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## The Next Revolution?

*Many of the same fractures and rifts run through Georgia and Ukraine.*

by [Taras Kuzio](#)

There are very few post-Soviet countries that are either not heading away from democracy or that are not “autocratic” regimes (in the typology of the human-rights monitor Freedom House). Apart from the Baltic states, there are perhaps just two: Georgia and Ukraine.

Georgia’s “rose revolution” and the almost certain victory of reformers in January’s elections could rescue its post-Soviet democratic transition. Could Ukraine follow Georgia’s example after its presidential elections in October 2004? Certainly, opponents of Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma will take hope from Georgia’s example: many of the weaknesses in the system of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze can also be seen in Ukraine.

### PLURALISM BY DEFAULT

This was always going to be a period of instability for Georgia and Ukraine. Shevardnadze was due to leave office in 2005, and Kuchma should retire in 2004; both dominated their country’s politics for a decade; and their successors will almost certainly come from a different generation. Georgia’s and Ukraine’s experiences before Shevardnadze and Kuchma also add to concerns about stability: both came to power in the same era (1992-1994) promising to rescue their countries from instability caused by “nationalists,” and in Georgia this “nationalism” had led to bloodshed.

But Georgia’s and Ukraine’s instability is due to more than uncertainty about future leadership, and runs deeper than “nationalism.” The fundamental problem is that regional, ethnic, and linguistic divisions make both countries pluralistic by default.

Pluralism by default, as the American political scientist Lucan Way argues, is not necessarily accompanied by democratic progress. Instead, it prevents the consolidation of a ruling elite and the creation of a united

“party of power”--and without a united “party of power” it is impossible to institutionalize an authoritarian regime.

As in Georgia, Ukraine has no single “party of power,” but instead fractured and divided “parties of power.” This was clearly demonstrated in 2002, when the For a United Ukraine bloc split into eight factions within a month of parliamentary elections. This has meant that no supporter of Kuchma has yet emerged as a potential successor--or, for that matter, would enjoy popular support. An obvious candidate is Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, but his popularity is limited by his origins in the Donbas, a very pro-Russian region with a reputation for authoritarian leadership. Another potential successor, Viktor Medvedchuk, head of the presidential administration, has a popularity rating of just five percent.

Indeed, the fractures within the elite have run so deep that in both Ukraine and Georgia they gave birth to the opposition. Nino Burdjanadze, Georgia’s acting president, and Mikheil Saakashvili, the man likely to be elected president, are former Shevardnadze supporters who then went on to create opposition movements. In Ukraine, a similar process started in late 2000 after secret tapes recorded by the secret-service officer Mykola Melnychenko indicated that Kuchma had been implicated in murder and illegal arms trades. Center-right “national democrats” deserted the president. Since then, Kuchma’s “centrist” allies have been isolated, facing strong opposition from the right and weaker opposition from the left.

The closer the elections, the more likely it is that there will be further splits within the “parties of power.” Already, some members of Ukraine’s “parties of power” are rumored to be negotiating with the moderate opposition. These are likely to be oligarchs who have been legalizing—or ‘gentrified’--their businesses, and therefore do not necessarily feel threatened by a victory for Viktor Yushchenko, the Ukrainian opposition’s best hope for the presidency. Yushchenko has said that he opposes re-opening the results of Ukraine’s privatization process.

And if the executive begins to show signs of panic as Kuchma’s term approaches its end, the chances of defections will grow.

## PLURALISM IN ACTION

However, in Ukraine, as in pre-revolutionary Georgia, the opposition is united only in its opposition to the president, not in policy issues. Yulia Tymoshenko, Ukraine’s equivalent of the radical Saakashvili, differs in

opinion on many key issues from Yushchenko, a moderate like Burjanadze.

This artificial unity among the opposition leaves some difficult choices. Yushchenko can ally himself with Tymoshenko and Socialist leader Oleksandr Moroz on an anti-oligarch and anti-Kuchma platform. Or, he can build bridges to moderate, 'gentrified' post-oligarchs currently in the pro-Kuchma camp. And it is an "either... or" choice, since Tymoshenko's and Moroz's anti-oligarchic populism would scare away any moderates in the centrist camp.

Still, the opposition is potent and the presidency weak. In Georgia, Shevardnadze's administration had run out of ideas about reform and about how to keep the opposition at bay. In Ukraine, the authorities are also running out of ideas as to how to block a potential Yushchenko victory: since his popularity ratings are consistently high, and he has the lowest negative ratings of any candidate, Yushchenko looks certain to reach the second round of October's presidential elections. The authorities fear Yushchenko and it is this fear that is driving the current push for constitutional changes that would affect the reduce the life and powers of a Yushchenko presidency. Amendments are unlikely before parliament begins a long recess at Christmas and they may become more unlikely still in the months before the election.

A fractured "party of power" and a dearth of ideas are bad enough, but the problem is compounded by the weakness of Kuchma's power base outside the "parties of power." Since Melnychenko's tapes surfaced in November 2000, the president's popularity has plummeted, and 80 per cent of Ukrainians feel he should not be granted immunity from prosecution after he leaves office. And gaining immunity is precisely what Kuchma's main political aim now is, at least in the view of most analysts.

Even overwhelming domination of the media has failed to bolster support for Kuchma or his supporters. Medvedchuk's party controls state television and the two largest private stations, but, in the 2002 elections, it still only just squeezed clear of the four percent needed to get into parliament.

Nor do Kuchma and his chief supporters have a strong regional power base. In Georgia, Shevardnadze had a jarring relationship with the leader of Ajaria, Aslan Abashidze. However, they found a *modus vivendi* that ensured semi-independence for Ajaria and support for Shevardnadze in elections. In Ukraine, similar deals by Ukraine's leaders were made with leaders in the Donbas--and also Crimea--to buy off potential separatists

(Russian nationalists) or those seeking greater regional devolution (local “parties of power” loyal to Kuchma). In the 2002 parliamentary elections the pro-Kuchma For a United Ukraine won its best result in Donetsk (37 percent), allowing the region’s leaders and their business associates to form the second-largest faction in parliament (62 seats in a 450-member chamber). In November’s rigged results in Georgia, Ajaria would have had a similar proportion of seats in parliament.

But, while regions such as Ajaria and Donetsk provide useful support for the executive, they are, by themselves, too small to ensure victory in elections. (And while Kuchma-supporting oligarchs are entrenched in Russophone eastern Ukraine, it is only in the Donbas have they been able to take complete control of a region.)

## WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE

If the executive is divided and lacks ideas and nationwide support, much inevitably rests on the loyalty of the security services. They proved vitally important in Georgia, and before that in Serbia, in 2000, when President Slobodan Milosevic was overthrown. In Georgia a key factor in forcing Shevardnadze to resign was the desertion of his allies in the national security sector: Tedo Japaridze, head of the National Security Council and former ambassador in Washington, Minister of State Security Valeri Khaburdzania, and his foreign-affairs adviser Levan Alexadze.

In Ukraine, the Interior Ministry and the security service have been implicated in human-rights abuses, such as the murder of opposition journalist Georgy Gongadze, and their loyalty can be assumed. But the Interior Ministry alone would not be strong enough to impose a state of emergency. For that, the military is needed, and its willingness to lead a crackdown is very uncertain.

The defense minister, Yevhan Marchuk, was a populist critic of Kuchma in the 1999 presidential elections and U.S. government sources even believe that Marchuk, a former head of the Ukrainian secret services, knew in 1999-2000 that Melnychenko was bugging Kuchma’s office.

Before the second round of the presidential elections, in an effort to bring Marchuk onside, Kuchma offered Marchuk the chairmanship of the National Security and Defence Council (NRDO). Marchuk accepted. But while Marchuk has changed sides, Kuchma has refused to bring him into his inner circle: when Marchuk left the NRDO to become defense minister,

he was the only head of a “power ministry” to be left outside the committee that would decide on imposing a state of emergency.

Marchuk pursued a pro-Western line in the NRDO and he would be unlikely to support a step as drastic as imposing a state of emergency. Others in the Ukrainian military would also be reluctant: Ukraine’s armed forces have reoriented themselves, taking their model from the West, developing their military relationships through NATO’s Partnership for Peace, and looking for assistance from, in particular, the United States and Britain (Britain’s largest military program is with Ukraine).

## INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

This highlights the importance of the United States, which provided, at the very least, psychological support for the Georgian opposition, prompting Shevardnadze to talk about “betrayal” by the United States.

While, unlike Georgia, Ukraine may not have a crucial pipeline running through it, Ukraine’s position between the EU and Russia makes it strategically and geopolitically important (since the early 1990s, U.S. ties with Ukraine have traditionally strengthened when relations with Russia have worsened). On balance, the United States has as strong a stake in Ukraine as it has in Georgia, since it has invested heavily in Ukraine militarily and economically since the mid-1990s (it is Ukraine’s largest investor)

Washington is already showing the type of interest in Ukraine as it did in Georgia ahead of its parliamentary elections in November. The United States, EU and Council of Europe have already warned Ukraine, a year before its presidential elections, that free and fair elections will be impossible if the executive continues to adopt the kind of dirty tactics already employed against opposition groups, which include open intimidation and smear campaigns.

And the United States has potential leverage. Ukraine’s elites are fearful of another rupture in relations of the kind that followed the revelations in 2002 that Ukraine exported Kolchuga radars to Iraq. Even Kuchma supporters backed the sending of Ukrainian troops to Iraq, where they are the fourth largest contingent.

Kuchma and his supporters face many of the same problems that Georgia confronted. The cracks are serious enough that, if the Ukrainian authorities attempt to rig the 2004 elections, they could instead trigger Ukraine’s own

“velvet revolution.” And before that, the authorities will have the Herculean task of finding a candidate, a process that could expose and possibly deepen the deep rifts within the ruling elite.

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