

Russia's Orange Revolution Syndrome

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 102

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June 2010

"We must not in any way allow the Ukrainization of political life in Russia."

- Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, January 22, 2010

The victory of Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine's 2010 presidential election called into question the significance of the Orange Revolution both in Ukraine and in the post-Soviet world at large. In my opinion, the Orange Revolution was more successful in Ukraine than many experts alleged. At the same time, it negatively contributed to Russia's political development.

Viktor Yanukovich's defeat in Ukraine's 2004-2005 presidential election was a humiliation for the Kremlin. It also raised the specter of a similar mass movement in Russia. Indeed, in the wake of the Orange Revolution, a wave of so-called "anti-monetization" protests spread across the country. This movement was against reforms that sought to exchange generous social benefits for relatively small amounts of cash. Together, the above developments pushed the Kremlin to a) dispense with large-scale economic reforms that had been developed based on an assumption of steadily increasing political control and b) increase pressure on nongovernmental organizations while encouraging official and semi-official political networks to flourish.

In assessing the impact of the Orange Revolution on Russia's political development, I will limit my analysis to three subjects:

1. The increase in administrative control over NGOs by means of both tougher legislation and the creation of a pyramid of "public chambers."

2. The changing of key players in public politics exemplified by the pro-Kremlin *Putinjugend*-type youth organization *Nashi* (Ours) and the fate of Open Russia's public policy schools.
3. The establishment of new political organizations and networks.

One can conclude that if the Orange Revolution and the mass protests in Russia that followed had not happened, Russia's political development might have taken a very different course.

The Rationale for Counterrevolution

The Kremlin's understanding of the color revolutions has been well articulated by political scientist Sergey Markov, a Duma deputy from the United Russia ruling party. According to Markov, the color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine opened a new page in the theory and practice of revolutions. Revolutions no longer take the shape of military turnovers, like they did during the 19th century, nor are they made by professional parties, as in the 20th century. Rather, they are prepared openly – not from a single center but by a network of nongovernmental organizations united by an ideology. Such networks are present in many countries undergoing development with foreign financial and technical assistance. According to this line of thinking, the Orange Revolution was instigated by the Ukrainian branches of international NGOs and, in a more extreme variant (elaborated, for example, by political scientist Vladimir Frolov), the U.S. government and its numerous puppet organizations among Ukrainian civil society, media, political parties, and the state apparatus. Protesting against this new reality makes little sense; those who want to actively participate in 21st-century politics should instead create their own NGO network and provide them with ideological, personnel, financial, and other so-called “political-technological” support.

Tougher NGO Legislation

The most publicized policy shift to occur in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution was the introduction of amendments to Russia's law on NGOs. The January 2006 amendments regulate the functioning of foreign NGOs and considerably broadened the oversight of the Federal Registration Service (FRS). The amendments stipulated that NGOs had to a) submit annual reports on their financial expenditures and use of property, b) disclose the source of all funds and assets received from foreign organisations and citizens, and c) issue reports on the activities and personnel of NGO management bodies.

The 2006 amendments caused many problems for NGOs, in particular smaller and poorly-financed regional organizations. According to the findings of a team led by Alexander Auzan, president of the “Social Contract” institute, the financial burden imposed by the amendments considerably exceeded the volume of state aid provided in the form of grants to NGOs in 2006 and 2007. Yuri Dzhibladze, head of the Centre for Democratic Development and Human Rights, observed that the law gives wide latitude to the FRS to deny approval of documents submitted by an NGO. Officially, 2,600 organisations were closed in 2006, and 2,300 in 2007. If any NGO repeatedly fails to submit its papers within the established timeframe, the new legislation empowers the

FRS to request that the court exclude it from the State Legal Entity Register. Of special concern has been the process of state inspections, which in practically all cases have concluded that the NGO under inspection has violated one or another article of the law, subjecting it to threat of closure.

Over time, some improvements in the legal climate for NGOs have taken place. In 2007, the State Duma passed amendments to facilitate state registration procedures for homeowner associations, as well as for gardening, dacha, and other citizen associations. This bill takes these organisations out of the sphere of the basic law, allowing their registration and reporting under a simpler procedure more relevant to their activities. Slight legislative improvements were introduced for other categories of NGOs in 2009. These, however, mainly apply only to the “good guys,” i.e. organizations that do not get financial support from foreign organizations. Further improvements are expected, such as a draft law (2009, signed into law in April 2010) on socially oriented NGOs, which may receive special aid from the state.

The Public Chamber

Established in 2006, the Public Chamber was designed to promote interaction between state authorities and civil society organizations. The Chamber somewhat serves as democratic decor, attempting to fill the void of dismantled or weakened state institutions. At the same time it is an attempt to vertically organize civil society organizations, bringing NGO representatives into its ranks and providing NGOs with financial support (1.2 billion rubles in 2009). The Chamber also has aspired to take on other functions, including civil oversight over defense and law-enforcement duties.

In reality, the Chamber’s functions and methods are not very clear. It is essentially a non-constitutional body that has been created by the president for the president. The executive appoints one-third of the chamber’s members, who then establish mechanisms for choosing the second (federal) and third (regional) components.

Other than channelling funds to useful NGOs, the Public Chamber has only advisory functions. Its main task is to serve as a buffer between civil society and state authorities. It alerts authorities to matters of social discontent, sets the tone and defines the agenda for state-civilian dialogue, and pushes aside those who are viewed as inconvenient.

Nashi (Ours) and “Closed Russia”

The start of the *Nashi* project can be dated to February 2005, when reports initially appeared in the media about a new Kremlin-sponsored youth movement that was to take the place of an existing movement called *Idushchie vmeste* (Going Together). At the start of March, then-leader of *Idushchie vmeste* Vasily Yakemenko declared the establishment of an anti-fascist youth movement, Nashi, with the stated aim of “promoting Russia’s transformation into the global leader of the twenty-first century.” To do this, it was to pursue a number of goals, which included keeping Russia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity intact, building an active civil society, and overseeing the modernization of the country through a so-called “cadres revolution.”

Political technocrat Gleb Pavlovsky visited Nashi's first summer camp at Russia's Lake Seliger in 2005 and encouraged its members to be tougher and ready to "break up fascist demonstrations and to physically resist attempts of anti-constitutional turnover."

Nashi also sought to uphold the notion of "sovereign democracy," invoked by Russian leaders as a countermeasure to the allegedly imported and destabilizing color revolutions. Yakemenko is generally assumed to be the first to use the term. As reported in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in October 2005, Yakemenko explained that Nashi "support[s] sovereign democracy, where freedom of the person and freedom of the state are necessary and of equal importance."

In 2007, Yakemenko was appointed head of the State Committee on Youth, which was later upgraded to a federal agency. After Yakemenko asserted in January 2008 that the Orange Revolution threat no longer exists, rumors that the Kremlin youth agenda would undergo another transformation flourished. But *Nashi* is still in existence. The Public Chamber awarded the group 5.5 million rubles (approx. \$175,000) for its 2010 summer camp.

Meanwhile, the most successful and fastest developing public organization in Russia, Open Russia, fell victim to the Orange Revolution syndrome. Open Russia was established in 2001 by shareholders of Yukos, the energy company headed by now-jailed Mikhail Khodorkovsky, to serve charity, educational, and enlightenment goals. Its "public policy schools" organized year-long curriculums involving regular roundtables and discussions on contemporary issues of politics and governance, as well as practical training courses on the ins-and-outs of electoral politics. Participants were drawn equally from the NGO and academic world, business, and the government sector (including, initially, activists from United Russia). Such seminars were convened with the cooperation of regional authorities, but in 2005 Open Russia faced increasing troubles. It was shut down in March 2006.

Official Political Networks

The creation of semiformal hierarchical NGO and civil society management networks began in 2005 after the Orange Revolution and the "anti-monetization" protests. This process was accompanied by state and local government sponsored deconstruction of civil society networks.

Although the implementation of public reception rooms by federal presidential envoys was pioneering and began to increase from 2002, official civil society networks really took off in 2005. The structure was a pyramid of public entities with the federal Public Chamber at the top (July 2005), public council chambers at the district level, and regional and municipal chambers at the bottom. There was also a Presidential Council for the Implementation of National Projects (October 1995), which had regional branches led by governors. Two other special networks were later established, both times on the eve of nationwide elections: the National Antiterrorist Committee in February 2006 and the National Anti-Narcotics Committee in October 2007. The latter is led by the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN), again with governors heading regional branches. Around the same time, United Russia was transformed into a mass party, with a membership that is now approaching two

million. Some 25,000 have participated in the project “Cadres Reserve – A Professional Team for the Country,” with the top 300 activists selected and presented to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

In recent years, such networks have been playing a more important role in personnel decisions, especially at the regional level. Not only are regional governors increasingly replaced by outsiders, but in many cases entire administrative sections (especially political ones) are staffed by former Kremlin-based “political technocrats.” One prominent parent company is Gleb Pavlovsky’s Foundation for Effective Politics, which actively (if not effectively) sided with Yanukovych in Ukraine’s 2004 presidential election.

Conclusions

The negative trends in Russia’s political development since late 2004 cannot be entirely explained by the authorities’ reaction to the Orange Revolution. However, the events in Ukraine played an important role in shaping the Kremlin’s anti-democratic worldview and increased the negative trends that already existed. The measures undertaken to avoid an orange threat in Russia included:

- An increase in state control over, and the “cleansing” of, NGOs (first and foremost those that received Western funding).
- A diminished role for elections.
- A cleansing of the political space, especially of recognizable politicians and semi-autonomous actors.
- The adoption of populist policies instead of socioeconomic reform.
- The establishment of pro-Kremlin youth movements.

While the Kremlin may consider its goals to have been achieved – the 2008 presidential transition was particularly smooth – the price has been high, including the loss of reform opportunities connected with a favorable economic climate.

In conclusion, the Orange Revolution had a negative impact on Russian policy and political development. It may, however, still have a much more important and positive impact on the Russian public if Ukraine’s political progress is followed by socioeconomic gains.

This publication was made possible by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.