

Making the Orange Dreams come true

Pawel Krzysiek, Lviv

With great effort from the Ukrainian society and strong support from the international community, there has been written another glorious chart of European history. Ukraine is waking up after 14 years of authoritative governments. The University Review through the eyes of its correspondent discovers the "Orange" revolution from the very inside. Just as it really was.

The last months in Ukraine have witnessed a scene of breathtaking events that we will surely remember for a long time. On December 28th 2004, another cold-war division collapsed. Having chosen the independent candidate Viktor Yushchenko, the Ukrainian nation decided in a presidential election to move from unlimited power exercised by a minority to a new quality of ruling. From the society based on fear and poverty to the society that holds promises for balance and stability – the Orange democratic movement finally appears to have reached a happy-end. "This movement was a demonstration that something as free Ukraine can truly exist. This was doubted by European countries for so many years", Henryk Kolodziej, vice president of Ukrainians' Union in Poland, says. However, despite this optimism, the Ukrainian democratic revolution itself does not guarantee an easy introduction of high values and principles into society. It constitutes, rather, a challenge to push changes forward and make the Orange dreams come true. But for now, this in Ukraine seems to have been forgotten.

Behind the voting

What undoubtedly lies behind the Yushchenko election is a strong protest from Ukrainian society against the perfidy of former power. As cardinal Lobomyr Huzar, the head of Greek Catholic church, comments, the Orange Revolution exposed the great motivation of the Ukrainian people to bring an element of normality to their country.

The third election round that definitively closed the question of presidential voting in Ukraine, has to be seen as a victory not only for the Ukrainian democratic opposition but primarily as a victory of the new quality of power. Only 14 years after the State Declaration of Sovereignty that established the principle of self-determination of the Ukrainian nation, this Eastern European country with a population of little more than 48 million has had the opportunity to finish with communist shadows. The 2004 elections exposed at first had the unprecedented actions of people who finally believed that their votes do count.

Youth's rebellion

First of all, the Ukrainian political coup was a result of an exceptionally dynamic reaction by the young population, mainly students. "Without the support of these groups the Orange Movement would have inevitably failed", Mieczyslaw Lapanowski, the long term observer at The European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO), says.

Despite a demographic crisis caused by a high death rate and a low birth rate, the Ukrainian young generation is still one of the most relevant social groups in the country. During the presidential voting, they were also the most active group expressing its opposition to the Leonid Kutchma's government. For many of them the election was seen as a rebellion against a sad reality. "Ukraine has never been a democratic country - one of the PhD students from Ivan Frank University in Lviv told me - Any student could be easily kicked out from the school for their views and beliefs."

In fact, according to the Berlin-based Transparency International, the Ukraine's system of higher education is in a pitiful condition. Among other problems there is widespread corruption, problems with finding a job and salaries at a very low level. "A complete lack of opportunities explains why students reacted so impetuously - Professor Yuriy Moskalenko from University of Iwanofrankowsk says - They felt their chance and Yuschenko showed them that their effort still can make a difference".

Nevertheless, Victor Yuschenko is definitely not considered in Ukraine as a saviour. Henryk Kolodziej points out rather to a simple need of a leader expected by the country's young generation and able to take Ukraine closer to the Western standards. As he says: "Young people in our country understand well the current situation. They go abroad, they read foreign newspapers, they observe the world as it really is. And after all of this they want to introduce these changes in their country".

Mission – observer

December's voting was particular for Ukraine also in terms of the foreign involvement. A threat of electoral fraud by the government side drafted in Ukraine 15,000 international observers, from which 1500 came from Poland.

The participation of neutral observers had to secure the process of voting. However, as Lapanowski says, the presence of the Western non-Russian or Ukrainian speaking personnel without specific training and professional support from the organisations like ENEMO or OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe-author's note) could not contribute relevantly to the act of voting. "Although Poles, French, German or Dutch can be proud of the scale of their involvement, their contribution in the voting monitoring was very little. The real job was made by professional staff and observers from countries like Armenia, Russia or Georgia, the most familiar with different possibilities of manipulation, he adds. The most important value of other missions was simply their presence."

Polish responsibility

Despite the remarks of Lapanowski, Polish involvement in Ukrainian elections had a slightly different background. The close relations between the Orange opposition and the legends of "Solidarnosc" movement during Kutchma's regime was for a long time the first strategic contact of Ukraine's dissidents with the Western World.

"Poland has a rich oppositionist tradition. Poland is in the European Union. Finally, Poland is the first and the most trustful advocate of Ukraine in the world", Kolodziej, who was actively participating in this underground cooperation, lists. And he immediately adds that for many Ukrainians a consciousness of Poland's successful struggle for independence is the most convincing reason for their own effort.

Double concern for the Ukraine's journey into democracy underlines also Polish MP Adam Lipinski, organizer of the parliamentary observation mission in December elections. "Our goal, he says, was not only voting monitoring. We aimed first of all to change the quality of reciprocal relations spoiled by the turbulent past. We went there to fight the stereotypes, to change the sentiments".

Polish involvement may thus constitute the first step in changing Polish image in the Ukrainian minds. What seems to have been already achieved in the Polish-Ukrainian neighbourly relations is the fact that in the minds of young generation from both countries, the reciprocal hostility is being slowly replaced by a sense of solidarity and belonging to the same European democratic family.

Quo vadis, Ukraine?

"Any orange colour, even this most fashionable, cannot express the real essence of what we are fighting for, professor Moskalenko says. Clear our home from lies and injustice, that is the real point."

Nobody in Ukraine doubts that the country has just reached a decisive phase of political and social transformation. There is also no doubt that the country has found itself at the crossroads. On the one hand, there is a strong belief that Ukraine will be finally able to emerge from international isolation. On the other hand, as one Ukrainian journalist told me, nobody believes in miracles. Ukraine will not change from one day to the next. If the country wants to go forward, it has to set up a new political agenda and choose a direction for its journey. And the Western direction announced already by Yuschtenko is surely not welcomed in the Russian geopolitical sphere of influence.

One thing is rather obvious. Like Poland of sixteen years ago, Ukraine has taken a unique opportunity to decide – move forward towards a democratic existence or go back to the uncontrolled authorities' power. Undoubtedly, many problems remains and, like in Poland, will remain for a long time. Today Ukraine is celebrating its glorious victory. Tomorrow she will have to ask herself what this struggle is for? For power? For democracy? For freedom or justice? Not everything will always depend on Yuschtenko. As a famous Polish saying states: "a king is created by people around him".

Paweł Krzysiek

Author took part in Polish government observation mission during presidential elections in Ukraine in 2004

***The University Review** is the quarterly of the Szczecin University, the biggest institution of higher education within the region of West Pomerania in Poland.

Created in 1991 in cooperation between Szczecin's media academics and professionals to give young journalism adepts more opportunity of practical training, the University Review is the breeding ground for young talented journalists and a foretaste of the professional media world. The work for the magazine is normally paid and the admission competitive.

The quarterly mainly features the latest news from the regional and national academic world. Furthermore, in cooperation with students' media from the faculties of philosophy, political science, law, economics and physical education of the Szczecin University each issue provides an insightful analysis of the most important events from the world of politics, business, art and sport.

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