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## **SERBIA, GEORGIA, UKRAINE, KYRGYZSTAN: UKRAINE DEBATES NEXT REVOLUTION**

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Last week's violent revolution in Kyrgyzstan was different from the peaceful transformations in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine. At the same time, this fact has not stopped debates in Ukraine and the West over whether further "dominos" are likely to fall in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk congratulated the Kyrgyz opposition on their "victory" (Ukrainian Channel 5, March 24). "There is no doubt that it is difficult to imagine such processes taking place without a well-organized opposition and popular support," he noted. Comparing Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, and Georgia to Ukraine, Tarasyuk believes that Ukraine's revolution was different in that, "The protests went on for a long time, they were large-scale, and they were not violent."

Ukrainian readers of the popular *Ukrayinska pravda* Internet newspaper see Belarus and Russia as the most likely sites of the next popular revolutions (*Ukrayinska pravda*, March 29). Among readers of the Ukrainian- and Russian-language versions of *Ukrayinska pravda*, 28% and 34%, respectively, believe that Belarus is next.

Channel 5 debated the issue of Belarus on March 26, a TV channel established by the current secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, Petro Poroshenko. Since the Orange Revolution, Channel 5 has dramatically increased its ratings from the 13th most-viewed channel to third place.

Belarus is set to hold its next presidential election in October 2006. President Alexander Lukashenka plans to run for a third term, after he organized a referendum last fall that changed the constitution to permit this. If Lukashenka's plans to create a presidency-for-life do not lead to a revolution in Belarus, then likely nothing will.

But is Belarus ripe for revolution? The opposition's talk of putting half a million people on the streets on March 25 should be contrasted with the 2,000 who actually turned up (EDM, March 28). Even the anti-Leonid Kuchma protests in Ukraine in 2000-2003 attracted rallies of 20,000-50,000.

Channel 5 is pessimistic about whether Belarus will fall next. At the same time, the Belarusian opposition is seeking to emulate Ukraine's revolution, and Belarusian and Georgian flags were the most conspicuous non-Ukrainian flags present during the Orange Revolution. "The opposition plans to act out the Ukrainian scenario and put forward a single candidate," Channel 5 explained (March 26).

Nevertheless, the Belarusian regime remains fully authoritarian, making it difficult for the opposition to organize as a serious threat to Lukashenka. What distinguishes all four revolutions -- Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan -- is that they took place in semi-authoritarian regimes that still permitted some limited space for the opposition, civil society, and independent media.

If further revolutions can only take place in semi-authoritarian regimes in the CIS, it limits the number of possibilities to only Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Graeme Herd, an analyst at the Conflict Studies Research Centre, based at Britain's Defense Academy, predicted in a January study that Ukraine's Orange Revolution would increase the likelihood that CIS ruling elites would move their regimes towards greater authoritarianism, making it unlikely future revolutions would take place ([da.mod.uk/csrc](http://da.mod.uk/csrc)).

Belarus also lacks a single candidate around which the opposition could unite. Currently there are 10 politicians who seek to be the united opposition candidate. Lukashenka will exploit this division (Channel 5, March 26).

Readers of the Ukrainian and Russian editions of *Ukrayinska pravda* readers believe that Russia could succumb to a popular revolution. Ironically, readers of the Russian edition were more pessimistic (17%) than readers of the Ukrainian edition (24%). Perhaps readers of the Ukrainian edition were simply engaged in wishful thinking?

Since Vladimir Putin was elected to a second term of office in March 2004, Russia has increasingly moved towards a fully autocratic system. The opposition is finding it more and more difficult to find space for their activities, and the pro-Western opposition has been increasingly marginalized.

The ability of the opposition to rely on independent media outlets proved crucial in the four revolutions to date. In Russia the media situation has so dramatically deteriorated that opposition and independent journalists are now moving to Ukraine. Savik Shuster, a controversial Russian TV host who was hounded out of Russia's NTV, is set to launch a discussion show on Ukrainian television, and observed, "Ukraine today is freer than other CIS countries" (*Rossiiskaya gazeta*, March 23).

Shuster predicted that other Russian opposition journalists would follow him to Ukraine. Olga Romanova, a host on Russia's Ren TV, also predicted that moving to Ukraine might be "the only way out" (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, March 24).

One prominent figure in Russia's opposition, Boris Nemtsov, has been appointed an adviser to Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko. Former Russian prime minister Mikhail Kasyanov, an ally of Nemtsov, is seeking to become Russia's answer to Yushchenko and the united opposition's candidate for the 2008 presidential elections. That race will be similar to Ukraine's 2004 elections in that it will also be a potential succession crisis when Putin finishes his second term.

Ukrainian political commentators agree with *Ukrayinska pravda* readers that Belarus and Russia are the next potential CIS dominos. Moldova, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are also mentioned (*Ukrayinska pravda*, March 29).

Ukrainian pundits have also pointed to various factors that assisted earlier revolutions. These include infringing the rights of small and medium businessmen, the role of young people, anti-oligarch sentiments, reaction against extensive foreign intervention, and the availability of modern communications such as cell phones and the Internet.

The Kyrgyz revolution, following so closely the Ukrainian one, has led to another debate in Ukraine about the viability of the CIS in its present form. Russia's recent unauthorized military incursion into the Crimea (see EDM, March 29), and Russia's territorial demands on Tuzla Island in 2003 have only served to accelerate this debate.

Two groupings are again re-emerging in the CIS, one led by Ukraine and Georgia and another by Russia. During Kuchma's second term as president of Ukraine (1999-2004), Russia gained the upper hand as Kuchma lost interest in the GUUAM group (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova). But, Russia's position is now becoming increasingly weaker in Eurasia.

As Tarasyuk told Channel 5 (March 24), the CIS does not have a "future in the form in which it currently exists." Yushchenko agrees, and is calling for radical reform of the CIS (*Ukrayinska pravda*, March 25). These reforms are likely to weaken Russia's position in the CIS and Eurasia even further.