

# The Foreign Policy of Ukraine

## One Year After the Orange Revolution

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It has been a year since the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. This year has been enough to produce substantial material for analysis, considering the changing dynamics of the situation within the country and its external environment. The eyes of many remain on Ukraine. Some wish it well, while others wish to see it fail, in the hopes that it will then be easier to keep Ukraine under control. Some can do a great deal to influence events in Ukraine, while others that have no levers of this kind still find themselves in a position to be affected by what happens in Ukraine.

One thing that the leaders of the Orange Revolution shared at the outset was a promise to bring Ukraine closer to the West. Some meant to introduce European liberal democratic standards into Ukraine's political and economic life, while others intended to renew the country's cooperation with the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Either way, this is one of the goals that demonstrators in Kyiv and elsewhere were standing for.

### **Ukraine and the EU**

In terms of Ukraine's post-Orange Revolution foreign policy objectives, one should distinguish between the EU and NATO dimensions. Ukraine's progress in working with these two organizations has been different. The EU deemed Viktor Yushchenko's victory in the presidential elections to be

a highly positive development and made it clear that it saw the post-revolutionary Ukraine as a new partner. The degree to which Ukraine would actually draw closer to the EU, however, depended on Yushchenko's willingness, readiness, and ability to implement a new set of policies, both internally and domestically. Such policies could open up a new stage in Ukraine's relationship with the EU and take it one step closer to eventual membership. A window of opportunity was opened, but it was necessary not to lose momentum.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what happened. In fact, new items were even added to the already long list of troubling developments. The EU was concerned about the Ukrainian government's policies to reconsider privatization deals and had reason to believe that promises to fight corruption were not being followed by deeds. Policymaking remained opaque, and personnel appointments at various levels of the executive branch disappointed even the staunchest supporters of the Orange team.

The level of Ukrainian public support for EU membership has not risen, and Ukraine's government has done almost nothing to popularize the European choice. Support for the EU in Ukraine is not based on adequate information on the nature of the EU, its functions, and what it means for Ukraine to move closer toward it. Most significantly, Ukrainians do not understand that moving in the direction of eventual EU membership requires hard work and some very unpopular government actions. To most, the EU remains nothing more than a nice sound; people tend to believe that if they were to enter the EU, they would automatically be better off by virtue of belonging to this elite club. Finally, it should not be forgotten that millions of Ukrainian citizens remain suspicious of the EU, viewing it as an alternative to maintaining good relations with Russia.

Of course, the EU itself was very slow and cautious in its dealings with Ukraine. Its members were somewhat divided in their assessment of how to react to the Orange Revolution. One thing was clear: no massive aid or new institutional framework was going to be introduced, let alone a promise of eventual membership. Furthermore, the EU itself entered a period of crisis after the failure of the constitutional referendum in France. The necessity to get its own house in order has become a priority, diminishing the appeal of any new external initiatives.

## **Ukraine and NATO**

More progress could be detected in Ukraine's relations with NATO. Efforts were made to recover from the late years under Leonid Kuchma, when Ukraine's NATO relations suffered after a short period of success. The post-revolutionary improvement in Ukraine-NATO relations is due mainly to the fact that this dimension of Ukraine's foreign policy has been delegated primarily to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which, under Boris

Tarasyuk, has the right experience and attitude to promote constructive Ukraine-NATO relations.

Since the NATO meeting in Vilnius, NATO and Ukraine have launched an intensified dialogue designed to prepare Ukraine for entering the stage of negotiating a Membership Action Plan. Certainly, Ukraine-NATO relations will depend on further developments in Ukraine. However, the new stage of cooperation has its own logic. The dialogue proceeds even with Ukraine's recent political crises. NATO membership for Ukraine in the not-so-distant future is a scenario that seems feasible and even quite likely.

## **Ukraine and the WTO**

Joining the World Trade Organization has also been an objective of Ukraine's new government. While the process of achieving WTO membership began in the early 1990s, Ukraine did not make significant progress toward this goal. Initially, it seemed that Yushchenko and his government would coordinate their work to achieve WTO membership. As time passed and other elements of the Orange agenda started to fall apart, however, this particular issue became highly politicized. Yulia Tymoshenko's government managed to drag through parliament a handful of the laws required for membership in the WTO, but others still await passage. Some Ukrainian business interests will be harmed if the country joins the WTO; this complicates the ability of government officials in favor of WTO membership to garner support.

## **Ukraine and Russia**

It is widely recognized that Moscow lost its fight to forestall the Orange Revolution. However, Russia quickly managed to review its policies and elaborate a new set better adapted to Ukraine's new realities. As a result, Russia's position on Ukraine has become more pragmatic and less personalized. Faced with the clear potential of losing Ukraine, Moscow has reacted brilliantly and re-established a position as an influential player in Ukrainian affairs.

In particular, infighting within the Orange camp enabled Moscow to emerge from its initial shock and elaborate a new and more sophisticated set of methods designed to keep Ukraine on a short leash. Opposing groupings within a once seemingly united team started to compete with each other to bring Russia back into Ukraine's domestic affairs, and Ukraine's continued dependence on Russian energy supply has remained a decisive factor in this struggle. It is easy to argue that such a scenario was predictable and even inevitable. Internally divided, Ukraine has always been an easy victim for outside powers. However, there are reasons to believe that Ukraine had a chance to minimize its dependence on Russia, and this chance may still not be completely lost. It is not yet

clear how deep the crisis is and if Ukraine can get back on the track that opened for it in late 2004.

## Ukraine and Its Neighbors

The Orange Revolution also created new opportunities for Ukraine to help steer processes of positive political change in other post-Soviet states. Attempts to introduce more democracy and, at the same time, decrease Russia's role in the post-Soviet space have been at the heart of this trend. Kyiv lost little time in forming a partnership with Tbilisi, with which it shared the experience of color revolutions as well as the desperate need to escape Russia's sphere of influence. This culminated in the Borjomi Declaration establishing a Community of Democratic Choice (CDC). Experts vary in their views on this initiative, ranging from deep skepticism to a conviction that the CDC is the start of an essential redistribution of power in the post-Soviet space and the formation of a real geopolitical pluralism.

There is reason to believe, however, that the level of democracy within the states that co-founded the CDC is not adequate to the task and that its principles are not well defined, which will make it difficult for others to join. It is not certain where this will lead and whether it will be possible for the current participants of the CDC, together with any future members, to form a decisive power bloc in the former Soviet space.

Meanwhile, GUAM, the grouping of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova that is the organizational predecessor of the CDC, has been given a second chance to become a regional player. GUAM, almost dead a few years ago, was revived by the events of the Orange Revolution. Electoral democracy in Ukraine and Georgia, changes in Moldova's political orientation, and unresolved disputes between Azerbaijan and Russia have made it possible to launch a new attempt to transform GUAM into something workable. Unlike the CDC, where democracy serves, at least in principle, as a fundamental ideology, there is no ideology in GUAM. Geopolitical and economic interests shape its agenda.

GUAM was characterized by a lack of common strategic interests and shared views among its members. While the problem persists, the time may have come for GUAM to work through some of the new initiatives which have been elaborated. Creation of a multinational force responsible for the safety of energy pipelines would be one small step in the right direction. It would also be helpful if GUAM could somehow contribute to the settlement of the Transnistria conflict, although this is unlikely. One positive factor for GUAM's further development is the elevated interest that certain outside players have demonstrated in its activities. The support of Washington and the interest of states like Romania and Lithuania has not just given GUAM another chance, but has also led to the revival of the idea of a Baltic-Black Sea cooperation zone.

So, even if the Orange Revolution and its leaders have not succeeded in meeting many of the goals of Ukraine's post-revolutionary foreign policy, the fight is not over. The Orange Revolution retains the potential to reshape not only Ukrainian foreign policy, but the geopolitical situation of the entire region.

