Did the Orange Revolution change Ukraine’s geopolitical position regarding Russia and the west?

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Abstract
This dissertation looks at whether the Orange Revolution changed Ukraine’s geopolitical position. Ukraine’s relations with Russia and the West before the Orange Revolution are addressed in order to determine where Ukraine was orientated geopolitically before 2004. After the Orange Revolution, President Yushchenko failed in his vision to position Ukraine geopolitically with the west and therefore left Ukraine still stuck between east and west.

Introduction
The Orange Revolution in Ukraine was perhaps the biggest moment in the countries political history since it gained independence from the USSR in 1991. As hundreds of thousands of protesters flocked onto the streets of Kiev in support of the pro-Western Presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko, who had been defeated by the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych in the blatantly fraudulent second round of voting in November 2004, Ukraine seemed to be at a crossroads. With the Orange protesters becoming a revolutionary actor, the government authorities, who had been responsible for the massive fraud in the second round in order to try and make sure Yanukovych won, backed down and agreed to a fresh set of elections. The new elections which were carried out fairly were won by Yushchenko, bringing to power a President committed to integrating Ukraine with the EU and NATO and moving away from Russia’s sphere of influence. Many at the time saw the events as a battle for Ukraine’s geopolitical position in the world, and it was this idea which prompted my research.

This dissertation will look at whether the Orange Revolution did manage to change Ukraine’s geopolitical position regarding Russia and the West. It is my view that, although the events of 2004 and the rise of Yushchenko promised a lot, they inevitably failed. Yushchenko’s vision of Ukraine forging a path to both EU and NATO membership was undermined by personal domestic and international failures. While Yushchenko battled with the other hero of the Orange Revolution, Yulia Tymoshenko, on how to implement changes to Ukraine’s economy, he got caught up in Ukraine’s complicated and corrupt political system, eventually undermining his own agenda in order to win small personal battles with Tymoshenko. With the EU failing to produce a clear strategy towards Ukraine the potential carrot of an offer of EU membership towards Ukraine was never forthcoming; something which could have provided a real boost to the domestic reform process back in Ukraine. This, combined with an
increasingly more neo-imperial Russia, who wanted to re-gain the influence it had in the post-Soviet space (PSS) meant that Yushchenko’s vision of a Ukraine fully integrated into European political and security structures failed. As a result, Ukraine was still stuck in the old geopolitical mould of being stuck between east and west, a position which does not help Ukraine in developing its political and economic structures.

In order to look at what effect the Orange Revolution had on the geopolitical position of Ukraine, the state of relations with Russia and the West before 2004 must also be addressed. During this time, Ukrainian politics was dominated by President Leonid Kuchma, who became President in 1994. Under Kuchma Ukraine’s geopolitical position was ambiguous as the President carried out a ‘multi-vector’ foreign policy, whereby he sought to keep good relations with both the West and Russia. Ukraine quickly normalised relations with the EU and NATO and Ukraine looked like it might be geopolitically positioning itself with the West. However Kuchma’s positive rhetoric on European integration during his first term was not matched by his actions and he became increasingly isolated in Europe towards the end of his Presidency. As a result of corruption scandals domestically Kuchma orientated Ukraine geopolitically towards Russia. Ukraine and its relations with the West and Russia before 2004 are addressed in chapters 2 and 3.

Ukraine is a divided country politically. The east of Ukraine tends to be more pro-Russian as the region had a high proportion of Russophone (Russian speaking) Ukrainians who use Russian as their first language and feel a strong sense of belonging to both Ukraine and Russia. The west of the country however is more pro-Western, with a higher proportion of ethnic Ukrainians who use Ukrainian as their first language and see Russia as a threat to the sovereignty of Ukraine. As a result of the political, cultural and identity differences in Ukraine, different visions of what Ukraine’s geopolitical position should be emerge. It is important to understand these geopolitical visions, as they are what have shaped Ukraine’s foreign policy in the years since its independence. The theories behind Ukraine’s geopolitical position are addressed in the next chapter.

This dissertation will address whether the Orange Revolution changed Ukraine’s position geopolitically by first looking at the theories behind Ukraine’s geopolitical position. It will then look at how Ukraine positioned itself geopolitically for the first 13 years of its independence from the USSR. Having addressed this, the dissertation will then go on to determine what effect the Orange Revolution and the subsequent Yushchenko presidency had on the geopolitics of Ukraine and address why Yushchenko failed in his vision of integrating Ukraine with the west.

**Theories of Ukrainian geopolitics**

**Introduction**

In this chapter I want to look at and address the different theories and literature behind Ukraine’s geopolitical position. I will do this breaking the theories into two broad groups;
one being reasons for why Ukraine should have a European orientation and one on why Ukraine should have a Russian/Eurasian geopolitical orientation. In order to understand whether the Orange Revolution changed Ukraine’s geopolitical position vis a vis Russia and the West we must look at the theories behind what Ukraine’s position has been interpreted as in the past and which groups in Ukrainian society back these views. The theories are relevant to the modern context of Ukrainian politics because politicians draw from history and culture in order to form their policies and depending on what their vision (if any) for foreign policy is will draw from theories of Ukraine’s geopolitical position in order to back up their policies.

There has been much academic debate both in Ukraine and Russia over hundreds of years as to what Ukraine’s geopolitical position should be. Is Ukraine a western European country? Is Ukraine part of the Russian orthodox “civilisation” as Samuel Huntington said it is in “The Clash of Civilisations?” Or is there another way in which Ukraine could define itself in a geopolitical context? Ukrainian and Russian academics have addressed these issues for hundreds of years yet it was Ukraine’s independence in 1991 with brought these debates back to the fore as elites and the public pondered what foreign policy outlook Ukraine should have. I will also use this chapter to define and explain some of the terms which I shall be using in the following chapters.

Defining terms

In order for the reader to get the full understanding of the following chapters I will define some terms which will appear in the following pages. To start off with I will address the term geopolitics. Geopolitics is a way of looking at politics from a geographical perspective or how geography affects the politics of a country (Flint, 2006 p. 13). It can be seen that if a country which is surrounded by water, such as a peninsula or an island, then certain areas of the politics of that country will differ from a country that is landlocked. An example of geography affecting politics can be seen in Britain and its historical reluctance towards the European Union. With Britain being an island off the coast of continental Europe it has had the historical perception of often standing alone or against European affairs. British Eurosceptics often play on this perception by invoking British islander spirit as apart from continental European affairs in order to oppose further integration into the EU.

Geopolitics often has a strategic aim, such as a states desire to control and compete for territory or influence of territory and resources. Halford Mackinder is seen to be the father of the theory of geopolitics. He wrote in the early 1900’s on the decline of British power and the rise of Germany and Russia. In 1904 he published the influential work “The geographical pivot of history” which looked at the ‘pivot area’ (which was mainly the Eurasian continental area) being a crucial area to European power (Flint, 2006 p. 18). Mackinder was worried that Germany and Russia may go into an alliance and therefore control most of the European and Eurasian continental land mass which in turn would not be good for British power (Flint, 2006 p. 18).

As I mentioned earlier geopolitics can be seen as the way in which geography affects the politics of a country. However geopolitics can also be the way a state ‘sees the world’ also
known as its world view or the perspective it has on its politics and the foreign policy it conducts; this is also known as its geopolitical position. Therefore this is what I mean when I ask the question “did the Orange Revolution change Ukraine’s geopolitical position regarding Russia and the West?” When I speak of Ukraine’s geopolitical position I mean is Ukraine’s foreign policy following a certain trend towards a certain geopolitical area; such as Western Europe and the EU, or Russia, or a mixture of both? A geopolitical position can also be seen as the way a state ‘looks’ in terms of its foreign policy. For example Britain has often been said to ‘look west’ i.e. at the United States in what has been called an Atlanticist foreign policy. This is because Britain has seen the US as its most important strategic ally in the world as the US has been a super power for most of the 20th century. It can therefore be seen that a state has a geopolitical position which reflects the strategic goals it wants to achieve.

Looking at some other terms now, normalisation is the process of two countries legalising their relations in terms of putting in place legal and institutional frameworks for which diplomatic relations within the international system are based on. This term will mainly be used when looking at Ukraine’s integration into the international system after its independence in 1991. Russia’s ‘near abroad’ is another term I would like to define. Russia’s ‘near abroad’ or sphere of influence is seen to be the eastern European, former Soviet Union states, such as Belarus. The idea of Russia’s ‘near abroad’ is important when looking at Ukraine as Russia considers itself to have the right to interfere with Ukraine’s policies, especially foreign policy and policy towards NATO. Finally European integration is another term I would like to define. European integration is the process a state goes through when it wishes to have closer relations, bounded in a legal or strategic framework, often with the ultimate aim of gaining membership of the European Union. European integration is not just integration into the EU; it can also refer to other European institutions such as NATO and the Council of Europe.

**Theories on Ukraine’s geopolitical position**

The idea of Ukraine’s geopolitical position revolves around the debate as to what part of the world Ukraine belongs to. I use the broad term ‘world’ here because over the years Ukraine has been claimed to be part of Western Europe, Central Europe, part of Russia, part of Eurasia and even part of its own space between Europe and Eurasia. In order to bring some structure to the debates surrounding Ukraine’s geopolitical position I will divide these debates into general groups.

Looking firstly from an impartial perspective Ukraine occupies a crucial geopolitical space between Europe and Eurasia (Wilson, 2009 p. 279). Ukraine can be seen to be the gateway to the Caucasus and a strategic point of entry to the Northern European plain as well as Central Asia and the Near East (Wilson, 2009 p. 281). The fact that Ukraine does occupy this crucial space has meant that both the European and Eurasian sides have claimed Ukraine as one of their own; and the debate as to where Ukraine’s true position lies is still continuing. I am going to look first at the theories which claim Ukraine as part of Russia and Eurasia.
**Russian/Eurasian Ukraine**

The Russian nationalist position on Ukraine’s geopolitical position is fairly clear: Russia has its own continental space and Ukraine is part of that (Wilson, 2009 p. 298). The Russian nationalist views Russia as being separate from Western Europe and that the border between the two lies in Ukraine (Wilson, 2009 p. 298). From this position it is clear that Ukraine in the Russian nationalist view cannot exist as an independent state and this therefore as consequences in the modern context of Ukrainian politics. The Russian historian Lev Gumilev outlined this Russian nationalist position by saying that ethnic Ukrainians were not a separate ethnicity but were a sub-ethnicity of Russians, concluding therefore that there can be no such thing as a Ukrainian nation (Wilson, 2009 p. 301).

One of the key points in history which Russian nationalists use to emphasise Russia’s claim to Ukraine is the 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav where Bohdan Khmelnytsky formed an alliance with Muscovy and marked the eventual absorption of Ukraine into the Russian Empire (Velychenko, 2007 p. 91). This treaty has also been used in order to emphasize Russian dominance over Ukraine (Velychenko, 2007 p. 91). Halford Mackinder’s work has been interpreted from a nationalist position in order to argue that Ukraine is an essential part of the geographical core of the Eurasian heartland and therefore as part of Russia (Wilson, 2009 p. 305). In more recent times the fact that Samuel Huntington puts Ukraine in the Orthodox civilisation has been interpreted as meaning Ukraine should belong to Russia (Huntington, 1996).

One of the main theories behind the Russian nationalist position is Eurasianism. Developed in the 1920’s and 1930’s Eurasianism is the idea that Russia is in its own space between Europe and Asia, hence Eurasianism (Velychenko, 2007 p. 28). Eurasianism is an attempt to legitimise a Russian state which contains ethnically diverse peoples and is an attempt to counter act non-Russian peoples claims for independence (Velychenko, 2007 p. 31). The multi ethical makeup of the modern Russian state and the territories within it which have been troublesome since the collapse of the USSR has led to the growth in the idea that Russia may still be an empire. Eurasianism dismisses this as the different ethnic peoples, which Eurasianists include Ukraine in, are part of one ‘Eurasian nation’ which therefore legitimises the Russian states current make up (Velychenko, 2007 p. 29).

Although much of the literature around these debates is often dated, the ideas still have significance in a modern context. Firstly the nationalist views outlined above are still present in the views of both the Russian general public and their elites. A desire to re-build Russia back to a strong nation has driven Russian policy makers since the collapse of the USSR with some of the views outlined above fresh in their minds. This, as we shall see later has had an effect on Ukrainian foreign policy and the geopolitical position elites have tried to shape for the state. The Ukrainian demographic makeup is also significant as around 17% of the population is ethnic Russian and an even higher percentage are Russophones. It can therefore be seen that Russian nationalism and Eurasianism manifests itself not just in Russia but in Ukraine too, especially in the south and east of the country where the main ethnic Russian population is based.
Independent/ European Ukraine

I will now turn to the debate around Ukrainian independence and the idea of Ukraine as a European state. Although these two ideas do not go hand in hand, the fact that the literature on Ukraine as a European nation generally assumes Ukraine’s right as an independent state which the Eurasian/Russian nationalist position generally does not mean it makes sense to group these two together.

Although the idea of an independent Ukraine and a European Ukraine are not the same, the idea of Ukraine as part of Europe is a central concept to the Ukrainian national idea (Wilson, 2009 p. 285). This is a view taken by many Ukrainian nationalists who saw Ukraine as a European nation with similar values and culture to Europe before Russian domination of Ukraine began. Ukrainian nationalists claim that medieval Ukraine and the Kievan state as it existed then was built on a western social and political model (Velychenko, 2007 p. 71). After around three centuries of Ukrainian submission to Russia, Ukraine’s independence in 1991 was seen as an opportunity to ‘return to Europe’ as a way of reconfirming Ukraine’s national character (Wilson, 2009 p. 290).

The writer Rudnytski claimed that Ukraine and the Ukrainian people have their own land which is a distinct geographical entity (Wilson, 2009 p. 280). Developing a more Ukrainian nationalist theme the writer Hrushevskyi claimed that Ukraine was a frontier nation and that with its open steppe to the east Ukraine had been the defender of European civilisation against ‘Asian hordes’ (Wilson, 2009 p. 282). Ukrainian nationalists have come up with critiques of Eurasianism, for example Andrievsky claimed that Russia sees its future in Asia and this therefore separates Ukraine from the Eurasian nation; as Russia moves east, Ukraine will discover its western position (Velychenko, 2007 p. 32).

From these Ukrainian nationalist/European positions we can see that Ukrainian nationalists see Ukraine’s natural geopolitical position as a European state looking west. In terms of the modern context of Ukrainian politics a western geopolitical position would mean integration into European institutions. However any Ukrainian government which such a western looking geopolitical position would surely incur the wrath of Moscow, especially over the issue of membership of NATO.

Conclusion

From the debates around Ukraine’s geopolitical positions it can be seen that the two sides have irreconcilable views. This combined with the uncertain post-soviet circumstances means that problems were likely to occur. In the following chapters I will be outlining and analysing the foreign policy of Ukrainian governments before and after the Orange Revolution in order to determine whether Ukraine found a coherent geopolitical position and whether this changed post 2004.
Ukraine and the West under Kuchma

Introduction

In order to see whether Ukraine’s geopolitical position changed after the 2004 elections and the Orange Revolution which followed, it must first be outlined what sort of foreign policy Ukraine pursued before 2004. In this chapter my aim is to outline and analyse Ukrainian relations with the west in the period 1991-2004 and assess what these relations meant for Ukraine’s geopolitical position in the first 13 years of its independence. During this period of time the main political actor in foreign policy was the President Leonid Kuchma who was in office between 1994 and 2004. It must first be defined what ‘the West’ means in terms of Ukrainian foreign policy. When looking at ‘the West’ in this chapter I will be looking at Ukraine’s relations with the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the member states of these organisations, such as the United States which has had a significant bilateral influence on Ukraine’s foreign policy.

During the first 13 years of Ukraine’s independence relations with the West have at times offered a lot but ultimately proved to be a disappointment. This is due to several factors which have been prevalent on both sides. At times Ukraine appeared to be moving encouragingly ahead on cooperation with both the EU and NATO on possibilities of achieving Membership Action Plans (MAP) for both organisations which would have offered a strategic plan to achieving membership. However due to factors such as gaps in rhetoric and political will on both sides, as things stood in 2004 Ukraine had failed to pursue its so called ‘European choice’ which Kuchma often talked of. This failure was underlined by the fact that Kuchma had been mostly isolated by the west during his second term as a result of corruption scandals and domestic infighting. More worryingly at the end of Kuchma’s reign there was a growing sense of ‘Ukraine fatigue’ in western institutions. As Ukraine continued to fail to back up its rhetoric of wanting closer integration with the EU with failures to tackle domestic issues such as corruption and the economy, the West became tired with the ‘Ukrainian question’.

Ukraine’s failure to integrate into western European structures was not just a Ukrainian failure; it was a western failure as their rhetoric was often not backed up with a strong political desire for Ukraine to join European institutions. EU officials were often seen to be not treating the question of Ukrainian membership in an equal way. Ukrainian policy makers often felt unwanted by Europe as they saw an ‘open door policy’ to states in the Balkans but not to them.

Kravchuk and the West

Ukraine’s independence in 1991 brought with it many problems but also great prospects and one of those was of closer relations with the West. It was the issue of nuclear weapons which Ukraine first began relations with the West however. Independence meant that Ukraine had inherited some of the old Soviet Union’s nuclear arsenal and this was one of the most pressing issues which concerned both the West and Russia in the early 1990s. The West did not want any new nuclear powers in Europe to emerge as a result of the collapse of the USSR
and so its primary focus towards Ukraine between 1992-4 was over this nuclear issue (Kuzio, 1997: p 220).

President Kravchuk had no real desire for Ukraine to become a nuclear power but was concerned that many of the nuclear weapons were being returned to Russia which was and still is the biggest threat to Ukrainian sovereignty. With Ukraine at the same time taking rapid measures in which to organise new armed forces in order to be able to secure its borders it seemed crazy to Kravchuk that he should be transferring nuclear weapons to Russia without some assurances. By dragging out agreements over nuclear weapons Kravchuk was able to use the issue as leverage in order to gain security assurances (Nahaylo, 1999: p 443). Although the West had no real intentions to protect Ukraine it did mean that Kravchuk was more confident in being able to defend Ukrainian interests (Nahaylo, 1999: p 443).

**Kuchma first term- western promise**

The election of Leonid Kuchma to the Presidency of Ukraine in 1994 brought a different rhetoric to relations with the West and also initial successful results (Kuzio, 1997: p 179). Kuchma had been elected in 1994 on a mainly moderate pro-Russian platform but soon found good relations with the West easier to come by (Kuzio, 2003 p. 8). Kuchma sought to normalise relations with the West with the prospect of Ukraine possibly becoming a member of the EU at some point. This process began in 1994 with Ukraine signing a co-operation agreement with the EU, which opened the possibility of Ukraine becoming an associate member in the future. 1995 saw Ukraine become a member of the Council of Europe and with it the West started to support Ukraine both financially and technically in helping it transfer to a market economy and a liberal democratic state. A large part of this help came in 1996 when Ukraine managed to secure a $260 billion loan from the EU. Ukraine also became the third largest recipient of aid from the United States, receiving over $200 million in 1998. The fact that Ukraine received such a large amount showed that Ukraine was increasingly seen as a potentially important geostrategic ally for the West. The unstable nature of the region and the continuing domestic instability in Russia made Ukraine’s geopolitical position of being between the central European and eastern/Eurasian zone important to US strategic thinking.

Ukraine further strengthened relations when in 1998 the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) with the EU was signed. This outlined the legal basis for EU-Ukrainian relations and as a result of which, Ukraine has since received over 1 billion Euros in funding from the EU. In the same year Ukraine and the EU signed a Strategy for European Integration in which the EU acknowledged and welcomed Ukraine’s aspirations for European integration. The Strategy also acknowledged that membership of the EU for Ukraine was a long term aspiration and outlined the possibility for Ukraine to lodge an application for membership in 2011.

Kuchma also sought closer co-operation between Ukraine and NATO. Kuchma was initially wary of closer relations with NATO as he knew NATO eastward expansion would antagonise Russia, so he outlined his view that expansion eastward should be done in consultation with
Russia (Kuzio, 1997: p 189). However several factors did eventually change Kuchma’s view on consultation with Russia. Firstly there was the desire from the West and the newly independent eastern European states to use NATO as a force for stability in Europe, especially as a way of securing democracy in these new states (Kuzio, 1997: p 192). Kuchma was also wary of not getting stuck between two new competing security blocs in Eastern Europe (Kuzio, 1997: p 222). This was coupled with the fact that at the time Kuchma was not willing to work closely within the developing security structures in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which Kuchma saw as a post-Soviet structure which the Russians wanted to use in order to regain control over states in what they saw as their ‘near abroad’.

The result of this movement to a more pro-NATO position initially started with Ukraine joining NATO’s Partnership for Peace structure in 1995. The Partnership for Peace programme was an ideal way to start NATO-Ukrainian co-operation as the programme was mainly based on practical ways in which NATO and Ukraine could work together to increase stability in the region. This was followed up in July 1997 when the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine was signed in Madrid. The NATO-Ukraine charter, which was aimed at building an enhanced relationship between the two signatories, started the formal basis for relations between NATO and Ukraine.

Despite the obvious benefits this partnership brought, in terms of NATO assistance in helping increase stability in region, many at the time felt the partnership showed Ukraine becoming more assertive in its foreign policy and moving out of Russia’s shadow (Feldhusen, 1999). Russia’s relative domestic weakness at the time, with the massive economic problems Yeltsin’s reforms had brought and the ongoing issue of Chechnya created a window of opportunity for Ukraine to establish closer relations with the West. The increasing cooperation between NATO and Ukraine was also useful to Ukraine as it could often ‘play the NATO card’ when in discussions with Russia (Kuzio, 2003 p. 8). This strengthened Ukraine’s hand on issues such as the Crimea and Sevastopol as Kuchma could use his successes with NATO, and the threat of Ukraine potentially joining the security structure as a way of making Russia more amenable to Kuchma’s demands.

The strengthening of relations with the West which President Kuchma achieved during his first term was a good start and normalised relations between Ukraine, the EU and NATO. This was more than Kuchma had been able to achieve with Russia at the time and is why that Kuchma’s first term could be said to have swung Ukraine’s multi-vector foreign policy westwards. This was not to say that Kuchma was actively orientating Ukraine’s geopolitical position towards the West however as there was a serious gap between his rhetoric on European integration (he had expressed his desires for Ukraine to join both the EU and NATO at some point in the future) and the reality of how far he was willing to go in order to achieve further integration (Larrabee, 2006 p 96). The ongoing problems with Russia meant that European cooperation was easier to come by. Although significant agreements with the EU (PCA 1994) and NATO (NATO-Ukraine Charter 1997), these were loose agreements which did not lay out a strong plan for Ukraine to quickly strive towards Membership Action Plans or become candidate countries for these organisations.
Kuchma second term- movement east

After the initial successes of starting co-operation with Europe, Kuchma came under increasing criticism in his second term (he had won re-election in 1999). Although Kuchma had brought in economic reforms such as privatisation, reducing subsidies and lowering taxes, Ukraine’s economy had not transformed into a market economy which is required for membership of the EU. This failure in the economy was coupled with criticism of Kuchma’s increasing repression of the media and unwillingness at democratic reforms. However it was the so called ‘Gongadze scandal’, or ‘Kuchmagate’ which really caused lasting damage to Ukrainian relations with the West and started the movement to a more pro-Russian foreign policy after 1999.

The Gongadze Scandal began when in November 2000 the death of the opposition journalist Hryhorii Gongadze was linked to Kuchma after secret recordings made by presidential body guard Mykola Melnichenko were made of him ordering the beating and kidnapping of Gongadze, as well as other remarks linked to corruption. Kuchma’s image in the West was further damaged after the appearance of further tapes which suggested that the President had authorised the sale of the Kolchuha early warning radar system to Iraq in 2002. These tape scandals as well as the increasing authoritarianism and corruption which were prevalent throughout his second term led to his de facto isolation by the West, stopping any hopes of further western integration during Kuchma’s second term (Wilson, 2009 p. 312). As a result of this isolation, and the election of Vladimir Putin to the Russian Presidency in 2000 Kuchma increasingly looked east to find friends internationally and a Ukrainian-Russian rapprochement occurred (Moshes, 2001).

As things stood in 2004, when Presidential elections were to be held and Kuchma was due to leave office, Ukraine was still applying a multi-vector foreign policy. However what stopped Kuchma from backing up his rhetoric and realising Ukraine’s European choice during his presidency? One of the main reasons was that both the EU and Kuchma were applying ‘virtual policies’ to each other (Kuzio, 2003 p. 5). What this meant was that both Kuchma and the EU applied rhetoric on Ukraine’s desire to join the EU and the EU’s willingness to grant Ukraine candidacy status, without ever really having the political will to back it up. On Kuchma’s side, his foreign policy has often been described as ‘pro-Kuchma’ i.e. he adopted flexible policies towards Russia and the West and came down on one side or the other when the geopolitical predicaments suited him (Kuzio, 2003 p. 11). This was shown by how in his first term when relations with the west were easier to come by, compared to the problem of Russia at the time, he sought to present himself as pro-western and when the west turned on him after the Gongadze affair, he sought a rapprochement with Russia and increased cooperation within the CIS.

On the EU side their ‘virtual policies’ were shown by the fact they were overly cautious on the idea of Ukraine joining the EU. The EU never asked for Ukraine to choose between integration in the West or the CIS (Kuzio, 2003 p. 10). This was a mistake as Kuchma wanted the EU to give Ukraine a clear signal that membership of the EU was achievable in the foreseeable future (Larrabee, 2006 p 96). The EU feared that any moves to try and strongly
bring Ukraine in a more western direction would cause problems in the EU’s relations with Russia (Kuzio, 2003 p. 6).

**Conclusion**

Kuchma was never really willing to back his western rhetoric up with the substantial domestic reforms which would have been needed in order to bring Ukraine inline with EU entry standards. By Kuchma’s second term the Ukrainian economy was still not officially a fully market economy, the political system was in the grips of vested interests from the shadow economy and the Ukrainian oligarchs (many of whom supported Kuchma) and as a result corruption in both the political system and the economy was endemic. In order to enter into the EU Kuchma would have had to radically reform the old corrupt system, which he himself was a part of, and as a result, the will to do that was not there.

**Russia and Ukraine under Kuchma**

**Introduction**

In this chapter I am going to analyse Ukrainian relations with Russia between the years 1991 and 2004 in order to determine whether Ukrainian foreign policy had a geopolitical position during these first 13 years of Ukrainian independence. For the most part I believe that Ukrainian policy towards Russia during this period was a failure. Although during this period, and especially under President Kuchma, Russo-Ukrainian relations became normalised to an extent economic, political and historical factors meant that entering the 2004 Presidential elections, Ukraine was still firmly seen to be in Russia’s geopolitical near abroad. This means that although legally Russo-Ukrainian relations are normalised, the de facto position is that Russia still holds a tight grip on Ukraine and interferes in its affairs.

**Normalisation issues**

The main feature of Russo-Ukrainian relations during the period addressed in this chapter was the struggle for Ukraine to assert its newly realised independence over its Russian neighbour. This difficult process of normalisation was formally completed with the signing of the Treaty on Friendship, Co-operation and Partnership in 1997, however in effect relations since then have not been based on mutual respect and non-interference. The process of normalisation of relations between Russia and the Ukraine was marred by disputes over a wide range of issues. The wide ranging nature of issues Russia and the Ukraine had to address during this 1991-2004 period show why the process of normalisation took so long and in effect is still not complete.

One of the main problems which marred Russo-Ukrainian relations in the early period of Ukraine’s independence was the “divorce syndrome” which was prevalent in Russian foreign policy (Hajda, 1998, p. 20). Although the collapse of the USSR had meant the creation of many more new states in Russia’s near abroad, many Russian’s felt that Ukraine was still part of Russia (Hajda, 1998, p. 21). The shared history and culture which Russians felt they had
with Ukrainians, as well as the large number of ethnic Russians living in Ukraine meant that Russian elites were still emotionally attached to Ukraine, especially in areas like the Crimea where a high proportion of the population is ethnic Russian (Hajda, 1998, p. 22). This Russian emotional and historical attachment to Ukraine as a part of its territory was a major barrier in Ukraine’s desire to be independent of Russian control in the 1990s and is still prevalent today.

This Russian emotional attachment to Ukraine was manifested in the disputes over the status of the Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol. When Ukraine declared its independence in 1991 the Crimea and the port of Sevastopol fell into its territory. However the Crimea had originally been part of the Russian Soviet Republic but had been transferred to Ukraine in 1954. As the Crimea had remained majority ethnic Russian (67% estimate in 1998) Russia felt it should be transferred back to them (Hajda, 1998, p. 34). The situation was further complicated with Crimea declaring itself independent of Ukraine in 1992 which encouraged Russian claims to the territory become part of Russia again. Crimea however quickly agreed later in 1992 to become an autonomous part of Ukraine with extensive powers. Russia’s position on Crimea was eventually undermined by the situation in Chechnya, where Russia was fighting a brutal war in order to retain control over a territory which had claimed autonomy from Russia (Hajda, 1998, p. 37). Russia could therefore not be seen to be encouraging the rights separatist regions in one state, while brutally dealing with a separatist region in its own territory.

The Crimean issue was also complicated by issues over the port of Sevastopol and the status of the Black Sea Fleet anchored there. Sevastopol was of critical strategic importance for Russia as it was its only warm water port and was vital in maintaining a presence in the Black Sea. After initially drawing up a joint treaty on Russia and Ukraine having joint command of the fleet, Russia took a hard line on the issue, requesting a lease of Sevastopol for 99 years; however this position was unacceptable to Ukraine and negotiations dragged on. Tensions rose between the governments and in the region until after drawn out negotiations it was agreed in 1997 that the fleet should be partitioned, with Sevastopol being leased to the Russian’s until 2017. The issue of the Black Sea Fleet was a major strain on relations in the early years of Ukrainian independence and it can be said that the continued presence of a large part of the Russian military on Ukrainian territory further undermines Ukrainian sovereignty. This is especially true as the issue of the Russian lease of Sevastopol remained an important political issue.

The normalisation of Ukrainian foreign relations with Russia was formally completed with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Partnership in 1997, although this far from meant Russia would treat Ukraine in a fair and equal way it allowed Ukraine to settle border disputes with Russia and it gave a legal framework for relations between the two countries. With Russia relatively weaker in the period between 1991-200 Ukraine gained more confidence to assert itself more in foreign policy spheres (Feldhusen, 1999, p. 121). This firstly came through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with Ukraine rejecting proposals by Russia for closer integration in military and security spheres between...
CIS members. Russia saw the CIS as a way in which it could lead regional integration with its near abroad and establish some sort of control over the member states. This was recognised by Kuchma and therefore in the period between 1991 and 2000 Ukraine sought more bilateral rather than multilateral relations between members of the CIS (Hajda, 1998, p. 31). Ukraine also sought other alliances in opposition to Russia with other Baltic and Black Sea countries through initiatives such as the Baltic-Black Sea Co-operation Framework, GUUAM and the Central European Initiative (CEI) (Feldhusen, 1999, p. 130). Although many of these initiatives did not develop fully or were successful, the fact that Ukraine was willing to take a lead in organisations such as these based on a more pro-western orientation showed that Kuchma for the most part was willing to take Ukraine in a more pro-western position.

Russo-Ukrainian rapprochement

Despite Kuchma’s pro-western, anti-Russian positioning in the mid to late 1990s, the early 2000s saw a Russo-Ukrainian rapprochement. The rapprochement came about for several reasons, all of which underlie the failures of Kuchma’s foreign policy positioning during this time. Although Kuchma wanted Ukraine to move away from Russia’s geopolitical sphere of influence, he did not carry out the reforms needed to alleviate Ukrainian reliance on Russia, mainly in the economic and energy sector. As problems developed with Kuchma’s plans to integrate into Europe, Kuchma found his foreign policy drawn back towards Russia. Although Kuchma had espoused a willingness and desire for European integration, his rhetoric did not match desire for change (Kuzio, 1997). A newly resurgent Russia, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin provided a more suitable place for Kuchma to pursue Ukraine’s foreign policy interests, especially after a series of corruption scandals surrounding Kuchma had damaged his popularity.

Ukraine still remained heavily reliant on Russia for economic trade and energy and as Kuchma saw that membership of the EU and NATO was not on the table Ukraine moved to a more pro-Russian foreign policy stance. Rapprochement with Russia secured Kuchma’s position domestically and put off issues such as the need for Ukraine to break off from the donor-recipient model of relations with Russia which in the end would undermine Ukraine’s sovereignty and not allow it to break out from the geopolitical grasp of being in Russia’s near abroad (Moshes, 2001, p. 8). By moving back towards Russia in his second term, Kuchma gave up on achieving a geopolitical shift in Ukrainian foreign policy to a more pro-western direction. From 2000 onwards, domestic reform needed to articulate a more coherent foreign policy was put off as Kuchma just tried to secure his position politically. This position has led it to be claimed that Kuchma had a “fake foreign policy” whereby his position on Russia and western issues would be formulated in a pragmatic way which would suit him politically (Kuzio, 2004).

Conclusion

President Kuchma claimed he wanted Ukraine to have a “multi vector” foreign policy with balanced relations between east and west (Schneider and Vondra, 2004). However when he
became disillusioned with the West he turned back to Russia. This meant that although for Kuchma politically in the short term the shift in direction was a success, it put Ukraine back in being able to have a fully independent and balanced foreign policy. The increase in neo-imperialism in Russian foreign policy when Putin came to power meant that although Kuchma’s rhetoric would suggest Ukraine had balanced relations with Russia, this was not the case. The failure to get Ukraine off the Russian energy IV drip meant that by the time Kuchma left office in 2004, Ukraine was still heavily reliant on Russian economic backing. This combined with Russian intentions to strengthen its power over its near abroad left Ukraine at a crossroads in 2004. Although relations with Russia were legally normalised in 1997, the foreign policy of rapprochement with Russia and the failure of domestic reform, as well as a desire of Russia to return to a great power meant that at the end of Kuchma’s tenure, Ukraine remained fully trapped within Russia’s near abroad.

The Orange Revolution and the West

Introduction

The Orange Revolution in late 2004 saw the pro-western Viktor Yushchenko rise to the office of the President in a re-run of the fraudulent second round which had initially seen the pro-Russian, Putin and Kuchma backed Viktor Yanukovych declared winner. As hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians poured onto the streets of Kiev in support of Yushchenko and his populist deputy Yulia Tymoshenko, it seemed that Ukraine was now ready to fully realise its ‘European choice’ after the disappointments and lack of reform during the Kuchma years. However once again Ukrainians were let down, as the Orange coalition which had initially symbolised such hope and unity, failed to bring about the reforms needed to bring about a true shift in geopolitical orientation to the west and away from Russia.

This chapter will address the circumstances surrounding the Orange Revolution, what it promised, and how ultimately Yushchenko failed to orientate Ukraine geopolitically with the West. The reasons for the failure of Yushchenko to shift Ukraine’s geopolitical position west were a result of both international and domestic factors. While during the Kuchma years, European integration had been stifled as a result of the Presidents’ willingness to shift priorities according to his domestic and geopolitical circumstances, after 2004 Ukraine had a President and a coalition in parliament which was ideologically willing to implement the reforms needed to achieve accession into Euro-Atlantic structures. Once in government however, the two main figures of the Orange Revolution, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko, became embroiled in political rows and personal disputes which split the Orange camp between its two main factions, Our Ukraine (the pro-Yushchenko party) and the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc, also known as BYuT. After Tymoshenko was initially sacked in September 2005, another Orange coalition in parliament was not able to be formed until December 2007, by which time radical reforms and European integration was off the table.

Internationally, although the Orange Revolution was welcomed enthusiastically by most of Western Europe, the EU, for several reasons which will be addressed in this chapter, failed to
treat Ukraine on the same level as other Eastern European states who had strived for accession earlier in the decade, such as Bulgaria and Romania. NATO's policy to Ukraine was based on a more ‘open door’ approach than the EU and Ukraine continued to its close cooperation with NATO after the Orange Revolution. However Ukraine disastrously missed its golden chance to be given a Membership Action Plan (MAP) by NATO which it had strived for so long in 2006, again as a result of domestic instability and personal disputes. These factors, combined with a resurgent Russia, pursuing neo-imperial policies in its near abroad and still not fully accepting of Ukrainian sovereignty meant that attempts to orientate Ukraine’s foreign policy westwards ended in failure.

The orange revolution

Before addressing the reasons for Yushchenko and his Orange forces failure to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures and re-orientate Ukraine geopolitically west, the Orange Revolution itself must first be looked at. The Orange Revolution, which was a series of peaceful mass protests during November and December 2004, were a response to the authorities blatant fixing of the second round of the Presidential election, held on 20th November; which was contested by former Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko and the current PM of the time Viktor Yanukovych. Although the Revolution developed out of vote fixing circumstances, the events came to symbolise Ukrainians apparent rejection of the Kuchma era politics and an embrace of Ukraine’s ‘European choice’.

For many the 2004 Presidential election was seen as a contest for Ukraine’s geopolitical orientation (Kuzio, 2006 p. 93). Viktor Yushchenko who had spent a brief, but successful time as Prime Minister between December 1999 and May 2001, based his campaign on his desire for Ukraine to realise its ‘European choice’ by joining both NATO and the European Union. He also ran on his willingness to battle corruption in the political elite and undertake the reforms necessary to realise European integration. The geopolitical orientation of the Yanukovych campaign was symbolised by the endorsement of the Russian President Vladimir Putin. As a Russophile and with his Party of Regions most popular in the East and South of Ukraine where pro-Russian feeling is at its strongest; Yanukovych took up populist positions on things such as promises to upgrade the status of the Russian language in Ukraine, as well as opposition to NATO membership and criticism of US foreign policy (Wilson, 2009 p. 317). As the campaign drew nearer to the first round of voting, in September, Yushchenko suddenly fell ill under mysterious circumstances and had to take almost a month off the election trail. When Yushchenko re-emerged into the public light once again, his appearance had changed dramatically, with his facial features disfigured and bloated as a result of what many (although not all) doctors said had come about from dioxin poisoning. Yushchenko himself claimed he had been poisoned by the government authorities at a dinner with a group of senior Ukrainian officials, although circumstances surrounding the alleged poisoning still remain much of a mystery.

What was not a mystery about the poisoning however was that after the event Yushchenko saw a huge swell of popular support (Wilson, 2009 p. 317). This, combined with mounting popular discontent towards the end of Kuchma’s rule meant the authorities felt they had to fix
the election as they feared prosecution for their corrupt activities if they did not win, as well as a loss of power and influence (Kuzio, 2008 p. 351). There was evidence of electoral fraud in the first round, which took place on the 31st October however it was the authorities and the corrupt election commissions blatant fraud tactics in the second round which began the process of the Orange revolution. As the election commission declared Yanukovych the winner in the second round with 49.5% of the vote to Yushchenko’s 46.6%, an exit poll of 15,000 people had Yushchenko up 53.7% to Yanukovych’s 43.3% (Wilson, 2009 p. 318). The results of these blatant tactics were for hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians to pour onto the streets in protest to what they saw as a stolen election, with an estimated half a million people on the streets of Kiev by November 24th (Wilson, 2009 p. 318). Orange was the adopted colour of the revolution as it was a neutral optimistic colour which could attract a broad constituency of voters (Kuzio, 2008 p. 349).

With the events surrounding the alleged corruption attracting increasing international attention Ukraine’s Supreme Court declared the results of the second round invalid on the 3rd of December and announced a fresh re-run on the 26th of December, breaking the political deadlock. With this announcement Yushchenko agreed a settlement with the authorities on constitutional reform, including giving more power to the parliament, in return for fresh elections. The deal between Yushchenko and the authorities was controversial in several ways as many of his supporters thought that in hindsight by reducing the power of the President, and not pushing for ‘revolutionary justice’ in the aftermath of his victory in the re-run of the second round, Yushchenko underplayed his hand as it meant that many of the perpetrators of the election fraud were not brought to justice (Wilson, 2009 p. 322). With the new elections Yushchenko was declared the winner with 51.2% of the vote.

The Orange Revolution was significant in what could be seen to be a shift by Ukraine geopolitically to the west. The mass demonstrations after the election fraud in the second round showed that Ukraine was developing an increasingly pluralistic civic society which wanted European values such as the respect of the rule of law and democracy to be upheld by their leaders. By holding, albeit belated, free and fair elections in the re-run of the second round, and bringing to power a pro-western reformist President, backed by an ‘Orange coalition’ of parties with similar aims, Ukraine showed signs that it was breaking out of the post-Soviet, Eurasian mould and embracing the path of a more modern Eastern European state (Kuzio, 2008 p. 354). In this way, the revolution symbolised the rejection of the outgoing President Kuchma, whose second term had become increasingly authoritarian after the several ‘tape scandals’ which caused his international isolation. The Orange Revolution also helped to consolidate civic gains such as a more free and open media (Ukraine’s media is seen as one of the freest in Eastern Europe) and three subsequent elections which were declared free and fair. However although the Orange Revolution symbolised the apparent ‘European choice’ of the majority of the Ukrainian people, the event itself cannot be seen as a shift to the west geopolitically as in order to realise Ukraine’s apparent ‘European choice’ vast reforms needed to take place in order to realise this, something the new President Yushchenko struggled to deliver on.
The EU and Ukraine, a lack of interest?

In 2005, Viktor Yushchenko announced an ‘end to multi-vectorism’, thereby rejecting the pragmatic, non-ideological approach of his predecessor President Kuchma and embraced a commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration (Kuzio, 2006 p. 89). This position suggested that under President Yushchenko a clear geopolitical shift to the west could be achieved. Although Yushchenko’s rhetoric suggested Ukraine was changing its geopolitical position and orientating itself more closely with Western Europe, officials in the Euro-Atlantic structures, such as the EU, had heard years of similar rhetoric from Ukraine, but little in the way of action. In this section, the reasons for Yushchenko’s failure to integrate into the European Union are going to be addressed.

The events of the Orange Revolution showed that Ukraine’s democracy and civic society were both maturing. This was underlined by the constitutional changes which were agreed upon between the fraudulent second round and the re-run on the 26th of December. The changes, which were due to come into place in 2006, strengthened the role of the Parliament in Ukraine by making it harder constitutionally for the President to dissolve it, as well as extending the lifetime of the Parliament from four years to five. As a result of these changes, Ukraine was now more inline with the constitutional structures of most of Western Europe which was important for the consolidation of democracy in the country and the possibilities of European integration.

Shortly after Yushchenko declared an end to Ukraine’s ‘multi-vector’ foreign policy, he laid out his wishes for Ukraine-EU cooperation. He wanted: the EU to recognise Ukraine as a market economy (a precondition for EU membership), the EU to support Ukraine in its bid for WTO membership, the EU to upgrade Ukraine from a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) to an Association Agreement and finally for the EU to offer Ukraine membership (Kuzio, 2006 p. 89). Yushchenko got his wish with his first two requests, as both the EU and the US quickly recognised Ukraine as a market economy and Ukraine achieved WTO membership in 2008, significantly ahead of Russia. However on the second two requests the EU dragged its feet as negotiations on an Association Agreement only began in September 2008 and a formal offer of membership was never forthcoming. Despite Ukraine’s desire to realise its ‘European choice’ and pressure from the European Parliament in 2005 which adopted a resolution pressing the Council to consider Ukraine’s accession, the EU failed to back up the democratic gains of the Orange Revolution and put membership on the table (Samokhvalov, 2007 p. 10).

There are several factors in the failure of the EU to offer Ukraine membership in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution. Firstly shortly after the Orange Revolution the EU was in the midst of an institutional crisis after the no votes on the proposed EU constitution by France and the Netherlands. Much of the EU’s time and attention was being dedicated to deciding what to do as the no votes had threatened the future of the European project. This forced the issue of Ukraine off the agenda at a time when it seemed that Ukraine’s leaders had the political will to push through the necessary reforms required for EU membership. The EU was also suffering from enlargement fatigue as 10 countries had been accepted into the
Union in 2004, and with the prospect of membership being granted to Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Turkey, most member states did not want to address the issue of Ukrainian membership, especially after the institutional changes needed to cope with enlargement had been rejected by the French and Dutch referenda. It was unfortunate that Ukraine’s democratic breakthrough came at a time when the EU was going through an identity crisis, with many states calling for deepening rather than widening of the Union (i.e. strengthening the EU’s institutions rather than widening membership).

The EU sought to appease the new regime in Kiev by offering enhanced partnerships and encouraging rhetoric but stayed quiet on the issue of membership (Kuzio, 2006 p. 95). Despite the institutional and enlargement fatigue factors which combined to mean that Ukraine was not offered membership to the EU soon after the Orange Revolution, an issue still remains over EU double standards. Although tough reforms were still necessary in order for Ukraine to meet EU entry requirement needs, Ukraine had a democracy and a market economy far more advanced than both Romania and Bulgaria in the late 1990s when the EU put them on course to membership (Kuzio, 2009 p. 352). This combined with the fact that Ukraine had begun the implementation of domestic reforms, such as liberalising the flow of foreign and capital investments and aligning its policies with international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, without receiving a positive sign from the EU on membership gave Ukraine the feeling that it was not fitting in whatever it did, undermining the reform process (Trofimenko, 2006 p. 46).

A clear sign from the EU on the possibility of membership would have strengthened Ukrainian elite’s desire for reform of both the economy and the political system (Kuzio, 2006 p. 106). While it can be said that Yushchenko and Tymoshenko were committed to reform, as their time as PM and deputy PM had shown, the Ukrainian political system was still gripped with insider interests and corruption. Yushchenko often talked about how Ukraine’s ‘shadow economy’ cost the state billions in uncollected tax revenues which as a result of shady dealings and corruption, allowed individuals to work outside the law. Many of the officials who had played a part in these actions had survived from the Kuchma era and untangling the complicated nature of these dealings and the persons involved required lots of political will and tenacity. Without the carrot of EU membership driving them forward it was harder for Ukraine’s elites to justify pursuing the tough reforms necessary to allay some of Ukraine’s structural economic problems. While the EU cannot be blamed completely for Ukraine’s failure to reform after the Orange Revolution, the lack of encouragement from Brussels meant that the reform process slowed down.

**NATO and Ukraine: missed opportunity**

Since the signing of the Ukraine-NATO charter in 1997, Ukraine has cooperated closely with its member states, often to the annoyance of Russia. After the Orange Revolution, the prospect that Ukraine might join NATO in the near future seemed real as NATO, unlike the EU, had an ‘open door’ policy towards membership. After a successful visit by Yushchenko to Washington in April 2005, NATO upgraded Ukraine to Intensified Dialogue on Membership, a step away from a Membership Action Plan (MAP) which would have seen
Ukraine put on the road to NATO membership. Ahead of the NATO Riga summit, which was planned for November 2006, Ukraine had a real prospect of being invited into MAP, so long as free and fair elections were held in the parliamentary elections, and a pro-reform Orange coalition was returned to government (Kuzio, 2006 p. 205).

There were problems in the Orange coalition however as since the Orange Revolution and Yushchenko’s inauguration, where Tymoshenko had become Ukraine’s first woman Prime Minister, relations between the two had deteriorated. Yushchenko initially sacked Tymoshenko and her government in September 2005, after he became dissatisfied with her coalition governments inability to work together and implement reforms. It was Yushchenko however who undermined his objective of joining NATO when after the elections to the Ukrainian Parliament in March 2006 Yushchenko initially rejected the prospect of an Orange coalition in parliament as he did not want to see Tymoshenko become Prime Minister again. As a result a pro-reform government was not able to be formed and an ‘anti crisis’ government, lead by Yushchenko’s rival of the 2004 Presidential campaign, Viktor Yanukovych formed instead. The forming of an ‘anti-crisis’ government, made up of parties which were pro-Russian and hostile to the idea of NATO membership meant that at the NATO Riga summit in November 2006, Ukraine was not invited to into Membership action Plan, which it was expected to be. This disastrous decision by Yushchenko completely undermined his pro-West agenda. If Ukraine had gained a MAP in 2006, this would have been real evidence that the Orange Revolution and the values which it stood for were beginning to pay off. Gaining a MAP in 2006 would have shown the rest of the world, especially the EU, that Ukraine was serious about integrating into Euro-Atlantic structures and could have even put the issue of membership of the EU back on the agenda as membership of NATO is seen as a precondition of membership of the EU.

Yushchenko’s decision not to immediately accept Tymoshenko’s return as PM at the head of an Orange coalition government was even more disastrous as NATO’s once ‘open door’ policy had now been slammed shut. NATO states such as the US and Germany have in recent years tried to repair their relationship with Russia, especially along economic lines, and part of this has meant not antagonising Moscow over the prospect of Ukraine joining NATO. At the NATO summit in Bucharest 2008, member states opposed granting Ukraine a MAP on the grounds of political instability and low public support (Kuzio, 2009 p. 353). It was this political instability which Yushchenko was partly to blame for fostering, as rejecting a Tymoshenko government in 2006 on the grounds of their personal disputes meant that a pro-reform government was not able to be formed at a crucial time for Ukraine.

Conclusion

The failure of Yushchenko to integrate fully into Euro-Atlantic structures in the years after the Orange Revolution meant that he was not able to provide a real geopolitical shift in Ukrainian foreign policy. The hope and optimism that followed the Orange Revolution was quickly dampened as the two main players, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko, fell out with each other, causing the Orange coalition in parliament to break up. As the EU, with its institutional problems at the time, failed to offer Ukraine membership; Yushchenko also missed the
change to gain a MAP from NATO. The failure of Yushchenko to deliver on his programme of integration and reform meant that Ukraine became increasingly open to Russian influence, something which will be addressed in the next chapter. As Ukraine slipped away from Western integration, it once again became stuck between east and west, as Russia sought to tighten its grip in its near abroad.

Ukrainian-Russian relations after 2004

Introduction

When Kuchma became isolated from the west and European integration into his second term as President, he decided to turn to Russia in order to find support for his regime internationally. This was not the case with Yushchenko as throughout his Presidency relations with near neighbours Russia hit rock bottom over issues such as gas, Georgia and NATO to name a few. While Kuchma had used his ‘multi-vector’ foreign policy in order to swing between east and west when it was politically convenient for him, Yushchenko’s pro-Western positions meant that he had few friends inside the Kremlin, even before he came to power. This chapter will look at what influence Russia had on the Orange revolution and Yushchenko’s presidency and how Russia’s influence on Ukraine, both internationally and domestically influenced Ukraine’s geopolitical position. An increasingly neo-imperial Russia after 2004 meant that Ukrainian attempts to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures were stifled by western worries of damaging their relations with Russia over the issue of possible Ukrainian membership of NATO and the EU. By being aggressive in its near abroad, Russia was able to influence Ukraine’s geopolitical position by making it harder for it to turn west, thereby keeping Ukraine geopolitically in Russia’s sphere of influence. Russia also sought to pursue its interests within Ukraine through support for the Party of Regions, headed by Viktor Yanukovych, which had its powerbase in eastern Ukraine which is mainly pro-Russian.

Ukrainian-relations, a turbulent period

Before the Orange Revolution, Russia had hoped for a continuation of the Kuchma regime with a Moscow friendly President in power in Kiev. As a result, Russia tried to influence the 2004 Presidential election by backing the Party of Regions leader Viktor Yanukovych who was seen as someone who would carry on Kuchma-like policies of sticking close to Russia and not vastly reforming Ukraine’s economy or political system. Although a rapprochement had taken place between Moscow and Kiev during Kuchma’s second term, after the turbulent relations in the 1990s, the fact that Russia heavily intervened in the 2004 elections showed that Russia still did not fully respect Ukrainian sovereignty. The Russian media attacked Yushchenko as anti-Russian during the campaign and Russian officials and money were sent to support Yanukovych’s candidacy (Kuzio, 2008 p. 364). As well as this, President Putin made several appearances with Yanukovych in a bid to show his support.
The fact that the Orange Revolution occurred and the pro-Western Yushchenko became President was a major policy failure for Russia. Russia has still not fully come to terms with Ukrainian independence and as a result, Moscow seeks to keep Ukraine tightly in its sphere of influence (Kuzio, 2009 p. 360). At the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit, Putin described Ukraine as an artificial state, a country which had received large amounts of its territory from Russia and therefore had little moral right to control that territory (Kuzio, 2009 p. 360). The fact that after the Orange Revolution, Ukraine had a pro-Western President who wanted Ukraine to move westwards geopolitically and ascend into Euro-Atlantic structures meant that Russia faced the prospect of Ukraine moving out of Moscow’s sphere of influence, something which was unacceptable to the Russian leadership and much of its population. As a result, the Kremlin moved to step up its desire for influence over Ukraine, which with a pro-Western President was to the detriment to Ukrainian-Russian relations.

One of the ways in which Russia gains influence over Ukraine is through playing ‘pipeline politics’. Ukraine is heavily dependent on energy from Russia, especially gas. Ukraine’s energy dependency on Russia has become an important strategic weakness for Ukraine as Russia has increasingly used the state owned gas giant Gazprom as a tool for its foreign policy (Samokhvalov, 2007 p. 16). Russia has frequently used this control of gas and oil for political purposes, most notably in 2006 and 2009 when Russia twice stopped the supply of gas in order to force Ukraine’s hand on paying increased prices and unpaid fees. However Ukraine has also used its geostrategic position as a transit country for Russian gas to Europe (Russia relies on Ukraine to transit 80% of its gas to Europe) as a bargaining tool in order to gain concessions on cheaper gas from Russia (Samokhvalov, 2007 p. 17). This has not stopped Russia from playing ‘pipeline politics’ in recent years however as Moscow has often undermined its business interests with the EU in the pursuit of political leverage over Kiev (Samokhvalov, 2007 p. 17).

The January 2006 gas crisis was the first major flashpoint in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine gas rows since the Orange Revolution. Just months before the elections to the Ukrainian parliament were due to be held, and after the two countries had seemingly agreed a deal for Ukraine to pay $53 per 1000m3 of gas, Russia pulled the plug on Ukraine, demanding instead $230 per 1000m3. The timing of the move was blatantly a political attempt to increase support for Yanukovych’s Party of Regions, who claimed that they were in the best position to negotiate a fair price for Ukraine (Wilson, 2009 p. 329). The disruption to gas supplies only lasted a few days, therefore not effecting EU states down stream too badly, with Russia and Ukraine agreeing a price of $95 per 1000m3 for 2006. Such a move by Moscow however, showed the more aggressive approach to gaining influence over its near abroad the Kremlin was now taking, with the Russian PM Mikhail Fradkov stating that the agreed price would not change in 2007 so long as Ukraine considered Russian interests in its relations with NATO and the EU in future (Samokhvalov, 2007 p. 18).

The deal put together in 2006 was not an end to Russian-Ukrainian gas disputes however, as in 2009 the situation boiled over again, this time with more far reaching consequences. On the 1st of January, Russia reduced the supply of gas to Ukraine, stating that customers in
countries downstream would not be affected. However on the 7th January the situation escalated and Russia cut off all supplies of gas to Ukraine, claiming that it had been siphoning off gas in order to keep supplies up. (Wilson, 2009 p. 339). As Gazprom and the Ukrainian state energy company Naftogaz argued over who owed what in transit fees and supply payments for several weeks, much of southeast Europe, including many EU states began suffering major shortages in gas supplies. Hundreds of thousands of homes went unheated, with EU states Bulgaria and Slovakia especially affected as temperatures plummeted to minus 20 degrees centigrade in some places (Wilson, 2009 p. 339). The protracted length of the crisis (it lasted from the 1st to the 20th of January) meant that both Russia and Ukraine drew criticism from the EU as pressure increased for both sides to come to an agreement. The view of many states that were affected by the dispute was that both Russia and Ukraine were being selfish by allowing their dispute to spill over into the rest of eastern and south-eastern Europe where many countries relied heavily on imported gas from Russia (Wilson, 2009 p. 339).

As Prime Ministers Putin and Tymoshenko came to an agreement to end the crisis on the 18th of January, with full supplies re-starting on the 20th of January, it was clear that both sides had been damaged as a result of the crisis. For Russia, it showed Moscow’s willingness to play pipeline politics in order to gain political leverage. Many suggested that Russia had set off the dispute in order to show Western European states and the EU of Ukraine’s unreliability as a potential political and economic partner, therefore driving them geopolitically away from Ukraine and allowing Russia more influence in its near abroad. The dispute did harm Russia’s image as a viable business partner in the west however, as energy security and a desire to diversify energy sources and providers became increasingly important to the EU after the Russia-Ukraine gas rows. This effect will not of have been of too much concern to Moscow however as even if Russia is slightly isolated from the EU, as long as Ukraine is seen as even less of a viable partner for the EU this works to Russian strategic interests as it undermines Yushchenko’s vision of western orientation for Ukraine and increases Russia’s political influence over Kiev. The increasing interlocking nature of Russian and EU policies towards Ukraine means that any developments in relations affect all three parties (Samokhvalov, 2007 p. 10). This has meant that as EU and NATO member states have become increasingly concerned about not damaging their economic and political relations with Moscow post-2004 Ukraine, after the initial hope of the Orange Revolution has become isolated from Europe and this has damaged any attempt to geopolitically shift westwards.

Apart from the 2006 and 2009 gas disputes, the Russian intervention in Georgia in the summer of 2008 was one of the main fissures in Russian-Ukrainian relations during Yushchenko’s presidency. The conflict which occurred between Russia and Georgia in the summer of 2008 over the breakaway Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia which came under de-facto Russian control bitterly divided Ukraine’s elites. Not only did the issue split the Ukrainian parliament between pro-Georgia and pro-Russia blocs, it also split the Orange coalition as President Yushchenko took a strong pro-Georgia line, while BYuT leader Tymoshenko took a more cautious pragmatic position which supported Georgia’s territorial
integrity but largely backed EU mediation efforts (Kuzio, 2009 p. 364). Party of Regions leader Viktor Yanukovych took the most pro-Russian line. Yushchenko and his Our Ukraine party took the most radical pro-Georgia line throughout the conflict.

Yushchenko and Georgia’s President, Mikheil Saakashvili have a close relationship, and they kept in regular contact throughout the crisis. Saakashvili, like Yushchenko has lead a ‘colour revolution’, known as the Rose Revolution in 2003, an event seen by many as an inspiration to the Orange Revolution protesters. Both Presidents have since tried to take their countries on similar pro-western paths, including a desire to join NATO. Yushchenko’s strong anti-Russian line damaged his popularity however. Many Ukrainians felt his ideological position was not in Ukraine’s national interests and that Russian-Ukrainian relations needed improving not damaging further (Kuzio, 2009 p. 364). One poll during the crisis showed that Yushchenko’s support had dropped to 5% at one point (Kuzio, 2009 p. 364). Yushchenko inflamed tensions further when he issued a decree demanding Russian Black Sea Fleet vessels give notice of their itinerates when leaving Sevastopol (Kuzio, 2009 p. 364). This decree was significant as by trying to interfere in Russia’s Black Sea Fleets operations, Yushchenko antagonised the Russian leadership, further damaging relations and also inflaming tensions in Crimea, a region where Russia has a major influence.

While the Party of Regions blamed Georgia entirely for the conflict, Tymoshenko took a more pragmatic approach, supporting Georgian sovereignty, while accusing Yushchenko of fanning nationalist flames at a time when calm and mediation was needed (Kuzio, 2009 p. 364). Tymoshenko’s pragmatic approach was mainly for her own political gains as it distanced herself from the ever increasingly unpopular Yushchenko and made her appear more of a serious figure, something which would help her in developing relations with Moscow (during the 2009 gas crisis, Russia refused to negotiate with Yushchenko and preferred Tymoshenko) (Kuzio, 2009 p. 365).

The 2008 Georgia crisis showed the extent to which Ukrainian relations with Russia had deteriorated since the Orange Revolution. After the Russian intervention in Georgia, many analysts started to wonder whether Ukraine was next inline. Russia was now in a stronger position to pursue Crimean separatist claims than it was in the 1990s when it had its own problems with Chechnya and with Yushchenko’s refusal to renew the Russian’s lease for the port of Sevastopol which was due to expire in 2017, it seemed possible that Russian military action in Crimea could happen. The crisis also put off any hopes, however small by now, of Ukraine possibly joining NATO. The weak and un-coordinated action of NATO and the EU showed a lack of will to stand up to Russia in its near abroad. The idea that Ukraine could join NATO, with the issue of Crimea looming large and after Russia had so strongly ‘shown its teeth’ in its near abroad against Georgia now seemed unlikely. Russia had demonstrated again, that by showing NATO and the EU that it sees the post-Soviet space as its near abroad it could put off their desire to strongly push for Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration.

In the years after the Orange Revolution, Russian-Ukrainian relations were marked by turbulent events such as the gas crises and the Russia-Georgia war. These events showed the increasing willingness Moscow had in flexing its political muscle in what it perceives as its
near abroad. The failure of Yushchenko to integrate with the west, combined with his anti-Russian sentiment damaged Ukraine’s relations with Russia. As a result, Moscow was increasingly willing to use the methods at its disposal to undermine Yushchenko and therefore stop Ukraine from trying to move out of Russia’s near abroad.

**Conclusion**

The Orange Revolution did not manage to change Ukraine’s geopolitical position regarding Russia and the West. The post-independence years before the Orange Revolution were dominated by President Kuchma’s ‘multi-vector’ foreign policy, which sought to balance relations between Russia and the West. However all this meant was that Ukraine was geopolitically stuck between east and west, veering one way and then another, depending on what was geopolitically convenient for President Kuchma at the time. The fact that Kuchma’s rhetoric of European integration was not backed up by an ideological commitment to the reforms which would have been necessary in order to enter Euro-Atlantic structures meant than in the end, Kuchma ended up more pro-Russian than pro-Western.

The Orange Revolution in 2004 seemed to represent the break with the old Kuchma regime. With President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Tymoshenko, Ukraine seemed to have two people who were both ideologically committed to undertaking the reforms necessary to integrate Ukraine into the EU and NATO, and therefore orientate Ukraine geopolitically with the west. However they were unable to achieve this. Ukraine missed its best chance to join NATO in 2006 when at the Riga summit; member states would have granted Ukraine a MAP, putting them on course to NATO membership. The failure to form an Orange coalition in parliament months before the summit, due to Yushchenko’s unwillingness to see Tymoshenko return as Prime Minister, meant that this opportunity was missed, and showed how Yushchenko was willing to let personal rivalries get in the way of long term strategic aims. The unwillingness of the EU to entice Ukraine with the real prospect of EU membership meant that Ukraine was not able to make great strides forward towards European integration during Yushchenko’s presidency.

**Future prospects**

Yushchenko’s failure became complete when he failed to make it to the second round of voting in the 2010 Ukrainian Presidential election. The contest, won by Viktor Yanukovych who defeated Tymoshenko, symbolises the unravelling of the gains of the Orange Revolution. The failure to orientate Ukraine geopolitically with the West, has meant that just 6 years on from when the government authorities tried to fix the election for him, the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych is now President of Ukraine. The failure of the Orange Revolution to change Ukraine’s geopolitical position westwards has meant that to an extent, Russia has been able to reinforce its influence over Ukraine. The recent renewal of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet lease by Yanukovych shows that Russian influence in Ukraine is here to stay. Although better relations between Ukraine and Russia will benefit regional security, Russia will also still push for its strategic interests in the region. Russia has not come to terms with
losing Ukraine, and there are many people in the Russian leadership who still wish for Ukraine to be part of Russia. This means that even if relations with Kiev are good, Russia will still seek to extend its influence over Ukraine in areas such as energy and the economy. This is already coming to fruition as the state owned Russian energy giant Gazprom is currently in talks over a merger with the Ukrainian energy company Naftogaz. Such a move would give Gazprom control over much of Ukraine’s gas pipeline system, and therefore another way for Moscow to play pipeline politics.

The only way in which Ukraine can break out of Russia’s geopolitical near abroad is for it to integrate fully with the west. Yanukovych talks of balanced relations with the West and with Russia, however Ukraine will never have equal relations with Russia when it is in such a weak position. Moscow will always seek to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty, whether it is through the continuing presence of the Russian navy at Sevastopol, or the desire to control Ukraine’s national pipeline infrastructure. The only way for Ukraine to complete its independence and become fully sovereign, is to geopolitically move away from Russia and join with the West. Such a move would not be easy, and is unlikely to occur under Yanukovych, but it is the only way for Ukraine to move out of Russia’s near abroad, and realise its European choice.

Bibliography


