

How the West **was** lost

Unwelcome elections will complete Yushchenko's descent from Orange hero to EU outsider

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Ukraine is scheduled to go to the polls in snap elections this December in a vote which few believe will break the political deadlock in the country. Whatever the outcome of the vote, the elections themselves could serve to further damage the standing of President Viktor Yushchenko and isolate him from the West. In just four years Mr. Yushchenko has gone from being celebrated as an icon of democracy to being viewed as an obstacle to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration.

Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's visit to Brussels earlier this month to attend a quarterly meeting of the European Peoples Party (EPP) and President Viktor Yushchenko's visit to Washington last month on the back of his attendance of the opening of the UN tells us a lot about how the West relates to Ukraine's two Orange leaders. While Mrs. Tymoshenko's visit was a success, Mr. Yushchenko's trip was, judging from media and other sources, a failure.

A report on President Yushchenko's meeting with US President George W. Bush by Roman Kupchinsky concluded that Washington was distancing itself from Mr. Yushchenko. Mr. Bush's meeting with Mr. Yushchenko received far less attention and praise than a similar meeting in April 2005 when I witnessed his triumphant post-revolutionary visit to Washington to speak to both houses of Congress, meet President George W. Bush, attend a joint reception hosted by the National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute and appear at a gala dinner laid on by the Ukrainian diaspora.

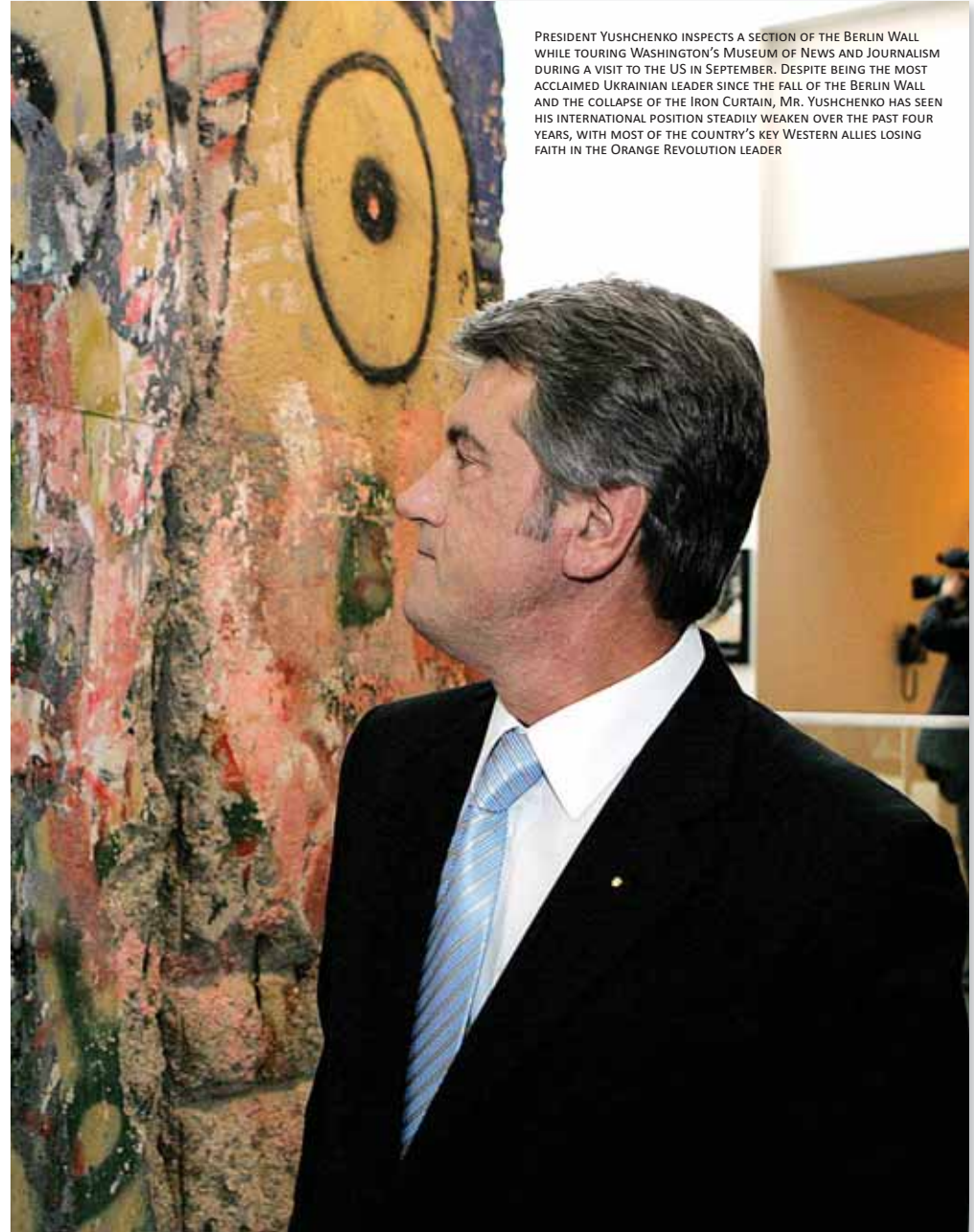
Three years later President Bush limited his praise for the Orange Revolution leader to: "I welcome you here to the Oval Office. I admire your steadfast support for democratic values and principles. A lot of Americans have watched with amazement how your country became a democracy. We strongly support your democracy. We look

forward to working with you to strengthen that democracy." As the report by Mr. Kupchinsky noted, the photo on the White House website avoided any hints of closeness between the two presidents.

Orange optimism giving way to Ukraine fatigue

Sources within the Washington administration who spoke to Mr. Kupchinsky confirmed that there was a pervading sense of fatigue with President Yushchenko among America's leadership, but that this did not extend to *Ukraine per se*. The Ukrainian President is widely perceived to be an inept leader, they reported, and Washington is hedging its bets on who will become the next head of state. Speaking to *Business Ukraine* one US government official with a long involvement in Ukrainian affairs claimed that the considerable negative impact of the country's prolonged political turbulence had already succeeded in doing far deeper

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PRESIDENT YUSHCHENKO INSPECTS A SECTION OF THE BERLIN WALL WHILE TOURING WASHINGTON'S MUSEUM OF NEWS AND JOURNALISM DURING A VISIT TO THE US IN SEPTEMBER. DESPITE BEING THE MOST ACCLAIMED UKRAINIAN LEADER SINCE THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE IRON CURTAIN, MR. YUSHCHENKO HAS SEEN HIS INTERNATIONAL POSITION STEADILY WEAKEN OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS, WITH MOST OF THE COUNTRY'S KEY WESTERN ALLIES LOSING FAITH IN THE ORANGE REVOLUTION LEADER

damage to Ukraine's position in America. "The level of frustration and disappointment with Mr. Yushchenko and more broadly the entire Ukrainian political establishment is the highest I've ever seen among supporters of Ukraine, whether they be US government, NGOs or Ukrainian Americans," he confirmed.

This uneasy relationship was in evidence during a breakfast talk Mr. Yushchenko gave to the US-Ukraine Business Council where his one-hour monologue left little time for questions. As in all of his interviews and speeches abroad since the spring of this year, President Yushchenko would only talk about crisis, how despicable Yulia Tymoshenko was and how she had allegedly done a deal with the "devil" (i.e. Vladimir Putin). Apart from it being unethical for foreign leaders to trash their opponents while abroad, the President's emphasis on the depth of Ukraine's crisis was not what businessmen and foreign investors wanted to hear.

Tymoshenko's European allies

Mrs. Tymoshenko's visit to the EPP was different. Both the Fatherland Party that she leads and Our Ukraine, headed by Vyacheslav Kyrylenko and honorary chairman Viktor Yushchenko, are members of the EPP. Mr. Kyrylenko has rarely, if ever, attended EPP meetings, while Mr. Yushchenko last went in to an EPP meeting in December 2007. Mr. Yushchenko's relations with the EPP have deteriorated and Our Ukraine no longer co-operates in a meaningful manner with the largest political group in the European Parliament. The EPP is a strong supporter of Ukraine's EU membership but complains that it is hampered in lobbying this view within the EU by Mr. Yushchenko's policies, which it claims has undermined the credibility of their pro-reform, pro-Western position. President Yushchenko has stayed away from recent meetings in protest at the EPP's demonstrations of support for Yulia Tymoshenko in the power struggle between the government and the Presidency. The last meeting he attended was in Lisbon in December 2007, where he was joined by Mrs. Tymoshenko despite his stated wish that she refrain from going. This uncomfortable pairing led to Mr. Yushchenko's refusal when EPP President Wilfried Martens requested to be photographed with both Ukrainian Orange leaders at the end of the summit.

Brussels backs Tymoshenko's pleas for compromise

This took place in the same month as parliament confirmed Tymoshenko as Prime

Minister. Mr. Yushchenko's refusal to be photographed with his PM sent a subtle signal to both the EPP, the EU (which held a summit after the EPP in Lisbon) and Western governments that President Yushchenko was already unsupportive of the Tymoshenko government just as that government was coming into office.

EPP President Martens read out a statement signed by all summit participants at the end of the latest EPP meeting in support of "the revival and strengthening of the coalition of democratic, pro-European forces in Ukraine." Particularly now, Martens reiterated, Ukraine needs a stable government during the global financial crisis. "New elections, the third in merely three years, will undermine stability. What Ukraine needs today is not new elections but responsible leadership and stable government. Now is the time for unity, not for division," Mr. Martens stated, adding: "Political instability and the economic crisis are a direct threat to the Ukrainian people."

The President of the European Commission Manuel Barroso said during Tymoshenko's visit, "We appeal to political forces in Ukraine to ensure consensus and stability." Mr. Barroso continued, "We need a stable Ukraine. A Ukraine that continues on its path of European integration."

Reassessing the post-Orange political landscape

In the last two years the West, in the sense of Brussels (through the EU and NATO), London and Washington (US government and IMF), have re-assessed Ukraine's leaders. US political consultants have failed to transform Party of Regions leader Viktor Yanukovich's image in the West and he rarely travels there. His visits to Brussels and Washington as Prime Minister in September and December 2006 respectively did not improve his image as a stiff, ex-con who walks, talks and until recently looked like a Soviet enterprise director (one of the few noticeable changes has been a switch from turtle necks under his suit jacket that made him look like an extra from the acclaimed US show *The Sopranos* to stylish matching shirt and tie combinations).

Fading allure of Yushchenko's Orange laurels

The West's attitudes towards Mr. Yushchenko and Mrs. Tymoshenko have changed more slowly but nevertheless the change has been noticeable. In the first year of Mr. Yushchenko's

administration he seemed to spend much of the time abroad collecting medals and accolades as the poisoned hero of the Orange Revolution while Mrs. Tymoshenko's government received bad publicity internationally for its alleged populism and oil price caps. The latter is, of course, now looks highly ironic in light of the energy price caps undertaken in many Western countries since then.

President Yushchenko's relations with the West have declined because of two factors. The President's report card shows five governments during his still unfinished first term as well as three elections, only one of which was scheduled. Ukraine's and Mr. Yushchenko's current image problems would not exist if the 2005 Tymoshenko government had never been removed and it had been permitted to undertake radical reforms over the last four years. Ukraine would have been closer to its long-stated goals of NATO and EU membership and Mr. Yushchenko would have been heading for re-election.

Obstacle to integration: the cost of the Orange civil war

The disunity of the country's pro-western and pro-reform forces has slowed Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration into NATO and the EU. Former Council of Europe rapporteur Hanne Severinsen said during a Kyiv visit this month: "Ukraine was very close to obtaining a perspective on EU membership and I am convinced that if political forces in Ukraine had reached a compromise then Ukraine's European integration would have been more successful."

Ukraine could have entered NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP) two years ago at NATO's Riga summit but failed to do so because the Orange victory in the March 2006 elections was not transformed into an Orange government and coalition unity. In 2006 President Bush, who was due to visit Kyiv in June of that year, was not yet then a lame duck president and Germany's opposition had not yet grown into the major obstacle it became at NATO's Bucharest summit earlier this year. Stephen Larrabee, Corporate Chair for European Security at the Rand Corporation pulled no punches when he told a recent conference: "Mr. Yushchenko has been the main drag on Ukraine's integration into the West."

An Ambassador from an important Western country in Kyiv which supports Ukraine's NATO membership told *Business Ukraine* that

they had advised the President on a number of occasions of the choice he faced. That choice was to undermine the Tymoshenko government and Orange coalition and thereby negatively impact upon Ukraine's drive to NATO membership, or leave Mrs. Tymoshenko in place and move Ukraine into NATO. As the Ambassador concluded: "of the two choices Mr. Yushchenko chose the former." Meanwhile, a former US Ambassador to Ukraine commented at a recent seminar: "Ukraine's NATO MAP chances were destroyed on October 8" (a reference to the day parliament was dissolved by President Yushchenko).

Disarming the country's NATO bid

The President's undermining of the Tymoshenko government in 2005, his opposition to her return as prime minister in 2006 and his second undermining of the government in 2008 more effectively de-railed Ukraine's drive to NATO than anything undertaken by Russian President Vladimir Putin. The President is charged in Western capitals with having placed his personal rivalry with Mrs. Tymoshenko above that of two important national interests: Achieving NATO membership and more recently, uniting the country in the face of the global financial crisis.

The Western countries least supportive of NATO enlargement for Ukraine such as Germany, France, Italy and Belgium, have placed two conditions in front of President Yushchenko. Firstly, he must support political stability. German Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Ministry Gernot Erler commented during a recent Moscow-Berlin TV link, "What will be achieved in discussing fantasies about different unions and security policies with Ukraine's participation when we still have to deal with the question of security within Ukraine at a time when there is simply a catastrophic domestic policy?" Erler continued, "We are very concerned and hope that Ukraine as quickly as possible moves to the path of stabilisation and achieves at the very minimum cooperation and understanding that governments remain in place for minimum periods."

Secondly, the country's NATO doubters call on the President to improve public opinion. With none of the five governments under Mr. Yushchenko being in office for a full year it has been, and will remain until the 2010 presidential elections, impossible to put in place a consistent NATO information campaign and increase support for NATO membership.

Turning a crisis into a vote-winner

Playing with fire at a time when the global crisis is about to hit Ukraine like a tsunami will not improve the President's electability in January 2010. Western business leaders, including 15 investment houses I met in London this month interested in emerging markets, stressed that they cannot understand a president who is fiddling while Rome burns in this manner. A senior US-based analyst and business consultant who works on Ukraine told *Business Ukraine* that the President's attempts to use the global crisis to improve his personal ratings with an eye to the presidential elections are doomed to fail. "Ukrainian voters have written him off and trying to revive one's image at this late stage will not work as voters will ask 'Where have you been in the last four years?'"

The last two years have seen a noticeable shift in Western opinion about Ukraine's two Orange leaders. Mr. Yushchenko's star was already fading in the West prior to the September crisis and his dissolution of parliament the following month. Calling pre-term elections, rather than re-building an enlarged Orange coalition, can only cause further damage to the President's image in the West. ●



The President's plans for alternative government

President Yushchenko rejected Mrs. Tymoshenko's latest proposal to establish a government of national unity to deal with the global financial crisis because he believes that he can revive his ratings, and thereby win a second term in office, by showing resolve in dealing with the global crisis through the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) at a time when parliament is dissolved and the government remains acting until after the elections. The President responded to Mrs. Tymoshenko's proposals by saying that the government should, "yield to the National Security and Defence Council in the sphere of legitimacy, mobility and professionalism."

The NSDC has been used by the President as a counter-government since 2005 through presidential appointments of NSDC secretaries who are hostile to Mrs. Tymoshenko. These NSDC secretaries have included the chairman of the National Bank Petro Poroshenko, whose exchange rate policy has been condemned as importing inflation, Anatoliy Kinakh, who has since defected to the Party of Regions, Ivan Plyushch, the first Our Ukraine-Peoples Self Defence deputy to refuse point blank to sign the Orange coalition accord in 2007, and Party of Regions parliamentary faction leader Raisa Bohatryriova. Instead of focusing on co-ordinating Ukrainian foreign and security policy towards attaining the goals of NATO and EU membership, Mr. Yushchenko's use of the NSDC as a constitutionally questionable tool to undermine two Tymoshenko governments has instead undermined Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration bid.