Rose, Orange, and Tulip: The failed post-Soviet revolutions

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Abstract

In 2003–2005, democratic revolutions overthrew the Georgian, Ukrainian, and Kyrgyz post-Soviet authoritarian regimes. However, disillusioned citizens witness today their new leaders creating a Bonapartist regime, entering into open conflict with former revolutionary allies or being forced to accept cohabitation with leaders of the previous regime. This article argues that despite internationally acclaimed civic mobilisation, civil society’s weakness seriously affected the three revolutionary processes. These were in fact initiated, led, controlled, and finally subordinated by former members of the authoritarian regimes’ political elite. Finally, the supposedly democratic revolutions proved to be little more than a limited rotation of ruling elites within undemocratic political systems.

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Introduction

In 2003–2005, the Commonwealth of Independent States faced, for the first time in its history, a wave of democratic revolutions. Following almost identical patterns,
Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan overthrew their (moderately) authoritarian leaders in what came to be known as the Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions, respectively. This development was paralleled to the 1996–1998 end of neo-Communist or ultra-nationalist regimes in Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. The democratic, pro-Western political forces now in power in Tbilisi, Kyiv, and Bishkek were expected to create genuinely democratic political systems, reform state structures, fight corruption, and improve socio-economic conditions. The three countries would join the Western democratic community, encouraging further diffusion of democracy in other post-Soviet republics.

This latter hope had to be soon abandoned as the brutal suppression of the May 2005 Andijan protest, in Uzbekistan, showed that strongly authoritarian regimes in the region have the capacity and political will to eliminate democratic trends. Furthermore, democracy soon faced serious difficulties in the three “revolutionary” countries themselves. Previous regimes’ non-democratic patterns resurfaced. The rule of law, state reform, and fight against corruption remained lettre morte. It became progressively clear that the revolutions had been hijacked by former protégés of the deposed dictators that paid only lip service to democracy. Popular enthusiasm was replaced by disillusionment as the new leaders created a Bonapartist regime (Georgia), entered into open conflict with former revolutionary allies (Kyrgyzstan) or had to openly accept cohabitation with leaders of the former authoritarian regime (Ukraine).

All three failures have a common cause: weakness of the civil society. It is true that civic activists had an important contribution to the mass mobilization that made possible the Georgian and Ukrainian revolutions. Nevertheless, the civil society did not play the dominant role. Instead, it only helped aggregate a protest movement initiated, led, controlled, and finally subordinated by former members of the authoritarian regime’s political elite. Despite appearances, the three revolutions were in fact the expression of a struggle for power within the ruling elite, which could not allow a civil society-driven democratization process. This is why the Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions are nothing more than failed revolutions.

This article analyzes the dynamics that led to the final failure of the three revolutionary processes. The next section explores the present concept of revolution, emphasizing the recent shift from class/violence/“anti-reactionary” aspects to mass civil disobedience and/or electoral process. Sections 3–5 depict the Georgian, Ukrainian, and Kyrgyz revolutions’ very similar trajectories, from the crisis of the anciens régimes to the present clearly non-democratic trends. Section 6 makes a comparative analysis of the three revolutionary processes, identifying structural causes that finally contributed to their failure. Section 7 summarizes the article’s main findings.

**The concept of revolution**

The concept of revolution is today more contested than it might seem. Seventeen years ago, the fall of Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe discredited Marxism as the main anti-Western ideology (except in places like Latin America or
Nepal). Or, it was Marx’s view that revolutions are “the locomotives of history.” Consequently, revolution itself started to be considered an outdated concept.

An increasing body of recent literature has argued that the age of revolution is over or even that the concept of revolution is obsolete. Current concepts of revolution may well be obsolete, but this does not necessarily imply that revolution properly understood has no future (Paige, 2003: 19).

Indeed, classical definitions of revolution do not seem to apply to the current situation. For Theda Skocpol, the revolution is “a rapid, basic transformation of a society’s state and class structure, accompanied, and in part carried through by class based revolts from below” (Skocpol, 1979: 4). Anthony Giddens speaks of “the seizure of state power through violent means by the leaders of a mass movement, where that power is subsequently used to initiate major processes of social reforms” (Giddens, 1989: 605). But class and violence are less and less present in recent revolutionary phenomena. Today, many analysts insist on the “democratic, non-violent roots of past and future revolutions.” Violence is often replaced by mass civil disobedience (Iran 1979; Eastern Europe 1989; Indonesia, Serbia and South Africa in the 1990s) or even by electoral paths (Chile under Allende, post-1994 Chiapas, El Salvador since 1992) (Foran, 2003: 9).

For a specialist in Central European anti-Communist revolutions, Timothy Garton Ash, their most important characteristic was “the increasing blurring of the line between reform and revolution.” This allows him to speak of “a non-revolutionary revolution” he calls “refolution” or “revelection:"

These largely urban events combine an insistence on non-violence (…) with the creative use of civil disobedience guided by an opposition elite, calculated pleas to world public opinion through the use of electronic media, attention and pressure form the outside world, and ‘a readiness to negotiate with power holders while refusing to be coopted’ (Farhi, 2003: 31).

This pattern might have generalized only recently, but it is by no means new. One should remember Mussolini’s March on Rome and the Nazis’ winning of democratic elections. They clearly fall in the category of “refolution” or “revelection.” Ironically, it is the ideological apparatus of such movements which provides a definition of the revolution more appropriate to present realities than Skocpol’s class-based approach. One can even quote the craftsman of the most controversial self-proclaimed revolution in the history of humankind, Adolf Hitler. In a speech delivered on March 19, 1934, he claimed that “the victory of a party is a change of government; the victory of a world view [Weltanschauung] is a revolution, which transforms the conditions of a nation profoundly and in its essence” (Domarus quoted by Noakes, 2001: 91).

A more elaborate but similar definition has been recently formulated by Jeffery Paige:

A revolution is a rapid and fundamental transformation in the categories of social life and consciousness, the metaphysical assumptions on which these
categories are based, and the power relations in which they are expressed as a result of widespread popular acceptance of an utopian alternative to the current social order (Paige, 2003: 24).

This seems to capture the essence of recent and, hopefully, future revolutionary processes. However, the clear connection to Hitler’s definition is not void of consequences. The most important one concerns the type of movement that may be considered a revolution. Already in 1934, Pierre Lucius analyzed in his book Révolutions du XXe siècle three such historical enterprises: Lenin’s, Mussolini’s, and Hitler’s. In this, he joined the latter’s opinion. Noakes (2001) is only one of recent authors equally studying “The Nazi Revolution.” But no Bolshevik would have accepted that Nazism is “revolutionary.” With different actors and examples, the debate still goes on. Some claim that:

- It is important to define revolutions as mass-based emancipatory movements that bring about economic, political and cultural development. Such a definition—which situates revolution in the Enlightenment and Marxist traditions—excludes reactionary or terrorist movements. The Taliban are/were not revolutionaries; they were counterrevolutionaries (...). By no means can Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda be called revolutionaries. Nor can the Khmer Rouge, Sendero Luminoso, UNITA, Renamo, the Lord’s Resistance Army, GIA, or any other fascistic or terrorist organization or movement devoid of an emancipatory or egalitarian social and political program (communication from Valentine Moghadam quoted by Foran, 2003: 15).

Even the anti-Communist 1989 revolutions are sometimes called “the anti-revolutionary revolutions” (Sakwa, 2001).

In response, commenting on labeling of the Zapatistas as revolutionary because they are progressive and of the Talibans as counterrevolutionaries because they are reactionary (as they “reject social equality as a value”), Karen Kampwirth notes that:

- this objection is problematic, for it often means that movements are labeled revolutionary if the analyst finds their goals palatable, or counterrevolutionary if those goals are distasteful. (...) I think we have to identify the Taliban as revolutionary as well, no matter how repugnant we find them (Kampwirth, 2003: 239).

In fact, the 1979 “Iranian Islamic Revolution” is rarely denied this name. And, if one accepts Paige’s (and, with that, Hitler’s) definition, it is difficult to argue that Talibans and Zapatistas do not fall in the same category. Consequently, the present concept of revolution can be considered as having little or no relation with class, violence or “anti-reactionary” orientation. Rather, it concerns a change of Weltanschauung caused by a major political regime change. Its most likely instruments are mass civil disobedience and/or electoral process.

However, this does not mean that all regime changes with a revolutionary discourse really represent a revolution, even if they include mass civil disobedience.
and succeed in overthrowing a dictator. Structures of the former regime may survive under the protection and leadership of a part of the previously ruling elite. It is not infrequent that members of an authoritarian regime develop confrontational relations with the dictator, join the opposition, and help overthrow the leader they had served. This can be done with massive popular support and under a revolutionary label. Still, it might simply represent a change within the previous regime and not a genuine revolution.

The critical element which should be taken into consideration is the effective “world view” transformation. A “revolution” should not be examined only under its spectacular, immediate consequences. Rather, a medium-term perspective should be adopted in order to evaluate correctly the nature and depth of the change. If the new regime reproduces too many of the views, attitudes, and practices of the previous one it is clear that no real revolution has taken place. It is in this perspective that next sections analyze the three post-soviet revolutions of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan.

**Georgia’s Rose Revolution (2003)**

**Georgia under Shevardnadze**

To the West, Eduard Amvrosiyevich Shevardnadze was known as Gorbachev’s foreign minister and one of the Soviet architects of Cold War’s end. However, from 1972 to 1985 he had been first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party and, as such, “a powerful autocrat running his own fiefdom in a remote corner of the Soviet empire” (Mitchell, 2004: 348). In 1993 he took back his job and ruled the newly independent Republic of Georgia for a decade.

In fact, the country was little more than a failed state. Nearly 20 percent of its territory was beyond the central government’s control. Abkhazia and South Osetia had seceded under Russian protection. Adjaria was controlled by its local potentate, Aslan Abashidze, who ignored central institutions and laws. To the South, the Armenian region of Javakheti was more closely integrated into neighboring Armenia than into Georgia (Jones, 2006: 45; King, 2004: 15). Since independence, the country has been under constant pressure from Russia. Various instruments—including support for secessionist regions, presence of military bases, and control of gas supplies—were systematically used in order to maintain Tbilisi inside the Russian sphere of influence (Larsson, 2004; King, 2004).

Furthermore, the socio-economic situation was (and remains) disastrous. Even in the capital, electricity or running water shortages were frequent. Georgia’s per capita national income was lower than that of Swaziland. More than half of the population lives below the poverty line (King, 2004: 15).

Under Shevardnadze, Georgia devolved into a “weak kleptocracy” (Mitchell, 2004: 348), enduring a decade of “chaos, poverty and fragmentation” (Jones, 2006: 39). Corruption became rampant. Government officials misappropriated international aid or helped sell off state industries to their associates. Off-the-record deals...
were said to account for 60–70 percent of the country’s total economic activity (King, 2004: 16). The state could not deliver basic services, repair the crumbling infrastructure, enforce the law, or collect taxes (Mitchell, 2004: 348).

Nobody denies that Shevardnadze was a brilliant politician who “knew how to make political deals, allow political freedoms, use cronyism and corruption, and do whatever was necessary to stay in power” (Mitchell, 2004: 343). Unlike other Commonwealth of Independent States leaders, he allowed political pluralism as well as the development of a relatively open society (vide infra). Still, he has never been a real democrat. He was unwilling to break the Soviet pattern of “personal rule, political corruption, and authoritarianism embedded in an essentially unbroken post-Soviet tradition of cadre politics” (Jones, 2006: 39). Progressively, his non-democratic methods became more and more visible. In April 2000, when he was reelected president with 79.8 percent of the vote, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe—which had monitored the electoral process—diplomatically declared the election “not in full accordance with the law” (Jones, 2006: 40).

In fact, it was Shevardnadze’s international prestige that helped conceal his authoritarian trends to the outer world. His pro-Western foreign policy also contributed to Western and especially American lack of criticism. Georgia’s participation was essential for the building of the US-supported Baku—Tbilisi—Ceyhan pipeline, the only major conduit beyond Moscow’s control allowing the transit of Caspian oil to the world markets (King, 2004: 15). As Georgia desperately needed a counterweight to Russian pressure, Washington provided political support, economic aid, and, after September 11, military assistance. In March 2002 the US announced a new $64 million program of military assistance in the Southern Caucasus. It included the Georgian Train & Equip Program, providing specialized counter-terrorism training for 2000 elite Georgian troops under the direct control of the US Marine Corps (Giragosian, 2004: 57). Geopolitical interest clearly had preeminence over considerations for democracy.

Nevertheless, things started to change inside Georgia. After the 2000 reelection, both Shevardnadze and his party, the Citizens Union of Georgia, appeared to be at the height of their strength. However, their political support soon began to erode. Dissension within the party led to the defection of important figures: Zurab Zhvania, the speaker of Parliament, in 2001; Mikhail Saakashvili, the justice minister, in 2002; and the new speaker of Parliament, Nino Burjanadze, in 2003 (Mitchell, 2004: 343). Still, Shevardnadze did not seem to realize the danger. In fact, he “began to regard himself as a patriarch, distant, wise, a mediator of conflicts among contending opponents” (Jones, 2006: 40). But his party’s severe defeat in the 2002 local elections (especially in the capital) forced him to come back to reality. He started to make serious efforts in order to rebuild the party before the November 2003 parliamentary elections, which were seen as a test before the April 2005 presidential election. However, Shevardnadze’s popularity had vanished. He was supported by about five percent of the electorate (Fairbanks, 2004: 113). Furthermore, the wave of defections had seriously affected the quality of his advisers. He was now surrounded by “a circle of his most corrupt and desperate supporters”
(Fairbanks, 2004: 119) whose influence clearly prevented him from correctly evaluating Georgia’s new political landscape:

> The only people left around Shevardnadze by late 2003 were corrupt officials like Levan Mamaladze and bitter politicians like Irina Sarashvili-Chanturia. None of these people could — or wanted to — explain to Shevardnadze just how weak he was (Mitchell, 2004: 348).

This explains why the previously astute and resourceful Shevardnadze led his regime to political suicide.

**The Rose Revolution**

The campaign for the parliamentary elections of November 2, 2003 was dominated by the rise and temporary association of personality-based opposition parties. Mikhail Saakashvili, the 36-year-old former Manhattan attorney with a law degree from Columbia University (and Shevardnadze’s former justice minister) led the New National Movement. Another grouping was formed around two more former protégés of the president, Zurab Zhvania and Nino Burjanadze (the latter being, at that time, Georgia’s single most popular politician). The Labor Party of Shalva Natelashvili also opposed the government, but did not associate with other parties. Both Saakashvili and Natelashvili “often evoked nationalist themes and made promises which could never be kept given budgetary realities.” Nevertheless, Saakashvili’s eloquence and skill at appealing across social lines helped him attract popular support (Fairbanks, 2004: 114). Combined with Shevardnadze’s miscalculations and lack of popularity, this could only have led to the opposition’s landslide victory.

Therefore, it was not difficult to foresee that irregularities of the 2000 presidential election would be repeated. However, nobody was prepared for the scale of the new fraud. It was reported that voting was marked by rampant ballot stuffing, multiple voting, late poll openings, ballots not being delivered to some polling places, and voter lists that included dead people but excluded thousands of live voters. The scale of the fraud was even higher during the counting of the votes. The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy conducted a parallel vote and turnout tabulation. An exit poll funded by NGOs was also conducted. Both showed that Saakashvili’s National Movement was the election’s clear winner, thus contradicting official results (Mitchell, 2004: 343).

Consequently, the opposition refused to accept the election’s official outcome. It began a vigil in front of the Parliament building, reuniting for nine days 500 to 5000 demonstrators. On November 14, the biggest demonstration up to that time mobilized 20,000 people. Still, tensions between rival opposition groups remained strong. While Saakashvili called for the president’s resignation, the Burjanadze Democrats initially demanded only new elections. The Labor and New Rights, on another hand, opposed the demonstrations from the start (a very costly mistake, as it would later become clear) (Mitchell, 2004: 343–344).

It seems that Shevardnadze intended to use force to disrupt demonstrations. But an internal split within the repressive apparatus (army, police, and presidential
guards) and the memory of Soviet troops’ 1989 attack of civilians in Tbilisi made this solution unworkable (Fairbanks, 2004: 117). Instead, the president appealed to Adjaria’s strong man, the secessionist Aslan Abashidze, who sent his supporters to organize a counter-demonstration in front of the Parliament. This action backfired, as Shevardnadze was seen as relying on Georgia’s very enemy (Mitchell, 2004: 344). Tensions were exacerbated on November 20 when the final official results were released and the composition of the new Parliament was announced. On November 22, as Shevardnadze was formally opening the new legislative session, protesters peacefully took over the building of the Parliament, some handing out roses to the police. Saakashvili led the crowd into the chamber and disrupted the session. Shevardnadze’s bodyguards hustled him out of the building, unfinished speech in hand (Fairbanks, 2004: 117; King, 2004: 13). The president immediately declared a state of emergency. But the next day he received in his office opposition leaders Mikhail Saakashvili and Zurab Zhvania (to whom, three days earlier, he had referred as “his children”) and handed them his resignation letter (Mitchell, 2004: 342).

The transfer of power was consolidated by the January 2004 presidential elections, which gave Saakashvili 96.2 percent of the vote, and by the March 2004 parliamentary elections, equally won by the former opposition. Zhvania was appointed to the newly created position of Prime Minister. Burjanadze became speaker of Parliament (Mitchell, 2004: 345; Fairbanks, 2004: 110).

Shevardnadze’s fall was totally unexpected. For the first time a post-Communist regime inside the Commonwealth of Independent States was overthrown by a democratic movement; hence the prompt use of the term “Revolution.” Resemblance to Milosevic’s fin de règne was obvious. Totally uncharacteristic for former Soviet republics — except the Baltic states — the Tbilissi events, like those in Belgrade, were often seen as a direct consequence of the mobilization of Georgia’s civil society.

Despite his paternalist attitude and electoral frauds, Shevardnadze had allowed the development of the civil society. Western support helped create large numbers of NGOs that, paradoxically, took advantage of the country’s weak economy. Foreign funding allowed NGOs to pay decent salaries, which was not the case in public administration or Georgian private companies. Consequently, the brightest Georgians competed for jobs in the civic sector. This helped create a culture of activism. Publicly criticizing the government for illegal and corrupt behavior or protesting against electoral fraud became a normal attitude (Mitchell, 2004: 345).

Furthermore, Georgian civil society directly benefited from Serbian NGOs’ anti-Milosevic experience. At least in part, the November 2003 events were possible because a number of prominent NGOs such as the Liberty Institute were trained in the methods and tactics of non-violent political opposition to authoritarian leaders by Serbian NGOs like the Center for Applied Non-Violent Action and Strategies (CANVAS) and the Center for Non-Violent Resistance. The 5000 members of the Kmara student group attended three-day summer camps run in Georgia by former activists of the Serbian Otpor organization (Jones, 2006: 40–42).

Georgian media played an equally important role. Poverty was a serious obstacle in the diffusion of newspapers, which few could afford. This explains the importance of the resolutely pro-opposition television station, Rustavi 2. During the pre-election
period it provided a regular platform to opposition leaders. Then it helped fund the exit poll and promptly released its results. It also provided an almost nonstop coverage of the protests, largely contributing to the mass mobilization that finally overthrew Shevardnadze (Mitchell, 2004: 345).

It is obvious that the development of Georgian NGOs would have been much less spectacular without generous foreign funding. Between 1995 and 2000, Georgia received over 700 million US$ of American direct aid. In 2002–2003, it was the fourth-largest per capita recipient of US Agency for International Development (USAID) aid (in 2000, USAID spent US$200 per person in Georgia compared with US$1.25 in Russia). The European Union also contributed 420 million euro between 1992 and 2004, an amount that does not include contributions from separate member states. Most of the aid targeted democracy and governance, including election reform, local government, judicial reform and development of the NGOs. Many of the programs promoted citizen mobilization and advocacy networks among NGOs (Jones, 2006: 41–42).

George Soros’ Open Society Institute (OSI) played a major role in financing not only the general development of Georgian NGOs but also civic actions, which directly contributed to Shevardnadze’s fall. In fact, it was Soros who promoted the “Serbian model” of peaceful regime change. Funding from OSI enabled the creation of Kmara and the training of its activists in techniques of non-violent protest by Serbian Otpor activists. Due to OSI financing, a number of politicians (including Saakashvili) and student activists could go to Serbia and confer with activists who had defeated Milosevic’s regime. Open Society Georgia Foundation was a major funder of the critical exit poll that helped reveal the extent of electoral fraud (Mitchell, 2004: 346; Fairbanks, 2004: 115).

External support provides a logical explanation of the surprising development of Georgia’s civil society. In turn, civic activism helped promote democratic values and largely contributed to the mass mobilization that overthrew Shevardnadze. At least, this is how most analysts describe the Rose Revolution. However, two caveats have to be formulated. First, Georgia was little more than a failed state. Therefore “the imperative of state consolidation often overrides Western models of due process and democratic governance” (Jones, 2006: 33). The next sub-section will analyze the highly negative impact of this situation on the democratization process started by the Rose Revolution. Second, it should not be forgotten that the main figures of the November 2003 events were Shevardnadze’s former protégés. Their fight for political power may have placed them in the vanguard of a revolutionary process, but this does not necessarily mean that revolution was what they had in mind. Stephen Jones goes as far as calling them “instinctive anti-revolutionary”:

Apart from a small coterie of activists, nobody was expecting the overthrow of the ancien régime and few wanted it. It was a revolution without revolutionaries. (...) The triumvirate that led the revolution — Zurab Zhvania, Nino Burjanadze and Mikheil Saakashvili — was composed of moderates, even the brash Saakashvili. Instinctive anti-revolutionaries, they could barely be distinguished — ideologically at least — from Shevardnadze, although their political style and sincerity were on a higher scale (Jones, 2006: 34).
Indeed, Georgia’s post-2003 trajectory is hardly that of a revolutionary-transformed state.

*The shadows of Bonapartism*

Three years after the Rose Revolution, the Georgian state is optimistically considered more efficient and less corrupt. A new law strengthens journalists’ rights and the function of ombudsman has been created. A part of the Shevardnadze-linked political class was removed. Constitutional amendments shifted the balance of power in favor of the executive, enhancing the state structures’ discipline and cohesion. The government introduced market reforms and increased bureaucratic accountability (Jones, 2006: 34, 46). An important step in regaining control over the national territory was the peaceful reintegration of Adjaria. In May 2004 the local dictator, Aslan Abashidze, was forced by what was seen as phase two of the Rose Revolution to abandon power and flee to Moscow (Mitchell, 2004: 347).

However, territorial unity has not been acquired. Tbilisi’s resolutely pro-Western orientation led to the intensification of the “Cold War” with Russia. Moscow continues to use its gas exports to put pressure on the Georgian government. It has also renewed its support for the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In November 2006 the latter went as far as to organize a referendum in support of independence. Ninety-nine percent of the voters approved the move, which was considered a first step toward unification with Russia (Guillemain d’Echon, 2006).

Internally, Georgia’s democratic development is seriously endangered by the very direction followed by post-revolution reforms:

> Georgia has its most powerful president since independence, no effective parliamentary opposition, a Third Sector weakened by the leakage of its members into government, a judicial system that is subject to presidential interference and control, an unreformed local government system, intimidated media and a centralized state model that has significantly diminished Adjaria’s autonomy (Jones, 2006: 46).

Despite objections formulated by democratic NGOs and other participants in the Rose Revolution, a series of little-debated constitutional amendments reinforced Georgia’s already-strong presidency, weakening the Parliament and the courts. Shevardnadze’s “super-presidential” Constitution was replaced by Saakashvili’s “hyper-presidential” Constitution (Fairbanks, 2004: 118–119).

The threat to the democratization process is so serious that Georgia’s present political system has been sometimes considered a form of Bonapartism (Jones, 2006: 35). Saakashvili controls almost two-thirds of the Parliament. Furthermore, in his 2005 state-of-the-nation address he even suggested that parties opposing his pro-Western stance should be banned (Hale, 2006: 312). The judiciary is more vulnerable to executive pressure than under Shevardnadze due to increased presidential appointment powers and the President’s chairmanship of the Judicial Council. Free from any constraint, the executive used its new powers to purge and renovate state structures ignoring the rule of law. This was extremely visible in the case of
government’s retrieval of money from corrupt officials. Those qualified as such were released without trial (after the payment of arbitrarily calculated sums) or in some cases detained and subsequently tortured (Jones, 2006: 35; 44). Further elements support the idea of a dangerous accumulation of power in president’s hands. Television shows open to critics of the government, which Shevardnadze had tolerated, were cancelled after his fall. A paramilitary Special Foreign Intelligence Service personally supervised by the president has been created (Fairbanks, 2004: 118–119; Jones, 2006: 45).

It is very difficult to qualify this evolution as democratic consolidation. Rather, the main consequence of the Rose Revolution is the creation of a political system that progressively reproduces the characteristics of the previous regime. One should not forget that Shevardnadze too had once been hailed as an open-minded, pro-Western reformer. However, personal rule quickly replaced democratization. As we are witnessing today an apparently similar process, it is a legitimate to question the very nature of the Rose Revolution. Despite early popular euphoria and international acclaim, its effects are extremely limited. Basically, it replaced Shevardnadze and his associates of the time with Shevardnadze’s previous protégés. Georgia remains an almost failed state where the rule of law is ignored while the executive acquires exaggerate powers.

Returning to Paige’s definition of revolutions, it is clear that November 2003 failed to bring a “rapid and fundamental transformation in the categories of social life and consciousness.” “Power relations” did not fundamentally change; nor did “social order.” Overall, one has to discard appearances and to accept that, in fact, the Rose Revolution can hardly be considered a genuine revolution.

**Ukraine’s Orange Revolution (2004)**

*The Kuchma regime*

The first directly elected president of independent Ukraine was Leonid Kravchuk, the former Chairman of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet. But in 1994 he was defeated by his former Prime Minister, Leonid Kuchma. The new president positioned himself as a champion of reform and created a “multi-vector foreign policy,” which attracted Western support (Kubicek, 2005: 274). During his first year in office, the new president repeatedly complained that he lacked the power needed to carry out reforms. After a showdown with parliament, Kuchma prevailed, and a new constitution, giving the president broad powers, was ratified in June 1996 (Hesli, 2006: 168). Unfortunately, these new powers were used to create an increasingly authoritarian regime. Its two main pillars were an extensive set of largely informal authoritarian institutions and processes that served to harass oppositionists and to falsify election results; and a coalition of oligarchic forces in parliament and in the administration that organized support for Kuchma, competing for his patronage (Way, 2005: 133–134).

State offices and agencies were systematically subverted to serve the personal interests of the president and his associates. The presidential administration used these
agencies to harass political opponents and keep their supporters in check. Individuals tended to be targeted not because they breached the law, but because they were disloyal to the regime (Arel, 2005: 327). As a former head of the Ukrainian Security Service stated, “if your business is loyal to the authorities, they will ignore or overlook anything. If you are disloyal, you or your business will be quashed immediately.” Businesses that helped the opposition were the frequent victims of harassment by tax authorities, the prosecutor’s office, and other government agencies (Way, 2005: 133). This led to the rise of pro-Kuchma oligarchs to economic and political dominance. In 2000, the state tax inspector reported that 386 of the 450 deputies in parliament were founders of 3954 businesses, controlling 25 percent of the country’s imports and 10 percent of its exports. Most of them have been accused of using government connections to promote a wide range of businesses and industries. Partly in exchange for access to state resources, oligarchs helped to mobilize political support for Kuchma, often drawing directly on their firms (Way, 2005, 134).

One of the president’s most efficient instruments was media control. Despite the formal privatization of most electronic media in 1995–1996, the government retained informal control over almost all the major television networks (Way, 2005: 132–133). Individual journalists known for their criticism of the government were intimidated by frequent attacks. Furthermore, in 2002 the presidential administration began distributing to major news outlets the so-called *temniki*, an eight- to ten-page daily bulletin with detailed directives about how certain news items should be portrayed and which events should be ignored. It gave very precise instructions about news coverage, leaving little room for interpretation. Editors were clearly under pressure to conform, as almost all media were by this time controlled by Kuchma’s associates (D’Anieri, 2005: 236).

Still, the continuing deterioration in the life of most Ukrainians, corruption scandals, and the rise of oligarchs made the president unpopular during his first term. As media control was not sufficient to win elections, “creative vote theft” was added. A secret recording of Kuchma’s conversation with the head of the tax administration reveals the method used in the 1999 electoral campaign:

It’s necessary for a tax worker to go to every collective-farm head in every village and say: Dear friend, you understand clearly how much material we have on you so that you could find yourself in jail tomorrow... And there is probably more than enough material on every collective-farm head. Yes or no? Probably yes. That’s why the police... that is, the services... they all have to, that is, take to [the task] and have a serious talk with every collective-farm head (Way, 2005: 134).

Government employees, students, and peasants were induced to vote for the government-sponsored candidate by threats of loss of jobs, expulsion from the university, and refusal of the state to distribute vital goods and services. This approach proved efficient: in the second round of the 1999 presidential elections, Kuchma defeated Petro Symonenko (head of the Communist Party) with 56 percent of the vote (Hesli, 2006: 169).

However, increasing authoritarian practices had negative foreign policy consequences. At first, Western support had been visible as Ukraine expressed greater

Consequently, Kuchma “noticeably turned toward Moscow, since Putin did not treat him as a pariah or criminal” (Arel quoted by Kubicek, 2005: 277). In fact, Russia has always been Ukraine’s largest single trading partner and the source of most energy imports. Cultural and historical links are also important for a large part of the population, especially in the more Russophone Southern and Eastern regions. The improvement of bilateral relations was welcomed by the Kremlin. Viktor Chernomyrdin, named ambassador to Kyiv in May 2001, made attractive promises with regard to Russian-Ukrainian economic and especially energy integration. In 2003, Kuchma controversially agreed to a Russian demand to reverse the Odessa-Brody oil pipeline for Russia’s benefit and, the same year, Kyiv joined Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in a “Single Economic Space” (Kubicek, 2005: 277). The Ukrainian president clearly considered this new orientation an antidote to Western criticism and lack of political and economic support. It was also an ideologically motivated choice, as it brought together two regimes increasingly hostile to democratic values and practices.

The Orange Revolution

Kuchma faced serious difficulties during his second presidential term. The most damaging was linked to the death of journalist Georgi Gongadze, a longtime critic of the regime and a crusader against corruption. His decapitated body was found in November 2000. Later that month, the Socialist Party leader, Oleksandr Moroz, released an audio recording on which Kuchma was heard instructing interior minister, Yuriy Kravchenko, to “deal with” opposition. The president’s alleged involvement in the killing led to public demonstrations on a scale unseen since independence (Kuzio, 2005: 119–120). These protests helped galvanize a group of opposition movements, which included an important part of the previously pro-Kuchma oligarchs. By 2004, the rightist forces of Viktor Yushchenko were allied with the socialists of Oleksandr Moroz and the populist leftists of Yulia Tymoshenko in order to overthrow Kuchma’s regime, whose popularity and legitimacy were now minimal (D’Anieri, 2005: 240).

In the 2004 presidential elections, Kuchma’s candidate, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, was confronted by Viktor Yushchenko. A former head of the National Bank and Prime Minister, he represented a new image of a politician: energetic, professional, and Western-looking. In fact, his pro-Western views (and the American
citizenship of his wife) were used by Yanukovych’s team to portray him as an agent of the West; it was even insinuated that his victory would plunge Ukraine into civil war (Hesli, 2006: 170). As this did not diminish his popularity, more brutal measures were taken by Kuchma’s agents. Apparently, there were at least two attempts on Yushchenko’s life; most notably, two months before the elections he suffered dioxin poisoning after having dinner with the director of the Ukrainian Security Service. He survived, but he could not take part in the electoral campaign. His face was severely disfigured (Way, 2005: 131—132; Hesli, 2006: 170).

In the first round of the 2004 elections Yushchenko received 39.9 percent of the votes and Yanukovych 39.3 percent. In the run-off election, held on November 21, exit polls predicted a Yushchenko victory; but the electoral commission declared Yanukovych the victor with 49.5 percent of the vote, compared with Yushchenko’s 46.6 percent. Given that the third-placed candidate from the first round (Moroz) had explicitly endorsed Yushchenko, these results were hard to believe (Hesli, 2006: 171). In fact, besides many smaller scale reported violations, virtually the entire lead enjoyed by Yanukovych could be traced to an “absurdly high and obviously falsified” turnout in his regional stronghold of Donbas (Arel, 2005: 326).

It is at this point that the Orange Revolution ignited. On the evening of November 22, 2004 Ukrainians took to the streets of Kyiv to protest. The scale and the duration of the protests were unusual. For two weeks, between 100,000 and 300,000 people gathered in Kyiv each evening (Copsey, 2005: 102—103). While blockading the cabinet building and the headquarters of the presidential administration in the capital, Yushchenko’s supporters also staged demonstrations in other large cities. Support expanded to include many government employees and journalists. The ruling councils in Kyiv, Ternopil, Vinnystia, and Ivan-Frankivsk refused to recognize the second-round results (Hesli, 2006: 171). The Kuchma regime contemplated the use of force and apparently ordered Interior Ministry troops to intervene on November 28. But the “sea of humanity in the streets of Kyiv” made repression impossible (Arel, 2005: 326–327).

On November 27 the Supreme Court ruled that the announced results could not be officially published until it had reviewed Yushchenko’s claim that the vote was manipulated. On the same day, the Parliament declared the election results invalid. Unable to resist overwhelming internal and international protest, the outgoing president, Kuchma, called for new elections. Finally, on December 3 The Supreme Court issued a decision declaring the second round invalid and ordering a repeat election with the same two candidates (Arel, 2005: 326; Hesli, 2006: 172). Kuchma accepted the Supreme Court decision, changed the central electoral commission’s membership, and signed legislation modifying the electoral law to disallow absentee ballots. Those most directly associated with the electoral fraud left their posts (Hesli, 2006: 172). On December 26, 52 percent of the Ukrainian electorate voted for Yushchenko and 44.2 percent for Yanukovych. The latter immediately filed appeals claiming massive fraud with the Supreme Court, which delayed the inauguration of the new president until a verdict was delivered. The complaint was rejected on January 20 and Yushchenko finally became president (Hesli, 2006: 173–174).

It is clear that the fall of Kuchma’s regime was due to an unprecedented mass mobilization. Despite all expectation, Ukrainian society overcame its traditional apathy
and actively participated in pro-Yushchenko demonstrations. A decisive contribution to the success of the Orange Revolution was made by Ukraine’s youth. The new generation has little or no memories of the Soviet period, while being largely influenced by Western values and way of life. Most of its members “take the desirability of democracy as a given” (Kuzio, 2005: 127).

Another key factor was international support. The youth group Pora, which played a crucial role in the protests, had received training from Serbia’s Otpor. Many Western NGOs and civil society groups provided key assistance to their Ukrainian counterparts. International election observers, as well as domestic observers trained by foreign NGOs, made a critical contribution by exposing and reporting election fraud and voting irregularities (Kuzio, 2005). Western calls for a re-run of the elections (including a resolution of the European Parliament) were equally important, as they boosted protesters’ moral and influenced Kuchma in limiting the scale of the repression.

The Orange Revolution’s victory was followed by the creation of a reformist, pro-Western government. Yuliya Tymoshenko, a deputy Prime Minister during Yushchenko’s term as Prime Minister in 1999–2001, became Prime Minister. The pro-EU and pro-NATO Borys Tarasyuk was appointed Foreign Minister; Anatoliy Gritsenko, a strong advocate of military reform, as Defense Minister. Yushchenko also quickly replaced regional governors and other officials associated with the previous regime (Hesli, 2006: 176). The new team seemed able and willing to bring the major changes expected by its supporters.

Disillusion and failure

From the very beginning, Yushchenko’s program seemed difficult to accomplish. It included the creation of five million new jobs; increases in pensions and benefits; immediate payment of wage arrears; reduction of taxation; a war on corruption; protection for all citizens against crime; reversing the demographic decline; “promotion of spirituality;” the doubling of agricultural productivity together with a pledge to close the income gap between rural and urban areas; the abolition of conscription by 2010; and, an honest, transparent and consistent foreign policy, complemented by good relations with Russia and the European Union. Some spoke of “a high degree of political immaturity, since it made pledges that would be impossible to fulfill within the limits of a five-year presidential term” (Copsey, 2005: 100). Anyway, the fundamental question concerned a higher level. It was the new administration’s capacity of deeply modifying the rules of political engagement, bringing them closer to democratic standards (Arel, 2005: 325).

It was expected that an effective program of deep political change would mark Yushchenko presidency’s first months. Or, on the contrary, the number of draft laws initiated by the new president and Prime Minister was the lowest ever submitted to parliament by the executive branch for any one legislative session since independence. Furthermore, the ambivalent attitude toward the law did not change. Kuchma’s repressive state agencies were not reformed. Thousands of criminal cases were opened against persons associated with the former regime (including Yanukovych
himself). The judicial system remained as selective as before, changing only the political color of its targets (Arel, 2005).

In a way, this is not completely surprising, as the new leaders had all been closely associated with the old regime. Yushchenko himself had been Kuchma’s Prime Minister; during the scandal related to the assassination of Georgi Gongadze, he had supported the president and signed a joint letter with Kuchma and parliamentary speaker Ivan Plyushch condemning the protesters as “fascists” (Kuzio, 2005: 120). The other three outstanding personalities of the Orange Revolution were the leader of the radical wing of the pro-Yushchenko movement, Yuliya Tymoshenko; Yushchenko’s advisor and fundraiser (and head of the only pro-Yushchenko television station), Petro Poroshenko; and the head of the Yushchenko campaign, Oleksandr Zinchenko. They were sometimes referred to as the “temperament, purse, and brain” of the Yushchenko movement (Way, 2005: 139), and had an essential contribution to its victory. But Tymoshenko—a “demagogic multi-millionairess, whose murky business past was matched only by the radiance of her political image” (The Economist, 2006b, May 4)—had led a pro-Kuchma parliamentary faction in 1998–2000. Poroshenko started his political career in the pro-government United Social Democratic Party of Ukraine and was a founding member of Yanukych’s Party of Regions. Zinchenko was until early 2003 a leader of the same United Social Democratic Party and the head of the virulently pro-presidential Inter television station (Way, 2005: 139). Despite their efficient anti-Kuchma actions, these politicians did not seem to be the most likely reformers of the Ukrainian political system.

Worse, rivalries between them led to serious lack of cohesion in government policies and finally threatened the stability of the new government. This culminated in September 2005 with Yushchenko’s firing of Tymoshenko, national security chief Petro Poroshenko, and other top officials accused of corruption (Arel, 2005: 329). But this step did not improve things. Reform did not progress, corruption did not diminish. In the March 2006 parliamentary elections, a disillusioned electorate gave 32 percent of the votes to the party of Viktor Yanukovich, Yushchenko’s 2004 adversary. Yulia Tymoshenko’s block received 22 percent, and Yushchenko’s “Our Ukraine” party got a humiliating 14 percent of the votes (The Economist, 2006c, March 30). Furthermore, it was claimed that certain “shady characters” had paid $5 million for a place on the candidates’ lists and the legal immunity that MPs enjoy (Arel, 2005).

Three months of difficult negotiations led to the creation of a coalition mirroring the previous one, as it reunited Yushchenko’s, the Socialist, and Tymoshenko’s parties. But it fell apart after just two weeks (The Economist, 2006e, June 29 and 2006d, July 13). Finally, with demonstrations and counter-demonstrations taking place in Kyiv, the president decided in early August to nominate as Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, Kuchma’s former protégé and the very symbol of what the Orange Revolution was supposed to have defeated (The Economist, 2006f, August 3). Furthermore, the constitutional changes that went into effect on 1 January 2006 (…) give increased powers to the prime minister, who will be selected by the Rada (parliament) rather than the president (as was previously the case). While the president will
continue to nominate the foreign minister and defence minister, the other ministers will be nominated by the prime minister but need to be approved by the Rada. Thus a highly fragile system of co-habitation could emerge, which could intensify many of the current problems if the president and prime minister cannot agree on important foreign-policy issues (Larrabee, 2006: 95–96; my italics).

Indeed, the Ukrainian political system is now based on the fragile cohabitation of the 2004 opposing camps. Yanukovich’s pro-Moscow and anti-NATO foreign policy moves (The Economist, 2006g, November 2) even suggest that his group has the upper hand. And there is little place for change: a stable regional cleavage gives Yanukovich the constant support of the more Russophone Southern and Eastern regions, which make almost half of the electorate. Yushchenko and his former allies, on the other hand, have been abandoned by many disillusioned participants to the Orange Revolution. Their only support now consists of genuinely pro-democracy, pro-Western Ukrainians who are too few and too divided to change the present situation.

Therefore, two years after the 2004 events, Ukraine’s democratic future allows even less optimism than it did at the time of Kuchma’s first election in 1994 (which, at that time, was perceived as an important reformist and pro-Western development). It is true that the Orange Revolution overthrew Kuchma’s monolithic authoritarian regime. But it did not succeed in replacing it with a democratic or at least a democratizing political system. And, more important, it is impossible to claim that it changed, in a way or another, Ukraine’s Weltanschauung.

Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution (2005)

The Akayev regime

The five former-Soviet Asian republics are singular in the post-Communist world. They are the only cases where no regime change followed the fall of USSR. Except for the elimination of some Slavs, present leaders and ruling elites are those of the late Gorbachev era. Of course, Communism does not exist any more; but its former high representatives conserved their positions within new, authoritarian regimes based on Soviet methods and mentality. Inherited coercive Soviet institutions are employed with greater vigor than had been the case under Gorbachev (Merry, 2004: 286; 291).

Initially, Kyrgyzstan seemed to be a regional exception. In 1990, when the country was still a Soviet republic, the Parliament voted for instituting the post of President of the Republic, and gave it to Askar Akayev instead of a hard-line communist Absamat Masaliev (Abazov, 2003: 54). The new president was seen at that time as “a Jeffersonian democrat in the heart of Asia” (Merry, 2004: 296) and, for a time, the image of the newly independent state was that of “an island of democracy” (Khamidov, 2006: 87).

By the mid-1990s, however, Akayev’s moves to gain broad control over the mass media and the political apparatus tarnished that image (Khamidov, 2006). Growing Western criticism of non-democratic developments received an aggressive response
from the republic’s ruling elite, based on Akayev’s coining of the concept of “nomadic democracy.” In his words, “you cannot approach the problem of democracy in a different environment with the same criteria as used in the West” (Abazov, 2003: 552).

Various opposition groups emerged and tried to take advantage of the popular discontent over authoritarian moves, rising social inequality and decline of standards of living (by 1996, 64 percent of the population was living below the national poverty line). Nevertheless, opposition parties have always been notably weak, mostly due to regional rivalry and clan loyalties (Abazov, 2003: 546; 552). It should be mentioned that an important North–South cleavage exists within Kyrgyzstan’s elite groups, due to a major geographic divide defined by an East–West mountain range that bisects the country. The greater Russian influence in the North is paralleled by a stronger Uzbek presence in the South. Akayev had a primarily Northern power base and systematically favored Northerners (Hale, 2006: 315; Radnitz, 2006: 134).

The opposition’s lack of unity allowed the president to significantly weaken the Parliament in a 1994 referendum-based constitutional reform. Furthermore, electoral irregularities became as widespread as in other neighboring ex-Soviet republics. The February 2000 parliamentary elections were described by OSCE observers as:

a disaster for Kyrgyzstan’s reputation as an oasis of democracy in the authoritarian Central Asian desert, since the government limited the choice open to the electorate and the election was marked by flagrant official interference and vote rigging (Abazov, 2003: 545).

Western criticism, however, was limited by Kyrgyzstan’s role in the American intervention in Afghanistan. In December 2001, the United States established the Manas air base outside Bishkek, the country’s capital. In response, Moscow secured in mid 2002 an agreement with the Kyrgyz military to lease the Kant air base. Subsequently, neighboring China launched joint exercises with the Kyrgyz forces inside Kyrgyzstan (Cornell, 2004: 240–7). The country’s strategic importance seemed to take preeminence over considerations for democracy.

The Tulip Revolution

Under the new international circumstances, Akayev saw no obstacle in rigging the February 27, 2005, parliamentary elections. Protests erupted sporadically in Western and Southern areas, as a dozen candidates who were barred from election or lost in the voting mobilized several hundred supporters to protest the results. The demonstrators—mostly unemployed rural dwellers—were mainly relatives, friends, and close associates of the candidates (Khamidov, 2006: 87; Radnitz, 2006: 134).

However, in early March 2005, protesting opposition leaders and candidates began to coordinate their actions in the framework of the People’s Movement of Kyrgyzstan (NDK) (Khamidov, 2006: 87). In fact, the NDK, formed by nine small parties, did not have a leader or a real common platform. It only asked for fair elections and for Akayev’s resignation by October 2005, when his term was due to end. But it brought together several influential politicians with bases in both the North
and South, turning otherwise isolated outbursts into a coherent wave of protest. This was the critical element needed to overcome Kyrgyzstan’s geographic fragmentation (Radnitz, 2006: 133–139).

Consequently, on March 18 protesters occupied the governor’s office in the Southern cities of Jalalabad and Osh. Violence continued for the following days, leading to the occupation of the Osh regional administration building, police station, TV station, and airport (Khamidov, 2006: 87–88). It should be noted that, unlike in the Orange Revolution, most of the crowd consisted of jobless or retired older men, with smaller numbers of older women and unemployed younger men. Some urban residents and students passed by or observed, but few took part (Radnitz, 2006: 134).

In the capital, the Jalalabad and Osh events determined the formation of a temporary alliance between NDK leaders, unaffiliated politicians, mobilization leaders from other regions, local businessmen, and NGO activists (Radnitz, 2006). On March 24, tens of thousands gathered in front of the main government building, and finally stormed it. Unable to control the situation, Akayev fled to Russia (via Kazakhstan). Public order could not be enforced anymore; two days of mass looting and destruction of property followed. Order was restored after the NDK released from prison general Feliks Kulov, Akayev’s main political critic, and put him in charge of the security services (Khamidov, 2006: 88).

Both Northern and Southern opposition agreed on Akayev’s removal from office. However, they did not agree on who should rule the country as there had been no leader of opposition forces prior to the revolution. To solve the problem, the Supreme Court decided that the old parliament temporarily retain its authority. This allowed it on March 25 to name the most prominent Southern opposition leader, the former Prime Minister Kurmanbek Bakiev, as acting president and acting Prime Minister. Presidential elections were scheduled for July 2005 (Hale, 2006: 315; Khamidov, 2006: 88). Technically, the Tulip Revolution was over.

A very obvious difference with respect to the Rose and Orange Revolutions concerned the main actors of the Kyrgyz protest movement. First of all, youth was almost completely absent in Revolution’s earlier phases. It was already shown that in Jalalabad young people did not play any significant role. This changed in Bishkek, where they formed the masses at the opposition rallies and stormed government buildings. But even there formal youth organizations played a very modest role compared to informal youth groups. The most important student group, KelKel, which received significant press attention during protests, had only 300 members, was active only in the capital and was responsible for bringing only 50–200 students to the protests on March 24. At least in part, this is due to Akayev’s efficient undermining of all opposition youth groups. Furthermore, following the Soviet practice, the regime forced university staff and students to participate in its political campaigns and to vote for candidates loyal to the president. In exchange, student stipends were increased, the last time in January 2005 (Khamidov, 2006: 85–92).

NGOs equally played a minor role. Kyrgyzstan, like other Central Asian republics, has a small urban population and clearly lacks a strong civil society. That is why most of the protestors in Bishkek came from the countryside, while the opposition was not based on civil society groups or on established political parties but on local elites.
reunited by tactical reasons (Radnitz, 2006: 133; Khamidov, 2006: 91). As Akayev was not overthrown by the mobilization of the civil society, change was very limited. Most of previous regime’s main actors maintained their positions while no institutional structure has been reformed. This allowed certain analysts to express extremely negative opinions on the Tulip Revolution, often denying its very revolutionary character:

The forces that drove the Tulip Revolution—indeed business interests, informal networks, and patronage ties—developed under Akayev’s 15-year rule, and remained strong after his exit. This helps to explain why Kyrgyzstan has had a putative “revolution” that in fact has been notable more for continuity than for change, with old patterns reproducing themselves and hindering efforts at real reform on major issues such as corruption and equitable distribution of resources.

(...). Kyrgyzstan did not have a true revolution (meaning the transformation or overthrow of a whole sociopolitical order) or even a regime change. What the country had, by all appearances, was something decidedly more limited, namely, a transfer of power (Radnitz, 2006: 132–133).

Disappointing aftermath

Presidential elections were scheduled for July 2005. Opinion polls showed a very small advance of acting Prime Minister Bakiev, whose main power base was in the South, over the mainly North-supported Feliks Kulov. In order to avoid a new North–South clash, the two concluded a gentlemen’s agreement. Kulov accepted to cede the presidency to Bakiev (who consequently received 89 percent of the votes) in return for the job of Prime Minister and the promise to support a constitutional reform that would transfer an important part of the presidential powers to the Prime Minister (Hale, 2006: 316). The agreement was honored with respect to the power sharing between Bakiev and Kulov. But the president seemed to have little interest in the constitutional amendments that would institutionalize the diminishing of his powers. While in early 2006 he spoke about a referendum giving voters a choice between a presidential, parliamentary, or a mixed system, nothing happened until the autumn of 2006 (Hale, 2006).

In the meantime, corruption and nepotism became rampant. An overly enthusiastic and newly appointed prosecutor general, free of Akayev ties and zealous in pursuing influential people, was quickly dismissed by Bakiev. Many present government officials became rich due to their positions in the previous regime. Bakiev himself is reputed to be one of Kyrgyzstan’s hundred richest people (Radnitz, 2006: 141). When he became president, he appointed members of his family to plum government posts. In particular, his son Maxim is highly criticized for the suspect activities of his many companies (Millot, 2006; Jégo, 2006a). Furthermore, business-linked killings became frequent. In only one year, three MPs were assassinated (Courrier International, 2006) while mutual accusations of conspiracy and influence-peddling became frequent among top officials (Hale, 2006: 316).
Bakiev’s growing control of the state, corruption, violence and a complete lack of reform frustrated opposition groups, which tried to re-ignite public protest. The president’s reactions were not exactly democratic. At one point, in October 2005, as mob scenes and violence proliferated, he temporarily endorsed a law which would have prohibited public demonstrations for one year (Radnitz, 2006: 143). In September 2006, his brother Janysh Bakiev had to quit the job of deputy head of the national security services after it was proved that he had ordered a set-up against Omurbek Tekebaev, one of the opposition leaders. Almost 600 grams of heroin had been put in his luggage in order to have him arrested for drug trafficking at Warsaw airport (The Economist, 2006a, September 21).

Tension grew in early November 2006, as opposition—a mix of politicians and NGOs representatives reunited in the Movement for Reform—mobilized up to 10,000 people in a one-week protest in Bishkek. Exasperated by Bakiev’s tergiversations, they demanded the long awaited amendment of the Constitution. After a series of new promises, postponements, and violence (Prime Minister Feliks Kulov implicitly admitted that some of the counter-demonstrators had been paid by the government), the president finally gave up. On November 9, he signed the text of a new Constitution, which allows the Parliament to nominate the Prime Minister and gives the latter the control of the security services (Millot, 2006; Jégo, 2006a,b; Libération, 2006).

However, this is by no means the end of tensions. Edil Baissalov, a member of the opposition, clearly stated that his camp demands the formation of a new government, which should destroy “corruption and the new oligarchic system put in place by the Bakiev family” (Millot, 2006). Pessimists believe that the country is “on the verge of political chaos and possibly of civil war” (International Crisis Group quoted by Jégo, 2006b). Even if this might be an exaggeration, it is clear that instability will not be soon eradicated.

To conclude, Akayev’s authoritarian regime was replaced by Bakiev’s weaker, growing undemocratic rule. The new (or, rather, old) political system is under attack by a part of Tulip Revolution’s former actors. Unfortunately, as in 2005, they hardly represent the democratic aspirations of the Kyrgyz civil society. Most of them belong in fact to local elites, which ruled the country with and for Akayev. Even if they succeed in overthrowing Bakiev and putting an end to instability, Kyrgyzstan has little chance to become a democracy. In any case, it is impossible to claim that the Tulip Revolution has the characteristics of a genuine revolution.

Analysis

Georgia’s, Ukraine’s and Kyrgyzstan’s revolutions were not isolated events. Explicitly inspired by the Serbian movement that led to Milosevic’s fall in 2000, they represent a clear example of international diffusion. Some of their actors even claim a special role in the global development of democracy. For Saakashvili, the Georgian revolution inspired similar movements in the Middle East and Central Asia as his country’s “spiritual mission” transformed it into “a beacon of freedom for the whole
world” (Jones, 2006: 33). However, this article does not include the international dimension (for a presentation of this subject see Bunce and Wolchik, 2006). This is why the following analysis concentrates on internal elements.

The three revolutions’ description allows the identification of a common pattern (McFaul, 2005: 6; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006: 296–297). In all cases, the regime change included the following successive steps: (1) a fraudulent national election; (2) efficient independent monitoring and rapid publicizing of the fraud; (3) opposition’s decision to protest against electoral fraud without questioning the country’s political and constitutional frameworks; (4) opposition’s success in mobilizing large numbers of citizens (the opposition was well organized but not necessarily united, at least in the early phases of the protest); (5) regime’s denial of the fraud and decision to impose official electoral results; (6) a division within the regime’s repressive apparatus preventing mass violence; (7) massive protest demonstrations forcing the regime’s leader to acknowledge his defeat; (8) installation of a new, “revolutionary” national leadership, reinforced by quickly organized complementary elections; (9) new leaders’ claim to build democracy, promote reform, and fight corruption accompanied by arbitrary actions against some members of the former regime (usually under charges of corruption); (10) increasingly visible survival of previous regime’s non-democratic patterns. The new leader accumulates exaggerated powers (Georgia), enters into open conflict with former revolution allies (Kyrgyzstan) or has to accept openly cohabitation with leaders of the former authoritarian regime (Ukraine).

Of course, local differences were present and led to the differentiation of final outcomes. Nevertheless, the overall processes are surprisingly similar. This can only be explained by the existence of common structural factors, which shaped three almost identical trajectories. Five such factors can be identified: (1) a moderately authoritarian regime that tolerated limited political competition and some civil liberties; (2) development of the civil society (except in Kyrgyzstan); (3) a major split within the ruling elite (typically, opposition leaders were the dictator’s former protégés); (4) popular discontent due to poverty, rising social inequalities, rampant corruption and mismanagement; and (5) delegitimization of the regime and especially of its leader, mostly due to the previous three factors.

Undeniably, the most important element is the existence of a moderately authoritarian regime. As the case of the May 2005 Andijan protest suggests, strongly authoritarian regimes (like those in four Central Asian republics or Belarus) have the capacity to suppress brutally protest movements in their initial phase. It is, on the contrary, much more difficult to act in this way if the regime wants to conserve a relatively democratic appearance. It would restrain from the use of mass violence as long as possible, thus allowing the protest to develop and transform itself into a revolutionary movement. This implicitly means that there are very few chances of further revolutions inside the Commonwealth of Independent States, as most of the remaining states fall in the category of strongly authoritarian regimes.

An element generally associated with democratization is the existence of a vibrant civil society, which by its very nature stimulates mobilization against authoritarian regimes. A civil society-driven revolution normally leads to the creation of a democratic
political system. Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan do have civic sectors that are much more developed than those of their post-Soviet neighbors. Nevertheless, they were not strong enough to dictate the course of the three revolutions.

Frequently, the development of civil society is quantitatively evaluated on the basis of the number of existing non-governmental organizations. Calculations based on data provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2005) suggest that the number of NGOs per one million inhabitants is 707.1 in Ukraine, 978.7 in Georgia, and 1730.8 in Kyrgyzstan (as compared to an impressive 9313.7 in the Czech Republic). Unfortunately, these figures are clearly exaggerated as they concern all registered NGOs; it is very difficult to say how many of them are really active. For example, in Kyrgyzstan (which is generally known for the low profile of its civil society and could hardly possess a civic sector more developed than the Ukrainian one), out of a total of 9000 registered NGOs only about 2200 are considered to be active (USAID, 2005: 119). Even for the much better known Czech Republic, other sources place the density of NGOs at only 3921 per one million inhabitants (Gill, 2002: 115). Therefore, the mere number of NGOs cannot be considered a reliable indicator of civil society development in the three post-Soviet countries.

Fortunately, more elaborate approaches have been developed. For eight years now, USAID has released an annual NGO Sustainability Index taking into consideration seven critical dimensions of NGOs functioning: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, infrastructure and public image. The Index uses a seven-point scale, with 7 indicating an extremely low level of development and 1 a very advanced NGO sector. Table 1 compares the values for Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan (in the year previous to their respective revolutions) with the 2004 values for best and worst positioned ex-Communist countries. The three states were assigned scores close to 4 points, indicating that NGOs sector’s sustainability is “minimally affected” by local practices and policies. Their situation is better than that of Uzbekistan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan (5.2–5.6 points, which means that sustainability is impeded) but much worse than that of Central European countries (where practices and policies enhance NGOs sector’s sustainability) (USAID, 2005: 13). Admitting that NGOs are

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representative for the civic sector, it can be concluded that overall development of Georgian, Ukrainian, and Kyrgyz civil society largely lags behind that of Central European or Baltic states (which, in turn, is inferior to the Western one). Furthermore, the fact that scores for Georgia and Kyrgyzstan are equal suggests that despite its visibility during the Rose Revolution, Georgian civil society is not much more developed than the Kyrgyz one. Ukraine is in a slightly better position, but the difference is not significant.

Due to its weakness, civil society could not play the leading role in the three post-soviet revolutions. In fact, in Kyrgyzstan it was almost invisible (this is why the early phases of the Tulip Revolution were almost exclusively populated by relatives, friends, and close associates of protesting politicians). In Georgia and Ukraine, civil society actively contributed to the fall of the respective regimes. Nevertheless, instead of playing the dominant role it only helped aggregate a protest movement initiated, led, controlled, and finally subordinated by former members of the regime’s political elite. Despite appearances, the Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions were the expression of a struggle for power within the ruling elite.

Previous sections have clearly shown that all “revolutionary” leaders (including the Westernized Saakashvili) had until very recently occupied important functions of the authoritarian regime and were often considered the dictator’s protégés. Their defection created a split within the regime, further delegitimized its leader and precipitated his fall by encouraging shift of allegiance. Politicians and businessmen whose support was decisive chose the defectors’ camp because they were seeing it as promoting continuity and bringing a much-needed limited change of style and personnel. Most likely, they would have not supported a radical contestation movement. The same is true for the heads of the repression apparatus that disobeyed orders asking them to use large-scale violence. Consequently, the split within the ruling elite and the opposition leaders’ previous association with the authoritarian regime largely contributed to the latter’s fall.

However, there was a price to pay. Once in power, the former dictators’ protégés were not able to act as genuinely democratic politicians. Their authoritarian heritage was determinant in the undemocratic course taken by the new regimes. The weakness and the consequently subordinated role of the civil society encouraged this trend, with civic activism unable to impose democratic constraints on new governments. Therefore, the overthrow of authoritarian leaders led to little more than a limited rotation of the ruling elites within an undemocratic political system.

Another factor was linked to socio-economic difficulties that fueled popular discontent. Poverty, rising social inequalities, corruption and mismanagement were important determinants of mass protest against the authoritarian regimes. It was hoped that political change would improve public services, reduce embezzlement, and stimulate economic growth. At first, all new “revolutionary” governments took spectacular (and often abusive) measures against associates of the fallen dictators in order to prove their will to reform the state system and eradicate corruption. But they stopped short from taking any really effective step in that direction as too many of their prominent members have been (and continue to be) linked to illegal activities. Lack of reform diminishes chances of improving economic conditions.
Consequently, mass discontent will target the new regimes, which will in turn be tempted to increase their undemocratic—or even repressive—character. The temporary endorsement by Kyrgyzstan’s new president of a law, which would have prohibited all public demonstrations (vide supra) is a good illustration of this trend.

The fifth factor is the delegitimization of the three authoritarian regimes and especially of their leaders. They were abandoned by an important part of the ruling elite and had to face widespread popular discontent as well as civil society’s harsh criticism. Furthermore, the very “moderation” of their regimes seriously limited their repressive capacity. It is not surprising they could not survive. What is surprising is the fact that those who replaced them are today in the same situation, at least in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Yushchenko was humiliated by his party’s 14 percent result in the March 2006 parliamentary elections and finally had to nominate as Prime Minister the very leader of the anti-Orange movement. Bakiev is under attack from his former Tulip Revolution allies, who dominate the Parliament; mass protest forced him to accept Constitution amendments reducing presidential powers. It is clear that the two presidents are in no better position than Kuchma and Akayev were three years earlier. Things are of course different in Georgia, where Saakashvili has successfully eliminated all contestation. But his undemocratic accumulation of power is hardly a guarantee of future legitimacy. Overall, it might be said that at least some of the factors that caused the fall of the three authoritarian regimes are again in place.

This evaluation of the three post-Soviet revolutions can be contrasted with other similar processes in post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe. Bunce and Wolchik correctly point out that...
Still, this might not be enough to deny completely the revolutionary character of the Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions. They all included a pre-revolutionary situation and a revolutionary process. A part of their actors—especially Ukrainian and Georgian youth activists—actively sought revolutionary results. And, for a short period, they even thought they had succeeded. Of course, as it is now obvious, the weakness of the civil society allowed former members of the ruling elite to hijack the three revolutions. As Henry Hale argues, this triple post-Soviet evolution should not be interpreted as a “trajectory toward or away from ideal-type endpoints like democracy or autocracy,” but rather as a form of elite interaction within hybrid regimes (Hale, 2005: 134). In a way, this is reminiscent of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, which simply replaced the Communist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu with the neo-Communist regime of Ion Iliescu. Like the fall of Romanian Communism, Georgian, Ukrainian and Kyrgyz Revolutions can be considered as containing clearly revolutionary elements. But, overall, they are nothing more than failed revolutions.

Conclusion

The Rose, Orange, and Tulip post-Soviet Revolutions were made possible by five structural factors, which include: the existence of a moderately authoritarian regime, the development of civil society, a major split within the ruling elite, popular discontent caused by socio-economic factors, and delegitimization of the authoritarian regimes (and especially of their leaders). These common elements led to almost identical trajectories whose starting point was a fraudulent national election. Mass protest determined the non-violent overthrow of authoritarian leaders and their replacement by “revolutionary” governments. However, weakness of Georgian, Ukrainian, and Kyrgyz civil society allowed former members of the authoritarian regime’s political elite to initiate, lead, control, and finally subordinate the protest movement. Once in power, they soon revived the non-democratic patterns of previous regimes. Rule of law, state reform, and a fight against corruption are today little more than ornaments of official discourse. Disillusioned citizen witness their new leaders creating a Bonapartist regime (Georgia), entering open conflict with former revolution allies (Kyrgyzstan) or being forced to accept cohabitation with leaders of the former authoritarian regime (Ukraine). The supposedly democratic revolutions proved to be a limited rotation of the ruling elites within undemocratic political systems.

Obviously, there is no question of Weltanschauung change. Despite the existence of a revolutionary process involving some genuinely revolutionary participants, the three countries experienced nothing more than three failed revolutions. Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan stopped short from democratizing and their present perspectives range between instability and authoritarianism. This will not change as long as their civil societies remain immature. Short-term foreign financial and know-how support can help develop NGOs and train civic activists in non-violent protest methods. But this is not enough to insure the large-scale diffusion of democratic values within the population and civil society’s associated rapid development. The 1996–1998 Romanian, Bulgarian, and Slovak examples of successful
democratic transition suggest the need of a more efficient approach. They equally indicate that the European Union—and not the United States—is the main regional actor possessing the appropriate instruments. Unfortunately, EU’s current enlargement-fuelled malaise makes its large-scale involvement in the Commonwealth of Independent States highly improbable, at least in the near future.

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