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END NOTE

COULD GEORGIA'S 'VELVET REVOLUTION' BE REPEATED IN UKRAINE?

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What is the likelihood that Georgia's "velvet revolution," precipitated by popular outrage at the falsification of the 2 November parliamentary elections, might be repeated in Ukraine? Could analogous events occur in Kyiv if an attempt is made to predetermine the outcome of the presidential ballot scheduled for October 2004? Ousted Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze and Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma became national leaders in the same era (1992-94), and each claimed to have saved his country from "nationalists." Each has also claimed that his removal from power would lead to instability.

Kuchma has successfully used his centrist, oligarchic power base to pit the Communists against the national democrats, alternately siding with one against the other. Kuchma and the centrists have thus positioned themselves as a buffer between the more Russian-speaking eastern part of the country and the Ukrainian-speaking west, claiming that only they are able to prevent a conflict between the two and thereby avoid Ukraine's disintegration.

Georgia and Ukraine have both assiduously courted U.S. and NATO external support vis-a-vis a perceived Russian threat. They were also founding members of the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) regional group, created in 1997, that represented an effort by its members to distance themselves from Russian integration projects under the aegis of the CIS. But Shevardnadze's pro-Western orientation did not deter Washington from tacitly supporting his ouster by a younger generation of leaders untainted by corruption. There is, however, more that differentiates Georgia from Ukraine. Shevardnadze is arguably more akin to former Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk than to Kuchma. Like Shevardnadze, Kravchuk was also forced to resign before his term expired in December 1996, and Ukrainian presidential elections were held in June 1994.

Ukraine has also been far more successful than Georgia at coping with regional separatism. Shevardnadze was powerless either to prevent the war that ended with Tbilisi's loss of control over Abkhazia, or to restore control over South Ossetia. He did, however, forge tactical alliances with Aslan Abashidze, the leader of the Adjar Autonomous Republic, in the 2000 presidential ballot and the 2 November parliamentary ballot. Official returns placed Abashidze's Democratic Revival Union in second place after the pro-Shevardnadze For A New Georgia bloc; then, on 10 November, Abashidze expressed support for the embattled Georgian president as the opposition demands for annulling the ballot gained momentum.

In Ukraine, regional policies to thwart separatism were implemented in the Donbas and Crimea, which regional "parties of

power" (Regions of Ukraine [Donbas]; and Party of Economic Revival of the Crimea in 1991-95 and People's Democratic Party in 1997 [Crimea]) were allowed to run as their personal fiefdoms. In the Donbas and Crimea, this has led to the stifling of opposition activities and the independent media. The two Donbas oblasts and the city of Sevastopol were the only three regions in which the main opposition party, Viktor Yushchenko's Our Ukraine, failed to cross the 4 percent parliamentary threshold in the 2002 elections.

The extent of media freedom and access to the media by the opposition were crucial to Georgia's "velvet revolution." The chairman of Georgian State Television resigned after criticism by Shevardnadze over the broadcaster's airing of the views of both the authorities and the opposition. Georgia's independent-media rating in Freedom House's 2003 "Nations in Transit" assessment is closer to that of Romania than the CIS average, which is where Ukraine is ranked. The greater extent of freedom for independent media thus makes Georgia more akin to Ukraine under Kravchuk than to Ukraine under Kuchma. Kuchma has a poor record of upholding media freedoms. In Ukraine, the state television and two independent channels (1+1, Inter), which broadcast throughout Ukraine, are controlled by Viktor Medvedchuk, head of the presidential administration.

Both the outgoing Georgian and Ukrainian presidents have faced obstacles to finding successors able to act as neutral "umpires" over warring clans and interests. Zhiuli Shartava, whom Shevardnadze originally selected as his successor, was executed shortly before the fall of Sukhum in 1993; Zurab Zhvania demonstratively broke with Shevardnadze in 2001. Neither country has been able to create the unified "party of power" which is essential in order to establish an authoritarian regime. After Georgia's "velvet revolution," the demoralized pro-Shevardnadze camp is unlikely to be able to thwart a victory by National Movement leader Mikhail Saakashvili.

Ukraine's ruling elites have been similarly tainted since the Kuchmagate crisis began in November 2000. Front-runner Yushchenko has a difficult choice to make: He can either choose to build bridges with moderates in the presidential camp who seek to gentrify themselves from oligarchs into businessmen, or he can unite with the Socialists and the populist Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc on a more anti-oligarch and anti-Kuchma platform.

Yushchenko's strategic choice is further complicated by the Communists, another factor that differentiates Ukraine from Georgia, where the Communists have been totally eclipsed as a political force. In Ukraine, there is a major division between the Communists and the essentially national-democratic Our Ukraine. The Communists view Kuchma and his oligarchic allies as the lesser of two evils in comparison with Yushchenko. In the event of a second-round runoff between Yushchenko and Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich the Communists are likely to back the latter. The power bases of both Yanukovich and the Communists are in the Donbas.

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