

**THE BEST WEEK IN  
UKRAINIAN HISTORY?**

**KIEV REPORT #2**

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**U**kraine has just had perhaps its luckiest week in its history -- a week where everything went right, and the educational process was so intense, so logical, so marvelously cogent that the country went through a hundred years of political evolution. It is now, by right, a part of Europe, a part of the Western cultural tradition, a true democracy! This has been not merely a week in life of one country, but an entire page in the history of the world -- and, let us hope, **democracy!**

**MEET THE CANDIDATES**

**I**t all started out rather unpromising with this fall's presidential elections. The alternatives were the usual: on one hand, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, with a much smarter and more sinister person, Viktor Medvedchuk (and Kuchma's son-in-law Viktor Pinchuk in tow), lurking behind; on the other hand, former Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko, with a much smarter and more sinister person, Yulia Timoshenko, lurking behind.

Both Yanukovich and Yushchenko were appointed by one and the same President Kuchma. Medvedchuk and Timoshenko had both proved that they know how to turn their government connection into enormous personal wealth. I could tell the difference between these two teams no better than I could tell Coke from Pepsi.

There was another divide: Ukraine speaks Ukrainian and Russian, it has Western and Eastern part, it can join NATO or ally itself with Russia. Yanukovich is from the Russian-speaking part of Ukraine, speaks bad Ukrainian, and so his campaign was

getting its local currency by exchanging the rubles it had. Yanukovich's campaign tone was thuggish, unmistakably betraying presence of Russian political consultants.

Yushchenko's power base was in Western Ukraine, its tone was uncharacteristically sleek, it tended to mention democracy, and it was not hurting for dollars and euros.

Since I wanted Ukrainian people to actually have a better life, I had no preference between the two. But I strongly felt that using a thuggish tone was a better electoral tactic as that was something the Ukrainians could relate to. My money was on Yanukovich, and I thought I was smart.

### ***SURPRISES***

Then an amazing thing happened: people appeared to deeply resent Yanukovich talking down to them, while actually appreciating Yushchenko's respectful and meaningful messages.

Yanukovich's billboards, with wonderful, in a certain way, ultimate, slogans "Just because!" and "That's the way it should be!" were everywhere, while Yushchenko's slogan "Yes!" (with a horseshoe as a symbol of luck), were nowhere to be seen. In Ukraine, it is called "using the administrative resource": after all, Yanukovich is a current Prime Minister while Yushchenko is just an opposition leader. Ukraine is a democracy, and everyone can sell advertising space to Yushchenko if they wish to have all their documents for the last five years audited by someone extremely unfriendly and their permits and licenses withdrawn. And of course there could not be any fair description of Yushchenko on any state-owned media.

Then, right in the middle of the campaign, Yushchenko had a little problem: in one day, his entire face got covered with horrific acne-like inflammation, his nose swelled to twice its former size, so that he started to look like a Hollywood movie monster. Since nobody in the world has ever had such a disease, especially one that developed so quickly and in such an inopportune time, people suspected that Yanukovich may have poisoned Yushchenko, probably with dioxin.

There is no direct evidence that Yanukovich was involved. But if you look like a thug, talk like a thug, and behave like a thug, people tend to suspect that you are a thug. It does not help matters if you come from a mafia-controlled Donetsk region of Ukraine, have a long history of association with the murderous mafioso who controls

the region, and having had two criminal convictions, did time in jail. In a word, Yanukovich got stereotyped.

Yushchenko got stereotyped as well: people assumed that since he had suffered horrible disfigurement for talking about the truth and democracy he must have really meant it. You have the stigmata – you must be Jesus Christ. And as a result, two things happened: Yushchenko became infallible; for Ukrainians, he became the focus of all their dreams and aspirations, and (pay close attention!) truth and democracy became important because Yushchenko was talking about them. As far as poisoning, believers duly noted that mortal poison did Yushchenko no lasting harm.

Let me say it again, since this is very important. Jesus was the guy who could perform a miracle here and there. People did not have, nor could they understand, the moral code that Jesus was proposing. But since Jesus could do miracles, people accepted his moral code as their own.

Same here. Make no mistake, truth and democracy meant nothing for Ukrainians. Ukrainian students cheated and waited for the time when they become businessmen so they could start stealing. Kiev's Mercedes-riding bureaucrats were the very epitome of graft, and now they are walking after Yushchenko with the strange smile on their faces, inviting students who demonstrated in the cold to spend the night in their palaces: obviously, there was more to them than graft.

Ukrainians did not accept the theoretical notion that somewhere there could be a government that actually served the people, respected them, and told them the truth. It has all changed now in Ukraine, probably forever, just because Yushchenko said that it should.

### ***THE "ELECTIONS"***

***Then*** there came the first round of voting on October 31. It is now clear that Yushchenko got more than 50% of the vote. But God had mercy on Ukraine and prevented Yushchenko's win in the first round. God has firmly decided to make Ukraine free and democratic once and for all, and for that Ukraine needed to go through some suffering so as to earn its freedom. There was serious fraud in favor of Yanukovich, with the result that both Yushchenko and Yanukovich got about 39% each, with Yushchenko getting marginally more votes. The total is less than 100% because there were 22 other candidates.

Now, that was really something. Never in the post-Soviet space did the opposition presidential candidate get more votes than the candidate of power. In fact, many people thought that voting against Yanukovich was quite useless. Other people thought that voting for Yanukovich was quite useless, but Yanukovich did much to disabuse them of this notion. Regional officials of the regions where Yanukovich would not win, knew they would be immediately fired (and they were). So, a lot of little tricks were used. Voting in Ukraine is voluntary, and students who wanted to get a failing grade on their next exam could abstain from voting. For the rest, the procedure was as follows: a student would obtain a ballot, choose any candidate he or she wanted as long as it was Yanukovich, show the ballot to the person quietly standing by the ballot box, probably their Civics or Ethics professor, drop the ballot into the ballot box, and be assured of a passing grade on their next Chemistry examination. For the older generation, there was another trick. Fail to vote for Yanukovich, and see your heat and water turned right off.

And yet, even with all these tricks, Yanukovich only obtained 45% of the vote. It meant that his true level support could not have been greater than 30%. And yet, Yanukovich HAD to win the second round, had to get at least 20% more. Why could not Yanukovich lose? Because there is a lot of stolen property at stake, and when property is stolen, there is no receipt to prove ownership. That means that a new government could take the property away. Whatever you could say about the famous Khodorkovsky case, it is no longer advisable for the oligarchs to have property for which they have absolutely no legal title.

In the second round, there was even more fraud on behalf of Yanukovich. As this is now well documented, I will not go into that. People of Ukraine are no strangers to fraud, and they could have submitted to it easily, with barely a sigh. But now they had a lightning rod of Yushchenko, a highly moral person they imagined him to be. Regardless of who Yushchenko actually is, what matters is that people appointed him as a personification of all the best that is in them, a focal point of all their hopes. From now on, a stab at Yushchenko was a stab in their heart.

And that made Yushchenko much more than a President: he is now in the same league with Reagan, the Pope of Rome, and the Beatles. There is a Woodstock atmosphere in Kiev, and Yushchenko supporters, people of all ages, look like the happiest people in the world. They have clearly found themselves, their inner freedom, and their strength.

## ***IRONIES***

**L**et us again return to what happened here, as it is unprecedented. In the second round of voting on November 21, Yushchenko got about 70% of support, and if the elections were fair he would have by now be the President-elect. Would Ukraine be a real democracy now?

Absolutely not!!! Ukraine would have gotten Yushchenko as President, and would have calmly gone back to cheating, stealing, hiding from authorities, and suffering as it always has.

After all, Yushchenko already HAD BEEN a Prime Minister, and quite recently. And there was no enthusiasm, no support, no happiness, no tears of joy, and lousy economic results, worse than those demonstrated by Yanukovich.

If the elections were fair, it would have made no difference who won, Yushchenko or Yanukovich. Again. After all, Yanukovich is no worse than Ken Lay: just a tough, self-serving, and cynical kind of guy.

What happened? With great help from Yanukovich, and thanks to him, Yushchenko has lit the inner light in the souls of mortally insulted people, the light they did not know was there. Truth, democracy, justice, or heroism mean nothing unless they are sanctified. In one fell swoop, Yushchenko have sanctified them all, and faces of his followers have changed. What happened in Ukraine is that the truth and justice were lost and are now being defended as a newfound, cherished, and fundamental possession of every citizen.

If Yushchenko now represents God, his detractors are with the Devil. Some of them, to be sure, are hellish personalities, gangsters and murderers, such as the Head of the Donetsk Region or the Mayor of Odessa.

### **TRANSFORMATION**

**I** am more interested in a momentary transformation. There is a woman I know who went on TV to defend Yanukovich. Her eyes looked dead, her hands were shaking, and she had made her worst hairdo. Across from her, there was a woman who defended Yushchenko, and that one grew ten years younger in four days, her back was straight and her eyes were shining. Was the debate about Yushchenko? Absolutely not.

Actually both of these women used to be equally skeptical about him. But inside one woman a tiny flickering light was now almost extinguished, while the other had the light of her soul burning as brightly as it could, just like the bright orange she wore. It was the debate about human dignity, with Yushchenko as a starting point.

Yushchenko is a tall man with a robust face of a peasant. Women here consider him attractive. But after the second round of elections, with his pockmarked and swollen face, he is universally seen as beautiful. This adoration brings a real danger of Yushchenko not being able to live up to it, but this is the case right now.

And let me just mention the designer revolution that happened here: people that used to choose between gray and gray were now proudly wearing bright orange, and 99% of them are doing so for the very first time in their lives.

Ukrainian TV these last four days is beyond description. First, there was Channel 5, a pro-Yushchenko private channel beamed straight to the Independence Square where most of the demonstrations took place. Channel 5 had a constant stream of interviews with intellectuals, artists, politicians, etc, all of them wearing something orange. Most of the times, the orange color looked attractive, stylish, appropriate for a successful, accomplished, strong-willed person that was being interviewed.

But I remember a man in his seventies, in the cheapest brown suit and a pitiful tie. Around his thin wrinkled neck, he was wearing an bright orange woolen scarf they gave him in the studio, and this scarf looked horribly out of place on this frail, poor, sickly creature. Very uncomfortable in front of the camera, the man said, "I am a retired army major, a World War II veteran. I wish to address myself to the soldiers. My sons! Soldiers! I am kneeling before you! Do not shoot at people, the people have made their choice! I want to say... Soldiers... When I was young..."

The old man was searching for words, panicking as he was being broadcasted live to a huge, country-wide audience. "Thank you very much!" said the anchorwoman in a bright and crisp professional voice, eager to end his suffering. The camera zoomed in for a goodbye. For the first time, the old man looked straight into the camera and said, "People just want to be free!" The orange scarf did not look out of place, and I could suddenly tell the guy really was a major. The guy was having his moment, even if a bit late in life.

And this is important. God did not create Man to chew cud for seventy years and then die: God created Man for one, two, or three defining moments, and the old man was having his.

But sometimes official channels were even better than the opposition TV. One report I saw informed the public that "special riot police is always ready to defend the Constitution" and the camera proceeded to get a close-up of fearsome black police dog.

Then I realized that President Kuchma, unwittingly, is a true father of his nation!

There are things in the world, such as trees, oceans, and countries, whose existence depends on all people. And then there are things, such as love, truth, dignity, inspiration, that exist only because of you. If you are not ready to give your all to defend your love and your truth they cease to exist. Again: truth is something that depends solely and exclusively on you; if you fail to defend it, it dies.

There simply is no way to transfer this responsibility on someone else's shoulders. And from the bottom of my heart I thank God for the existence of President Kuchma, who showed guard dogs to thousands and thousands of Ukrainian students so that they would stand up, put away their Chemistry textbooks, attach their orange armbands and go to the Square.

For truth cannot be defined as a statement that corresponds to reality. Truth is what makes you unafraid of guard dogs. What happens on that Square is no rock concert, people are braving dogs and weapons – and ***hallelujah! – a nation is reborn!***

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