

What Happened to the Colour Revolutions? Authoritarian Responses from Former Soviet Spaces

Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese

In this paper we survey how colour revolutions have succeeded or failed in post communist spaces to identify the correlation between the attitude of the authorities, and their capacity to produce a backlash, and the failure of a colour revolution. By analysing the role of external forces in colour revolutions we explore problems associated with the export of democracy to post-socialist spaces, suggesting that colour revolutions have prompted a validation of actors, their performances and claims by the authorities that have then learned to use those techniques to challenge the opposition. This limited the effect of colour revolutions in the remaining countries.

Keywords: Authoritarian Regimes, Colour Revolutions, Democratization, Former Soviet Spaces, Social Movements

1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS *SUI GENERIS* ABOUT COLOUR REVOLUTIONS?

In recent years, post-socialist spaces have undergone a series of social and political changes, often initiated from the bottom of society, that have come to be known as ‘colour revolutions.’ Starting with apparently isolated initiatives in Slovakia and Serbia in the twilight of the twentieth century, many post-Soviet republics have witnessed attempts to carry out colour revolutions. The wave of non-violent protests in Eastern Europe and Central Asia is unique given its regularity, frequency and geographical concentration (Bunce and Wolchuk 2007; Ó Beacháin and Polese 2009, 2010).

These colour revolutions have followed a similar pattern: in the framework of an electoral contest, a civic campaign to guarantee free and fair elections is established. Normally, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) take the lead (often coordinated with political forces) and benefit from ‘know how’ acquired through international trainings and manuals. Through a joint effort, civil society and political actors follow a two-pronged strategy: they seek to discredit the regime (negative campaign) while pushing people to go to the polls (positive campaign). The assumption is that where the regime is sufficiently unpopular, a high turnout will allow a resourceful opposition to win the elections. Should the regime refuse to acknowledge the popular verdict (by falsifying the vote or simply refusing to step down), people are called on to the streets and a general strike is called until the *status quo* changes (this may mean that the authorities step down or that they crush the protesters).

Every revolution involves a confrontation between the elite and an opposition, as Tilly (1978) reminds; however, in the case of the colour revolutions, this confrontation had the innovative feature of occurring during an election campaign when the opposition sharpened civil disobedience tools, forged alliances with civil society, and reached out and called upon the masses to defy the regime. Inviting people to the streets is the result of an elaborate strategy perfected over many years. The principle is very simple: as long as an unpopular regime is facing a test (elections), encourage people to ‘vote their mind’ and the regime will

lose legitimacy. This was, at least, the main idea behind the OK '98 campaign in Slovakia and previous actions in Bulgaria (1997), Romania (1996) and Serbia (1996-97) through which the "electoral revolution model" was invented (Bunce and Wolchik 2006). Another innovative feature of colour revolutions is the deep involvement of civil society in politics, particularly in confronting the regime. In this context, it is understandable that the influence of external forces has merited special attention (Aslund 2006; D'Anieri 2005; Kuzio 2005; Wilson 2005) reviving a theoretical question in the social sciences of whether democracy can be exported and if so, to what extent (McFaul 2007)

While recognising external influences in colour revolutions, we have argued elsewhere that to reduce the protests as manifestations of US power or as a mere arm wrestling between the West and Russia is too simplistic (Ó Beacháin and Polese 2008, 2009, 2010). In addition to the political dimension of a colour revolution, several other variables can influence the domestic outcome of a protest. Contact with other protest movements and international actors is a way to generate political opportunities, particularly with increasing access to communication technology. In their boomerang model Keck and Sikkink (1998) show how the role of externalization, through which weak domestic actors can be aided by more powerful nongovernmental or governmental allies. Putting pressure on the government from outside may ease the task for local civil societies or opposition.

While scholars have recently become intrigued again by the question to what extent a revolution can be exported and, more theoretically, to what extent international actors can promote democracy in a country (Bunce and Wolchuk 2006; McFaul 2007; McDonagh 2008) we are interested in the other side of the coin. We want to explore to what extent democracy can be imported and, if so, by whom.

Strategies of non violent protests have been theorized in the past, with Gene Sharp a pioneer outlining 198 methods of non violent action (Sharp 1973) and even publishing a sort of revolutionary handbook, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, in 1993. He has not been alone; simulation games on how to manage protests and trainings on non violent resistance have been organized for local activists (Tarrow 2005), and governments have paid increasingly attention to democracy promotion from below (Bunce and Wolchik 2007) that have designated local NGOs as main instruments of democratic transition (Tordjman 2008). As a result, a main thesis promoted by many post-Soviet autocrats, and supported by a large number of Western media concerns the primary role of the US, and to a certain extent the EU, as supporters of those revolutions. Whereas it is possible to see every colour revolution as a confrontation between US and Russia, to limit the events to a political confrontation might be too simplistic an approach. For one thing, if it is possible to 'win a revolution' by simply pumping money into a country and training local activists, why have some attempted revolutions failed?

If there is evidence that external actors have played a main role in those protest movements, external influences as well should be conceived in a broader manner (McFaul 2007; Ó Beacháin and Polese 2008a; Polese 2008; Polese 2008b) by exploring the role of civil society along with the political forces. If external influences were able to affect the attitude and skills of civil society, and its engagement in politics and able to unite the opposition, one must not forget that external influences also influence the regime with promises and threats. While studies on colour revolutions have shown the importance of civil society (Demes and Forbig 2005; Kuzio 2005; Nikolayenko 2006; Polese 2009; Tordjman 2008), the most vibrant civil society cannot resist the attacks of a regime that, with no regard of its reputation in the West, chooses a repressive attitude. Once attempts are made to export

democracy it is important to check whether, and to what extent, these attempted efforts succeed in reaching their targets.

Looking at the chronological results of a colour revolution, we can see that after a certain point colour revolutions have failed. This might be due *inter alia* to a change in the attitude of the regime. While international assistance has continued (though international support has varied from country to country) the remaining regimes have become more interested in the technology of a colour revolution. A main role in a colour revolution may be the attitude of the regime that, increasingly aware of the power and potential of non violent strategies, has sought for a way to fight them. Short of resources, a first impulse has been to repress protests in blood as in Andjan 2005, but then an increasing understanding of the strategy has led regimes to work out a similar strategy that has come to counterbalance the one originally used only by the opposition (Finkel 2007; Ambrosio 2008)

In the remainder of this paper we concentrate on the problems associated with democracy importation in post-socialist spaces, and suggest that colour revolutions have been characterised by brokerage, that is the linking of two or more previously unconnected social actors; modularity, that is movements that activate people and movements, over whom they have no control; and certification, that is the validation of actors, their performances and their claims by the authorities that have then learned to use those techniques to challenge the opposition (on these three concepts see Tarrow 1998: 48-49; Tarrow 2005: 190, 194). This limits the effect of colour revolutions in the remaining countries, as we will demonstrate in the final part of the paper. We will do this by surveying the way colour revolutions have happened, or failed, in post communist spaces to find the correlation between the attitude of the authorities, and their capacity to produce a backlash and the failure of a colour revolution. The analysis will show that colour revolutions are not possible anymore the way they were originally conceived because now both sides, the regime and the opposition, are using the same weapons, and the regime's monopoly or quasi monopoly on the use of force is likely to be decisive.

2. EVERYBODY WANTS TO EXPORT DEMOCRACY, BUT WHO IS WILLING TO IMPORT?

The rapid diffusion of the colour revolutions phenomenon has prompted scholars to blow the dust off an age-old theoretical question on whether democracy can be exported, which should be considered in a wider context, rather than merely concentrating on a single country or a single actor, reducing the overall importance of external factors in protest movements (McFaul 2007). A number of works have concentrated on external forces, and in particular on US democracy assistance (Carothers 1991, 1999; Fukuyama 2004; Smith 1994; Youngs 2004; de Zeeuw and Kumar 2006) as a main factor to boost democracy in the world. At civil society level, some theoretical suggestions have been rediscovered to ask to what extent civil society and people were able to have an effect on politics. The works of Gene Sharp (1973, 1993) have been considered vital to such protest movements and have informed both opposition and civil society, whilst the boomerang effect theorized by Keck and Sikkink (1998) has signposted the way civil society actors and ordinary people may set an international network to exert international political pressure on national governments. In particular reference to the colour revolutions, a small number of works have explored the way civil society and people can have a role in democracy export (Biber 2003; Polese 2009;

Demes and Forbig 2007; Aslund and McFaul 2005; McIntosh Sundstrom 2006). There is a third set of forces that have a major role in democracy promotion. Exporting democracy is feasible only as long as countries are willing, consciously or not, to import it. In this respect, the crucial role played by domestic elites in the regime process should be acknowledged (White 2009). This under-researched set of actors is a particular focus of this article. In other works we have referred to this as the attitude of the elites (see Ó Beacháin and Polese 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) and we can imagine two possible paths. One is the clear desire of a political elite to import democracy, by importing institutions, practices, experience and know-how and permitting external forces to operate. The other is the incapacity of the political elites, and its international affiliates, to control the flow of information, expertise, intelligence that is bound to affect the attitude of domestic forces, encouraging a public opinion more receptive to democratization.

A main question, and variable, is: to what extent, democratic impulses from outside are able to influence domestic policies and to what extent they are received at local level? We deem this to be correlated with two main variables, one is the desire of political elites and opposition to enjoy this external support and the other is the extent to which those impulses are understood. As McFaul put it “With rare exception, domestic actors dominate the drama of regime change; external actors can influence outcomes only by working with and through these domestic actors” (2007: 47). It has been suggested that domestic actors adopt foreign strategies only as long and as much as they understand them (Morrison 2008). As a result, some regimes proved incapable at first to grasp the very nature of the protests. The opposition, together with external actors were able to benefit from this surprise advantage due to the incapability of a regime to understand non violent struggle and other innovative methods of political competition.

Democracy export can only work in tandem with a constituency willing and able to import. In other words there has to be a market for the democracy export product. A country will be able to profit from the export of know-how and interest of other countries only as long as it is able to import those things.

Democracy importation depends mainly on two factors. One is the capacity of the opposition to understand the strategy needed. The other is how much authorities allow it. Not only a political opposition, or a movement, has to respond to outside stimulations, they should also be able to understand the very nature of such ideas and technologies. In this respect we can see a noteworthy pattern in colour revolutions. When only the opposition was able to understand, and import foreign techniques, democracy promotion and import proved successful. This was made possible by incompetency or simply the fragmentation of the regime. We have shown that if techniques, ideas, messages, strategies and even money permeate the country, there is complicity of the ruling elites (Ó Beacháin and Polese 2010). If we look at the success cases, we will see that the causes were structural rather than occasional, and in this we tend to avail Skocpol’s (1979) structural framework.

Opposition and civil society were certainly major actors in Serbia, Georgia or Ukraine, and the international community played a vital role in the protests and political negotiations. People were likewise were brave enough to stand up against the police and potential death threats. However, in all three cases, one could detect a degree of rupture within the elites themselves. This has been less explored in the Serbian case, and is more visible in Georgia and Ukraine, but the level of defection from the regime proved to be extremely high. Secret agreements were concluded and in many cases in all the three countries, the president’s close allies remained in power either because they reached an arrangement with the opposition or

because they helped in the critical moments of the protests. For instance, in Ukraine the Ministry of Internal Affairs refused to follow president Kuchma's instructions to attack the protesters unless the order came in writing, discharging the Ministry staff from all responsibilities. Conversely, where the ruling elites had a similar approach, it was not too difficult to effect countermeasures and minimise defection, like the case of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and especially, Turkmenistan show.

However, this unexpected success awakened the interest of other regimes, which decided to better understand the phenomenon, as presidential incumbents learned from their opponents' methods and mistakes (Lane 2009). This produced a backlash as authoritarian regimes became capable of counterbalancing external influences and, to put in an economic metaphor, impose duties on the import of democracy to reduce their impact.

This new attitude of some countries invites us to shift our attention from the external actors as exporters of democracy to domestic ones, and in particular the regime as blockers of the coloured virus that use a mixture of repressive and preventive strategies. Many post-Soviet regimes have sought to smother foreign influences (the closure of universities in Minsk and St. Petersburg along with the British Council in Russia and Open Society Institute in several republics is illuminating in this regard). They have made clear that opposition protests, however peaceful, may face violent repression and, accordingly, an analysis of the backlash against colour revolution activity by post-Soviet regimes can provide a useful tool to better evaluate the chances of future anti-regime movements. To understand the relationship between regime attitude and the success of a colour revolution we will present a number of cases in this paper to suggest that authoritarian regimes that permit extensive foreign support for domestic opposition are more likely to experience a colour revolution.

3. NARRATIVES OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

There are several moments acknowledged as the starting point of the colour revolution phenomenon. For the purposes of this article, we will consider Slovakia and Serbia as the starting points because, for the first time, we see a coordination of civic and political forces in confronting the incumbent government, backed by external forces that soften the attitude of the regime and, in turn, have an impact on popular attitudes.

3.1. Pushing People to Vote: Slovakia

Because of the increasingly authoritarian and isolationist attitude of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, parliamentary elections in 1998 were seen as Slovakia's last chance to regain international credibility. In the course of the 1990s a number of international programmes, like PHARE and USAID, enhanced the capacity of local NGOs along with civic education projects financed by the Open Society Foundation. These helped develop the domestic NGO sector. An increasing number of small organizations were registered during the first post-communist decade as a result. When the authorities began to adopt a more repressive stance a 'third sector SOS' campaign was launched in 1996 and on the eve of the OK '98 (*Občianska kampaň OK '98*) campaign some, 14,400 civil society organizations were registered in the country, including 422 foundations and 161 non investment funds (Butora 2007: 26).

Activists in Slovakia have the distinction of putting together a campaign that was to have an effect on all future civic movements in post-communist societies. There are three aspects of the campaign that are worth mentioning here. One is the coordination of the civic campaign with opposition leaders that helped the opposition to coalesce around common goals. The second is the importance of external actors: although it was clear that Mečiar would try to manipulate the elections, international pressures from the EU and US helped to limit the level of repression during the campaign and prevented fraud at the polls. Ultimately the government felt pressured to accept international election observers that were aided by a large number of (unaccredited) domestic ones. The third relevant factor is the manner in which the campaign was conducted. The OK '98 campaign fought a deep-rooted political passivity and succeeded in bringing people to the polls. It was estimated, before the campaign, that many of those disillusioned with politics (and likely to vote against Mečiar) were not planning to go to the polling booth. In 1994, less than a quarter of young eligible voters had participated in elections. However, in 1998, young and first time voters became a potentially powerful opposition force. The result was a remarkably high turnout: 84 percent of the registered voters went to the polls (compared to 75.65% in the 1994 elections) with Mikuláš Dzurinda's Slovak Democratic Coalition emerging as the main force in the country. Two questions emerged at this stage. One is what would have happened had Mečiar tampered with the election results and the other is how and to what extent could and would external forces combat such electoral fraud and mobilise the opposition. An answer to both questions would come two years later in Serbia, where this strategy was further developed.

3.2. Taking the Streets: Serbia

Serbian President Slobodan Milošević employed a variety of strategies, fair and foul, to stay in power until 2000 and keep his allies dominant in parliament. The 1996 elections, when anti-Milošević forces fared best, were still characterised by opposition fragmentation. From 1996 on, however, the regime proved unable of maintaining the full support of the army, and the foreign media was substituted with domestic ones. The OSCE investigated electoral frauds (Tarrow 2005: 110). Sensing the opportunity, in 2000 parliamentary elections, opposition representatives were able to form the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), a coalition of no less than eighteen parties, constituting the first serious internal threat to Milošević's grip on power (Spoerri 2008). However, to be considered a real opposition, the DOS needed to secure popular support of the voters, as the Slovak case had demonstrated two years before. The Serbian case differed from that of Slovakia. Mečiar had accepted his defeat and left his post but Milošević seemed less inclined to comply. What would happen if the regime refused to acknowledge the election results?

The September 2000 presidential election was also seminal by virtue of the fact that hundreds of thousands of hitherto apathetic young people cast their vote for the first time. This was another result of the work of the anti-regime youth movement OTPOR – that cooperated with political forces and a number of civil society actors to transform youth perceptions about elections. Owing to their efforts, the youth came to view elections not as part of establishment politics but rather a “cool” way to “rock the vote.” By framing the election campaign in such a manner, OTPOR succeeded in cornering Milošević. It limited his options to either doing nothing, which would allow his opponents to thrive and foster ridicule, or ruthlessly suppress, which would only de-legitimise his government. When the government refused to acknowledge the opposition's 28 September election victory the

people took to the streets, following a strategy that would characterize subsequent protest movements.

Shortly after Milošević's downfall, it was reported that OTPOR, far from being the spontaneous happy-go-lucky amateurs whose resourcefulness could be attributed to youthful ingenuity and thriftiness, was in fact funded to the tune of millions of dollars by US organisations like the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).¹ Indeed, in March 2000, the IRI had hosted a secret conference at the Hilton Hotel in Budapest where OTPOR members were trained in non-violent protest techniques and introduced to Gene Sharp's ideas by veteran activist Bob Helvey (Popovic 2001). But while US taxpayers may have funded the purchase of several thousand cans of spray paint, 'revolutions always need revolutionaries' (Thompson 2003: 9). Accordingly, the Bulldozer Revolution needed willing volunteers to risk their freedom to do the graffiti and citizens to respond to it, actions executed and supported by many ordinary people that would not receive much formal acknowledgement. Similarly, the producers of 2.5 million stickers emblazoned with "gotov je" ["He's Finished"] had to be confident that there would be people who agreed with the principle sufficiently enough to wear them. While the OTPOR did not deny that they had received US funding when hard evidence emerged in late 2000, some simply argued that the money accelerated the anti-Milošević surge, which would have won out sooner or later, and facilitated a non-violent transition.²

American and European donors spent \$80 million in total during the eighteen months prior to Milošević's overthrow (Spoerri 2008: 81). The US-led NATO bombing of Serbia had accentuated anti-Americanism and funding for the OTPOR that could be traced back to Washington would have discredited many of their activities. It would be wrong, however, to over-emphasize the significance of external support for domestic opposition. Even Milošević himself, with an arrest warrant for charges of crimes against humanity hanging over him, depended on the appearance of popular support to demonstrate democratic legitimacy. By having re-invented himself as a nationalist and populist, Milošević left a gap through which democratically inspired opportunists might also slip in. Elections in this context were vital.

3.3. Trying to Go Post-Soviet: Georgia

With Milošević's overthrow, Belgrade became something of a revolution university where students of regime-change flocked for advice. The era of trans-national activism in post-socialist spaces had officially begun. OTPOR veterans (and to a lesser extent OK '98) became tutors of transformation, deans of democratisation, and rectors of revolution. Future Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili travelled to Belgrade during the years after the Bulldozer Revolution and former OTPOR activists travelled to Tbilisi to train their Georgian counterparts in *KMARA* ["Enough!"]. The model was available, had been successful and was

¹ Michael Dobbs, "U.S. Advice Guided Milošević Opposition: Political Consultants Helped Yugoslav Opposition Topple Authoritarian Leader," *Washington Post*, 11 December, 2000; Page A01, Robert Cohen, Who Really Brought Down Milošević?, *New York Times Magazine* 26 November 2000. <http://www.nytimes.com/library/magazine/home/20001126mag-serbia.html>, *International Herald Tribune* 13 December 2000.

² Slobodan Homen, a student leader who travelled several European capitals, including Budapest to meet U.S. officials and democracy consultants, cited in Dobbs.

now ready to be shipped abroad; “all demonstrators knew the tactics of the revolution in Beograd, everyone knew what to do, this [the Georgian one] was a copy of that revolution, only louder” (*Washington Post*, 25 November 2003, A22).

After the events of November 2003 in Georgia, accusations against George Soros and Western actors in general arose among post-Soviet elites. In an attempt to prevent a “colour revolution”, the Open Society Institute was expelled from Uzbekistan, its offices raided in Belarus and Kazakhstan and, by the end of 2004, the Russian office of the Civic Education Project was moved to Kiev. Popular wisdom suggested that American money and technology had been enough for the US to ‘win’ Georgia for the West.³ To this day and with the benefit of considerable hindsight, Shevardnadze attributes his defeat primarily to the efforts of erstwhile supporter George Soros.⁴

By post-Soviet standards, Georgia was a liberal state though this was as much a result of state weakness than by regime design. By supporting separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia had demonstrated its will to weaken and subordinate Georgia by applying political and military leverage, a policy that was complemented by Georgia’s complete dependence on Russia for gas and other vital imports. The West not only provided a potential counterbalance to Russia, but it was also a vital source of aid. This funding further committed the Shevardnadze regime to using a democratic vocabulary to justify their place in power. It also necessitated permitting freedom of action for a range of potential opposition-orientated activity in the media, the NGO community or the parliament. These attributes, a relatively free society and a democratic basis (rhetorically at least) of governance provided weapons that could be exploited by Georgian oppositionists and the international community. While initially considered a success story, a Caucasian island of democracy in a post-Soviet authoritarian sea, the Shevardnadze regime, despite its early accomplishments, descended into a corrupt oligarchy that had to hang on to rigged elections to stay in office. For the Georgian opposition, and many foreign observers, the question was not whether the November 2003 elections would be rigged but rather to what degree. The answer surprised even the worst prophecies. Cornered by exit polls (sponsored by Rustavi 2 TV) and accurate parallel vote tabulations (carried out by the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy), Shevardnadze’s administration dragged its feet for twenty days before announcing the final results. What was worse was not the entirely fictional results from Adjara but the petty tyrant who ran the mini police state from his presidential palace in Batumi (Ó Beacháin and Polese 2008: 95-97)

Opposition strength, built on the foundations of a free media, pluralistic civil society and open society, was sufficient to mobilize impressive crowds to show their outrage at attempts to tamper with the election results. As in Serbia, Georgians managed to seize the dominant political discourse (Georgia as a pro-western European democracy) and turn it against the regime. Oppositionists too succeeded in framing the issue in terms of national and personal pride; was Georgia’s position so pitiful that one’s vote could be taken without protest? Tens of thousands people demonstrated outside parliamentary buildings and Rustavi 2 TV carried sympathetic coverage (even going so far as to broadcasting “Bringing Down a Dictator” on how OTPOR overthrew Milošević, twice). The international community in its different guises issued statements of concern. For all this, the Rose Revolution reached its critical

³ Yaroshevsky Vitali (2004) Why the Russian Authorities Failed in Ukraine, an Interview with Olga Kryshatanovskaya, *Novaya Gazeta* No. 91, 9 December.

⁴ Eduard Shevardnadze, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Tbilisi, 24 October 2008.

point only following Saakashvili's characteristically daring invasion of the parliament, which stole the initiative from Shevardnadze who was shepherded out as he tried to open the disputed legislature. Shevardnadze's subsequent declaration of national emergency and its failure to be effectively enforced indicated that the regime could no longer rely even on the power institutions of last resort.

3.4. Perfecting the Post-Soviet: Ukraine

Like Georgia, Ukraine, enjoyed a vibrant non-government sector, independent media outlets, and a recent history of collective action and anti-regime protest. Street protests in Ukraine had already been used in 1990 and re-emerged during the Kuchmagate movement in 2001 and 2002. Popular mobilization was matched by an increasingly active civil society and independent media like Kanal 5 TV, *Ukrainska Pravda* or *Zerkalo Nedely*.

Pre-existing networks were instrumental in spreading information and civil disobedience techniques and foreign support was substantial. The US alone allocated more than 65 million dollars in 2003/2004 to support democratic initiatives while the Open Society Institute instituted a fund from which NGOs could obtain election monitoring know-how. Besides, well before 2004, Ukrainian NGO leaders and politicians had been invited to international trainings in non-violent protest methods and civil disobedience.

A main role in the orange revolution was played, however, by the regime itself. Conversely from other countries, opposition parties were mildly harassed and Viktor Yushchenko's *Nasha Ukraina* could win the largest number of parliamentary seats already in 2002. In addition, competition between communists and the party in power resulted in fragmentation of majority forces. Sensitive to Western criticisms, Ukraine had allowed development of civil society and relative freedom of expression that would prove crucial in November 2004. This eventually led to an open confrontation between the government and the opposition once evidence was produced that elections had been falsified. Ukrainians mobilised in large numbers and forced the government to enter negotiations with the opposition, with Russia and EU representatives arriving to mediate (Pifer 2007). Diplomatic and internal pressures compelled the regime to propose as an exit strategy a third round of the presidential elections. Moscow found no effective strategy to oppose this decision and the regime accepted relegation to opposition.

Despite the mistakes of the regime it has to be acknowledged that the opposition, together with civil society, had a main role in this transformation and in perfecting the non-violent strategy deployed in Slovakia and Serbia. Capacity to resist pressures, to manage large crowds, to not respond to provocations, to approach key persons in the regime and secure their cooperation, and the use of humour are all techniques employed in earlier protests. But Ukraine's Orange Revolution witnessed a dramatic escalation. The understanding that opposition elements were mastering new techniques and that the rules of the game had substantially changed gave other former USSR regimes a signal they had to modernise their strategies to maintain power.

4. THE TURNING POINT AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE AUTHORITARIAN BACKLASH

Whilst many analysts often classify the Tulip Revolution among the successful ones, it

might be seen as a self standing case. For one thing, neither the opposition nor civil society was prepared to challenge the regime, at least not as much as their counterparts in Georgia, Serbia or Ukraine. This resulted in a brief, intense, and violent wave of protests that prompted the Kyrgyz president to flee the country. Transnational activism had reached Kyrgyzstan and the basic technique of a colour revolution had been mastered, but neither the population nor the activists themselves were strong enough to prepare a similar scenario. Indeed, Beissinger (2007) suggests it was the strength of expectations, rather than the opposition, that played the decisive role in overthrowing President Akaev.

One interesting thing we notice in the Kyrgyzstan case is the germ of anti-revolutions techniques that will spread throughout the CIS. In Kyrgyzstan, a Kel-Kel clone organisation was created to confuse the public opinion and discredit the original one. As a preventive measure, electricity was cut off in February at Freedom House's Bishkek printing press, where opposition newspapers were produced. The major opposition papers, *MSN* and *Respublika*, came under relentless attack; their newspapers were seized, sellers harassed and they were subjected to numerous and expensive government-inspired libel cases.⁵ By fingering foreign funded subversives Akaev distracted himself from domestic opposition sizzling in the south of country. Corresponding with a very wide definition of civil society this southern-based opposition were non-state actors bound by blood, kinship, locality and region.

By Central Asian standards, civil society in Kyrgyzstan was developed and most of the international bodies most associated in the public mind with the colour revolutions – NDI, IRI, IFES and the Soros Foundation – had offices in Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan's Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society represented the most serious attempt to coordinate democratically-inclined NGOs and received a grant of over \$100,000 from the US Government. Its leader, Edil Baisalov, had led 75 Kyrgyz monitors during monitoring Ukraine's 2004 presidential election and developed a strong admiration for the Orange Revolution.⁶ Formal youth movements were far less prominent in Kyrgyzstan than in Serbia, Georgia or Ukraine and did not play a decisive role in the Tulip Revolution (Khamidov 2006). *Kel-Kel* (Renaissance) had been formed in January 2005 with the modest objective of ensuring free and fair elections but even during the height of the election campaign its leaders claimed no more than 300 members, mostly Bishkek university students of whom only a small percentage were very active.⁷ A more radical group *Birge* (Together), broke from Kel-Kel at the end of February 2005 but had only twenty activists, all in the capital.⁸

Certainly, the notion that western-funded NGOs mobilised the masses doesn't hold much water in Kyrgyzstan's case (Lewis 2008: 133). Whereas protesters in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine had been young, urban, educated and under the guidance, coordination and direction of strong political leadership, what happened in Kyrgyzstan was a spontaneous revolt of the periphery against the centre. Those who took over government buildings in southern cities

⁵ Rina Prijivoit [then chief political editor of MSN, now Kyrgyzstan Ambassador to Austria/OSCE], interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, 10 March 2005 and Zamira Sydikova [then editor in chief of Respublika newspaper, now Kyrgyzstan Ambassador to the United States and Canada], interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, 11 March 2005.

⁶ Edil Baisalov [then head of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society], interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Bishkek, 12 March 2005.

⁷ Burul Usmanalieva [Kel-Kel leader], interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Bishkek 9 March 2005.

⁸ Mirsuljan Namazaliev [Birge leader], interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Bishkek, 30 May 2008.

were not western-trained, English speaking, foreign funded NGO leaders but rather a traditional, rural, Kyrgyz underclass that saw an opportunity to strike a blow against a regime unable to adequately defend itself. Bishkek was besieged by those who felt marginalized not just in the elections but during the previous decade. Moreover, even the most ardent protester didn't believe the opposition had actually won the election; a majority of local "businessmen" formally unaffiliated to any party took the lion's share of seats and the cosmetic character of the "revolution" soon became apparent when the new parliament, produced by the disputed elections, was left in place while an elite pact drained the life from the subsequent presidential election (International Crisis Group 2005a, 2005b).

The storming of Kyrgyzstan's presidential palace (the White House) had not been organised or planned by opposition leaders. The assault was spontaneous, its success largely due to the unwillingness of security forces to defend the palace already deserted by the president. The widespread looting, violence and intimidation that engulfed Bishkek, though of mercifully short duration, was symptomatic too of the leadership deficit. Power was not seized by opposition politicians but handed to them on a plate by mob action. While Akaev's overthrow may have been revolutionary indeed, Kyrgyzstan proved the least revolutionary case. Rather than spring tulips signalling a flowering of a new political dispensation, a Kyrgyz renaissance amid the Central Asian political desert, the new regime proved as corrupt and authoritarian as its predecessor. This is not surprising given the fact that whereas Georgia, Ukraine, and Serbia possessed leaderships with visionary purpose and had witnessed a progressive strengthening of civil society, the conceptual foundations had not taken root in Kyrgyzstan.

Although one could see a continuous line in the evolution of the colour revolutions, with regimes gaining interest and the international community loosening its momentum, the Bishkek events are a turning point in the history of colour revolutions. After March 2005 challenges to post-Soviet regimes through street protests were unsuccessful for a change in the attitude of a number of actors. First of all the international community, and in particular the US, could not count on the same relations and interest all over the CIS and a new cost-benefit analysis applied.

The colour revolutions proved to be an issue of potential conflict between Russia and the Western world, with this latter losing interest in challenging further Moscow's role. In the nineties the Baltics had moved away from Moscow; Georgia and Ukraine seemed to have followed. But, at least in the eyes of the Western community, the strategic importance of Turkmenistan or Azerbaijan does not compare to the role Ukraine or Georgia could play in their regions.

Accusations of undermining a regime and the harsh reactions resulting from that could be a price Western governments would not want to pay in oil and gas exporting countries. As a result, the tendency to "export" colour revolutions decreased and a double standard applied. Some regimes that were at risk of criticisms could buy out their reputation, or at least the silence of diplomats, with natural resources. Perhaps the most visible example is Kazakhstan, that was given the 2010 OSCE chairmanship despite of its continuous violations of a number of standards.

Another issue is that even soft support to the opposition could contradict diplomatic principles and could be seen as a challenge to the elites, even more in countries like Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan where the opposition does not officially exist or is illegal.

A second variable that changed is the capacity of the oppositions to unite behind a name, which was hindered by two factors. An illegal, or allegedly non-existent opposition has much

less capacity to recruit new members, and defection from the elites is punished more harshly than in Georgia or Ukraine. In addition, the colour revolutions were successful in the countries offering the best starting conditions for the opposition. In the remaining countries, political participation was not strong enough to challenge the regime. It had either no resources, no human capital or was at most inexperienced. In the rare cases when it could have been able to act, they faced a new attitude of the regime, that quickly mastered the techniques used in neighbour countries.

In other words, many of the remaining post-Soviet regimes did not possess the same conditions that had facilitated mass mobilisation to defend election results. It is also largely due to the fact the post-Soviet authoritarian regimes identified the key ingredients of these colour revolutions and took measures to ensure that civil society actors were not afforded the same degree of latitude.

Tajikistan refused to register Freedom House. As that country's foreign ministry euphemistically put it, 'after Ukraine and Georgia we have certain concerns about the activities of these western democracy promotion organizations.'⁹ Uzbekistan closed down a host of NGOs suspected of playing a part in colour revolutions including the Freedom House, Internews, and the BBC. The Soros Foundations – often referred to as Open Society Institutes – came under particular scrutiny for as one US visitor to Central Asia put it "in CIS countries, George Soros is considered the devil incarnate" (BBC Monitoring 2005). In fact, attitudes towards Soros became a good barometer of attitudes towards democratic reforms. Days after Yushchenko's historic victory, the Kazakhstan authorities raided the offices of the Soros Foundation, ostensibly on tax evasion charges.¹⁰ The reversal of fortunes for OSI in Uzbekistan had come earlier but was also swift; shortly after the Rose Revolution – the organisation was permanently shut down for a host of technical violations.¹¹ During a rare parliamentary session in Spring 2004, Uzbek President Islam Karimov told those assembled that Soros had planned a similar Rose revolution in Uzbekistan. OSI's main goal, he said, was to 'select from among the young talented Uzbek intelligentsia those who could become a supportive force for them, to fool and brainwash them against the constitutional order.' Karimov said that he had never met Soros, unlike his Kyrgyz counterpart 'who meets Soros once every three months. Akaev and I are not alike at all. We have different opinions.' When interviewed in early 2004, Karimov emphasised his fear that Akaev would be overthrown by neglecting to take forceful actions against western funded NGOs. He recounted a conversation with Akaev when the Kyrgyz president told him that western money was being funnelled into Kyrgyzstan to eliminate the democratic deficit:

I asked him: if so, why don't you prevent what is happening, why don't you take measures? The answer was: I can't. What can I say to this? I hope we do not get to this and that in Uzbekistan there will be no repetition of events in Georgia and Ukraine. After all, people should understand what is being prepared for them and resist such plans. Otherwise, they will

⁹ Foreign Ministry of Tajikistan Information Chief, Igor Sattarov quoted in Kathy Gannon, "Islamists See Opening in Central Asia Chaos," AP, 24 March 2005.

¹⁰ Donnacha Ó Beacháin, in conversation with Soros Foundation employees, Almaty January 2005.

¹¹ One of the authors, Donnacha Ó Beacháin, was given a diplomatic card by the Uzbek authorities simply for being indirectly employed by the Soros Foundation in Tashkent. These cards were summarily withdrawn in 2004.

regret it.¹²

Akaev's overthrow confirmed not only Karimov's fears but those of all remaining Central Asian presidents, to ex-communist leaders.¹³ Karimov made good on his word that those who would try to challenge the state would regret it. Seven weeks after Akaev's ouster, in the Ferghana city of Andijan, state forces killed several hundred people who had gathered to protest in the main square. While the motives that animated the demonstrators may have been labelled differently from those in Ukraine, the Karimov regime was taking no chances. The Uzbek President had spoken for most of the remaining post-Soviet autocrats when he made clear his suspicion of western funded NGOs, their role in the Rose and Orange Revolutions, and his determination to combat a similar colour revolution on his home turf:

... Everything depends on [the length of] the preparation ... In Ukraine, preparation to present changes started back in 1995. Look at the number of nongovernmental organizations there and their sources of financing, and everything will be clear to you. By the way, now we are monitoring the projects that receive funds and grants to understand if the certain project is really humanitarian or if this is a hidden preparation to some other "colour" revolution.¹⁴

The counter-revolution, if it may be so called, took on many dimensions. The media and internet servers came under increased scrutiny, and while suppressing organisations that emulated OTPOR, KMARA or PORA, and forbidding entry to foreign activists from entering the country, the authoritarian governments created new pro-regime youth movements like Russia's *Nashi* and Kazakhstan's *Zhaz Otan*. The Kremlin led the way in attacking OSCE election monitors, threatening to veto funding for them unless the OSCE modified the composition and activities of missions. In the meantime, Russia and its allies sponsored Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) monitoring missions to counter the OSCE by giving ringing endorsements of rigged elections throughout the post-Soviet space (Fawn 2007). Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have not registered any opposition parties but even in those countries where opposition parties do exist, their activities are hampered by repressive legislation and state harassment (Ó Beacháin 2007). In January 2005, Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan was banned from a party conference speech that condemned the September 2004 parliamentary elections as rigged and the resultant parliament as illegitimate. Opposition party candidates failed to take a single seat in Kazakhstan's national legislature as parliamentary elections in August 2007 produced a one party assembly (Ó Beacháin 2005; Isaacs 2008).

¹² Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Islam Karimov Excludes Possibility of 'Colour' Revolution," available at http://2004.press-service.uz/eng/rechi_eng/rechi_eng32.htm [accessed 26 April 2009].

¹³ Unlike Nazarbayev, Karimov and Niyazov, Rakhmon in Tajikistan had not reached the position of General Secretary of his country's branch of the communist party but instead was a staunch party member who had attained the rank of collective farm director.

¹⁴ Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Islam Karimov Excludes Possibility of 'Colour' Revolution," available at http://2004.press-service.uz/eng/rechi_eng/rechi_eng32.htm [accessed 26 April 2009].

Belarus had long been considered a likely site of a colour revolution and, correspondingly, opposition elements in the country had received significant international assistance since 2000. Presidential elections were due in 2006 but Premier Lukashenka wrong-footed the opposition by calling the presidential elections four months early. He had learnt that elections provided a focus for the opposition and they would time-table their protest activities to coincide with what they anticipated would be a rigged contest. An early election would give the opposition less time to campaign and organise, and the rush to collect the necessary 100,000 signatures in 30 days to secure candidature would be additionally chaotic. Moreover, by having the election in March instead of summer, opposition protesters would be condemned to braving Minsk's harsh climate instead of basking in the July sun. The twelve member Central Election Committee was composed exclusively of Lukashenka acolytes¹⁵ and the Commonwealth of Independent States would be on hand to give the election a clean bill of health. All candidates were limited to a very modest sum – \$31,000 – to advertise their campaign but this was merely a ploy to limit the opposition since the president dominated the media – officially as president not as a candidate – and the election campaign coincided with a government promotion campaign “Za Belarus” (“For Belarus”), which turned out to be a thinly veiled marketing ploy to laud the president and his achievements.

NGOs were kept on a very tight leash lest they facilitate opposition election campaign or post-election protests. Of 1,284 NGO registration applications less than two per cent (61) were successful (OSCE 2006). The country's last human rights NGO, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, was fined and then suspended after a decade of activity¹⁶ while a month before the elections observers from the “Partnership” NGO was arrested and given prison sentences of up to two years. The independent media, already cowed from previous assaults, was further undermined as the election approached. In September 2005, the assets of independent newspaper *Narodnaya Volya* (“People's Will”) were frozen and the government-run distribution network *BelSoiuzPechat* refused to circulate the publication (UNHEC 2006). An amendment to the Criminal Code in January 2006 strengthened already oppressive conditions for journalists by making it a criminal offense to misrepresent or discredit Belarus or its president.

In Ukraine, oppositionists could take refuge behind parliamentary immunity but this luxury was not afforded to anti-regime leaders in Belarus, not least because parliament did not contain opposition members. So whereas protesting legislators in Kiev could defy police in the knowledge that an arrest was unlikely, and deter excessive police brutality for fear of prompting parliamentary inquiries, in Belarus it was made clear that opposition leaders would not be spared arrest and imprisonment. Opposition rallies and campaigning were continuously interfered with and in the run-up to the vote over 200 opposition campaigners were arrested. Presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin was arrested during the campaign for holding an unsanctioned press conference.¹⁷ A week later ten supporters of the other main opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkievich including his deputy campaign manager, Vincuk Viachorka, were arrested and imprisoned for the remainder of the election

¹⁵ Six members were nominated by the president and six by the presidentially controlled upper house of parliament.

¹⁶ Ostensibly the NGO was shut down for not paying taxes on an EU grant, which legally should have been exempt from taxation.

¹⁷ Alyaksandr Kazulin, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, August 2009.

campaign.¹⁸

Government rhetoric became increasingly bellicose equating opposition protests with terrorism and attempts to undermine the constitutional order. Emulating protesters in Georgia and Ukraine, mobile phones were used to send chain sms messages saying “Freedom is as close as never before! We are in the majority! Come to October Square at 20.00 on 19 March. Vote and Protect! Send this out to your friends!” But the Government was more than equal to the task and used the technology for its own counter-revolutionary ends. Mobile phone users were sent a message on 19 March through the cellphone operator Velcom stating “On 19 March in the evening at October Square provocateurs are preparing bloodshed. Safeguard your life and health” (Pontis Foundation 2006).

Unlike in Georgia and Ukraine there were widespread arrests during and in the immediate aftermath of the protests. Not only was the post-election tent city attacked and dissembled by state security forces but up to a thousand mainly young activists were rounded up and imprisoned. Alyksandr Milinkievich was imprisoned in April for attending an unsanctioned Chernobyl commemorative rally while in July another defeated opposition presidential candidate Alyksandr Kazulin was sentenced to five and a half years after which he embarked on a hunger strike. Youth movements were kept under surveillance; in September the leader of Belarus’s Malady Front (Youth Front), Zmister Dashkevich, was also imprisoned.¹⁹ Central to the government’s success in countering opposition protests was the belief that if threatened the Lukashenka regime would not hesitate to use lethal force to preserve its position.²⁰

A similar situation can be observed in the Caucasian republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the presidents of which had reason to fear the spread of the colour revolutionary virus from neighbouring Georgia. In Azerbaijan, the regime of Ilham Aliev, who had “inherited” the presidency in a fraudulent contest following his father’s death, took several substantial pre-emptive measures prior to parliamentary elections in November 2005. Members of youth movements that has sprung up openly imitating the symbols and tactics of their Georgian, Serbian and Ukrainian counterparts were harassed, imprisoned and found it impossible to organise rallies or host visiting OTPOR or PORA members.²¹

Nor were the opposition able to rely on support from the west or the new colour revolution regimes in Tbilisi and Kiev since all sought access to Azerbaijan’s energy resources and did not want to push Baku towards the Kremlin or jeopardise existing arrangements symbolised by the Baku-Tbilisi-Cheyan pipeline opened in 2005 (Eurasia Daily Monitor 2005). As opposition leader Guliyev tried to return to Azerbaijan, over a hundred opposition leaders were arrested, several thousand troops were placed at the airport, and it was made clear that should Guliyev set foot in Azerbaijan he would be arrested. Guliyev’s retreat slowed vital opposition momentum and dissent was killed off entirely when a wide-ranging purge was carried out and the alleged ring leaders of the conspiracy to overthrow the president forced to capitulate on national television (RFE/RL 2005b). With all internal dissent crushed, the president’s supporters romped to victory on 6 November.

¹⁸ Vincuk Viačorka, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, August 2009.

¹⁹ Zmister Dashkevich, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, August 2009.

²⁰ Alyksandr Milinkievič, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, August 2009.

²¹ The name of one of the more visible movements, MAGAM was Azeri for “it’s time”, the same term used by PORA in Ukraine. Eurasia Insight (2005b), RFE/RL (2005a), BBC (2006), Levan Ramishvili, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Tbilisi, 24 January 2008.

Table 1. Differing Regime Approaches to Colour Revolution Threat

	Permissive regimes (what was allowed)	Authoritarian backlashes (what changed once regimes learnt how to deal with colour revolutions)
Elite	Generally the majority was not fully united and this led to some defections to the opposition	United (as a result of a common enemy to fight i.e. West/democracy promotion) but also as a result of a Darwinian selection (only the toughest regimes will survive)
Opposition	Elites allowed the development of an opposition as long as they did not stand openly against the regime (when they did it was too late to stop them)	Outlaw the opposition, make clear that international assistance to opposition is considered a declaration of war; discredit or jail opposition (making clear that even parliamentary immunity will not save them if they challenge regime); raise costs of openly challenging the regime to undermine unity of the opposition
External actors	International actors allowed to have major say in exchange for political support/economic or technical assistance	Decline financial or technical assistance; decline international election observers and/or challenge them with rival ones; raise price of interference (e.g. energy supply/prices, cooperation in other spheres)
Civil society	Civil society highly tolerated, as long as they were not openly challenging the regime. If restricted to local activities or national on a non (overt) political basis, actions and initiatives were allowed	Strictly control civil society and its funding; reduce internationalisation (arrest other NGO leaders when trying to enter the country, stop domestic leaders when trying to go abroad for trainings); raise costs of challenging the regime (harsh punishment for 'dissidents'); create alternative civil society movements (e.g. Nashi), not tolerate alternative vote count
People	Public opinion only partially controlled; non-state controlled media easily accessible, repression of protesters modest in quantity and quality	Raise cost of action (arrest, beat or kill protesters); foment fear; dwell on patriotism/nationalism as opposed to international assistance; improve economic conditions (in the short run by distributing primary goods or in general); manipulate media

In neighbouring Armenia opposition protests came in two waves. 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 pro-presidential majority cutting off a debate to initiate a confidence plebiscite in President Kocharian (Eurasia Insight 2004). Opposition leaders 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. The demonstration on 9 April attracted up to 25,000 people but when the protesters assembled at parliament buildings chanting slogans demanding the president's resignation 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.²² As part of the crackdown, the offices of three leading opposition parties were ransacked and temporarily closed down, the homes of numerous opposition activists were raided by police and opposition parliamentarians were taken into custody. Kocharian made a nationwide address on state television in which he blamed the opposition for the clashes. When the threat re-emerged in 2008 following flawed presidential elections that handed power to Kocharian's anointed successor, the regime proved no less equal to the task. A state of emergency was declared, ten people killed and hundreds injured and arrested.

Russia has played a pivotal role in stemming the spread of colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space and bolstering authoritarian regimes, including its own, from the "Orange plague". Domestically, Russia responded to the colour revolutions by suffocating NGOs and non-governmentally controlled media. In response to the Orange Revolution, the Kremlin has created a youth movement *Nashi* ("Ours") that copies colour revolutionary techniques but for the service of the government. Russia also was very influential in combating the colour revolution menace outside its borders. Its central position as a supplier of gas to colour revolutionary states like Georgia and Ukraine plus the distributor of energy supplies for several Central Asian states has allowed it to exert substantial leverage to manufacture desired political outcomes in post-Soviet states.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Colour revolutions seem to have had a short but spectacular life. The phenomenon initially appeared something sporadic and casual but went on to quickly develop as a major component in post-communist politics. In particular, the link between civil society and politics was understood only at a later stage and this is why CIS leaders failed to understand the relevance of the phenomenon. This gave the opposition in several countries a certain advantage and the international community could rely on alternative channels of political communication. However, the surprise factor is only one of many components. Where ultra-repressive conditions applied or where the electorate was marked by passivity, a colour revolution was unlikely. In this respect colour revolutions happened in the right places (where people and opposition were more receptive to external stimuli) and at the right time (an attempt in Kyrgyzstan and then Ukraine would probably have been less successful than approaching Kyrgyzstan after Ukraine).

In this context we can identify the role of the international community. By pumping money into the right country at the right time and providing the appropriate training to the right people, the US and other international actors increased the chances of a colour revolution that led to regime change. Then, by playing the card of diplomatic pressure they were sufficiently successful, at least in some cases at limiting Russia's role by supporting a

²² 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.

fast and drastic resolution of the political crisis. However, such a strategy would not work without a domestic component, a network of NGOs and political activists ready to act in a non traditional way, to challenge the authority of the regime and to think of the best way to adapt imported theories of action to their situation. This political opportunity boosted civic activism and was the basis for national and international networks to challenge the authorities through domestic and global channels and set up a network of trainers in civil disobedience that are now operating worldwide in relative secrecy.

As an old physics law teaches us, to every action corresponds a reaction and the spreading of the colour revolutions generated a tumultuous wave throughout the CIS, with leaders concentrating gradually on civil society as a political instrument and striving to limit its effects. In this respect we can see that colour revolutions have created new links and political opportunities for domestic actors by internationalising their struggle, but also prompted local governments to participate in this game by using similar strategies of pro-regime NGOs and training of activists to maintain the status quo.

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