

Kuzio: Orange Revolution is "Over but not Failure"

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[Taras Kuzio](#), an expert on post-Soviet affairs at George Washington University, discusses the current political crisis in Ukraine and what it means for the country's relations with the United States, the European Union, and Russia. He says the Orange Revolution, while over, should not be considered a failure, and that NATO membership for Ukraine is unlikely anytime soon.

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Interviewer: Lionel Beehner

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Why has it taken three months for a government to get off the ground in Ukraine?

With the new constitutional reform that was introduced this year just ahead of the parliamentary elections. The Ukraine moved from a presidential to, in effect, a parliamentary presidential system. Therefore, one could lay some blame upon this being a completely new system for Ukraine. The move to a parliamentary presidential system is in many ways when looking at the transitions imposed in Europe a very positive thing because countries with parliamentary systems have tended to do far better in democratization than those in the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] which tend to have presidential systems. That is one factor. A second factor has been the ingoing division within the orange revolution camp which became in September of last year when the Yulia Tymoshenko government was dismissed by Viktor Yushchenko, and since then the orange camp which consists of three political forces Ukraine allied to the president, Yulia Tymoshenko bloc, and the

socialist party. The three have really never gotten back together again and they entered the parliamentary elections in March as a separate component. These inner divisions led to very long and protracted coalition negotiations, and the government can not be proposed under the new constitutional reforms until a parliamentary coalition is created because previously under the old system it was the president who appointed the government. Now the government is appointed and responsible to a parliamentary coalition—so more of a west European model.

Given the outcome of the March elections, it seems the Ukrainian public has swung back toward the Party of the Regions, which is led by Viktor Yanukovich, who famously lost the presidential elections in 2004 in what became known worldwide as the Orange Revolution. Why has his popularity gone up since then?

One has to compare the results of the parliamentary elections in March to the presidential elections in November and December 2004. The results are pretty much the same, and nothing has really changed. Although the Party of Regions this year came first in the five political forces which crossed the 3 percent threshold into parliament, they received 32 percent, when one does a comparison of what the political forces who supported Viktor Yanukovich in 2004 obtained and what they obtained this year, and the orange forces who backed Viktor Yushchenko in 2004 and what they obtained this year. There really is not that much of a difference. So both sides obtained approximately the same percentage of support. It is just that the Party of Regions came first with thirty two percent because they were the only political force which crossed into parliament that represented the old system whereas the orange forces were divided between three political forces. But the two together actually obtained more than the party of regions. Therefore, they were able if they had wanted or had the political will to create an orange coalition which would have given them more than 50 percent of the seats.

Does it seem that Yanukovich will become prime minister then?

It is a question that is difficult to answer because of these constitutional reforms. The president is supposed to just have a formality of actually proposing his name now because the parliamentary coalition is being created called the anti-crisis coalition consisting of the communists the socialist and the party regions. They have nominated Viktor Yanukovich for Prime minister; they nominated him to the president, the president then puts his name to parliament to be voted on. That is the formal procedure. It has never happened before. But this is the actual procedure under the constitutional reform. Mr. Viktor Yushchenko has said that he does not want to see Mr.

Yanukovich as prime minister for a whole host of reasons. One of which, he feels he will be overshadowed by Mr. Yanukovich, because he is a strong willed character, also because the position of Prime minister has become more important and has more power under the constitutional reform, but also because Mr. Yanukovich is loathed by a good proportion of Ukraine, primarily in western and central Ukraine who voted for the orange revolution. Viktor Yanukovich does represent in many people's mind that election fraud and violence that took place in 2004. He is a divisive figure not a uniting figure. Whether the president has the right not to propose Mr. Yanukovich for the position of Prime minister to parliament for its vote, is a separate question because the only real alternative for Viktor Yushchenko is really to dissolve parliament and call fresh elections. So he is really caught between two very difficult questions, and I would suspect that he will have to go forward and propose Mr. Yanukovich for the position of Prime Minister because it is the lesser of two evils. Because if he calls fresh elections the party of regions could well get more votes than they got in March precisely because the Orange camp has failed to come back together again.

Does this mean that the Orange Revolution is effectively dead?

I think regarding the Orange Revolution, the first nail in the coffin was done in September of last year when the president, in my view, wrongly disbanded the Yulia Tymoshenko government and created the divisions in the Orange camp which led to the situation today. Up until the divisions in September last year, the Party of Regions had an average rating of about 20 percent. After the September crisis, the party of regions shot up over 30 percent. What has happened now with the defection of the socialist part to the party of regions to create this so called anti crisis coalition has in effect put second nail in the coffin of the orange revolution. We should be very cautious here. Although the potential for an orange coalition now is very unlikely because the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc and Our Ukraine together does not have enough deputies to create a parliamentary coalition. They only have 210 and they are required 226 minimum. At the same time, many of the positive aspects which have arisen out of the election of Viktor Yushchenko and the orange revolution will continue. It will be difficult to see how any coalition in power in Ukraine even the Prime minister Yanukovich can turn back the gains of the orange revolution in a more free system. Ukraine held its first free and fair elections in March of this year and a free and independent media. There is a danger here with the creation of the anti crisis coalition. After all it is the first coalition in Ukraine's history with a communist inside the coalition. But at the same time, it would be wrong to assume that the Orange Revolution is a failure. It is over, but I would not say it is a failure.

Why is Yulia Tymoshenko such a divisive figure in your opinion?

I think that she finds it difficult to work as a team player. In many ways some regard her as a populist. I think this is a much abused term because after all many political forces, parliaments, and governments in Europe have parties in power which include such political forces. Poland—a member of EU and NATO—have two so called populist parties in its government. So I think it is a mixture of misnomer, very wrong negative views about Yulia Tymoshenko rising from her Prime Ministership in 2005. Particularly from economists who regard her economic policies as wrong. At the same time, she is also somebody who is one of the few political forces in parliament who is willing to break from the old regime. So she is somebody with a force for good as well in terms of pushing along democratization and the battle against corruption. It is never a black and white issue. If you are an economist, you probably don't like her because of her attitudes towards laissez-faire economics and re-privatization. At the same time in Europe, many of her social market economic policies are the norm, which they are not in the U.S. So there are different views about her. And of course she has a checkered past as someone who was involved in the energy industry in the 1990s and became in effect one of Ukraine's first dissident oligarchs. So people have very mixed views about her. They find it difficult to work with her in terms of working as a team. Certainly she shares some of the responsibility for the implosion of the orange camp. But I would lay the greatest blame here and responsibility on the president because during those three months of coalition negotiations from March to June, it really was a responsibility of the president to ensure that they be completed very quickly. And the fact they dragged on right to the deadline in late June is really the responsibility of Our Ukraine politicians and President Yushchenko.

What has been the effect on the Ukrainian people? I have read a lot of articles that Ukrainian people have become very disillusioned with politics.

Yes, this is something that is probably the saddest aspects of the entire crisis and the different crises rising since September of last year. One of the main reasons why people went on the streets in the orange revolution was precisely because they thought that Viktor Yushchenko represented somebody who was different to the norm. He wasn't the typical politician. Usually public opinion in post-communist Europe, particularly in the CIS, tends to see politicians as all the same: They are all a bunch of rogues, who only enter politics for corrupt personal interests and not for the interests of their voters or the country's interests at large. People go into the streets, such as during the orange revolution, believing that this is not quite the case with this particular person with Viktor Yushchenko. That innocence is in some ways

being totally eroded because we have now a return to the view that “well, we were wrong, all politicians are actually all same. Viktor Yushchenko has not really been that different from the other politicians.” That is one of the most tragic aspects. You see that in today in Kiev where the ability of youth groups such as Pora, which means “its time,” which was very active during the Orange Revolution, is now unable to get people on the streets to protest the formation of this new coalition and the possible appointment of Viktor Yanukovich as prime minister. They are unable to do that today because people are disillusioned. People are angry; they feel deceived that the politicians they believed would make Ukraine different during the orange revolution have proven that they are incapable of doing that. Here I think Viktor Yushchenko really has failed to live up to many people’s expectations, both in the west and in Ukraine.

Specifically, what are Yushchenko’s main mistakes? I am referring to the past year, not just the past few months.

His main mistakes have been an inability to understand strategic questions facing the country. When the presidential administration and the president have dealt with issues, these have tended to be in reaction to events—for example, the gas crisis in January 2006. There has been a total inability of the president to have a backup command structure. His presidential secretariat has failed to provide him with that. The first head of the presidential secretariat Oleksandr Zinchenko and the current head of the presidential secretariat Oleg Rybachuk have both failed to provide the president with the necessary backup, expertise, and research for him to undertake presidential functions. The National Security Council has also not really operated as it should do, given the previous president Leonid Kravchuk. There is a mixture of institutional problems, strategic inability to deal with issues in Ukraine, and also a kind of detachment from what is going on around them. The president’s party itself Our Ukraine proved to be disastrous. This is a party after all where the honorary chairman is the President Viktor Yushchenko. A year ago, in the summer or spring of 2005, we would have expected that this party, which is headed by the president, would have come in first in the elections. In fact, he came in third, with 10 percent fewer votes than in 2002 under Kuchma. These are precisely the fault of the president and Our Ukraine leadership. Another important area, which has certainly impacted relations with the West has been an inability to understand the relationship between domestic and foreign policy issues. The U.S. in particular, for example, and the Bush administration was actively lobbying after the parliamentary elections in March of this year for an orange coalition. This orange coalition would have been a precursor to Ukraine being invited to a membership action plan at NATO’s Riga summit in November of this year, and potentially for an

invitation to membership in the 2008 NATO enlargement summit. But this was conditional on the Orange camp reuniting and forming a government very quickly. I don't think the Bush administration really cared who the prime minister would be, as long as there would be a reuniting of pro-reform pro-democratic forces. The fact that the president and his team were willing to drag on these coalition negotiations for three months just because they did not want to let in Yulia Tymoshenko's prime minister and at the same time was simultaneously negotiating with potentially the Party of Regions for a grand coalition, is I think a complete failure of their understanding of how this would impact not only inside Ukraine, which we have talked about, but also understand this impact upon the west. Now you have in the west a Ukraine fatigue in many ways. The supporters of the orange revolution, supporters of Viktor Yushchenko, which were numerous particularly in the U.S. and within NATO, which had an open door policy have now become far less, and they have become disillusioned as well with the inability of Viktor Yushchenko to really stamp his authority on the country.

Let's talk about foreign policy. What does a Yanukovich premiership mean for European and U.S-Ukrainian relations?

Certainly because of the growing Ukraine fatigue, it is highly unlikely that Ukraine would be potentially invited into a membership action plan in the Riga NATO summit in November of this year. It is difficult to imagine NATO inviting in a country with a parliamentary coalition leading a government that includes two political forces—a socialist and a communist—that are totally opposed to membership in NATO. That is one of the factors, already with the anti-NATO and anti-American demonstrations in the Crimea in June, which the president was unable to deal with. Those demonstrations have already put a question mark on the whole question of whether Ukraine would have been anyway invited into NATO in 2008. I think the enlargement summit now is likely to be postponed from 2008 to maybe a few years down the road. The NATO issue both outside Ukraine and inside the new government is likely now to return more the Kuchma era position on NATO, which was “yes we are interested in cooperation with NATO, but we are not interested in membership.” That is one of the downsides. The other area which deals with the European Union is more complicated because the European Union never really welcomed the Orange Revolution unlike NATO. The EU never opened its doors to Ukraine following the Orange Revolution, and its argument (particularly it's West European members) was that “we are so preoccupied with our own internal problems such as Turkey, failure of the constitution to be passed by France and the Netherlands in their referendum, and entire enlargement fatigue that the European Union is going through that we really can't deal with Ukraine at the moment.” So Ukraine was in many ways sidelined and cold shouldered by the European Union and therefore

any kind of relationship is unlikely to change there. The only possible change would be that what we have is in many ways a very cynical view in Western Europe that the Orange Revolution was never here to say or very successful.

Russian-Ukrainian relations since the Orange Revolution have been less than spectacular. Do you see a lot of the issues with Russia changing, for example, the gas crisis earlier this year, the Black Sea fleet, issues of democratization, etc.?

Some issues will change, some issues will not. Russia and Ukraine under even Kuchma and during Vladimir Putin's first term were already on very divergent political paths. Let's recall that Putin's Russia is heading towards a more utilitarian regime, and Ukraine is still heading towards and still has moved with its constitutional reforms towards a more democratic system away in some ways from the CIS. Politically internally they are still very different countries. At the same time, where it will change is that the Putin regime was always hostile to the democratic revolutions that were taking place where it regarded as its turf, the CIS. Therefore, regardless of what Mikhail Saakashvili did in Georgia or Victor Yushchenko did in the Ukraine, the Putin regime was always going to adopt the very negative view about those leaderships. The fact that now you will have a change where the prime minister could be held by Viktor Yanukovich will certainly create a change in atmosphere and relation with Russia. At the same time, Russia has already stated that it is not planning to give Ukraine under Prime Minister Yanukovich any preferences on gas. Russia is playing hardball even with its allies inside the CIS. It has not really been giving them any better privileges and preferences. For example, pro-Russia Armenia still has to pay a higher price for its gas being delivered from Russia than even Ukraine today under Yushchenko. So I don't think there is going to be many changes there. Where there will be changes will be more on the level of diplomatic and political relations. After all, party regions in Ukraine have already in 2005 signed a close agreement of cooperation with president Putin's party of Unified Russia. So there is already some kind of close relations. Certainly, the Party of Regions and Viktor Yanukovich's Prime minister would maybe adopt less hostile in Russia's view positions on international relations. For example, Ukraine in the last two years has been adopting the western position on isolating the Yulia Tymoshenko regime in Belarus and among human rights issues in general inside the CIS. That could be now less likely to be the case. Also, U.S. backed regional initiatives in the region such as the GUAM group (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) and the community of democratic choice, these are two regional groupings that the U.S. and the Bush administration has been backing. Anybody such as prime minister Yanukovich would be like to be colder to these initiatives because they would

be seen as provocative towards Russia. Those would be the kind of main changes. What it would in effect be is maybe a return to the Kuchma era, multi-vector foreign policy. But it is so difficult to completely see ahead because of these constitutional reforms because even under these constitutional reforms, president Yushchenko still has control over the security forces and foreign policy issues. What we can in effect see is the prime minister conducting one foreign policy and the president conducting another. In that respect, there could be a clash between parliament and president over foreign policy issues.

What does it mean for future elections in Ukraine about the divisiveness in the country: East versus West, pro-Russia versus pro-Europe, religious versus the secular parts, catholic parts in the west versus eastern orthodox? There seems to be this in the United States with the red versus blue. How significant and how damaging is this going to be to the political process going forward?

The regional divide is a very important factor in Ukrainian politics in terms of elections and voting. It does not have an impact on an interpersonal level and in terms of some kind of conflict. After all, these individuals living in the east of Ukraine and in the west of Ukraine are all Ukrainians in terms of citizenship. The divisions between them are purely on a linguistic level primarily. From a linguistic level, this leaves different political preferences. So we are not talking about a potential ethnic divide or potential ethnic conflict as we have seen in many other countries. Hence, what we should be careful of is moving from an idea regionalism can therefore lead to separatism or to interethnic conflict. This regionalism is a factor that Ukraine has inherited from the Soviet era and even from other periods in history. It does have political preferences. It just means that of all the political forces in parliament none of them really have ability to attract voters from throughout the country. They are all in many ways regionally based including the Party of Regions itself, which is not popular in western central Ukraine. But what we tend to have a problem with in the west in particular in western media and newspaper accounts are that this issue is over simplified. It is not a question of Catholic nationalist west versus a pro-Russian Orthodox East. There are more Orthodox believers living in west Ukraine than Catholics. Catholics are only confined to three provinces of west Ukraine. West Ukraine is far bigger than three provinces. It is linguistic. It is not really religious, but that linguistic is a consequence of history and it leads to political preferences and in some ways foreign policy issues. What it does mean is that kind of anti-Russianism that you have in three Baltic States understandably because of the occupation that they went through under the Soviet Union is only really something that

exists in western Ukraine. In eastern Ukraine, which is largely Russian speaking, that kind of anti-Russianism does not exist. Therefore, no politician no president certainly can really adopt a stern anti-Russian line. He has to carefully tread between dealing with Russia on the one hand and dealing with the west on the other. What we should again be cautious of understanding is that a pro-Russian position in eastern Ukraine means really that all it wants is good relations with Russia. It does not mean that the east Ukrainian region wants to somehow join Russia or join this nebulous Belarus Russia union that has been creating over the last ten years. What we in effect have is most Ukrainians are in favor of integration with Europe to the European Union. NATO is a different question. What they also want is that this integration with Europe be not done at the expense of bad relations with Russia.