

The Ukrainian Presidential Elections of 2004-5: Myths and Facts

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Those of us who follow Slavic politics were used to the raucous contest in Ukraine, but none of us was prepared for what was to follow. Over the last few months, Ukraine watchers have followed the battle between pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych and former director of the Ukrainian central bank, Viktor Yushchenko. The former won the elections by the tiniest of margins.

Nevertheless, it should come as no surprise. As of this writing, on November 23, 2004, Ukraine seems on the verge of splitting apart. Major protests against the election are presently going on in Lv'iv, Kiev, and other major towns in western Ukraine. Many of these protests are building tent cities in the public squares and vowing not to return home until Yushchenko is declared the winner. The city councils of both Lv'iv and Kiev have declared the Yushchenko the president of Ukraine. Yushchenko's supporters accuse the Yanukovych camp of rigging the elections. The American media is reporting solely from the Yushchenko camp and is echoing his demands.

For example, it is regularly reported that in eastern Ukraine, where Russian is spoken and Ukrainian nationalists are held in contempt, Yanukovych recorded turnout rates of 90% or more, considered to be too high to be credible. What the media has not reported is that in western Ukraine, more Ukrainian provinces have recorded identical turnout rates than have been recorded in the east, without a whimper of protest from the west. Or again, western analysts have complained about victories for Yanukovych of 85% or more in parts of eastern Ukraine, while ignoring identical margins of victory in the west.

The mythic morality play in the western media is between a "corrupt" and "authoritarian" Kuchma regime in Kiev, under which Yanukovych served as prime minister and is close to the president. Against this is the "democratic" and "progressive" Yushchenko, who seeks ties with the west "based around shared democratic values." His former role as chief banker of Ukraine and thus the mouthpiece for major western banking concerns is largely played down, and, by and large, his "desire" to forge ties with the west is played up. Here is merely one example from today's edition of the Independent:

Ukraine was perilously close to civil conflict last night after the democratic opposition refused to recognize the regime's candidate as the victor in an election that will determine whether the country deepens its fragile democracy, and tilts towards the West, or heads down the autocratic route of its northern neighbour and former master, Russia.

This saccharine, syrupy morality play is a gross parody of the truth. The Independent continues:

The opposition and western election monitors accused the government of dirty tricks before and massive fraud during the poll to tip the victory to Mr Yanukovych by 3 per cent. In many polling stations where Mr Yanukovych gained most votes, more than 100 per cent of voters apparently turned out.

These arguments the Independent is putting out are identical to what is being reported by the New York Times and the Washington Post. There is no variation on the story. Largely, this is because the Yushchenko camp is providing western media outlets with press releases in excellent English. The Yushchenko, less media savvy, has not done so, and its accusations of vote fraud in the western part of Ukraine where Yushchenko has his power base have gone unreported.

The reality of the matter is rather different. Ukraine in this new century has made major steps forward in the economic realm. In the 1990s, under President Leonid Kravchuk, the economy was dismantled in secret deals and given to a corrupt group of oligarchs centered around Alexander Volkov, Gregory Surkis, Igor Bakai, Viktor Pinchuk and Vadim Rabinovych. All the above are Israeli citizens and the business deals in question were made in Israel prior to them becoming public knowledge in Ukraine. They control the Ukrainian economy to this day.

Under their control, the Ukrainian economy lost much of its GDP and its industrial base was stripped clean. The media was firmly in the hands of magnate Rabinovych which kept public pressure off his colleagues. However, the election of Leonid Kuchma began to change this. Although originally supported by the Israeli cabal, Kuchma began to steer a course away from them and one towards the anti-oligarchical stances taken by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

For example, he initiated a major audit into the finances of millionaire Julia Tymoshenko, who, though a very rich woman (through questionable investments in natural gas transport), seemed to pay very little in taxes. Quickly, she began to form an opposition bloc to Kuchma and began a smear campaign, the effects of which are still being felt.

Although Kuchma supported the NATO-brokered GUUAM pact (Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova), he began to make moves that were not in the interest of oligarchical rule in Ukraine. The United States began to worry greatly about Putin's moves to protect the Russian oil supply. His arrest in 2003 of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, also an Israeli, sent ripples throughout the western oil and gas concerns. The GUUAM pact was a means of dealing with Putin, in that it sought a string of pro-U.S. states that made up the major pipeline route through to western Europe and the Mediterranean, designed solely to bypass Russia so as to ensure western control. A Ukraine tilting towards Russia dealt a blow to these well laid plans.

Under Kuchma, inflation was tamed, GDP growth reached a whopping 16% in the beginning of 2004, and unemployment plummeted to about 3%. The growth of the economy was substantially higher than these official statistics, because so much of the economy is on either the black or grey markets. Due to this, Kuchma became more and more popular despite the assaults waged upon him by the Tymoshenko bloc.

As the Presidential elections neared, Kuchma was constitutionally forbidden to run for an additional term. His closest comrade was Yanukovych, and early polls showed him in the lead. It made some sense due to the high-powered economy Kuchma had put together.

A worried Yushchenko began to accuse the government of vote rigging even before the first round of elections got started. Yushchenko, the former chair of the Ukrainian central bank, was often associated in the minds of the Ukrainian voters as the oligarch's candidate, though in the western press he was lionized as the "democratic opposition." He remains close to the

western banking establishment, including long Khodorkovsky comrade Jacob Rothschild.

As the second and final round of returns came in, Yanukovych eked out a victory of 49.4% versus 46.7% for Viktor Yushchenko. Immediately, the country came apart. Tymoshenko called for a general strike to paralyze the country. Under a Yanukovych administration, she was very likely to have gone to prison for tax evasion. Now, assuming Yanukovych takes his place, Tymoshenko will go to prison for tax evasion and attempting to overthrow the government. (NB – my sources in Ukraine tell me that it is widespread knowledge in Kiev that Tymoshenko, who is married, is sleeping with Yushchenko, who is married to an American).

Out of nowhere, a youth movement was set up named Pora (It is Time, a subsidiary of the Soros empire), and rock concerts were staged just days after Sunday's voting. Mountains of orange clothing appeared as if from a volcano, and a major public-relations campaign was launched in western countries. Of course, all of this had been planned months in advance. News of the huge counter-rallies of Yanukovych supporters were suppressed in both the local and international press.

Yushchenko's camp claims that exit polls showed him with a slight lead. The western press has amplified that to a "substantial" lead. The reality is that exit polls, depending upon the region of Ukraine taken, spoke to several different leaders and certainly did not uniformly crown one candidate. The exit polls cited derive from the "Democratic Initiatives Foundation," which is an American organization. Yushchenko's campaign, it should be noted, had a larger war chest than the Yanukovych camp, and this is partially because he utilized substantial support from western governments and NGOs. American tax monies went into the Yushchenko campaign, making a mockery of George W. Bush's statement that "the election should be free from any foreign interference," by which he meant Russia.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Yushchenko's political party, "Our Ukraine," funded largely by Tymoshenko and her allies, had nowhere near a majority of seats on the Rada, or Ukrainian parliament, another indicator as to his real popularity. The so-called "no-confidence" vote that brought down the Yanukovych government and trumpeted regularly in the western press, as well as the recent Supreme Court ruling calling for new elections, was brought about by three things: a) threats from the IMF and western donor countries that aid will dry up if Yushchenko does not win, and b) the "Our Ukraine" and "Hromada" factions promised the smaller parties making up the Rada power in any future Yushchenko government, thus, formerly anti-Yushchenko factions such as the communists and the Socialist Party of Alexander Moroz switched their support to Tymoshenko and her clan, and c) that the government had been paralyzed during the demonstrations, making running the country impossible.

The threat of cutting of IMF support is particularly ironic given that fact that when Yushchenko was chairman of the central bank, he assisted in the laundering of millions in IMF cash through the agency of the then prime minister, Paul Lazarenko. The IMF lent the Ukrainian government more money than it normally would have at that time largely because Yushchenko falsified the amount of cash reserves on hand at the bank, thus making Ukraine look more credit worthy than it actually was. This money, once laundered through front companies located in the west, was used by the likes of Tymoshenko and her various lovers to buy up the natural gas transport systems in Ukraine. Ukraine watchers normally refer to this as the Lazarenko affair, a criminal conspiracy suspiciously left out of U.S. government posturing over Ukraine's elections.

This is the west's candidate of "reform" and "democratic values." Conservative think-tanks such as the oil industry-funded National Center for Public Policy Analysis consider

Yushchenko a promoter of “free market values.”

Another accusation which has reached the heights of absurdity has been the alleged government control of the media. The Ukrainian media is strictly in Israeli hands and agitated shamelessly for Yushchenko. The present media situation in Ukraine is well described by Andrew Wilson in his book, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*:

The various clans have also been dividing up the Ukrainian media between them. Not surprisingly, Kuchma’s supporters have a strong position in state TV and the regional press (regional papers tend to outsell national papers in Ukraine), but most of the major players also control their own papers. In the capital, Surkis’s media interests include the newspapers *Law and Business*, *Alternative*, and *Kiev News*; Bakai has *Today*; while Rabinovych controls (or controlled) *Capital News*, *Business Week*, the UNIAR news agency and the radio station Supernova. . . . Pinchuk, Volkov and Bakai, with Alfa Kapital, have all been shareholders in the top-selling *Facts*. . . .(269)

Therefore, whatever pro-Kuchma reporting there was in Ukraine, the so-called opposition had much more media impact. This does not include the major foreign outlets being brought into Ukraine through their European affiliates, all of which have been shamelessly pro-Yushchenko. It has also been reported that anti-Yanukovych advertisements have run on state-owned television.

As it currently stands, the forces loyal to Yushchenko have vowed not to leave their barricades within the major cities of western Ukraine. The security forces have issued a press release saying they will not tolerate any lawlessness, lines of riot police are presently forming to guard major government buildings in Kiev and Lv’iv.

Tymoshenko has been front and center of the entire operation. An extremely beautiful woman, she is an asset, so to speak, to the Yushchenko camp, and is just as visible as Yushchenko himself. Her website, it might be worthy to note, is little more than hundreds of pictures of her in various states of undress. She is somewhat popular with younger Ukrainian males for this reason. There is not a single aspect of this stage managed reality drama that is not deliberately distorted by the western press.

It makes sense to conclude that Yanukovych victory was legitimate. If there were irregularities in eastern Ukraine, there certainly were also in the west. A strong economy could only have helped Kuchma’s hand picked successor. In fact, it would have been surprising for Yushchenko to win the election given the strength of the economy and the low levels of unemployment. Such factors are central to American elections, for example.

At this juncture, how far the protesters are willing to go is a matter of speculation. Present rhetoric is clearly leaning in favor of civil disobedience and rioting, both of which have been publicly endorsed both by Yushchenko as well as Tymoshenko. Presently, Yanukovych's pleas towards to Yushchenko camp for talks have earned nasty rebukes. It seems, at least at this juncture, the Yushchenko camp is bent on violence. The U.S, predictably, has backed Yushchenko and refused to recognize the results of the election.