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[Ukraine Should Follow in Georgia's Footsteps](#)



By Taras Kuzio

I very much enjoyed reading [Vitaly Sych's article](#) by this title published in the leading Ukrainian weekly magazine Korrespondent and the Kyiv Post. It is rare to read an article in Ukraine praising Georgia under President Mikheil Saakashvili – even though Ukrainians tend to have friendly and positive views of Georgians.

Although Freedom House gave Ukraine a better ranking than Georgia (“free” as opposed to “partly free”) after Ukraine’s revolutions, the irony is that Georgia may turn out to be a better success story than Ukraine. Georgia has done better than Ukraine on battling corruption and making the country a good place for business, and there is no likelihood of pro-Russian forces coming to power. As President Mikheil Saakashvili wrote, [Georgia is no longer a “failed state.”](#) With Ukraine’s democracy under threat from authoritarianism after the election of Viktor Yanukovych, the country could be downgraded to “partly free” in the 2011 Freedom House rankings (see Pavel Korduban in EDM, July 15).

Sych’s eight points are important in explaining why Georgia post-Rose Revolution is a success, whereas Ukraine following the Orange Revolution was not. Sych is absolutely right when he writes, “people in charge should possess a vision and political will.” This is something Viktor Yushchenko and the majority of Ukrainians politicians have never had. Even today the opposition and shadow cabinet find it difficult to explain to Ukrainian voters what their alternative vision is to Viktor Yanukovych and their strategy as to how they will go about implementing their vision when they return to power.

Sych suggests that radical reforms should be undertaken at the beginning of the presidency, when the

president still has a honeymoon of public support. Yushchenko in 2005, although incapacitated from being treated for poisoning, had the powers of the 1996 presidential constitution, but never used them. Ukraine's Oligarchs, the defeated candidate and Party of Regions and the pro-Kuchma ruling elites were scared enough in early 2005 that they would have signed up to anything in exchange for immunity. Yushchenko never understood the power he had or how he could have used it to push through decisive changes.

Saakashvili has used the presidential constitution to introduce wide-sweeping reforms. Presidents Yushchenko and Yanukovych have wanted to change the constitution back to a presidential system, but neither of them has explained what reforms he will undertake with these greater powers.

Like Sych I am exasperated by Ukrainian politicians talking about 'Ukraine's special path,' which is a path to gross corruption by the elites and impoverishment of the country. Yulia Tymoshenko's support for 'third wayism' and 'solidarism' makes her closer in spirit to Britain's New Labour than to center-right parties in the European Peoples Party political group in the European Parliament, of which her Fatherland Party is a member.

Nevertheless, Sych ignores two important differences between Georgia and Ukraine. First, although he hints at the issue when he discusses the 31-year old Georgian Deputy Interior Minister, he does not take to its logical conclusion. The Saakashvili generation includes people who are in their late 20s to late 30s. This is a generation younger than the Orange Revolution generation, who were in their late 40s to early 50s.

Which generation is ruling the country makes a difference as the Saakashvili ruling group is the least Sovietized generation. Ukraine's tragedy is that the Viktor Yanukovych-Nikolai Azarov generation is a step backwards, as they are between 60-62 years of age. That is, they are the same age group as when Kuchma came to power in 1994, meaning that their careers began in the Leonid Brezhnev 'era of stagnation' in the 1970s.

It is therefore little wonder that the current Ukrainian authorities are neo-Soviet and russophile in the manner in which they think, operate and act.

Even if, as Sych suggests, they were to drive across the US, the Yanukovych-Azarov generation would simply be incapable of understanding how America functions, the source of its deep patriotism and democratic political culture. Saakashvili, on the other hand, would be able to drive across the US, where he studied, with an entire mini bus of his team and understand what they were seeing and witnessing.

This takes me to the second point that Sych is missing, and that is education and language. I witnessed this in practice when twenty Georgians networked at the November 2006 Riga NATO summit because they all knew English (Ukraine only sent 3 people).

The Saakashvili team has been educated in Western universities and they all know English. How many Ukrainian politicians and government ministers have been educated in the West or know English? Very few is the answer. Yushchenko is married to a Ukrainian-American, but he never bothered to learn English.

A Western education and the English language bring a range of benefits that include wider intellectual horizons, the ability to read Western publications, a greater understanding of how North American-European systems operate, an easier ability to mingle with Western political and business leaders and greater ability to influence the Western media.

Ukraine's opposition should therefore set five tasks for itself over the next six months:

1. Take a crash course to learn English.
2. Sign up to study political science or economics at Kyiv Mohyla Academy.
3. Visit Georgia and get to know how and why their reforms and campaign against corruption have been

successful.

4. Draw on their new experiences and language skills to prepare draft programs outlining their alternative visions for Ukraine. These could be subject to discussion in the media, academic establishments and in focus groups.

5. Hire political consultants, lobbyists and public relations experts in Washington, DC and Brussels. Currently the only Ukrainian political force using US consultants is, ironically, President Yanukovich and the Party of Regions that he led until April. Ask these consultants to prepare at least one opinion editorial for a Western newspaper each month that would be signed by opposition leaders.