciences conducted a yearly survey between 1994 and 2004, asking which element of society was most influential. They found that a majority of Ukrainians believed it to be 'organised crime'. With Yanukovych put forward as the ruling regime's candidate, Ukrainian voters in 2004 believed that this was the final leg in the mafia's take-over of the country. Yanukovych had two criminal convictions and was high in Ukraine's most powerful Donetsk clan (perceived to be criminal by many).

Widespread social anger at a decade of economic transition enabled President Vladimir Putin to turn Russians against liberal democracy by equating the chaos and 'oligarcisation' of the 1990s with 'democracy' itself. Russians applauded his campaign against oligarchs; only the West protested Mikhail Khodorokovsky's imprisonment. In Ukraine the democratic opposition channelled social anger *against* the oligarchs and corrupt ruling elites from the onset of the Kuchmagate crisis in November 2000 (when the president was accused of involvement in the murder of journalist Georgi Gongadze) over the following four years to the Orange Revolution. The main slogan of the Orange Revolution, used repeatedly by Yushchenko at rallies, was not 'Free Elections!' but 'Bandits to Jail!'.

Following his election, President Yushchenko has been a persistent critic of Prime Minister Tymoshenko's 'populism' since her first period in government in 2005,but the criticism is unfair because her two governments have merely sought to implement Yushchenko's 2004 election programme – itself socially populist. The Razumkov Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies think tank developed Yushchenko's 'Ten Steps' election programme (July 2004) and fourteen draft decrees (October-November 2004). The 'Ten Steps' and fourteen decrees became the basis for the Tymoshenko government programme approved by parliament in February 2005; the programme's preamble stated, 'The government programme is based on, and develops the basis of, the programme of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko's 'Ten Steps towards the People'…'

The 'Ten Steps' and fourteen draft decrees are replete with social-populist policies. The 'Ten Steps' explains that, 'Social programmes are not a devastation of the budget, but investments in the people, in the country and the nations future'. Yushchenko pledged in Step two that if he is elected, 'My Action Plan will ensure priority funding of social programmes. The way of finding budgetary money for this purpose is easy: not to steal, not to build luxurious palaces and not to buy expensive automobiles'.

Ten Steps Towards the People

1. Create 5 million jobs.
2. Ensure priority Funding for Social Programmes.
3. Increase the Budget by Decreasing Taxation.
4. Force the Government to Work for the People and Battle Corruption.
5. Create Safe Living Conditions.
6. Protect Family Values, Respect for Parents and Children's Rights.

7. Promote Spirituality and Strengthen Moral Values.
8. Promote the Development of the Countryside.
9. Improve Military Capabilities and Respect for the Military.
10. Conduct Foreign Policy that Benefits the Ukrainian People.

14 Draft Decrees

1. Promote Social Defence of Citizens.
2. Take Steps to Ensure the Return of Lost Savings to Citizens.
3. Increase Support for Child Allowance.
4. Establish the Criteria for Analysing the Activities of Heads of Local State Administrations.
5. Reduce the Terms of Military Service
6. Create a System of People's Control of the Activities of State Authorities.
7. Struggle against Corruption of High Ranking State Officials and Civil Servants in Local Governments.
8. Reduce the Number of Inspections of Businesses and Ease their Registration Process.
9. Withdraw Peacekeeping Troops from the Republic of Iraq.
10. Defend Citizens Rights to Use the Russian Language and other Minority Languages in Ukraine.
11. Ensure the Basis for Good Relations with Russia and Belarus.
12. Ensure the Rights of the Opposition in Ukraine.
13. Adopt First Steps to Ensure Individual Security of Citizens and to Halt Crime.
14. Strengthen Local Government.

Yushchenko's support in 2004 came from a cross-section of Ukrainians and grew out of a large number of expectations. Post-Soviet politicians operate in an inherited political culture where they are unaccountable to voters or the judiciary, whilst other politicians ignore their programmes after being elected themselves. Yushchenko's fatal mistake was to not appreciate the degree to which Ukrainians were changed by the Orange Revolution and that they would not countenance their president ignoring his programme and societal demands for 'justice'.

Of the three factors that facilitated the Orange Revolution -democratic rights, national identity and social populism- Yuschenko has successfully addressed two, but failed with one. He has presided over Ukraine's democratization in the holding of two free elections and the emergence of a plural media. Ukraine is the only CIS country defined as 'Free' by the Freedom House think tank while during the same period Russia has moved in the opposite direction from 'Partly Free' to 'Unfree'. Yushchenko has also energetically devoted himself to national identity questions, such as reviving Ukraine's historical memory and commemorating the victims of Stalinism and Communism. The 1933 artificial Ukrainian famine has been raised on an international level. Yushchenko's nation-building drive has led to poor relations with autocratic Russia where Jozef Stalin is being rehabilitated.

Yushchenko's record in dealing with social populist demands has been a failure. He is perceived as having sought to undermine Tymoshenko's two governments at every opportunity. No 'Bandits' went to jail, the elites remain above the law, politicians remain unaccountable, the judiciary and prosecutors office is as corrupt as it was in the pre-Orange era and only one re-nationalisation took place (Kryvorizhstal). The Tymoshenko's government policy last year of seeking to repay lost Soviet bank deposits (promised in Yushchenko's second of his fourteen decrees from his 2004 programme) was blocked by the president and denounced as 'populist'. Ukrainians supported the policy and Tymoshenko's ratings shot up making her the country's most popular politician.

Yushchenko's failure to implement his 2004 programme, and his attempts to undermine governments that sought to do so, have brought four years of political crises and pre-term elections. This failure to implement the social and legal components of his 2004 programme, coupled with his association with four years of political instability, have overshadowed Yushchenko's two contributions to Ukrainian contemporary history as a democratiser and nation-builder. Ukrainian politicians need to appreciate the rules of the game in democracies; namely, that voters will punish them in elections if they ignore their election promises.

About the author:

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