

# Stalingrad and Waterloo

## Orange in-fighting poses growing threat to Ukraine's long-term integration ambitions

Taras Kuzio Business Ukraine

The month of May is usually associated with the end of World War II and this was even more the case this year with President Viktor Yushchenko quoted predicting that the 26 May Kyiv mayoral elections will become Yulia Tymoshenko's own personal Stalingrad. Despite the obvious appeal of employing WWII imagery in his political struggle with erstwhile Orange Revolution ally Tymoshenko, Yushchenko may well have mixed up his military metaphors. In reality it is far more likely that spring 2008 will instead be remembered as Yushchenko's Waterloo.

### Together they stand, divided they fall

As well as Victory Day celebrations May is also traditionally the month of Eurovision, the kitsch competition which has been come to epitomise Ukraine's hit and miss efforts in recent years to emerge on the international stage. However, instead of last year's hilarious Russia Goodbye entry or Ruslana's barnstorming Wild Dances, it is Abba's 1974 Eurovision contest hit Waterloo which is perhaps the Eurovision tune for Ukraine's President Yushchenko. It maybe over thirty years old but the song will ring particularly true given his current predicament. It is commonly accepted that, with permanently low approval ratings of less than 10%, President Yushchenko could only win a second term with the support of Prime Minister Tymoshenko. His use of terms like Stalingrad is wishful thinking when the Tymoshenko bloc is the most popular political force in Ukraine and Tymoshenko the most popular political leader. In reality, there is no escaping the fact that the only time the President's popularity has increased in recent years has been when he has re-established his alliance with the Tymoshenko bloc, as he did briefly did last year. As the Abba song says, 'Waterloo - knowing my fate is to be with you'.

Nevertheless, in both 2005 and 2008 Yushchenko has sought to undermine Tymoshenko's government even though in doing so he undermines himself more. The two months of April and May 2008 closely resemble the first Orange collapse of August-September

2005 in the manner in which the President's actions appear once again to be driven by emotion rather by rationale. Numerous parallels between the 2005 and 2008 Orange implosions are immediately apparent. The National Security and Defence Council was used on both occasions not for coordinating foreign and defence policy, as it should be, but as a surrogate (anti-Tymoshenko) government. In both instances 'Yuliaphobia' was rampant in the President's words and actions. Then as now economic policy, privatisation, social policies, corruption and energy divided Tymoshenko from Yushchenko. The only difference is that Ukraine has different constitutions in 2005 and 2008 and today the President has no right to remove the prime minister. Nevertheless, the coalition and government is slowly sinking and sooner or later Tymoshenko will have to decide whether to jump ship or seek an electoral showdown that she seems bound to win. Following the autumn 2005 crisis, where the President removed Prime Minister Tymoshenko a few weeks after describing her administration as "the best government in Europe," the popularity of the President and his political force, Our Ukraine, collapsed to levels from which it has never recovered. It is supremely ironic that Our Ukraine is only a third as popular today, when its Honorary Chairman is the President, than it was under former president Leonid Kuchma. In contrast, the Tymoshenko bloc has increased its support by 450% in the same five-year period and its ratings remain stable at between 25-30%, overtaking the Party of Regions regularly in opinion polls as the most popular party in the country. Regardless of the outcome of the Kyiv mayoral elections, any sober analysis of these general trends would conclude that this situation more closely resembles Yushchenko's Waterloo than Tymoshenko's Stalingrad.

### Orange civil war undermining foreign policy

The current in-fighting within the Orange coalition is also undermining the country's Euro-Atlantic integration ambitions. After many years of false starts the last thing the

country needs is more doubts over the credibility of its stated foreign policy intentions. During Kuchma's decade in office Ukrainian foreign policy was divorced from reality. While professing to support the goals of achieving NATO and EU membership the country's leadership did everything it could to undermine these goals at home. Ukrainian foreign policy was thereby widely viewed as schizophrenic - pulling towards Europe at the foreign level while moving towards Eurasia at the domestic level. This schizophrenic approach to policy has not fundamentally altered since the Orange Revolution. The twin goals of seeking Ukraine's membership of NATO and the EU are nothing new - they were introduced by former President Kuchma in 1998 (for the EU) and 2002 (for NATO). Since 2005 the schizophrenic practice of supporting the lofty foreign goals of Euro-

It is supremely ironic that Our Ukraine is only a third as popular today, when its Honorary Chairman is the President, than it was under former president Leonid Kuchma. In contrast, the Tymoshenko bloc has increased its support by 450% in the same five-year period and its ratings remain stable at between 25-30%, overtaking the Party of Regions regularly in opinion polls as the most popular party in the country

Atlantic integration while undermining them at home has continued with the Presidential Administration apparently working to block the work of the Tymoshenko administration at every turn. Our Ukraine analyst Ihor Zhdanov describes the daily denunciations by presidential secretariat head Viktor Baloha directed at the Tymoshenko government as merely serving to worsen public opinion of the President while also bringing no results. Acting as a de facto Vice President rather than as a senior bureaucrat Baloha has hurled unbridled insults against the Prime Minister in language that would be libelous in a country such as Britain. According to Baloha, Tymoshenko is a 'cowardly charlatan', an 'uncultured pigmy' and he recently claimed that her constitutional proposals are directed at the introduction in Ukraine of a regime similar in nature to that of Hitler's Germany. Rather than distance himself from Baloha's outspoken remarks Yushchenko has rushed to confirm that he speaks with the full authority of the presidential office. In a 15 May interview with the Ukrainian service of the BBC Yushchenko commented, "There is no such thing as an independent presidential entourage."

### International community inclined to wait and see

Since the Orange Revolution Ukraine has been unable to achieve the kind of political stability needed in order to capitalise on the international goodwill generated by the pro-democracy regime change of 2004. The country's in-built political divisions have been aggravated by a lack of Orange unity that has made European partners think twice before rushing to engage in what is widely perceived as politically suspect partner. Interviewed in a Ukrainian newspaper this month the German Ambassador to Ukraine Reinhard Shefers commented: "Of course the internal situation influences whether Ukraine is accepted as a partner. Ukrainian domestic policies unquestionably are also evidenced and impact on foreign policy." The Ambassador added his wish that Ukraine would become 'stable'.

In reality, Germany gains more from the political instability within the Orange coalition as it provides convenient arguments which Berlin can use when speaking out against inviting Ukraine into a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). Germany was the leading NATO member to oppose issuing Ukraine and Georgia with MAP's at last month's NATO summit in Bucharest. That summit did issue a commitment to Ukraine and Georgia that they would be admitted into NATO but failed to give any time frame. Instead, NATO passed the onus to both countries to prove that they were progressing. In December NATO foreign ministers are to meet to review this progress. Ukraine would appear to have a greater chance of displaying progress than Georgia, whose two frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are the main stumbling blocks for NATO membership. Meanwhile, Georgia's 70% support for NATO membership is envied by Ukraine. However, it remains to be seen how NATO intends to measure any progress made in Ukraine. The two most commonly cited problem areas that NATO member Germany raises are public opinion and political stability. Both areas are either being neglected or undermined by President Yushchenko. Public support for NATO membership in Ukraine dropped from a third of the population in the 1990s to a quarter today, especially following the US invasion of Iraq (many Ukrainians mistakenly believed that this was a NATO operation as the US is linked in the public mind with NATO).

Information campaigns to improve public support for NATO have not been prioritised since Yushchenko's election in January 2005. One reason has been perennial government instability through four govern-



ments in the last four years as well as disinterest in NATO membership on the part of the Yanukovich government. The current Tymoshenko government is the first government since 2005 to include a large financial allocation for a concerted NATO information campaign. If the government is replaced by a grand coalition, as Mr. Baloha seeks, the NATO information campaign allocation will undoubtedly disappear from the budget.

### Undermining Euro-Atlantic ambitions

This in-fighting and instability makes it hard for NATO and the EU to give a green light to Ukraine's membership prospects. Undermining the Tymoshenko government in 2005 led to the undermining of Ukraine's very real prospect of being invited into a NATO MAP at the 2006 Riga summit. The undermining of the current Tymoshenko government will repeat this history and become a second defeat for Ukraine if the scheduled progress review in December failed to produce any concrete results. With a new US president in place next year during NATO's 60th summit Ukraine has a better chance than this year in entering a MAP, but only if the country has by then entered a period of stability and the government is finally permitted to do its job.

The last four years have shown that in undermining the Tymoshenko government and thereby the Orange alliance President Yushchenko damages his own popularity and that of his political force, Our Ukraine while preventing progress in reforms and impeding the battle against corruption. Crucially, the President's current spoiling tactics undermine his own stated commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration. This can only lead to one conclusion: that spring 2008 will come to be seen as a second Waterloo for the President, following on from his autumn 2005 setback. As the Abba song states, "Waterloo - I was defeated, you won the war. I tried to hold you back but you were stronger." ●