

## Security & Terrorism

### Outside View: Ukraine's orange revolution

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 13 (UPI) -- Almost a year after Viktor Yushchenko became president of Ukraine last January -- following his election as a pro-reform, pro-Western candidate -- the nation faces tough new challenges as it moves closer to its goal of integrating into the Euro-Atlantic community.

Yushchenko came to power after losing a first presidential election that was riddled with fraud. The reformist Orange Revolution sparked street demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians in favor of Yushchenko, leading to a second election that he won.

But the president's problems today won't be solved by demonstrations, rallies and speeches. He must govern while grappling with challenges greater than any Ukraine has faced since it won independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. To solve these problems, eloquent words and cheering crowds are no substitute for the eloquence of action.

The Orange Revolution and Yushchenko's election enabled Ukraine to resume its transition to democracy and a market economy, an effort that stalled under the semi-authoritarian and corrupt former President Leonid Kuchma. Now greater effort needs to be undertaken in this area.

To show the Ukrainian people that the revolution has changed their lives and not just their government, Yushchenko and his government need to institutionalize freedom of the press, democratize the state and build on the rebirth of civil society. A key step in this direction will take place in January, when Ukraine will change from a Soviet-type presidential system to a parliamentary system commonly found in much of Europe.

Once the parliamentary system is in place, Ukraine needs to ensure it holds a free and fair parliamentary election in 2006. This would prove to the watching world that the nation is fully committed to a democratic path.

As Ukraine implements the rule of law, it also needs to speed up the campaign against corruption and organized crime. This should include holding accountable those high-ranking Kuchma officials implicated in abuse of office, election fraud and the killing of journalist Georgy Gongadze.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued a sharp reprimand to Ukraine for failing to bring high-ranking officials from the Kuchma regime to justice. This was followed by a European Court of Human Rights ruling that said Ukrainian authorities failed to protect the life of Gongadze and mishandled the investigation into his kidnapping and murder five years ago.

The ability of the Ukrainian courts to bring those responsible for Gongadze's murder to justice will be closely monitored.

With the election of Yushchenko, Ukraine has a chance to join NATO and eventually the European Union. After the latest NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting in Vilnius in late October, Ukrainian leaders now have five months in which to encourage the United States and NATO to invite Ukraine into NATO's accession process -- known as MAP (Membership Action Plan) -- in mid 2006. If the invitation is extended, Ukraine would join current MAP members Croatia, Albania and Macedonia.

A particularly bright spot for Ukraine is the positive and proactive relationship of the Ukrainian armed forces with the the U.S. Department of Defense. In this regard, the United States has been working to help Ukraine to achieve its defense reform, military professionalization, and capacity-building goals. Much of this activity is focused on eventually bringing Ukraine in line with the NATO membership criteria.

U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is now an advocate of Ukrainian NATO membership. Such membership would serve a step toward European Union membership, which could realistically come during a second term for President Yushchenko after 2010 if he wins re-election.

Under former President Kuchma, relations between Ukraine and the European Union were unproductive. This was mostly because the Ukrainian government was unwilling to implement the necessary political and economic reforms required to entice the EU into offering Ukraine an associate agreement, which is a half-step to full EU membership. Under the current regime, which is more committed to Euro-Atlantic integration, real progress is likely.

Ukraine's democratic revolution followed Georgia's a year earlier and Serbia's in 2000. Yet, of all three revolutions, it is Ukraine's that has the best chance to succeed in building on these democratic breakthroughs and consolidating a democratic market economy.

The outcome of the 2006 elections is as important as the process. An invitation to join NATO and eventual integration into the European Union is not likely to occur if pro-reform forces fail to win a parliamentary majority.

To win NATO and eventually EU membership, the Orange Revolution coalition will have to unite under a common goal -- Euro-Atlantic integration by way of staunch political and economic reforms in Ukraine.

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