Taking Ukraine Seriously: Western and Russian Responses to the Orange Revolution

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The Orange Revolution – A Staging Post on a Long Journey

The Orange Revolution – that mass popular protest at the end of 2004 against vote rigging in the first two rounds of the Ukrainian presidential election – resulted in a largely fair third round of voting that brought to power the reformist coalition under President Yushchenko. The reformers made Ukraine a more democratic and, possibly, a more independent country. Much still has to be done, however, to realize fully the reformers' goals of assuring Ukraine's independence, achieving European standards of governance and economic freedom, and anchoring the country to Western institutions such as the WTO, the EU and NATO. This paper will examine what the reformers achieved, and what remains to be done. It will also consider Russia's efforts to regain its influence and power in Ukraine, and the role that the West might play to support reform.

The Orange Revolution was significant for several reasons. It marked a coming of age of civil society in much of Ukraine. Throughout a large part of the country, Ukrainians sloughed off their passivity toward those in authority. The uprising was the largest civic action in Europe since the Velvet Revolution ended communist rule in Czechoslovakia in 1989. One in five Ukrainians, including 48 percent of the population of Kyiv, participated in protests against the fraudulent second round of voting on 21 November 2004.[1] The third round of voting on 26 December was notable for being one of the rare times in the history of the former Soviet republics that an election has been largely democratic, and not a carefully stage-managed affair. It was the first free election

in Ukraine since 1994. The Orange Revolution and the final outcome of the election went against the prevailing trend in the former Soviet Union toward increased authoritarianism. Furthermore, the victory of Viktor Yushchenko marked the first time since Ukraine became independent in 1991, that a non-communist president replaced an ex-communist leader.

Following the Orange Revolution, its architects began a process of political and economic reform. Nevertheless, the difficulties the reformers faced suggest that their victory in the election was only a staging post on the long road that Ukraine has yet to travel to achieve their goals.

Among the results of the Revolution and its aftermath, which we treat as the period lasting up to the return to power as prime minister in August 2006, of Yushchenko's opponent in the presidential election, Viktor Yanukovych, were:

- *The emergence of a structural basis for democracy*. The presidential election of 2004 and the parliamentary elections of 26 March 2006 confirmed the existence in Ukraine of two broad and, admittedly, fissiparous political streams – the Orange parties in the West and Centre, and the Blue or conservative parties in the East and South. Provided that future elections remain democratic, the difficulty that either tendency will have in permanently dominating the political landscape should discourage absolutism and encourage pluralism and compromise.[2] Furthermore, the competition among the various political parties, and the political fluidity it implies, should, if the experience of the ex-communist states of Central Europe is any guide, stimulate political and economic reform.

- *Greater political freedom.* The application of "administrative resources," that is the illegitimate use of state funds and methods of pressure, including assassination, blackmail, judicial and administrative persecution and vote rigging, largely disappeared at the national level as a means of influencing the political process, although misuse of "administrative resources" remains still a factor locally.
- *Greater media freedom.* Ukrainian television was partly de-monopolized and democratized. Gone were the censorship directives that the presidential administration under Kuchma issued to the media. National journalists work in a freer environment, no longer fearful of arrest or violent personal attack. At the same time, the parliament, the *Verhovna Rada,* passed a law prohibiting the media from offering any commentaries, assessments or analyses during an election campaign. Furthermore, local journalists may still face difficulties. According to Viktoriya Syumar, Director of the Institute of Mass Information in Ukraine, the media reported only 12 cases of economic or political pressure in 2005, compared with 60 in 2004. There were only 14 reported cases of censorship in 2005, compared with 52 in 2004.[3] In its 2005 Annual Worldwide Press Freedom Index, Reporters without Borders, the international watchdog for press freedom, raised Ukraine's ranking from the 138th spot in the previous year, to the 112th place out of 167 countries. By comparison, Russia ranked 138th .[4]
- *Economic reforms.* Ukraine moved from a government in which corruption was integral to the system, to one that began a modest start in the fight against bribes. Procedures for registering new companies were simplified, and 4500 regulations

governing business activity were eliminated. To reduce the temptation to take bribes, salaries for officials were increased. Corrupt practices were prosecuted. While the government lowered the income tax rate, by reducing tax evasion, it managed to increase tax revenues. As a result of these and other steps, the government shrank the shadow, or illegal economy. The Financial Action Task Force, the international body that monitors money laundering, removed Ukraine from its black list of countries that fail to deal with the problem. Both the United States and the EU granted Ukraine market economy status. In its 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index, Transparency International, the global anti-corruption association, raised the ranking of Ukraine according to the degree of corruption, from the 122nd spot in 2004, to the 107th place in 2005 out of 159 countries. In the same time period, Russia dropped from 90th place to 126th.[5]

As a result of these and other reforms, Freedom House, the US non-governmental organization devoted to promoting human rights and democracy, in its report "Freedom in the World 2006," judged Ukraine to be now "free" instead of, as it was previously, "partly free." It raised Ukraine's marks for political rights and civil liberties, on a scale from the best to the worst standards of one to seven, from 4 in 2004 to 2 in 2006. In the same time period, Russia was classified downward from being "partly free" to "not free." Its score declined from 5 to 6 for political rights, while remaining at 5 for civil liberties.[6]

Much still remains to be done, to overcome the burdens of Ukraine's past. The culture of patronage, in a wide variety of areas ranging from the appointment and promotion of officials, to the awarding of contracts, has not yet been replaced by a culture of merit. The state bureaucracy remains largely unreformed; the legal process is

not yet entirely independent; regulations are neither impartial nor clear; contracts are difficult to enforce; property rights are still not well protected; and the Ukrainian economy and political process remain largely dominated by oligarchs who can still block foreign investments. It will therefore take a while to establish conditions for promoting competition and restraining unfair trade practices.[7] The slow pace of economic reform meant that Ukraine's rating in the Index of Economic Freedom 2006, published by the Heritage Foundation and the *Wall Street Journal*, has – on a five-point scale where a score of one is highest and a score of five is lowest –improved only marginally, from 3.49 in 2004 to 3.24 in 2006. In comparison, Russia scarcely budged from its 2004 score of 3.51 to 3.50 in 2006.[8]

The break-up in September 2006 of the coalition between the two principal Orange parties – President Yushchenko's Our Ukraine and Prime Minister Tymoshenko's *Batkivshchyna* – owed much to a persistence of authoritarian patterns of thought and behaviour, and a poor understanding, even among the reformers who had headed the Orange Revolution, of the rules of the game of a functioning democracy and a market economy. Other factors were President Yushchenko's poor management skills and political judgement, possibly worsened by the precarious state of his health following the attempt, by apparently unknown assailants, to poison him during the election campaign.

The art of compromise does not come easily to an authoritarian culture, nor does respect for the rule of law. In forming their coalition after the presidential election, the two Orange parties had not agreed on a detailed action programme or worked out an adequate system of policy coordination. Instead, the President duplicated in his administration some of the functions of the Cabinet, so as, in the view of several political

observers, to block the government from carrying out policies he opposed. In doing so, the President sometimes ignored the law. The Prime Minister interfered in the economy using methods borrowed from the communist era. Officials of the Orange Coalition repeatedly bullied the judiciary to render favourable decisions, and attempted, through dubious means, to force some of the oligarchs associated with President Kuchma to divest themselves of their media holdings.

The President's bad judgement and his difficulties in treating his allies as equals came to the fore in his actions in the dissolution of the coalition and subsequently. The alliance between Yushchenko's party and Tymoshenko's party was essential for success in the reform programmes and for victory in the parliamentary elections in March 2006. In spite of the coalition's importance, when in September 2005 one of Tymoshenko's allies brought forward accusations, which seem to have been well founded, of corruption against particular officials in the President's administration, Yushchenko dismissed Tymoshenko, after she refused to place her party under his control.[9]

This split, coupled with Yushchenko's lack of experience in mustering support in Parliament, forced him, in order to get parliamentary approval for Yuriy Yekhanurov as her successor, to enter into a tactical alliance with the man who had been his opponent in the presidential election in the previous year: Viktor Yanukovych. Yanukovych had a criminal record and as prime minister at the time, was implicated in the political oppression and monstrous electoral frauds that had led to the Orange Revolution in the first place. One of the terms of Yushchenko's agreement with Yanukovych was that members of the previous regime would not be prosecuted for their crimes. Yushchenko's break with Tymoshenko, and his agreement with Yanukovych, may have rescued

Yanukovych from marginalization. Certainly both events contributed to a serious decrease in public support for Yushchenko in the parliamentary elections in March 2006.

Membership in the WTO is central to Yushchenko's policy of joining Western economic institutions. Although it was important that the *Verhovna Rada* should pass a series of bills that were a condition for Ukraine's admission, Yushchenko did not do the necessary lobbying. As a result, half the bills were defeated.

A similar scenario played out in January 2006. As a result of the lack of support from members of Yushchenko's own party, due in part to a lack of lobbying by the government and the presidential administration, the *Verhovna Rada* passed a motion of non-confidence against the government for its handling of a gas dispute with Russia.

After the parliamentary election in March 2006, the inability of the reformist parties to agree on a programme for a new government, and especially the political ineptitude of the President, eventually resulted in August 2006 in Yushchenko offering the post of prime minister to Viktor Yanukovych, in spite of his past. The gap between the political values and goals of the two men has become apparent by the fact that Yanukovych has disregarded much of the political action plan he had negotiated with Yushchenko as a condition for his appointment.

The slow pace of reform in Ukraine since its independence in 1991, compared with those in the ex-communist Central European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, can be better understood when one takes into account the differences between Ukraine's history and those of former communist countries in Central Europe. Unlike the Central European states, Ukraine was only obliquely affected by the evolution of West European civilization during the past five hundred years from

authoritarianism to pluralism. As a result, Ukraine has had no culture of pluralism or memory of democracy to draw on. It also has had no knowledge of a market economy. In addition, Ukraine had experienced no previous period of existence as an independent state to give it a sense of national cohesion. At the moment of its declaration of independence, it also lacked much of the apparatus of a state, since the sole function of the limited governmental structure in place at the time of the Ukrainian SSR had been to carry out the decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

If Ukraine's past and present are a prologue to its future, Ukraine's progress towards a stable democracy and a prosperous market economy may, in spite of the Orange revolution, continue to be slow.

The Russian Big Brother

Another factor that acts as a brake on Ukraine's progress along the road of reform, is Russian interference. Most Russians find it difficult to conceive of a Russia without Ukraine. For the Russians, Kyiv was the first Russian capital: the tsars buried there were Russian, the Sofiiskyi Sobor was the first Russian cathedral, and the Percherska Lavra was the first Russian monastery. The Treaty of Pereiaslav of 1654, which, for many Ukrainians, signifies the beginning of Russian domination, is regarded by Russians as the restoration of the unity of the Russian lands, destroyed by the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century.[10] As a consequence, public opinion polls in Russia have shown that about three-quarters of the population thinks that Russia and Ukraine should form a single country. According to a September 2005 poll carried out by the Levada Centre in

Moscow, 71 percent of Russians favour a united state with Ukraine. Only 24 percent are opposed.[11]

The prevailing attitude of the Russian government toward Ukraine can perhaps be discerned in statements made by President Vladimir Putin and his Ambassador to Ukraine, Viktor Chernomyrdin. In the interview accorded by President Putin to the Russian newspaper *Kommersant* on 12 April 2005 while he was visiting Germany, the President spoke out against Ukraine's membership in the EU. If Ukraine entered the Schengen zone of visa-free travel among some EU countries, he declared, "there will be a certain problem. As far as I know, at least 17 percent of the population living there are Russian. This is the division of a people. It recalls the division of Germany into East and West." Although Putin carefully limited his statement to ethnic Russians, it has been interpreted as referring to Russia and Ukraine as a whole.[12]

More recently, according to *Ukrainska Pravda*,[13]Chernomyrdin remarked, "Ukraine and Russia have never lived as two sovereign states. Ukraine has never been a sovereign government. Now we have to learn how to perceive her as such." In an interview with the Russian newspaper *Isvestiya*, three weeks before the Orange Revolution, the Ambassador was apparently somewhat franker: "Russia was always an independent state. Ukraine never was. There never was such a country."[14]

Beyond a disinclination, derived from history, to regard Ukraine as a separate, equal and sovereign state, the Russians have had, especially since President Putin came to power determined to restore Russian strength, a concrete reason for seeking to dominate Ukraine - control of Ukraine would be highly advantageous to the recovery of Russia's earlier power and influence:

- Ukraine's population of 48 million is about one-third the size of Russia's population of 143 million.
- In Soviet times, Ukraine possessed about 37 percent of the Union's military and industrial complex.
- Tutelage over Ukraine would give Russia once again access to Ukraine's long border with areas of former Soviet influence – Central Europe and the Balkans – as well as to the northern littoral of the Black Sea.
- The compliance of Ukraine with Russian economic plans might determine the success of President Putin's efforts to bring key former Soviet republics together in a common market, known as the Common Economic Space, or CES, in which all the central institutions are under Russian control.
- The subordination of Ukraine to Russian foreign policy would block the eastward expansion of the EU and NATO**.**

For several reasons, therefore, Russia has devoted considerable effort to bringing Ukraine under its tutelage. It has repeatedly interfered in Ukrainian politics so as to make the Ukrainian government compliant to its interests. The Russian government used to put pressure on Yushchenko's predecessor, Kuchma, to dismiss certain ministers regarded as unfriendly. Ukrainian candidates for high office still go to Moscow to seek the Kremlin's blessing. The Kremlin has encouraged Russian companies to buy up key Ukrainian companies, notably in the energy field. It has repeatedly pressured to have the gas pipeline transporting Russian and Central Asian gas to Western Europe put under effective Russian control. Russia successfully took advantage of Kuchma's weak position, resulting from his apparent implication in the 2000 murder of dissident

journalist Heorhiy Gongadze, and other crimes, to pressure Ukraine into joining the CES. Had Yushchenko not, on assuming office as President, limited the extent of any Ukrainian association with the CES to that of a free trade zone, Ukraine would have been prevented from joining the WTO or the EU, except in tandem with Russia. Since Viktor Yanukovych became prime minister in August 2006, Russia has resumed its pressure on Ukraine to become a full member of the CES.

In the presidential election of 2004, Russia followed its practice in the parliamentary elections of 2002 of funding its favourites. It reportedly supplied about half the campaign expenses for Kuchma's chosen successor, Viktor Yanukovych.[15] Putin's "political technologists" gave tactical advice to both Kuchma and Yanukovych.[16] The same technologists helped write the illegal censorship directives for the Ukrainian media.[17] Russian television campaigned on behalf of Yanukovych, and Putin himself visited Ukraine twice during the campaign to show his support. Finally, the Russian government may have been involved in at least two of the three or four assassination attempts against the opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko.[18]

The implications of the Orange Revolution for Russian-Ukraine relations

For Russia, shock at the victory of the Orange Revolution went beyond the apparent loss of any early prospect for increasing Russian influence in Ukraine: The Orange Revolution gave a fillip to political turmoil elsewhere in the former Soviet Union – the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005 and the uprising in Uzbekistan in May 2005 – and awakened fears in the Kremlin that the Ukrainian experience might serve as a model for political change in Russia itself.

The growing gap between Russian and Western interests and understanding also contributed to the threat perception that the Orange Revolution had inspired in Moscow. The Revolution was regarded by leading Russian politicians as the result of a Western coup.[19] It strengthened the trend in Russian foreign policy to adopt a defensive posture toward the West, strengthen ties with other former Soviet republics, and develop closer relations with other countries, such as China.

The policies of the reformers strengthened this threat perception. Besides blocking full Ukrainian membership in the CES, the reformers actively sought to join the WTO, the EU and NATO. The Yushchenko government also gave new life to GUAM, the regional alliance of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, which the Russians regard as anti-Russian. In the same vein, Ukraine worked with Georgia in December 2005 to create the Community of Democratic Choice, uniting Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Moldova, Slovenia and Macedonia for the purpose of spreading democracy and human rights in the area.

The National Security Concept of 2000 had determined the main security threats to Russia to be:

- The possible establishment of foreign military bases and large military contingents along Russia's borders;
- Any weakening of Russia's political, economic and military influence in the world;
- Any strengthening of foreign military blocs and unions, above all the eastward extension/expansion of NATO; and

- Any weakening of the integration processes within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).[20]

For Russia, Ukraine's membership in NATO would put Russian control of its Black Sea naval base at Sevastopol in jeopardy, and make the defence of European Russia difficult. According to Dmitri Trenin, a senior associate of the Carnegie Moscow **Centre**, writing in an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Moscow's principal goal is to stop the "conveyor belt" moving Kyiv toward NATO. To this end, Russia is willing to risk a "real conflict" with Ukraine.[21]

Following Yushchenko's victory in the presidential election of 2004, the Russian government, therefore, renewed its efforts to bring about a government in Ukraine favourable to Russian interests. The return of Yanukovych as prime minister is not likely to lessen Russian concern at the future direction of Ukraine. The political situation in Ukraine remains unstable. The president and the prime minister are locked in a bitter struggle for power. The president is reportedly seeking to force early elections in 2007. 22

To apply pressure on the Orange coalition, Russia brought charges in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe alleging acts of repression by the new government against members of the opposition. It granted Russian citizenship to officials of the previous regime who had been criminally charged and were living in exile in Russia, thus protecting them from extradition to Ukraine.

Russia's most significant move against the reformers, however, was to set off the gas crisis at the end of 2005, by seeking a steep increase in the price of gas supplied to Ukraine. Statements by the Russian government and officials, together with the manner

in which the price increase was handled, suggest that the main aim of the increase was political: The 2003 Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020 states that the country's fuel and energy complex is "an instrument for the conduct of internal and external policy. The role of a country in world energy markets largely determines its geopolitical influence."[22] Gleb Pavlovsky, one of Putin's leading political technologists, declared: "I think that the most important outcome of the gas conflict is not the additional $3 billion or so that Gazprom intends to earn from the deal with Ukraine, but the experience we have gained of conducting a policy aimed at becoming a great energy power."[23]

Just after his resignation, Andrei Illiaronov, a former economic adviser to President Putin, described, in an interview with *Time* magazine, the price hike as a political weapon. The price was discriminatory, and the way in which it had been proposed was deliberately provocative, so as to prevent the dispute from being settled before the parliamentary elections of March 2006. One of the other aims of the increase was to take over the Ukrainian gas transit pipeline.[24]

Russia had torn up its existing gas agreement with Ukraine, concluded in 2004 and valid until 2009, which established a gas price of $50 per 1000 cubic metres. Instead, Russia insisted on increasing the price with no transitional period to $230 per 1000 cubic metres on 1 January 2006. To pressure Ukraine into yielding to its demands, Russia not only blocked gas shipments that were payment to Ukraine for providing the transit for Russian gas bound for Western Europe, but also the shipments of gas from Turkmenistan that the Ukrainians had bought directly from the Turkmenis.

When the Ukrainians continued to take the gas they regarded as theirs from the common pipeline supplying both Ukraine and Western Europe, there was an outcry from West Europeans at the loss of gas. The protests of the West Europeans led Russia eventually to agree to a compromise price.

Russia associated its new price, however, with conditions that, according to the leading weekly newspaper in Ukraine, *Dermal Tychy*, and other sources, were likely to bring Russia closer to its apparent goal of taking over the pipeline to Western Europe. The gas shipments were to be handled by Russian-controlled intermediary, Rosukrenergo, which through a further controlled intermediary, was to take over the distribution to one half of the Ukrainian market, thus depriving Naftohaz, the Ukrainian company that also owns the transit line to Western Europe, of half of its domestic market, and threatening it with bankruptcy.

The Russians achieved one of their apparent aims. The terms of settlement of the gas crisis damaged considerably the reputation of Yushchenko's government and may have contributed to his party, Our Ukraine, taking third place in the March 2006 parliamentary elections, with only 13.95 percent of the vote, behind Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna at 22.28 percent and Yanukovych's Party of the Regions at 32.14 percent.

In the autumn of 2006, Russia negotiated with its favourite prime minister, Yanukovych, a gentler agreement setting the gas price at $130, well below the rising world price. It continued to maintain pressure, however, to take over the pipeline to Western Europe.

Russia could, in theory at least, use other weapons against Ukraine. One of these weapons could be military pressure. On 11 January 2006, in an article in the *Wall Street*

Journal, Russian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Sergei Ivanov described the tasks of the Russian armed forces, stating, "Our top concern is the internal situation in some members of the Commonwealth of Independent States … and the regions around them."[25]

Another tactic could be to make moves to annex the Crimea. In response to the gas crisis, Ukraine warned that it might seek a revision of the treaty regulating the rent paid for the Black Sea Base in Sevastopol; the Russian defence minister responded with an indirect threat to take Crimea away from Ukraine. A revision of the treaty, he stated, might lead to a revocation of the1997 Ukrainian-Russian friendship treaty, by which Russia recognized the 1954 boundaries of Ukraine, which made the Crimea part of Russia for the first time in modern history. [26] It has also been intimated that Russia might also revoke the 1997 treaty if Ukraine joined NATO.

In theory, Russia could accompany any revocation of the 1997 treaty by promoting a separatist movement in the Crimea. In the 1990s, a public opinion poll showed 70 percent of the Crimean population was in favour of joining Russia. Both President Putin and an analyst close to the Kremlin have recently indicated that, if the West grants Kosovo independence, the precedent of Kosovo's independence should also apply to the secessionist movements in the post-Soviet space – a group that presumably includes separatist movements such as those that Russia protects and supports in Georgia and Moldova.[27]

Under present circumstances, however, we doubt whether Russia would consider using force against Ukraine or promoting a secessionist movement in, for example, the Crimea: The importance to Russia of its relations with the West continues to act as a

restraint on Russian behaviour towards Ukraine. This element of Russian foreign policy was apparent when, in response to Western criticism, Russia backed down on its suspension of gas shipments to Ukraine. In spite of existing tensions, we believe that further development of Russia's relations with the West, especially in the economic field, remains one of the country's primary goals. Nevertheless, even within certain limitations on its behaviour, Russia can still do serious harm to Ukraine

How the West Might Support Ukraine

In his article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Dmitri Trenin noted, "The accelerated transformation of the countries of the CIS in the direction of political democracy, the free market and civil society is possible only with the support and serious assistance of the West."[28] The return of Yanukovych as prime minister in August 2006 shows how long the road to a stable democracy and a genuine independence is likely to be for Ukraine.

To help the reformers in Ukraine achieve their goals, Western policy toward Ukraine might be guided by two principles:

- First, since reforms in Ukraine will not come quickly, and Russian hostility towards reform and increased Ukrainian independence will not disappear easily, Ukraine needs from its friends a long-term, but critical, commitment.
- Second, the West should be flexible and forthcoming in its diplomacy toward Ukraine.

The vertiginous increase in the price of energy has increased Ukrainian dependence on Moscow's good graces. Since Ukraine is one of the most inefficient consumers of energy in Europe, the West might support Ukrainian independence by helping Ukraine

bring its energy consumption in relation to its GDP down to the levels of more advanced economies.

The Ukrainian reformers have sought membership in the EU, and NATO. NATO has generally been more forthcoming towards Ukraine than has the EU. The provocative nature for Russia of Ukrainian membership in NATO, coupled with the reticent attitude towards NATO of the new prime minister, strongly suggests that the EU should become the leading Western organization in efforts to build closer relations with Ukraine.

In his article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Trenin commented that a readiness on the part of the EU to offer Ukraine membership would change the course of the country's history.[29] The EU, however, deals with Ukraine within the framework of its European Neighbourhood Policy, a programme intended for the former Soviet republics and Middle Eastern and North African states that are not expected to become EU members.[30] As a result, the EU does not give to Ukraine the generous credits and advice it offers to candidate countries to help them bring their legislation and regulations in line with EU requirements, even though Ukraine is expected to carry out largely the same reforms.

The Deputy Commission President Guenter von Heugen, in an interview in *Die Welt* on 20 February 2006, predicted that in twenty years, all European states would be members of the EU, except for the successor states of the Soviet Union not already in the EU, such as the Baltic countries. In other words, Ukraine would remain excluded. .[31] Other EU officials have declared that the EU will neither offer membership prospects to the ex-Soviet republics nor rule them out forever.

One reason for the EU's reserved attitude toward Ukraine can perhaps be discerned in the remarks made by the German Foreign Minister Steinmeier to the German-Russian

Forum on 21 March 2006: “In the EU-Russia-Ukraine triangle, the three sides must be as equal as possible. Disturbed relations between two of these partners destabilize the region. However, the precondition for regional stability is that all sides stop thinking in terms of traditional spheres of influence and in categories of geopolitical rivalry.” Such remarks tend to confirm the Ukrainians’ view that some members of the EU, and especially Germany and France, seek to make the EU’s policy toward Ukraine dependent on Moscow’s views.[32]

Although it can be argued that if the EU wants an independent Ukraine, it has to treat it as such, it is understandable that, with the present unclear political circumstances in Ukraine, there is no pressure on the EU to change its reticent attitude towards Ukrainian membership. While President Yushchenko continues to support early Ukrainian membership, Prime Minister Yanukovych favours a slow approach.

Apart from the question of Ukraine’s membership, the EU might be more forthcoming with its assistance to the country, since it is in the interest of the EU to have a stable and prosperous democracy on its doorstep. The negotiation of a free-trade zone is included in the current EU-Ukraine Action Plan. In December 2005, the EU External Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner announced that the EU would negotiate such an agreement as soon as Ukraine becomes a member of the World Trade Organization, which President Yushchenko now hopes will happen in 2007. The EU might consider helping Ukraine prepare for free trade by being as generous in its support for the required economic and legal reforms as it is for membership applicant countries.[33]

There is another reason for the EU being more forthcoming towards Ukraine – to support the reform movement in Ukraine in its efforts to develop the country’s ties with

the West. The reformers' task of winning over Ukrainian public opinion is not an easy one. According to a poll conducted by the Democratic Initiatives Fund in January 2006, 56.8 percent of Ukrainians support Ukrainian membership in the CES, while only 42.6 percent back membership in the EU.[34] Another poll held in December 2005 by the Razumkov Economic and Political Studies Centre in Kyiv, found that 42.2 percent of the population consider that ties with Russia should have priority, while only 25.4 percent would give the same importance to ties with the EU. Only 16 percent of the Ukrainian population were in favour of NATO membership, while 61.4 percent were opposed.[35]

While President Yushchenko maintains his support for Ukraine's early entry into NATO, Prime Minister Yanukovych has insisted that Ukraine is not ready to join, although he does not rule out eventual membership. He does favour continuing co-operation with the Alliance. He nevertheless has echoed Russian calls for an early referendum on Ukrainian membership, apparently so as to kill the idea for the foreseeable future. He has disbanded the Interdepartmental Committee on Euro-Atlantic Integration. He has cut funds for the government's two NATO information programmes by 40 percent and has reduced the budget for the NATO sponsored reform of the Armed Forces by 50 percent. (36)

When he was previously prime minister under President Kuchma, Yanukovych recognized the need for co-operation with both NATO and the EU so as to maintain Ukraine's multi-vectoral foreign policy. Without it, Ukraine would be more dependent on its relations with Russia.

Because Yanukovych is likely still working out his policy toward NATO, it is important that NATO should keep the door open to Ukraine, not to promote membership

at this time, but to maintain existing networks and programmes on the condition that Ukraine practises the democratic values that it professes, such as free elections, freedom of the media, and rule of law.

The West has a strong interest in seeing Ukraine succeed in its reforms – Western values are at stake. The West has also a vested interest in preventing the emergence of a more powerful Russia once again exerting pressure on its neighbours. The increased assertiveness of Russia as a result of the rise in energy prices, including its willingness to use its gas as a political weapon, suggests that an independent and democratic Ukraine is increasingly important as an obstacle to the expansion of Russia's power. If Ukraine can preserve the gains of the Orange Revolution, its example may even eventually assist in the development of a democratic Russia. The question is, of course, whether the West can maintain a long-term critical commitment to Ukraine in spite of the vicissitudes of Ukrainian politics.

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