

From roses to bullets: the rise and decline of post-Soviet colour revolutions

Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese

Donnacha Ó Beacháin is Lecturer and Marie Curie Fellow at the School of Law and Government, Dublin City University

Abel Polese is Marie Curie Fellow at the Institute of Geography, University of Edinburgh

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Civic and political actions aimed at achieving political change and removing unpopular presidents occurred in several post-communist states between 1998 and 2006 would seem to have many elements in common. All regime changes were attempted using non-violent protest methods and a political opposition, assisted by a vibrant civil society, popular support, and Western aid succeeded in either replacing or, at least, challenging a political monopoly. In some cases, these “colour revolutions” have produced significant changes, notably in Slovakia, Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine; in other cases change has been less visible but has nonetheless affected society and revitalized the political opposition as in Belarus and Azerbaijan or, to a lesser extent, in Russia or Kazakhstan. Little has changed, however, in countries like Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan.

While it would be wrong to assume that the phenomenon is limited to post-socialist countries – similar events have occurred elsewhere as in Nepal 2006 and Myanmar 2007 – the very nature of post-communist countries, whose political and economic structures were similar at the end of the cold war, provides good grounds for comparative analyses. Of particular interest is the momentum that colour revolutions gained between the end of 2004 and the first half of 2005, when expectations had risen to such an extent that every election in CIS countries seemed susceptible to triggering a revolution, at least until the Uzbek authorities showed that use of non-violent strategies would not necessarily be matched with a similar attitude by the elites and the price for miscalculating government responses was life itself. Since the Andijan massacre of May 2005, when hundreds of protesting Uzbeks were shot dead, coloured protests became since ever more cautious but the strategy was not phased out as the 2006 protests in Minsk demonstrate. However, it lost some of the force and impetus that made it a modular phenomenon able to build a revolution on

the mere expectations of political actors.¹ The starting question of our research is: why were some protesters, as in Georgia, able to take power brandishing roses while others, as in Uzbekistan, were subdued by brute force.

In particular, we are interested in the reasons for the colour revolutions' popularity and success. The speed with which the phenomenon spread was surprising and it now seems that there has been a convergence of techniques used by both post-soviet governments and oppositions. Despite the lost momentum after Andijan similar techniques have been used in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia between 2007 and 2008.²

By comparing the way these revolutions were attempted or executed throughout the post-soviet space this article attempts to address the questions above. To do so we have chosen to concentrate on the whole of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) for a number of reasons. First of all, being all successors of the Soviet Union the similarities between those countries are most evident. Second, it is unclear when the colour revolutions started so that a choice, more or less arbitrary, is necessary so that – and this is the third point – we chose to concentrate on those countries that our field experience allow us to analyse to a deeper extent. The article starts with an overview of the colour movement from the first stirrings to the present day. We then propose criteria that will be applied to our analysis, constructed on five variables. The factual analysis of individual countries that follows is built around these five variables.

¹ Cf. Bessinger, Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena. In: *Perspective on Politics*, 5 (2007) 2, pp. 249-264.

² Since 2005, the emphasis on civil society has also motivated ruling elites to manufacture pro-government movements and organisations to counterbalance those of the opposition. We are aware that the colour revolutions phenomenon is an ongoing process, which is why we have adopted a circumscribed time frame and concentrate on the 2003-2006 period for comparative analysis.

I. The alpha and omega of colour revolutions

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, non-violent protest became increasingly common in communist Eastern Europe culminating with the emergence of Solidarność in 1981. Millions forced the Polish government to renegotiate work conditions, providing ample evidence of how strong and successful non-violent protest could be. By the end of the decade, non-violent “revolutions” were experienced on a major scale. Primary examples include the Czechoslovak “Velvet Revolution” and East German “Friendly Revolution” while in the USSR a human chain of two million people stretching from Vilnius to Tallinn held hands to symbolise their determination to achieve independence for the Baltic Republics (1989). Although sometimes, as in Tbilisi (1989) and Vilnius (1991), the authorities killed protesters, the demonstrators largely stuck with their strategy of peaceful collective action. This movement of people power has not been limited to Eastern Europe. The Philippines, South Korea, Pakistan, Burma, China and several other countries have seen the rise of non-violent protest movements, though the outcome has not always been idyllic.³

In the course of the 1990s, non-violent protest movements came to be perfected. The Slovak elections of 1998 are considered a major turning point when opposition parties, civil society and the population jointly challenged the legitimacy of Prime Minister Mečiar and, through voter education and promoting a high electoral turnout, engineered a victory for the opposition.⁴ Two years later, Belgrade was the theatre of a similar movement though unlike the case in Slovakia, the Serbian government refused to acknowledge the election results. It followed that for the first

³ Thompson, Democratic Revolutions.

time in the post-communist space, street protests were used to de-legitimize the ruling elites and force a president, in this case Slobodan Milošević, to resign. The defining moment of the campaign was the occupation of the parliament by ordinary people in what has been called the “Bulldozer revolution”. What had been considered isolated episodes in Slovakia and Serbia came to have a more widespread significance in the following years. Revolutions passed from being a sporadic event to a constant worry for political elites facing elections⁵ and an attempt to effect a colour revolution was witnessed, during 2003-2006, in most former soviet republics.

There are a number of reasons why the phenomenon was witnessed on such a scale in the former communist space. One perspective might be that the former communist countries were a primary target because of their geopolitical importance and it was easier to build on the structures created during the Cold War, when large sections of the US intelligence resources were devoted to the region. From another point of view, income distribution had become more uneven, despite economic growth, and fomented discontent that could be channelled into bitterness against rigged election results. When evidence of election falsification could be produced, the elections proved to be a defining emotional moment, a collective slap in the face that prompted civil protests. Civil society mobilised and cultural and linguistic similarities could help a diffusion of information and exchange of know how. In addition, some of the countries could be classified as “post-totalitarian”⁶ with the political elites losing support at both the domestic and international level, which in turn narrowed the tools they could use to manage the state. This did not happen to the same extent

⁴ Bunce/Wolchik, Favorable Conditions and Electoral Revolutions. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 17 (2006) 4, pp. 5-18.

⁵ In this respect Tucker has maintained that elections, and in particular rigged elections, are a climax of emotional involvement and it is easy to mobilize people; see Tucker, Enough! In: *Perspectives on Politics*, 5 (2007) 3, pp. 537-553.

⁶ Linz/Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*.

everywhere and to compare the different outputs of similar movements and strategies, from Georgia 2003 to Belarus 2006, we believe it is useful to organize the analysis along five major variables and show how each relevant country interacts with these five variables.

The first variable relates to the character of the state on the eve of the protests. Much depends on the attitude of elites and their commitment to democracy. None of the twelve countries analysed here was classifiable as a democracy before the events⁷ but it is undeniable that some presented more democratic tendencies than others in terms of freedom of expression, impartiality and independence of media, repressive potential and attitude to political pluralism. Relatively democratic oriented elites are more likely to allow the preconditions for a colour revolution to take root by permitting the development of civil society, the opposition more freedom to organize,⁸ foreign influences in domestic affairs and generally not hindering popular political participation. A democratic and permissive attitude might not necessarily derive from a genuine desire for democracy but might be dictated by necessity such as lack of economic resources that prompts the elite to be more Western friendly in exchange for greater financial aid. Alternatively, the elite in power might present some signs of fragmentation, given that conflicts for power inject factionalism so that “the regime” is far from being monolithic. This can sometimes result in elite defections to the opposition during a political crisis or opportunistic bandwagoning as power leaks from the incumbent president and flows onto the streets.

The second main variable is the opposition. A compact opposition is a *sine qua non* for a number of reasons. If opposition leaders are engaged in a struggle for power against one another they will be unable to challenge pro-presidential elites and

⁷ Ibid. See also the rating conducted by Freedom House at www.freedomhouse.org.

will tend to steal voters from one another rather than the ruling regime. Only when the opposition can unite the anti-regime elements in the electorate can they try to convince those who are undecided or on whom the regime depends. Furthermore, if the opposition itself is fragmented external actors (and the electorate itself) will be confused and disheartened by the presence of so many leaders. It is important to highlight the conditions in which the opposition operates: the opposition might be illegal, with the international community unable to express support without positioning itself openly against the regime. The ability to unite is also affected by the presence of charismatic leaders able to rouse the population and give concrete shape to popular discontent by formulating a coherent and cogent programme of action. Finally the strength of the opposition is also measurable through the economic means they have at their disposal. If the economic elite is fully backing the government, it will be difficult for the opposition to find the means to mount a challenge.

Although we agree that external influences have been a key element in the protests and we use it as a third variable, we consider them of secondary importance. It would be wrong to believe that the USA and the EU, by pumping money into a country, can by themselves change the destiny of individual post-soviet countries. While development aid does give external actors a say, experience demonstrates that aid may not reach its targets at the local level but rather may simply end up in an autocrat's foreign bank account.⁹ In addition, external influences are strongly affected by a number of factors other than ideological or political. In oil rich countries, for instance, the influence of external actors is limited as foreign money is seen only as an asset in addition to domestic resources and not as a vital necessity for the local

⁸ And allowing it to be legal, which is not the case of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, for instance.

⁹ Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents*.

economy, as is the case of countries that have few natural resources.¹⁰ It is important to assess the relationship between the elite and foreign forces, as diplomatic pressures may apply; by the same token, foreign support to the opposition, when possible, could be a strong factor. As mentioned earlier foreign aid comes as a result of a *do ut des* compromise, a return from the country is expected, in terms of support for democracy or enhanced diplomatic relations. However it is important to explore how the instructions of foreign powers are perceived and interpreted at the local level. Do recipients follow a suggested path because they believe in it or because they think it is the best way to gain access to financial resources? There is also the question of how external forces have succeeded in influencing domestic policies.

External forces can penetrate a country through political and economic channels but recent tendencies have shown that foreign powers are also keen to concentrate on civil society,¹¹ which is the fourth variable. Given its particular position in between politics and the polity, it is important to explore the significance of civil society. This varies from country to country and depends on historical traditions, current human resources, practical knowledge and financial resources. It is also useful to understand what influence civil society has in a country's politics, popular attitudes and behaviour.

The fifth and final variable we would mention is the people. The people could be considered the main point of the revolution, given that power depends on people, directly or indirectly.¹² As important as organized movement there is the silent

¹⁰ Kazakhstan has already declined to accept EU financial aid and is now only accepting offers of technical assistance that usually has few strings attached in terms of political reform. Informal conversation between Donnacha Ó Beacháin with EU Commission in Central Asia, March 2006.

¹¹ Tordjman, "Surfing the wave". In: Ó Beacháin/Polese (Hg.), *Coloured Revolutions in Eurasia 1998-2005*.

¹² Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*; Cf. Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

struggle of people who can refuse, on a personal basis, to support the government¹³ .

However, since a major resource of the opposition are street protests, it is important to understand how and why people react to stimuli from politics and civil society and to what extent they are able to organize by themselves or to follow a leader. Some questions would include: how motivated do they become during the process and how much are they willing to risk? How do the authorities and the opposition perceive these people? Does the opposition think that their help is going to be crucial? Do the authorities overlook them because they feel the people will never represent a threat or do they tend to try and control them even more?

Table 1: Conditions of Colour Revolutions

	State	Ruling Elites	Opposition	External Influence	Civil Society	Population
Armenia	Few natural resources and weak state	Relatively permissive but repressive if challenged	Fragile unity occasionally achieved but prone to division	Considered a Russian ally but also recipient of much US assistance	Active	Relatively active
Azerbaijan	Resource rich with expanding economy but weak political	Relatively permissive but repressive if challenged	Well resourced but divided and lacking alternative ideology or policies	Weak	Active, at least nominally	Moderately active

¹³ Scott, Weapons of the Weak.

	institutions					
Belarus	Fairly strong	Repressive	Unable to compact	Dependent on Russia for energy. Weak western influence as many sanctions already applied	Relatively active, though frequently repressed	Relatively active but few are radically against the regime
Georgia	Few natural resources and weak institutions	Relatively permissive and pro-West	Usually divided but important elements compacted in 2003	Large US assistance	Developed	Active
Kazakhstan	Oil rich, fairly strong economy but weak political institutions	Repressive	Small and disunited	Weak	Activities closely monitored and circumscribed	Passive, consider themselves well-off and stable by standards of the region
Kyrgyzstan	Few natural resources and weak state	Relatively permissive	Many small opposition parties with little ideological underpinning, difficult to unite	Only CIS country to host US and Russian military bases. Large aid recipient in 1990s	Western-funded NGOs developed in capital, clan networks important elsewhere	Outside the capital, clan networks predominate as people mobiliser, large emigration
Moldova	Fairly strong	Relatively permissive	Disunited and with different	Both the EU and Russia	Quite active. NGO sector has	People are involved in

		and pro-West	visions	influence, the latter in energy and territorial disputes	been growing since independence	protests but confused by too similar political manifestos, large emigration
Russia	Strong with rich natural resources	Increasingly Repressive	Active but harshly repressed by the authorities and not always well coordinated	Weak	Active but under increasingly tight control of the authorities, thus de facto decreasing	Passive
Ukraine	Strong	Relatively permissive	United in 2004	Dependence on Russia for energy supply	Developed	Apparently passive but frequently mobilized since 2001
Uzbekistan	Significant natural resources but very weak institutions	Very Repressive	No opposition parties permitted	Weak, increasingly aligned with Russia	Strongly repressed by the authorities	Passive
Tajikistan	Few natural resources, very poor, weak political institutions	Repressive	Opposition parties unable to unite and vulnerable to cooption by regime	Dependent on Russian military support, investment and remittances	Weak	Passive, fear of renewed civil war, large emigration

Turkmenistan	Rich in natural resources but very weak institutions	Very repressive	No opposition parties permitted	Official neutrality and hostility to foreign alliances	Weak	Passive, substantial emigration of Russians since 1991
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Bessinger has shown how such tendencies can be diffused from country to country; when victorious revolutions occur the chances of similar events happening in other states increases for a time as protesters imitate these successful models.¹⁴ A revolution in a neighbouring country can galvanize the opposition as structural requirements for a revolution diminish and new political opportunities and possibilities are seen to emerge. Likewise the authorities may learn from neighbouring states what they need to do to avoid that situation. This is why in the course of this paper countries will be presented chronologically, based on when elections took place, with a view to illustrating the “state of affairs” of the colour revolution phenomenon at any given moment. Finally, looking at the dates of each election or protest (Table 2), it would appear that once similar protest movements occur at the same time, at least one is going to fail. As all eyes focus on the election most likely to produce a colour revolution, other contests occurring at the same time are pushed into the background and lose one resource generally at the disposal of the opposition during a colour revolution, that being intense international attention and pressure to conform with election standards. So, for example, parliamentary elections in Tajikistan in February and March 2005 received scant attention compared to those in Kyrgyzstan.

Uzbekistan's 2004 parliamentary elections were entirely eclipsed by Yushchenko's third round presidential victory of the same day.

Table 2: Elections in the Commonwealth of Independent States

	Elections	(Attempted) Revolution	Result
Armenia	19 February and 5 March 2003, (presidential); 25 May 2003 (parliamentary); 27 November 2005 (only referendum);	April 2004	Opposition defeat
Georgia	2 November 2003 (parliamentary)	November 2003	Rose Revolution: President Shevardnadze deposed and replaced by Mikheil Saakashvili in January 2004 elections (96% for Saakashvili)
Russia	December 2003 (parliamentary) 14 March 2004 (presidential)	None	No change
Ukraine	31 October 2004 (presidential)	November 2004	Orange Revolution: Defeat for Victor Yanukovich, Victor Yushchenko elected President (5-% for Yushchenko)
Uzbekistan	2004 (26 December) Parliamentary	Andijan, 13 May 2005	Massacre

¹⁴ Bessinger, Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena. In: Perspective on Politics, 5 (2007) 2, pp. 249-264.

Tajikistan	Tajikistan 27 February and 13 March 2005 (Parliamentary)	None	No change
Moldova	6 March 2005 (Parliamentary)	2003-5: Ruling communist party changes orientation from Russia to the West	“Silent revolution”
Kyrgyzstan	27 February and 13 March 2005 (parliamentary)	March 2005	Tulip Revolution: President Askar Akaev ousted and replaced by Kurmanbek Bakiev whose presidency is confirmed in July 2005 election (89% for Bakiev)
Azerbaijan	15 October 2003 (presidential) 6 November 2005 (parliamentary)	October 2003, November 2005	Opposition defeat
Kazakhstan	19 September and 3 October 2004 (parliamentary), December 2005 (presidential)	None	No change
Belarus	13 and 17 October 2004 (parliamentary and referendum); 19 March 2006 (presidential)	12 April 2002 (“We can’t live like this”); October 2004, March 2006	Opposition defeat
Turkmenistan	December 2004 (parliamentary) February 2007 (presidential)	None	No change

II. Georgia: The Rose Revolution

While everyone afterwards could cite compelling reasons why the Rose Revolution in November 2003 should occur in Georgia, no one prophesied it. Eduard Shevardnadze, the dominant political figure in Georgia for three decades bestrode national politics like a colossus and appeared politically immortal. Shevardnadze's strength belied the weakness of the state and throughout his reign the "silver fox", as he was known, had to maintain a delicate balancing act against competing forces in Georgian politics. His managerial skills had helped Georgia overcome the instability of the early 1990s but by the end of the decade he oversaw Georgia's descent into one of the most corrupt societies on earth.¹⁵

Shevardnadze had made it clear he would step down after the 2005 presidential elections, when he would be 77 years old. His support base had already collapsed and local elections in 2002 confirmed what opinion polls had already revealed - that popular approval for Shevardnadze was in single digits. His Citizens Union of Georgia (CUG) that had triumphed in the 1995 and 2000 elections imploded as all reformers defected. Chief among these were Zurab Zhvania, Nino Burjanadze and Mikheil Saakashvili. Western-educated and representing the affluent constituency of Vake, Saakashvili had seen his support surge as his "Tbilisi without Shevardnadze" slogan proved a winner with voters in the local elections. He now set his sights on a Georgia without Shevardnadze and parliamentary elections on 2 November 2003, marred by serious irregularities and voter fraud, provided the catalyst for the Rose

Revolution. Under American pressure, Shevardnadze had accepted an NGO-organised parallel vote tabulation (PVT) for the elections and exit polls were also employed throughout the country. Together these gave a detailed electoral snapshot shortly after the closing of the polls. Saakashvili's National Movement's topped the poll with 27% of the vote and three other opposition parties – Labour, the Burjanadze-Democrats and the New Rights Party – came in third, fourth and sixth place garnering 35% of the vote between them. The PVTs gave Shevardnadze's party For a New Georgia less than a fifth of the vote (19%) and an allied party, Industry Will Save Georgia, failed to make the 7% threshold. A steady stream of stories suggesting substantial electoral irregularities prompted people to take to the streets in increasingly large numbers.

Throughout the protests, Shevardnadze's legendary powers of compromise and cooption deserted him. Though he did speak directly to the protesters and opposition leaders, he underestimated the level of frustration and the strength of opposition sentiment. This was not surprising perhaps since he knew the opposition leaders intimately having given them their first break and ministerial positions. As the protests grew bigger, Shevardnadze vacillated, hoping that the winter cold would diminish popular enthusiasm for demonstrations. Eighteen days passed before, on 20 November, official results were released which put Shevardnadze's party in first place, the "Revival" party in second and Saakashvili's National Movement in third. Apart from being pushed from first to third place, the figures provided for the Revival were particularly galling. Revival was the party of local strongman Aslan Abashidze, who ruled the police-state of Adjara as a private fiefdom. Adjara was a painful reminder of the weakness of the Tbilisi government as it was unable to impose its will on the errant republic; effectively Abashidze headed an independent state that paid

¹⁵ Only five countries were considered more corrupt than Georgia in 2003 (joint 133rd out of 139

modest homage to Tbilisi but no taxes or custom duties. As Shevardnadze's position became ever weaker he reached out to Abashidze to provide a crutch. The price was accepting the completely imaginary results from the Adjara province, facilitating a greater role for Abashidze in the running of Georgian affairs. For many Georgians such an alliance, and on such a pretext, was akin to national apostasy and further indicated that there were no limits to how far Shevardnadze would go to remain in power.

The main details of the Rose Revolution are well-known; large rallies, mobilising 100,000 on occasion kept a constant presence outside of parliament buildings. On 22 November, as Shevardnadze read his speech to open the legislature, security protecting parliament faded away and an advance party of protesters led by Saakashvili burst into parliament shouting "resign, resign". Shevardnadze was spirited away by his bodyguards and tried to regain the initiative by declaring a state of emergency though this was not implemented by the security apparatus. With the speaker of parliament Nino Burjanadze, at Saakashvili's request, having declared herself Acting President, a conflict of legitimacy emerged that fortunately never escalated into a civil war. After meeting with Saakashvili and Zhvania, Shevardnadze resigned. Complete national unity was momentarily achieved *after* the resignation of Shevardnadze rather than before. Saakashvili received 96% of the vote in the presidential elections of January 2004 though as subsequent events were to demonstrate this overwhelming mandate was rather fragile.

A number of factors can be cited to explain why the Rose Revolution occurred in Georgia. The role of the media was crucial. Rustavi 2, the independent television channel, was emboldened by Shevardnadze's failed attempts to shut down the station

surveyed states). See Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2004 at

in 2001 and throughout the crisis advertised opposition gatherings in advance and gave them comprehensive and favourable coverage. External forces played a role but this has been exaggerated by many, particularly Russian, accounts. The United States and several European countries, particularly Germany, had generously supported Shevardnadze and this was complemented by aid from international organisations aimed at facilitating democratisation efforts in Georgia. Indeed, throughout the 1990s, Georgia was one of the largest recipients of US aid per capita in the world. After the 2000 elections, however, there was a noticeable dampening of enthusiasm for Shevardnadze in the West though important military assistance was given to help Georgia meet challenges in the Pankisi gorge. In 2003, however, the US announced funding cuts and the IMF declared it was suspending assistance to the Shevardnadze government.¹⁶ Funding for non-governmental organizations in Georgia remained constant however. The National Democratic Institute and the Liberty Institute was particularly active, the later providing some able figures in Saakashvili's administration. The youth organization, *Kmara*, has received special attention as it was modelled on Serbia's OTPOR and, indeed, the Soros Foundation in Georgia funded trips to Serbia for opposition leaders like Mikheil Saakashvili and the National Democratic Institute to meet with OTPOR and it was from these meetings that *Kmara* emerged.¹⁷ The Soros Foundation provided funds for *Kmara* and other organisations during the election with the remit of promoting voter education and *Kmara* adopted a confrontational, often tongue in cheek, style of campaigning.¹⁸ Notwithstanding the

http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2004 [accessed 7 March 2008].

¹⁶ Welt, Georgia, p. 9.

¹⁷ Liberty Institute Director, Levan Ramishvili, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Tbilisi 28 July 2005. Co-Director of National Democratic Institute, Lincoln Mitchell, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, New York, 18 April 2008.

¹⁸ *Kmara* Leader, Giorgi Kandelaki, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Tbilisi 31 July 2005 and Kakha Lomaia (Director of Soros Foundation Georgia in 2003), interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Tbilisi, 29 January 2008.

unmistakable funding from abroad, foreign actors played a remarkably quiescent role during the Rose Revolution. Despite disliking Shevardnadze, Russia preferred an old familiar adversary to a new unpredictable one while the United States had learned to live with disappointment and never considered supporting Shevardnadze's premature departure. During November 2003, both Russia and the US offered mediation not meddling and both states were surprised at the route events took.

The opposition, while not entirely united, had reached a critical mass sufficient to discredit the elections and provide a focus for a disenfranchised electorate.¹⁹ The most critical element to the success of the Rose Revolution was popular mobilization, which added so much weight to opposition demands and credibility. It was this ingredient that was to be borrowed by the Ukrainian opposition during the Orange Revolution.

III. Armenia: three strikes, not out

The Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan were deeply unsettled by the ousting of their neighbour in Georgia. Both had issued strong public endorsements of Shevardnadze during the November 2003 crisis and given the status of Shevardnadze compared to Armenian and Azeri presidents Kocharian and Aliev, who had never risen above domestic politics, the attitude was very much "if it happened to Shevardnadze, it could certainly happen to us". Armenia's post-communist political development has occurred in a state of siege. Squeezed between a hostile Turkey and Azerbaijan, both of whom maintain an embargo on Armenia as a result of the frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia's political elite have exploited political

uncertainty to maintain a monopoly of power. Opposition can only help Armenia's enemies, President Kocharian frequently argued, himself a native of Nagorno-Karabakh.²⁰

Both the 2003 presidential and parliamentary elections of February/March (there were two rounds) and May respectively were rigged and gave rise to spontaneous though inconclusive popular protests involving several thousand people.²¹ The opposition could not decide whether to participate in the second round of presidential elections (as encouraged by runner-up Stepan Demirchian) or boycott them (as advocated by Artashes Geghamian who came third).²² The second round, also marred by systemic irregularities and vote rigging, gave Kocharian victory with 67.5% of the vote, the highest ever received by a presidential candidate since Armenia regained independence in 1991. Sergei Sarkisian, the powerful Defence Minister who had conducted Kocharian's campaign, rejected OSCE criticisms and attributed them to the fact that Western observers were not as familiar with the "Armenian mentality" as their CIS counterparts who endorsed the elections.²³

The opposition in Armenia, traditionally weak and divided, was heartened by Shevardnadze's fall and the more optimistic wondered whether the same fate might befall the veteran Kocharian. Within a month of Saakashvili's election as president of Georgia, the two main opposition parties staged a walkout, on 2 February 2004, from the Armenian legislature and announced a parliamentary boycott in response to the

¹⁹ It is often forgotten that the opposition Labour and New Right parties decided not to collaborate with the protests and attended the aborted inaugural meeting of the disputed parliament.

²⁰ See de Waal, *Black Garden*. On Kocharian's rise to the presidency see *ibid.*, pp. 256-261.

²¹ Of the presidential election, the OSCE said 'the overall process failed to provide equal conditions for the candidates. Vote counting and tabulation showed serious irregularities, including widespread ballot box stuffing'. OSCE/OIHR, *Republic of Armenia Presidential Elections*.

²² 'Armenia Faces Presidential Run-Off Amid Ballot-Stuffing Complaints', *Eurasia Insight* 20 February 2003.

²³ 'Violations ... were not massive', the CIS report claimed, 'On the whole, we believe that they did not influence the course of the elections'. Danielyan, *Armenia Poll Sparks Domestic Outcry*. In: *Eurasia Insight*, 7 March 2004.

pro-Kocharian majority cutting off a debate to initiate a confidence plebiscite in the President. At a news conference the following day, Geghamian said the parliament was illegitimate and that the boycott would spark a 'parliamentary crisis'.²⁴

Having raised the stakes, government and opposition were now on a collision course. On 29 March, a day after police confronted protesters in Armenia's second city, Gyumri, parliament initiated legislation to give the police more powers to break-up rallies, particularly those considered a threat to the constitutional order (the legislation passed all stages by May). On 1 April, the prosecutor's office in Yerevan brought forward criminal charges against the opposition alliance relating to the unsanctioned rallies, which, according to the charges, called for regime change through violence and 'overthrowing the existing constitutional order'.²⁵ During the first week of April, over two hundred opposition activists were arrested. On 5 April, Demirchian and Geghamian came together for a rare joint press conference during which they reiterated their claim that Kocharian had stolen the elections and advertised their upcoming mass rally on 9 April.²⁶ Four days of protests were called for with the explicit objective of forcing Kocharian to resign. The protests would start on the 9 April, the first anniversary of Kocharian's inauguration for a second term, and culminate on the 12 April, the opposition's deadline for parliament to accept their proposal for a no-confidence plebiscite on the president. Leaders of the Justice Bloc stated their intention of surrounding the presidential palace and nearby parliament buildings with tens of thousands of supporters who would occupy these areas continuously until Kocharian stepped down. For the government it seemed clear that this was an attempt to replicate the events of Tbilisi. Having failed to reverse the

²⁴ Id., Armenian Opposition Mounts Fresh Attack. In: Eurasia Insight, 6 February 2004.

²⁵ Peuch, Armenia: Government Threatens Opposition. In: RFE/RL Newswire, 1 April 2004.

²⁶ Eurasia Insight, 'Armenian Authorities Carry Out Preemptive Roundup of Opposition Activists', 6 April 2004.

results of 2003, the opposition had been emboldened by Shevardnadze's political demise and were seeking to use similar methods in Armenia to orchestrate Kocharian's downfall. The demonstration on 9 April attracted up to 25,000 people and all speakers called on Kocharian to resign but as the deadline of 12 April approached it became clear that the government was unlikely to relent.

Despite warnings from police that the event was illegal, up to fifteen thousand protesters marched through central Yerevan on the 12th but were blocked by a heavy security presence from reaching the presidential residence on Marshal Baghramian Avenue, just before parliament buildings. Parliament was protected with barbed wire and defended by riot police armed with water canons. The crowd stopped and chanted "Kocharian, Resign" and, in a clear attempt to copy the tactics used in Tbilisi, two thousand activists camped overnight close to the presidential office. President Kocharian didn't need to have the parallels with Georgia underlined further and was determined not to meet Shevardnadze's end. At 2 a.m., riot police used stun grenades and water canon to disperse the campers and arrested 115 activists.²⁷ As part of the crackdown the offices of three leading opposition parties, National Unity Party (AMK), the Peoples Party of Armenia and the Republican Party, all vocal critics of the Kocharian regime, were ransacked and temporarily closed down. The house of numerous opposition activists were raided by police and three opposition parliamentarians were taken into custody. Other opposition leaders went temporarily into hiding. Kocharian made a nationwide address on state television in which he blamed the opposition for the clashes.

Kocharian had weathered the storm and put down the first attempt to emulate the Rose Revolution elsewhere in the Caucasus. The Armenian government was

supported by its traditional ally Russia and was subjected to only mild chastisement by Western powers. Organized opposition wilted in the face of state repression and the fractious united bloc began to go their separate ways. Though in many respects the opposition was, and remains, composed of disenchanting privileged groups and the battle with Kocharian had the character of a struggle between competing elites, no one doubted there existed a large reservoir of apathetic and marginalized people who, given suitable circumstances, might be mobilized for change. The real cleavage in Armenia, as in many other post-soviet republics, has not so much been between the parties offering themselves for high office but between the small group of haves and the vast majority of have-nots.

IV. Russia: preserving hegemony

Where Georgians saw roses, Moscow could only see the thorns while what took shape on the streets of Bishkek looked less like a tulip than a weed. The Orange Revolution, and the resultant election of a pro-Western president in Ukraine, was painted as a major geopolitical defeat for the Kremlin and a major reverse for Putin personally who had so publicly backed Yanukovich. The fear of a chain reaction, or domino effect, permeated Russia's political elite. In an article published in the government daily newspaper, *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, it was argued that should Moscow fail to reassert its position in Ukraine within two years then "velvet revolutions" would take place according to the same scenario in Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan

²⁷ Accounts of what happened taken from a number of sources including the US Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Armenia 2004, section 2b. Reports published by Freedom House, Eurasianet and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty were also employed.

and, possibly, in Armenia. In the event of such catastrophes the Kremlin might find its 'room for manoeuvre in the post-Soviet space' seriously curtailed.²⁸

There was a clear strategy on the part of the Kremlin and its supporters to tar Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan with the same brush. Speaking in Yerevan the day after Akaev's toppling, Putin said that what had happened in Kyrgyzstan was 'not anything unexpected for us' and was a result of 'weakness of power' but 'accumulated socio-economic problems'. At the same time he expressed regret that 'once more in a country in the post-soviet area, political issues are decided by unlawful means, accompanied by riots and human casualties'.²⁹ By saying that 'once more' violence and anarchy had descended on a post-soviet state was to suggest that this was what had occurred in Georgia and Ukraine. Looting and vandalism by uncontrolled mobs were something that could easily be written off as undesirable models. The key lesson to be learned was to build a state capable of withstanding any assault. The colour revolutions had raised the stakes and started alarm bells ringing. In a 2005 interview, Russian opposition leader Gary Kasparov summarised the Kremlin position thus:

I don't think they care about publicity now; I think this regime is paranoid. They watched the Georgian revolution and they probably got confused. They watched revolution in Ukraine and they got very angry. They saw revolution in Kyrgyzia [Kyrgyzstan] and they panicked. And now they saw Uzbekistan and I think they went absolutely mad. They've gone mad and these people are causing a real threat now not just for Russia but for the rest of the world because they don't believe they can keep power peacefully, they don't believe they can win real elections. It seems to me, and it is a tragic conclusion, that this

²⁸ As quoted in Torbakov, Russian Policy Experts Believe Ukraine's Revolutionary Fervor is Contagious. In: Eurasia Insight, 20 December 2004.

²⁹ Kremlin press release, 24 March 2005, http://www.rusembcanada.mid.ru/pr/190405_1_e.html

regime has made a conscious decision to stay in power as long as they can - using all means.³⁰

Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that Putin has explicitly linked socio-economic factors to regime change, he has made a determined effort to impoverish the colour regimes in Tbilisi and Kyiv. Since Mikheil Saakashvili took office, all communication lines between Georgia and Russia have been cut off; it remains impossible at the time of writing (March 2008) to travel by road, rail or air between Moscow and Tbilisi nor is it possible to post a letter between the two countries. Almost all of Georgia's main agricultural products are prohibited from entering the Russian market in what is an embargo in all but name.³¹ The ostensible reason is that Georgian wine and mineral water, firm favourites in Russia since Soviet times, do not meet Russian health standards; we are supposed to believe that health standards in Russia, where the average male life expectancy is just 59, are higher than, say, Germany or Britain where Georgian products are exported unimpeded. A similar tactic has been used against Moldova, another country that from a Kremlin perspective has been moving outside the Russian orbit and towards the West despite the leverage Russia enjoys in helping or hindering an amelioration of the Transnistrian issue. The cost of the wine ban to Moldova was even greater than for Georgia. Wine exports constituted one quarter of all Moldovan exports in 2005, 80% of which was sold to Russia. Wine sales dropped by half in 2006 as new markets were difficult to procure at short notice. As part of a comprehensive package that involved Moldova removing its veto on Russia joining the WTO, Kremlin concerns over the quality of Moldovan wine disappeared as quickly as they had emerged. The tactic has proved counter-productive with Georgia as that country exploits the opportunity to

³⁰ Gary Kasparov, interviewed by the BBC, *Russian Godfathers, Part II: The Prisoner* (BBC 2006).

reorient its trade towards new partners particularly in Europe and Kazakhstan. The Saakashvili administration has modelled its approach on that of Estonia, which too faced an embargo and intense Russian pressure in the 1990s in an attempt to steer the Baltic republic away from a path to the EU and NATO. It is no coincidence therefore that, despite Russian objections, former Estonian premier Mart Laar is Saakashvili's chief economic advisor.³² Ukraine has also paid a heavy political price for its colour revolution and drift away from Russia. As in Georgia gas prices have increased dramatically (the price quadrupled in 2005-6) and supplies have been cut. Such punitive measures are not just targeted at Georgia, Ukraine or Moldova but are intended to have a demonstration effect; post-soviet countries will see that it pays to stay on the right side of the Kremlin.

V. Ukraine: oranges blossom in November

An active civil society, compact opposition, massive popular mobilization, balanced external forces and a regime that repressed in moderation created the conditions for what has become known as the Orange Revolution. By 2004, street protests in Ukraine had already become a well-used way of expressing dissent; they had been used in 1990 to protest against Moscow rule and re-emerged during the Kuchmagate movement in 2001 and 2002. In 2004 people were called on to the streets several times before the revolutionary protests of November functioning as a sort of psychological training as elections approached. Popular mobilization was matched by

³¹ Countries are reluctant to use the word "embargo" since this is considered an act of war under international law.

³² Laar was appointed by the United Nations Development Programme and is paid by this body.

an increasingly active civil society and independent media³³ despite overwhelming government control of information.³⁴

Civil society benefited from external aid that complemented pre-existing networks encouraging civil disobedience. The US alone allocated more than 65 million dollars in 2003/2004 to support democratic initiatives in Ukraine including independent media and NGO training. The Open Society Institute instituted a fund from which NGOs could obtain election monitoring know-how. Support was also granted in the form of trainings in capacity building and non-violent methods of protest. Since 2000, Ukrainian NGO leaders and activists had been invited to international trainings in non-violent protest methods and civil disobedience.³⁵ As a complementary strategy, activists from Otpor (Serbia) and Kmara (Georgia) visited Ukraine to train local leaders.³⁶

Western assistance extended to opposition parties, at least in the form of diplomatic pressures and support for the “Orange Coalition”. However, this was largely balanced by an equally intrusive attitude on the part of Moscow. For their part, the EU and US, while acknowledging Ukraine’s low standards in human rights, media freedom, and electoral practices, made clear that they hoped, or even expected, that elections would be fair and free.³⁷

Opposition parties played a major role in the Ukrainian protests. A coalition had failed to materialize in 2002 facilitating a pro-government coalition to win a

³³ For instance Kanal 5 or newspapers like *Ukrainska Pravda*, *Zerkalo nedeli*, *Den*.

³⁴ Practice of the Ukrainian presidential administration was to issue some *temniky* to give instructions on what could be said and what should better be avoided mentioning during the news.

³⁵ Cf. Kuzio, *Ukrainian Leaders Crack Down*. In: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 1 (109), 20 October 2004; Corwin, *East: Regime Change*. In: *RFE/RL*, 19 April 2005.

³⁶ For an exhaustive picture of the training modules, strategies and actions see Krivokapic, *Les faiseurs des revolutions*. In: *Politique Internationale*, (2005) 106. See also Kolesnikova, *Interv'u z Mikhailom Svistonchem*.

³⁷ There were strong allegations that the mayoral elections held in April 2004 in Mukachevo, a town in western Ukraine, had been falsified. The EU did not take any official position but based on this event urged Ukraine to exert more control on the processing of election results.

majority despite *Nasha Ukraina* garnering the largest vote of any party in the country. In 2004 rivalries were put aside and Yushchenko could count on the support not only of his bloc but on Yulia Tymoshenko and, after the second round, on Oleksandr Moroz, leader of the socialist party. This alliance meant that in the end Yushchenko was endorsed by more than half of Ukraine's active electorate.

Claims that under Kuchma Ukraine deviated from a democratic path, while justified, should be compared with the situation pertaining in some neighbouring states. Though at least eighteen journalists had died in mysterious circumstances since 1991, and while the president was even alleged to have ordered the murder of a journalist and transformed the country into a blackmail state³⁸ seeds of democracy had been allowed to take root. Already in 2002 an opposition party (*Nasha Ukraina* bloc) was allowed to gain the largest number of seats and the ruling regime could enter a coalition only at the price of cooperating with the communists. The alliance between communists and oligarchs was unstable but boosted political pluralism by splitting the forces in parliament. Likewise it allowed for the development of a strong civil society, independent newspapers and TV channels. Despite government attempts to close Channel 5 with tax demands, the station remained on air due to mass protests. In addition, Ukraine proved quite sensitive to Western criticisms; although incapable of complying with Western standards, and more interested in personal gain, Kuchma clearly showed a concern for his reputation in the West. The pro-government forces were far from being compact and succeeded to find a common tongue only in moments of crisis,³⁹ being normally unable to overcome ideological and personal differences. The attitude of the regime was crucial in allowing the preconditions for the development of a protest environment but also for its survival, since disagreement

³⁸ Kuzio, Parliamentary Elections. In: PRISM, 8 (2002) 1.

on the use of force prevented a police action that might have meant the end of the protests.⁴⁰

The above mentioned pre-conditions resulted in an open confrontation between the government and the opposition. A first round had to give the impression of fair and free elections with Viktor Yushchenko having a slight advantage on his opponent Viktor Yanukovich: 39.87 against 39.32 percent. The second round was then managed in order to make Yanukovich winner by around 3% of the vote. The opposition then deployed all its forces; independent exit polls showed the real results of the elections while opposition forces connected with civil society movements and tried to prompt people to challenge government legitimacy. Ukrainians mobilised in large numbers with protesters in Kyiv constantly in the region of several hundred thousand people, reaching a peak of one million people on Saturday the 26th of November.

As a result of this total blockade, the government was obliged to enter into negotiations with the opposition. Russian and EU delegates were invited to mediate and a political compromise was reached. Repetition of the second round was agreed but only after the constitutional reform transforming Ukraine into a parliamentary republic was passed, so that presidential powers would be limited from the time of the next parliamentary elections (2006) onwards. Further to the invalidation of the election results by the Supreme Court, a third round was set for 26 December and Yushchenko reported a victory with 52% over 44.19% for Yanukovich, who had already been removed from his Prime Ministerial post. A new moment of Ukrainian history began; the country became politically more unstable (as shown in the early

³⁹ Mostovaya/Rakhmanin, *Opposition and Contraposition*. In: *Zerkalo nedeli*, 6 (2001) 330.

⁴⁰ Chivers, *Back Channels*. In: *New York Times*, 17 January 2005; Kuzio, *Did Ukraine's Secret Service Really Prevent Bloodshed?* In: *Jamestown Foundation (Hg.), Eurasian Daily Monitor*, 2 (2005) 16.

2007 early elections and the 2006 political crisis) but this was due to the incapacity of a fraction to prevail over the others and is deemed to be healthy for democracy.⁴¹ President Kuchma did not need to flee the country and was allowed to retire quietly so long as he stayed out of politics.

VI. Moldova: the grape revolution

The year 2005 was a year of revolutionary expectations in the former USSR. Given that many CIS countries were holding elections during that year many thought an avalanche of colour revolutions would follow the Georgian and Ukrainian revolutions. The spread of the revolutionary virus from Tbilisi to Kyiv had surprised many and when the Kyrgyz revolution materialized, the question before every subsequent election was less “who will win” than “what is going to be the result of this attempted revolution”. Moldova did not experience any revolution following the elections despite some expectations⁴² and this was due to a number of factors. The 2005 elections came after a radical change in the attitude of the governing party, the Communist Party of Moldova that has ruled the country since 2001⁴³ and whose leader, Vladimir Voronin, is also head of state.

The policy platform presented by the Moldovan communists at the 2005 parliamentary elections did not differ greatly from other parties, which is why political polarization was not a feature of the election.⁴⁴ To understand this

⁴¹ We refer to the Linz and Stepan’s expression, “when democracy is the only game in town”. See Linz/Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*.

⁴² ‘Moldova and the next colorful revolution’ Stratfor 19 February 2005; see also Corwin, *Is Russia Hoping for Revolution in Moldova?* In: RFE/RL, 7 March 2005.

⁴³ At the 2001 elections the communists passed from 40 to 71 mandates in parliament. Quite impressive a figure if one considers that the Moldovan parliament has 101 seats.

⁴⁴ Bransten, *Moldova: Voters Back Communists*. In: RFE/RL, 7 March 2005; Cashu, *Why an Orange Revolution is Unlikely*. In: RFE/RL, 6 March 2005.

standardization of opinion one should refer to Moldova's territorial disputes. Since 1992 Moldova witnessed two attempts at separation; one from the Gagauz region, promptly solved, and the other from Transnistria, still ongoing. This Russian speaking buffer between Moldova and Ukraine had become the shelter of Russian speaking elites since the 1970s and sought autonomy as soon as the Soviet Union collapsed. As Transnistria was the main source of energy and industries for Moldova, a quiet resolution and independence appeared highly improbable; however this territorial dispute has drawn the attention of the international community with Russia and the EU invited into the crisis-solving negotiations. Russia in particular has often advocated a higher level of autonomy for Transnistria, possibly with the expectation that the region will join Russia.⁴⁵ Strongly dependent on Russia for energy supplies, the communist party elite has been swinging between East and West until a more radical Kremlin position after the 2002 Istanbul summit made clear that a closer relationship with Moscow might necessitate the effective loss of Transnistria to Russia. Faced with these conditions the communists radically changed their position and adopted a more pro-Western attitude,⁴⁶ despite Russian bans on Moldovan wine and threats to increase the price of natural resources. This *volte face* was also influenced by a desire not to be wrong-footed as the popular mood swung away from Russia and towards closer ties with the West.

⁴⁵ In 2006 Transnistria held a referendum whose questions were: 1) Do you support the course towards the independence of Transnistria and the subsequent free association with the Russian Federation? (Yes: 97.2 percent - No: 1.9 - Invalid/undecided: 0.9%); 2) Do you consider it possible to renounce Transnistria's independent status and subsequently become part of the Republic of Moldova? (Yes: 3.3 percent - No: 94.9 - Invalid/undecided: 1.8).

⁴⁶ President Voronin is reported to have met with presidents Yushchenko and Saakashvili before the 2005 elections to bolster his policy of reorientating his government towards the West.

The West had given Moldova mixed signals. While accepting Moldovan membership of the WTO and supporting democratic reform in the country⁴⁷ it never offered Moldova assistance or financial aid in the same quantities as it had to countries like Ukraine or Georgia. One of the reasons is certainly that a more pro-Western Moldova would mean a more pro-Eastern Transnistria and pragmatism suggested that *in media stat virtus*. Despite the risk that the communists might turn back towards Moscow, the West does not consider worthwhile efforts to oppose the regime by supporting its political opponents who have a similar programme.

In the 6 March 2005 elections, the Communist Party retained its dominant position despite seeing its parliamentary strength drop from 71 to 56. The Democratic Bloc of Moldova (DBM) won 34 and the Christian Democratic People's Party (CDPP) 11.⁴⁸ Russia had made clear that anybody but Voronin would be embraced but it lacked a figure in the opposition who it could wholeheartedly endorse. This reinforced another structural deficiency for would-be revolutionaries to overcome, the lack of opposition unity. The CDPP shared many policies with the "new" Communist Party including a pro-Western orientation while the DBM was only moderately against President Voronin as demonstrated by the fact that they did not oppose a second term for him when it came to a parliamentary vote.

The Moldovan electorate, for their part, proved to be quite passive as demonstrated by the low electoral turnouts for mayoral elections and even parliamentary ones⁴⁹ and this inertia is accentuated by the lack of colour in the political party spectrum. This combination of a passive electorate and lack of party

⁴⁷ On 18 February 2005, the US government dispatched US 1.7 million to support democracy promotion projects. Organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy and the Soros Foundation are active in the country.

⁴⁸ The threshold to enter parliament is 6% in Moldova and those parties mentioned are the only ones that secured representation in the 2005 elections.

diversity partially explains why NGOs did not play a major role in consolidating anti-government sentiment, despite having strongly developed since independence.⁵⁰

A revolution in Moldova lacked a main component present in all other colour revolution attempts - electoral fraud. Whereas the OSCE criticised the 2005 parliamentary election campaign as not meeting democratic standards, the election itself were credited as being fair and free. Thus, the opposition could not demonstrate government bad-faith in such an effective way and were denied a crucial trigger event that could inspire and mobilise.⁵¹ Though there were criticisms and attempted protests, the opposition, organised civil society and ordinary people failed to coordinate their efforts, and any efforts were eclipsed by the unfolding drama in Kyrgyzstan.

VII. Kyrgyzstan: when roses become tulips

After the Orange revolution, Kyrgyzstan was considered the country most likely to succumb to a colour revolution as it combined some of the structural weaknesses and political opportunities afforded to opposition activists in Georgia and Ukraine. Some expected, rightly as it turned out, that parliamentary elections held on 27 February and 13 March 2005 would trigger the regime's demise. President Akaev, a politician by accident, had liberal instincts, reinforced by his country's lack of natural resources which, unlike Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, did not allow him much room for independent action. Surrounded by poor or unfriendly states and unable to sell oil to the West, Akaev decided early on that his best bet was to offer America a

⁴⁹ Botan, A branch of "orange evolution"?,

<http://www.elections2005.md/chisinau/comments/20051221/> [accessed 21 December 2005].

⁵⁰ From 1991 to 2001 the associative sector evolved from zero to almost 2000 registered NGOs, see www.e-democracy.md/en/ngo/dynamics/ [accessed 4 March 2008].

democratic success story. With a raft of progressive legislation introduced in the early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan achieved a string of notable firsts in the CIS; first state to privatise land, first to break with the rouble and establish its own currency (1993), first to join the World Trade Organisation (1998). Like Shevardnadze, had Akaev stepped down in 2000, he might have done so with a little gratitude and some applause but his decision to seek another term sealed his fate. By this stage, Akaev had engineered a series of constitutional changes that had augmented his powers and his family had greatly enriched themselves. Far from becoming the “Switzerland of Central Asia” as Akaev had once boasted, Kyrgyzstan had simply conformed to many of the excesses characteristic of other Central Asian executives breeding a corrupt elite parasitically living off an impoverished and politically impotent citizenry. Like Shevardnadze before him, Akaev had attracted substantial international acclamation and funding only to see both evaporate shortly after the 2000 presidential election as it became clear that the regime had become merely a corrupt oligarchy. Both the US and Russia had military bases in Kyrgyzstan but as Akaev felt increasingly under threat there was a noticeable shift towards Russia during his last year in office. The Kremlin, in turn, had learnt something from the Ukraine debacle and while keeping good relations with Akaev maintained contact with opposition leaders many of whom were not, like Saakashvili and Yushchenko, unabashedly pro-Western in orientation.

As Kyrgyzstan became progressively weaker, its elites grew more rapacious in devouring the state’s remaining resources and more intolerant of dissent. The Kyrgyz opposition did however retain some of the residual structural advantages afforded to them in the 1990s though these were fast disappearing. An independent print media did continue to exist though it was largely confined to the capital, dependent on

⁵¹ See Tucker, Enough! In: Perspectives on Politics, 5 (2007) 3, pp. 537-553.

foreign printing presses and subjected to continuous repression.⁵² Externally funded NGOs and other actors played a much smaller role in Kyrgyzstan than in Georgia and Ukraine though a much greater one than in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The opposition lacked, however, a television channel like Rustavi 2 in Georgia or Channel 5 in Ukraine, to champion its cause. The public received its TV news exclusively from Kyrgyz state television and a small number of Russian channels, all of which portrayed the Rose and Orange Revolutions as lamentable descents into anarchy.⁵³

Despite negative media coverage, the Rose and Orange Revolutions certainly had a strong demonstration effect on elites and society in Kyrgyzstan. In Bishkek, students had formed Kel-Kel, an imitation of Kmara and Pora, which tried to energise political participation on the part of the youth. In a clear attempt to emulate the revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, a colour was chosen to emblematised the protest movement and a flower. It was perhaps symptomatic of the lack of unity combined with the artificial nature of the debate that it was never conclusively decided whether yellow or pink would symbolise the revolution though the tulip edged out the daffodil as the relevant flower, in large part due to Akaev's use of the term "Tulip Revolution" on a number of occasions.

The Tulip Revolution followed the Georgian/Ukrainian script with a Kyrgyz twist. The large crowds, though never reaching the levels witnessed in Kyiv and Tbilisi, were mainly to be found in peripheral towns and cities in the south and took the form of a popular uprising, temporarily displacing government officials and structures with "revolutionary" ones. Akaev went ahead and opened the new parliament on the 22 March, claiming that the worst was over and that he had found

⁵² Editor in Chief of Respublika newspaper, Zamira Sydykova. Interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Bishkek, 10 March 2005 and Rina Prijivoit, Chief Political Correspondent with MSN newspaper. Interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Bishkek, 11 March 2005.

⁵³ Kel-Kel leader Burul Usmanaliyeva. Interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Bishkek, 9 March 2005.

an “antidote” to the colour revolution virus, only to find himself within days dislodged from the White House by an angry mob and on a plane to Moscow and political obscurity. Where the Tulip Revolution diverged from its Rose and Orange predecessors was that it introduced a level of violence into what had hitherto been an entirely peaceful enterprise. In an effort to avoid bloodshed, Akaev had refused to declare a state of emergency though it is not clear whether he could have relied entirely on the security apparatus. That said, it was defeat by superior numbers rather than defection by irresolute officers that explained how the police failed to protect the presidential palace and those Akaev aides unfortunate enough not to have fled the building were badly beaten. Unlike Shevardnadze or Kuchma the question of Akaev staying in the country after the revolution was off the table and Kyrgyzstan’s first president is condemned to a life in exile, thus raising the stakes for other post-soviet autocrats. Most importantly, perhaps, after the storming of the White House, Bishkek was convulsed in an orgy of violence and looting that left three dead and much of the commercial districts damaged. Foreign shops, particularly Turkish, were targeted and the process took on an unpleasant ethnic appearance as Russians and other minorities were intimidated.⁵⁴ Whether one interprets this as anarchy engineered by pro-Akaev elements (as some opposition figures argued) or a collective venting of pent-up anger, it damaged the image of the revolution and indicated that a qualitatively different process was at play than that experienced in Georgia and Ukraine.

Kyrgyzstan shared many of the structural conditions present in Georgia and Ukraine – an unpopular president on the verge of stepping down, electoral irregularities, a reasonably strong civil society complemented by opposition parties, some independent media outlets, and Western assistance. However, it lacked a strong

⁵⁴ Donnacha Ó Beacháin interviews with Bishkek residents, March-May 2005.

and united opposition. By the time Akaev had been toppled, many opposition leaders had united on paper, but the parties they maintained were small, and little united them save a common will to power and desire to see the back of Akaev. It would soon become evident that Kyrgyzstan's opposition had leap-frogged to power despite a lack of preparation and having been denied some of the structural advantages enjoyed by their counterparts in Georgia and Ukraine. In the short-term, Western organisations basked in what seemed like another democratic success story and in July 2005, Kurmanbek Bakiev was elected president with 89% of the vote and promptly appointed Felix Kulov as prime minister in what was trumpeted as a north-south unity dream team.

VIII. Tajikistan: no violet revolution

Parliamentary elections were held in Tajikistan at the same time as Kyrgyzstan but led to regime consolidation rather than collapse. President Rakhmonov, ruler of the Central Asian republic since 1992, presided over a weak state much like Akaev's and there was a mild degree of political pluralism but autocracy, corruption and poverty were the main features of the regime. In June 2003 an omnibus national referendum, approved by 90% with a 96% turnout, had made fifty changes to the constitution, the most significant of which allowed Rakhmonov to rule until 2020.⁵⁵ The strongest card that Rakhmonov has been able to play is the need for stability and peace to ward off the ever-present threat of war and chaos.⁵⁶ Threats of civil war are not idle in Tajikistan; the country underwent a vicious internecine feud for five years in the 1990s leaving an estimated 100,000 dead and half a million homeless. Fears of a

⁵⁵ See Ó Beacháin, *The Necessary Lie*. In: Dusseault, *The CIS*, pp. 269-297, here 287-288.

return to mass violence dampens enthusiasm for mass mobilization and strengthens government charges that rallies and protests are organized by reckless individuals, insensitive to the dangers of opposing the regime that has presided over peace, if not prosperity.

Prior to the Tulip Revolution, the Tajik government had beefed up security along the border with Kyrgyzstan and Rakhmonov met with security chiefs as Akaev was dislodged from power.⁵⁷ Cognisant of the decisive role the security forces had played in determining the success or failure of colour revolutions, Rakhmanov has granted generous pay rises for the police, army, and judicial apparatus on whose loyalty his rule depends.⁵⁸ On 6 November 2006, Rakhmonov demolished his opponents taking almost 80% of the vote in a five man presidential contest. Three of the main opposition parties did not bother offering candidates, unwilling to lend legitimacy to a foregone conclusion. The opposition was hopelessly divided and unable to agree on a common strategy let alone nominate a consensus candidate to take on the president.⁵⁹ In early 2007, a new movement, Vatandor (Patriot), was founded by Dodojon Atovulloev, chief editor of the Charogi Ruz newspaper that is smuggled into Tajikistan. The success of Atovulloev's movement, according to its founder, will depend on the vast émigré vote, estimated to be in excess of one million Tajiks, most of them young males, who have fled the country and whose repatriations constitute more than 10% of Tajikistan's GNP. Though Vatandor threatened to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people to inaugurate a 'violet revolution' if

⁵⁶ Interviews conducted by Donnacha Ó Beacháin in Tajikistan, May 2007.

⁵⁷ Amirshoeva, Tajikistan. IWPR RCA No. 364, 4 April 2005.

⁵⁸ Kasymbekova, Grace and Favour in Tajikistan. IWPR RCA No. 441, 1 April 2006

⁵⁹ Amirshoeva, Tajik Opposition Floundering, IWPR RCA No. 459, 4 August 2006, Kasymbekova, Clock Ticking for Tajik Opposition Campaign, IWPR RCA No. 447, 12 May 2006, Amirshoeva/Asanova/Saifiddinova, Tajik Election Choices Already Limited, IWPR RCA No. 467, 5 October 2006.

Rakhmanov did not step down,⁶⁰ his chances of success, and those of similar movements, are slim. Rakhmonov has provided his security ministries with sufficient inducements to guarantee their loyalty. More important perhaps is consistent, though conditional, support from Moscow. Russia was decisive in ending the civil war in Rakhmonov's favour and is the key to maintaining the fragile peace. Should Rakhmonov rile the Kremlin his position would immediately be jeopardised but this is unlikely in the foreseeable future considering the mutual dependency that has developed. Moreover, the émigrés, in which the opposition has put much stead, are disparate and difficult to organize let alone mobilize. Finally, it is very difficult to disseminate any anti-regime message within Tajikistan. Opposition parties on the ground, disabled by media monopolies, state repression and popular apathy, are unable to do so and parties based abroad are similarly handicapped.

IX. Uzbekistan: blood on the streets

Uzbekistan had emerged as a key ally of the US in the 'war on terror' but Islam Karimov, former communist leader and president since independence, became increasingly alarmed by the colour revolution phenomena. In particular, Karimov could not understand how the United States could profess itself his friend while encouraging civil society and other political initiatives in Uzbekistan that could only undermine his monopoly of power. It did not escape Karimov's attention that Shevardnadze and Akaev had been being darlings of the West, generously supported by substantial aid, and yet these men had been overthrown by forces assisted by

⁶⁰ Pisaredzheva, New Tajik Party Seeks Émigré Vote, IWPR RCA No. 484, 27 February 2007.

Western funded organizations. In a revealing interview with the Russian paper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, he explained his view of events:

Everything depends on the preparations. Take Ukraine, for example, where preparations for the recent election began in 1995. Consider how many non-governmental organizations exist there and on whose money do they exist, and everything will become instantly clear. By the way, we are tracking all funds and grants nowadays. We want to know what project exactly is under way so as to be able to tell truly humanitarian projects from veiled preparations for some "colour" revolution.⁶¹

Karimov had not been idle and after the Rose Revolution a concerted assault on Western-funded NGOs was initiated. In April 2004, the Soros Foundation in Uzbekistan, which only months previously enjoyed a status that endowed employees with diplomatic cards, was shut down on spurious technical grounds.⁶² The stream of closures became a flood after the Orange Revolution. Internews, Freedom House, Radio Free Europe and the BBC all felt the heat and their offices were shut down by order of the government.

Elections to Uzbekistan's powerless bi-cameral parliament took place on 26 December 2004, the same day as Yushchenko's triumph in Ukraine and Karimov was keen to clarify the difference of approach in the two countries. As he cast his vote, Karimov described Uzbekistan's path as evolutionary not revolutionary. 'Our way, the way of Uzbekistan is evolutionary. I am strictly against revolution as revolution is violence'.⁶³ The umbilical connection made between violence and revolution, echoing soviet reasoning, was repeated regularly by the Uzbek leader. He attributed the Orange Revolution to Kuchma's 'errors' and 'miscalculations' that allowed a large 'protest potential' to accumulate in Ukraine which exploded at the elections.

⁶¹ Interview [in Russian] with Viktoria Panfilova published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 14 January 2005.

⁶² One of the authors (Donnacha Ó Beacháin) was in possession of such a diplomatic card until 2003 due to his work with the Soros-funded Civic Education Project.

Karimov also believed that the Ukrainian ‘crisis’ was due to foreign interference. ‘These newly created organisations like PORA, Kmara and Otpor, I believe, contradict all democratic principles we often like to cite’. He said that such organisations required large amounts of money and human capital and that ‘the international community should pay attention to these facts because the variants for possible defeat at the elections are ready’.⁶⁴

After the Orange Revolution the wide thoroughfare in Tashkent’s Mustakillik (Independence) Square, where Independence Day celebrations and other official events are held, suddenly disappeared, replaced by narrow footpaths surrounded by trees as foliage replaced previously paved open spaces. At the end of April 2005, parks suddenly sprang up throughout the capital’s city centre, blocking access to government buildings. Karimov told state television viewers that the changes were simply due to routine urban improvements.⁶⁵ Fear of large crowds mobilizing was at the heart of the Andijan massacre that took place in the densely populated Ferghana region on 13 May 2005. Independent estimates of how many died put the number at as many as seven hundred. The Uzbek authorities initially admitted to seven dead, before revising the figure to 169 in the face of widespread disbelief.⁶⁶ Employing the traditional bogeyman of Islamic fundamentalism, that he had exploited to curry favour with America, Karimov blamed religious fanatics:

They hoped that weak local and central power would allow a Kyrgyz variant. Calling on youth with poisoned ideas, they counted on achieving their goals by seizing administration

⁶³ ‘President Slams OSCE for Criticism of Elections’, Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan http://2004.press-service.uz/eng/pressa_eng/pressa_eng73a.htm [accessed 30 May 2007].

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ismail, Uzbekistan capital's mysteriously vanishing streets, AFP, 26 May 2005.

⁶⁶ For an overview of the Andijan killings see Hill/Jones, Fear of Democracy or Revolution. In: The Washington Quarterly, 29 (2006) 3, pp. 111-125; Akiner, Violence in Andijan.

buildings, overthrowing the authorities constitutionally chosen by the people, and creating a Muslim caliphate here.⁶⁷

The euphoria that had accompanied the colour revolutions quickly subsided after the Andijan massacre. It was no longer simply a case of “election-protest-resignation-victory”. Events in Uzbekistan also had the effect of taking some pressure off post-soviet dictators some of whom had feared that the colour revolutions were an unstoppable tide that would overwhelm them.

X. Kazakhstan: colourless elections

Kazakhstan is in theory a multi-party democracy but in reality is ruled by one man, former communist boss Nursultan Nazarbayev. The first elections following the Rose Revolution, the 19 September and 3 October parliamentary elections saw opposition representation in the national legislature fall to a single seat.⁶⁸ The Orange triumph was more difficult to explain away than the Rose Revolution since it was difficult to argue that Ukraine was more backward than Kazakhstan, as had been implied in the case of Georgia. The day after Victor Yushchenko won the presidential contest in Ukraine, the Kazakhstan administration filed a criminal case against the Soros Foundation for alleged tax evasion. Moreover, on 28 December 2004, Kazakhstan’s Prosecutor-General brought forward charges against the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK), the most radical of the opposition parties⁶⁹ and, on 6 January 2005, an Almaty court obligingly ordered the organization to disband. The court accepted the Prosecutor-General’s argument that by claiming that recent

⁶⁷ Quoted in Rand, *Tamerlane’s Children*, p. 188.

⁶⁸ Ó Beacháin, *Parliamentary Elections in Kazakhstan*. In: *Electoral Studies*, 24 (2005) 4, pp. 762-769.

⁶⁹ Junisbai/Junisbai, *The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan*. In: *Demokratizatsiya*, 13 (2005) 3, pp. 373-392.

parliamentary elections had been “rigged” and the government “illegitimate”, DCK could be described as an “extremist” organization and its advocacy of non-violent resistance threatened social harmony and the security of the state.

As the Tulip Revolution unfolded in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, the Kazakhstani political elite was for a brief time in a state of shock. The border was closed and Almaty, a mere three hours drive from Bishkek, was awash with rumours as the government imposed an information blockade.⁷⁰ Nazarbayev had linked himself closely with Akaev to the extent that his youngest daughter had married Akaev’s eldest son in a modern re-enacting of feudal marriage alliances.⁷¹ When it became clear that Akaev had absconded many suspected (correctly as it turned out) that he had taken refuge in Kazakhstan before making his way to Russia. Kazakh State television followed a highly negative report on the rioting with the presenter stating that ‘hardship and the weakness of the authorities’, (the implication being that neither affected Kazakhstan) were at the root of the disturbances. ‘Experts’ were brought on to parrot the line emanating from Moscow and Tashkent that the Kyrgyz events were modelled on political techniques devised elsewhere. A parliamentary deputy from the presidential party, Otan, was then trundled out to confirm the expert view:

We should assess the events in Georgia, Ukraine and Bishkek as a new political technique.

It was not representatives of the ordinary people who took to the square. It was a small number of quite specific people. There were both followers of an idea and people who have

⁷⁰ Kazakhstan’s media only reported that Akaev had left Kyrgyzstan a full two days after the Italian satellite channel RaiNews24 showed a military helicopter with the Akaev family allegedly on board taking off from a Kyrgyz military base and heading in the direction of Kazakhstan. See Yermukanov, Astana Effects Information Blockage. In: Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2 (2005) 60.

⁷¹ The marriage between Aidar Akaev and Aliya Nazarbayeva who, typical of their generation and status, had dated while studying in the United States, was an unhappy one. Married in 1998 with the pomp and ceremony normally reserved for royal weddings, they quietly divorced after a couple of years. Among the guests at the wedding were the Uzbek and Tajik Presidents.

their own aims in view. There were also people who looted shops during the riots.

However, this is a political technique.⁷²

Nazarbayev quickly realised that the new regime in Bishkek, an amalgam of former Akaev ministers, would not threaten Kazakhstan and was the only foreign head of state to attend Kurmanbek Bakiev's inauguration in July 2005. He knew also that Kyrgyzstan could not escape its geography, surrounded as it was by China, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, states that would not tolerate exporting revolution to their territories. The kind of pressure that could and would be applied was more directly articulated during the height of the disturbances by the Chairman of the Kazakh Union of Economists, who assured the viewing public that Kyrgyzstan's flirtation with revolution would quickly be contained as the would-be radicals digested economic and geopolitical realities:

It is not in their interest to worsen economic relations with Kazakhstan. This applies to [their relations with] Russia and Uzbekistan. All these markets are our markets. On the other hand, this will not damage our entrepreneurs' activities there because no one is investing in Kyrgyzstan except us and Russia. They know this perfectly well.⁷³

The following December, Nazarbayev was elected for another seven year term. Having marginalized any potential source of opposition long before the election was announced, Nazarbayev ensured that the campaign was 'colourless' both in process and result.⁷⁴ During the campaign television viewers were assailed with images of rioting and looting in Bishkek and stories of how Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan had deteriorated since their respective regime changes.⁷⁵ This also became an essential part of the Kremlin mythology. Buoyed by huge reservoirs of oil and committed to a multi-vector foreign policy that seeks alliances with all major powers,

⁷² Kazakhstan TV1 [in Kazakh], 25 March 2005. The Otan MP interviewed was Serik Abdirakhmanov.

⁷³ Kazakhstan TV1 [in Kazakh], 25 March 2005. Interview with Arystan Yesentugelov.

⁷⁴ Kennedy, A Colorless Election. In: Problems of Post Communism, 53 (2006) 6, pp. 46-58.

Nazarbayev's position is relatively secure. He also knows from experience that Western commitments to democracy can often be bartered with. Just months after unfair parliamentary elections eliminated the last vestige of opposition and created a one-party legislature, Kazakhstan was rewarded with the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010.⁷⁶

XI. Turkmenistan: Stalin's Disneyland unscathed

The colour revolutions on Turkmenistan had a negligible effect on the hermit state of Turkmenistan. No reference was made to the revolutions on Turkmen state television though negative reports from Russian television were available to the large amount of satellite TV subscribers.⁷⁷ As a one party state with a president for life, the Turkmen regime had zero tolerance for any manifestation of opposition. A small opposition in exile, composed mainly of former political notables, has been unable to make any headway and an attempted assassination of Niyazov in November 2002 merely provided a new basis for repression.⁷⁸

Turkmenistan has nothing to fear from the new 'revolutionary' governments in Georgia and Ukraine as both countries, particularly Ukraine, depend on Central Asian energy supplies. As they sought to wrestle free from Russian domination, Presidents Saakashvili and Yushchenko found themselves making strategic economic alliances with the Turkmen dictator. These alliances were reaffirmed when Sapamurat Niyazov died in December 2006; both Saakashvili and Yushchenko attended the funeral in

⁷⁵ Donnacha Ó Beacháin's recollections of TV coverage in Kazakhstan December 2005. See also OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Kazakhstan Presidential Election.

⁷⁶ Isaacs, Parliamentary Elections in Kazakhstan. In: Electoral Studies, 27 (2008) 3 [in press].

⁷⁷ Donnacha Ó Beacháin, interviews with Turkmen citizens 2005-7.

⁷⁸ See Fredholm, The Prospects of Internal Unrest; International Crisis Group (Ed.), Cracks in the Marble.

Ashgabat, paying due homage with a view to pleasing the emerging elite led by Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov. Initial optimism that the new Turkmen leader would undo the worst excesses of the Niyazov regime and perhaps even liberalise the polity has proved largely unfounded. The opening of Ashgabat's first internet café in 2007 was hailed as a major step forward but even this "reform" was illusionary.⁷⁹ In sum, Turkmenistan presents few of the conditions necessary for a colour revolution; it has no independent media and no legal opposition within the country. Energy riches insulate the country from foreign influence and the activities of civil society are emasculated.

XII. Azerbaijan: necktie revolutionaries

The threat of revolution was stronger in oil rich Azerbaijan where unrealised expectations of instant wealth from the country's huge Caspian Sea reserves had disillusioned many ordinary people. As a Muslim member of George W. Bush's "coalition of the willing" with troops in Iraq, Azerbaijan had enhanced its clout in Washington since 9/11.⁸⁰ Azerbaijan was also the source of energy for the only pipeline that could deliver Caspian Sea energy to the European market without going through Russia or Iran. The construction of this Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in 2002 further boosted Azerbaijan's prominence in US foreign policy. Not only was America unlikely to offer more than mild criticism of the Azerbaijan regime but Mikheil

⁷⁹ Donnacha Ó Beacháin visit to Turkmenistan, June 2007. The solitary internet café, adorned with pictures of presidents Niyazov and Berdymukhamedov and copies of Niyazov's book "Ruknama", had just six computers. One's passport had to be handed over for the duration of the visit and the details were written into a book. The cost of access was \$20 per hour at the official rate of exchange (\$4 at the black market rate) and the connection was unbearably slow.

⁸⁰ Indeed, prior to the attacks on New York, Azerbaijan had been the only country excluded from America's Freedom Support Act though this was largely to appease the influential Armenian diaspora in the United States.

Saakashvili had made it clear from the beginning that he did not intend to disturb the domestic political arrangements of his Caucasian neighbour. If Georgia was to confront Russia on the issue of energy it meant finding alternative sources of oil and gas. This in turn made cosyng up to dictators not only in Azerbaijan but in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan absolutely necessary.

When Shevardnadze was overthrown, Ilham Aliev's position as President of Azerbaijan and leader of the governing New Azerbaijan (Yeni Azerbaycan) party was shaky. He had come to power as part of a dynastic succession thinly disguised as a democratic election on 15 October 2003. His father, Heydar, had ruled Azerbaijan for a decade and would have contested again had his health not begun to fail him as he approached his eightieth birthday. Ilham was put forward as the governing party's sole candidate for the presidential election and according to official results, generally dismissed as fiction by international monitors, he took 77% of the vote in the first round.⁸¹

All major opposition parties condemned the fraudulent elections and though official permission to rally was refused protests went ahead regardless attracting up to ten thousand demonstrators. Violent clashes with police resulted in a couple of fatalities and over six hundred imprisoned. The opposition were temporarily silenced but got renewed impetus from the Rose and Orange revolutions. A plethora of youth movements modelled on Kmara and PORA emerged including Yeni Fikir (New Thought) linked to the Popular Front of Azerbaijan, Magam (It's Time) and YOX (No!). Contact was made with Kel Kel in Kyrgyzstan and hopes were high that Azerbaijan's parliamentary elections in November 2005 – the first such elections

⁸¹ OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Azerbaijan Presidential Elections.

since the Tulip Revolution – might be the scene for what was already being dubbed the ‘necktie revolution’.⁸²

The Azeri Government took pre-emptive measures before the November 2005 elections. During the summer of 2005, the government launched a campaign against the youth movements that had sprung up in Azerbaijan, openly imitating the symbols and tactics of their Georgian, Serbian and Ukrainian counterparts.⁸³ Throughout the autumn, the Aliev regime remained hyper-sensitive to all potential threats. On 15 September, PORA leader Sergei Yevtushenko was detained at Baku airport and put on a plane to Donetsk. Yevtushenko, a former adviser to Ukraine’s foreign minister, had been invited by Musavat leader, Isa Gambar to visit Azerbaijan and address members of his organization.⁸⁴ The leader of MAGAM, Emin Huseynov, cooperated with Kmara and the Liberty Institute in Georgia. Huseynov travelled to Tbilisi fifty days before the vote to get advice from Liberty Institute Director Levan Ramishvili and others.⁸⁵ The Azadliq (Freedom) bloc ostentatiously imitated the Ukraine model, adopting orange as their colour for flags and symbols. They copied the Georgian revolutionary emblem by adopting a red carnation and OTPOR/Kmara influence was evident in the widespread use of the clenched fist as a symbol of resistance. Leaflets were printed on orange paper; graffiti was in the Azeri language with orange paint. Ramil Gassanov, a leader of the governing party’s youth wing, mocked this aspect. ‘Look, they have chosen orange as their colour, their symbol, the

⁸² The description owes its origins to the fact that all major opposition movements took to wearing orange ties in the run-up to the election. The leader of the largest opposition party, the Azerbaijan Popular Front, explained that the election was taking place ‘after the revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, which showed people that if you fight to the end, you can win. The psychological impact of these events should not be underestimated’. See Schleifer, In Azerbaijan. In: *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 November 2005.

⁸³ Ismailova/Abbasov, Azerbaijan. In: *Eurasia Insight*, 12 August 2005. NDI strenuously denied the charge.

⁸⁴ ‘Ukrainian Youth Activist Deported From Azerbaijan’, RFE/RL, 17 September 2005.

colour they have chosen is foreign, imported from Ukraine, it shows they lack initiative, lack originality'.⁸⁶ For his part, President Aliev dismissed the possibility of a colour revolution: 'when we see these Orange t-shirts, we can only laugh at them'.⁸⁷ He had some reason to smile since the international funds made available to youth movement in Georgia (half a million from Soros) and Serbia (several million from the US) did not find its way to Azeri youth movements. Moreover, the Georgian and Ukrainian governments studiously avoided any hint of supporting the Azeri opposition.⁸⁸

Thwarted in their efforts to stage mass rallies, the opposition received an enormous boost by the announcement that Rasul Guliyev, a former speaker of parliament and one of the leaders of the 'democratic opposition,' was returning to Azerbaijan after a decade of self-imposed exile. Fifty thousand people were expected to greet him on his arrival at Baku's Heyder Aliev International Airport so Aliev Junior acted swiftly. Over a hundred opposition leaders were arrested, several thousands troops were placed at the airport, and it was made clear that should Guliyev set foot in Azerbaijan he would be arrested and enjoy the tender mercies of Azeri justice. A stop in Ukraine gave Guliyev enough time to figure that his return to Baku would more likely end in prison than parliament and he returned to London.⁸⁹

Guliyev's retreat slowed vital opposition momentum but it soon became clear that Aliev was just starting. Having demonstrated to the opposition that he would tolerate no mobilization, he quickly began to crush potential rivals closer to his power base. Inheriting the presidency at short notice from his father, Ilham Aliev had taken

⁸⁵ Ramishvili stressed the need for non-violence as 'if one window is broken you will lose the support of the international community'. BBC documentary, 'How to Plan a Revolution' (BBC, 2006), Levan Ramishvili, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Tbilisi, 24 January 2008.

⁸⁶ In conversation with colleagues. BBC documentary, 'How to Plan a Revolution' (BBC, 2006).

⁸⁷ Interview with President Aliev. BBC documentary, 'How to Plan a Revolution' (BBC, 2006).

⁸⁸ Socor, Rose, Orange Revolutions. In: Eurasia Daily Monitor, 1 November 2005.

time to acclimatise to his new role. An ex-KGB and Communist Party boss Heydar Aliev had built up a formidable power base and had cemented allegiances from influential Azeri clans. Ilham's relative youth and inexperience made him a softer touch and power began to accumulate in the hands of ministers to the extent that some felt untouchable enough to publicly criticise government policies. It seems at this point that Aliev sought help from Moscow using the old KGB network of which Russian President Vladimir Putin had been a part. In October, many high ranking state officials were charged and arrested with plotting a coup with the opposition. In the space of two weeks dozens of former cabinet ministers, government officials, police chiefs, and business executives were arrested and taken out of circulation. On 1 November, the Prosecutor-General's Office and Ministries of the Interior and National Security released a joint statement claiming that they had evidence proving that those arrested had been plotting with Guliyev to overthrow Aliev ahead of the parliamentary elections. Prepared confessions were read out by the accused on national television (AzTV). Any lingering notions that Aliev was a wimp, a shadow of his iron-willed father, were by now firmly put to bed. On 4 November, he publicly warned his cabinet to take note of his recent purge that had saved the country from anarchy and civil war. Almost simultaneously, 10,000 supporters of his Yeni Azerbaijan Party rallied in Baku Square waving portraits of the president and his father. No difficulties were encountered in securing permission for the rally. By the time the parliamentary elections were held on 6 November, almost all opposition had been silenced and the president's supporters romped to victory amid widespread

⁸⁹ 'Ukrainian Authorities Release Azerbaijani Oppositionist', RFE/RL 20 October 2005.

charges of voting irregularities. A colour revolution had been averted but not without a considerable effort by President Aliev.⁹⁰

XIII. Belarus: the bison awakens

Belarus is perhaps the country that has most constantly tried to produce a revolution. Since 2001 civil society has been active in organizing street protests like the “We can’t live like this” march on 12 April 2002 against what the US administration has called “the last dictatorship in Europe”. Belarus is also a prime example of how the attitude of the incumbent regime is important in determining the outcome of a colour revolution.

Since his election in 1994, Aleksander Lukashenka has completely changed the political direction of the country, transforming a state that was slowly carrying out market reforms and timidly orientating itself westwards into a continuation of the Soviet Union and one of the best allies of Russia.⁹¹ From an economic point of view Belarus is doing well, partially thanks to favourable prices of Russian raw materials it enjoys.⁹² The political regime has more in common with a Central Asian state than a European one⁹³ and Belarus conforms in some ways to Linz and Stepan’s description of a Sultanistic regime.⁹⁴ Media censorship is more pronounced than during the *Glasnost* years, NGOs are given little opportunity for political action and opposition leaders are closely monitored. Anti government leaflets and magazines are normally

⁹⁰ A comprehensive selection of articles relating to the 2005 Azerbaijan elections can be found at <http://www.eurasianet.org/azerbaijan/> and <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1062546.html>

⁹¹ See Parker, The Last Soviet Republic The alliance seems to be rather a marriage of convenience. See Kupchinky, Russia/Belarus. In: RFE/RL 3 April 2006. Arkhangelsky, The Essential Enemy. In: Russia Profile, 15 January 2007.

⁹² Almond, Less Bizarre than it Seems. In: The Guardian, 21 March 2006.

⁹³ Kuzio, Sultanism in Eastern Europe. In: Europe-Asia Studies, 52 (2000) 3, pp. 523-547.

⁹⁴ Linz/Stepan, Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation.

printed in Russia and then smuggled into Belarus. Despite all this, the NGO sector, and civil society in general, is one of the most active in the CIS. Reports abound of arrested NGO leaders accused of terrorism,⁹⁵ and NGOs closed⁹⁶ or heavily taxed. Authorisation for demonstrations must be sought fifteen days in advance and these often end with arrests and violence. However since 2002 open air protests have been organized when possible and were attempted during the 2003 parliamentary elections, the 2004 referendum and the 2006 presidential elections. In fact among the biggest protests of a “failed revolution” have occurred in Minsk, with more than 10,000 people gathering in the city centre to protest against Lukashenka’s victory in the 2006 presidential elections, all the more significant when we consider the risks they face in confronting the authorities.⁹⁷

Ordinary people and civil society could not alone guarantee the radical change witnessed in other countries. Both the Belarusian population and civil society are not as much against the regime as is reported in the West. Though Western observers ridiculed the 2006 elections in which Lukashenka won 82% of the vote as being neither free nor fair independent surveys conducted before the elections still gave Lukashenka a strong lead over his opponents.⁹⁸ Moreover, the opposition had been unable to unite; at the elections they failed to present a joint candidate though fighting for the same electorate.⁹⁹ The West had little room for manoeuvre in Belarus. So many sanctions had been implemented against the country (it was excluded from the Council of Europe in 1997) that there was not much that the EU or the USA can still use as a stick. The Lukashenka regime meanwhile continues a subtle policy of

⁹⁵ Belarus: Election Activists Sentenced In Closed-Door Trial. RFE/RL 4 August 2006.

⁹⁶ After years of hardship, the Open Society Institute stopped operating in Belarus in 2005. The local branch of the Service Civil International had been shut down the previous year.

⁹⁷ Peuch, Belarus, RFE/RL, 21 March 2006.

⁹⁸ See Gradirovski/Esipova, Questions of Freedom.

harassment and repression. During the 2006 protests, the strategy was to arrest the leaders of the protests one by one and then attack the mass with the police. This was much more subtle than the techniques used in Uzbekistan 2005 or Myanmar in 2007, as no mass killing were reported and thus the events gained comparatively little international attention. Nevertheless such policies have had a sobering effect on would-be opposition activists who know that the price of political agitation might be a long prison term.

XIV. Conclusion

The colour revolution phenomenon has the appearance of a chess match between regimes and opposition in the CIS. Whilst the opposition has been perfecting its techniques to “organize a revolution”, the regimes have also had to undergo a steep learning curve the better to formulate effect counter-strategies. In particular, post-soviet autocracies have absorbed several lessons from the colour revolutions. They could be summarised as follows:

Don't allow youth organisations to develop.

Be wary of Western funded organisations.

Divide the opposition.

Ensure your own forces are united.

Ensure security forces are on side.

Do not allow large gatherings of protesters, particularly close to official buildings.

⁹⁹ Second place Aleksander Milinkievich took 6% of preferences, Sergey Gaidukevich 3.5% Aleksandar Kazulin 2% making a total of 11.5% won by the opposition.

One tactic frequently employed by the ruling authorities has been the use of “clones”, that is organizations established by the government that mimic in appearance existing opposition movements and are designed to confuse the public by parroting a pro-government agenda. This was a common practice during the Soviet era but in the wake of the colour-revolutions it has regained popularity among post-soviet elites. Kyrgyzstan’s Kel-Kel is a case in point. Within days of being established as an anti-Akaev youth organization, another youth group sprang up with the same name but a very different message for which they were given the original Kel Kel’s website domain to propagate.¹⁰⁰ In the Azerbaijan of 2006, there were two “Islamic” parties, two “Civic Unity”, three “Popular Fronts”, four “Democratic” parties and no less than five “Communist” parties. The clones, often formed from renegade members of the original party, are quickly registered by the government and play the role of pseudo-opposition, sometimes under direct government control, to sow confusion and encourage membership leakage from the real opposition groups.¹⁰¹

Harsh attitudes and iron fists are certainly an asset for current regimes. Post-soviet governments in Central Asia have generally relied on traditional conservatism and a widespread deference to authority and elders, all of which are presented as national virtues. Opposition (as would be displayed in, say, a presidential debate) is equated with division and confrontation and is portrayed as foreign to the national character. Family pressures – parental, spousal or other – also play a major role in political socialisation. In such societies, where family and community are so important, not only does political activity mean possible alienation from both but also

¹⁰⁰ Donnacha Ó Beacháin interview with Kel Kel leader Burul Usmanaliyeva, Bishkek 9 March 2005 and NGO leader Edil Baisalov, Bishkek 12 March 2005.

¹⁰¹ Anar M. Valiyev, ‘Parliamentary Elections in Azerbaijan: A Failed Revolution’, *Problems of Post Communism*, 53/3 (May/June 2006) [pp. 17-35] p. 28

the authorities make clear that anti-state activities will involve repercussions not only in terms of one's personal career and security but also for those of family members.

Another point is that people in some cases are too poor to be content but too cowed to mobilise. When worried about earning their daily bread people have no time or will to involve themselves in protest movements, unless a dramatic event happens and their economic situation further deteriorates. Ultimately, mobilisation mainly involves those strata that are not so poor to be preoccupied with issues of survival but not so rich that they are unwilling to risk what they have. When rallies are banned and there is a consequent risk of physical abuse only a small hardcore of agitators will mobilize, making them easier to identify, isolate and monitor. Their arrests mean yet smaller gatherings next time creating a diminishing cycle that will only be broken by a mass uprising as was seen in Andijan with tragic consequences.

In most post-soviet countries the opposition have failed to mobilize people to the levels necessary to seriously undermine the government. There was often a credibility gap; on the one hand the opposition would claim that the vast majority of the electorate was with them while they found it difficult to muster regularly more than 10,000 people to defend their position on the streets. Opposition alliances, so vital to create the conditions necessary for mass mobilization, are often fragile and vulnerable to external pressure or internal dissention. This is especially true when the opposition is elite in exile rather than a genuine alternative with opposition leaders having far more in common with the ruling regime than with the common people. But since the government monopolises coercive power, the opposition have no option but to fall back on the people, or certainly this was a lesson learnt from Georgia and Ukraine. The people will, according to this view, be the vehicle to drive the opposition to power. Usually ignored between elections, the people are to be courted

into the streets to act as the battering ram against the gates of power. But like marriage in a Hollywood fairytale it is unclear what happens afterwards. Whereas there is a temptation to view those leaders ranked against the existing autocratic government as purveyors of liberal and democratic values, this is often not the case. Opposition figures often have only a negative identity with little uniting them but a collective will to dislodge the president. Lacking policies and unable to unite behind a common platform they seem sometimes to offer a change of personalities not of policies. There is a struggle more for power than for democracy or social justice - more person change than regime change.

The 'revolutionary' states have been unwilling or unable to export their model to most other post soviet countries on whom they depend for trade. For much the same reason, Western countries have been reluctant to support civil society or political party development to the point where it jeopardises their energy supplies. Toleration for gas rich Turkmenistan and oil rich Kazakhstan can be contrasted with the international isolation of energy poor Belarus. Thus, revolutionary impulses must be indigenous. External forces can facilitate, they can sometimes support, but they cannot manufacture a revolution.

Western observers regularly berate, increasingly functionally, post soviet states for electoral fraud and for missing the opportunity to win the confidence of European public opinion, not realising perhaps that the objective is to win domestic power not Western flattery. But as elections provided the catalyst for the Rose, Orange and Tulip Revolutions, Russia and other post-soviet autocracies have sought to counteract the critical findings of the OSCE's election monitoring organization ODIHR (appropriately pronounced 'oh dear'), whose damning reports were seized upon by oppositions to justify their position. To this end CIS election missions,

composed of observers selected by post-soviet autocracies, have been dispatched to counteract ODIHR and other Western or independent election monitors. The CIS missions invariably give a clean bill of health and ignore even the most outrageous excesses of electoral manipulation. When Karimov was elected Uzbek President for another seven year term on 25 December 2007 in a rigged contest, the CIS described the contest as ‘free, open and transparent’ and said it had received no complaints.¹⁰² A similar endorsement was received the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a Russian-Chinese dominated organization that includes all post-soviet Central Asian states except Turkmenistan.¹⁰³

Although the phenomenon of colour revolutions has not ended yet, two aspects should be highlighted. The first is the extent to which both post-soviet leaders and oppositions have learnt from these events. Rather than see the regime-changes as the result of autocratic deficiencies, there has been a tendency to attribute events to “political technologies” devised in the West and skilfully executed in a manner that camouflage its foreign roots. Oppositions, for their part, have demonstrable proof that mass mobilisation timed to coincide with a rigged election can sometimes dislodge unpopular autocrats. Secondly, non-violent protest movements have been a leitmotif of political protests in recent years. Although there is no conclusive evidence that what has happened in Rangoon, Kathmandu, Kuala Lumpur or Lhasa is directly connected with colour revolutions in the CIS, the intensity and regularity of the protests seem to confirm that a tendency to use civil disobedience is growing, although governments seem to have found effective ways to minimize their effects.

¹⁰² Uzbekistan National News Agency, ‘CIS mission: presidential elections free open and transparent’, <http://uza.uz/en/politics/144/>

¹⁰³ Uzbekistan National News Agency, ‘SCO observer mission says elections in Uzbekistan were free and legitimate’, <http://uza.uz/en/politics/143/>

