

Ukraine is Not Russia

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The Orange Revolution in Ukraine in November–December 2004 that propelled Viktor Yushchenko to power as Ukraine's third president has demonstrated that Ukraine and Russia follow highly divergent trajectories in their domestic and foreign policies. Ukraine's president Leonid Kuchma was elected to a second term in 1999. The same year, Russia's Boris Yeltsin resigned and appointed his Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, acting president of the Russian Federation. The appointment was later confirmed by Putin's electoral victory in 2000. During his first term in office, Putin has moved Russia closer to autocracy and allowed a steady erosion of democratic liberties. In Ukraine, Kuchma's second term was dominated by a severe political crisis that has undermined the legitimacy of the ruling elites. Putin secured an effortless electoral victory in 2004. But when later that year Kuchma tried to use Yeltsin's old gambit and choose his own successor, Viktor Yanukovych, his move caused political upheaval and radical changes.

The roots of this divergence can be found in different institutional structures, social dynamics, and geopolitical aspirations of the two countries. Unlike Russia, Ukraine has had a sizable democratic, non-left opposition. During Kuchma's second term, his former Prime Minister, Viktor

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Yushchenko, moved into the opposition camp. In April 2001 his government was dismissed by the votes of Communists and pro-Kuchma centrists. After his dismissal, Yushchenko created a new bloc, Our Ukraine, which came first in the proportional half of the 2002 parliamentary elections. This was the first time the non-left opposition came ahead of the Communist Party, which until then was Ukraine's main opposition force. As the results of the 2002 elections showed, four opposition groups (Our Ukraine, Yulia Tymoshenko bloc, Socialists and Communists) controlled over half of the seats in the parliament, which has also retained significant political power under the 1996 semi-presidential constitution.

In Russia, on the other hand, the democratic opposition was fragmented, demoralised and increasingly marginalized. The 1993 Russian constitution gave few powers to the parliament, and under President Putin the executive branch largely controlled the Duma. During 2003-2004, Putin consolidated his power by pushing the democratic forces to the margins and aligning his Unified Russia with the nationalists and the extreme right (the Liberal Democratic Party and Motherland) in order to secure a two-thirds majority in the Duma. By contrast, Kuchma's attempts to create his own dominant parliamentary bloc repeatedly failed.

In effect, Russia and Ukraine have had different political regimes since the 1990s. Thus, after the fraudulent second round of presidential elections on November 21, the Ukrainian parliament refused to recognise the official results and initiate election law reforms. In the words of a Russian scholar, Maria Lipman, "In Russia, by contrast,

