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POLITICS

The Ukrainian standard

By Natalia Shapovalova and Balázs Jarábik



After Viktor Yanukovich defeated Yulia Tymoshenko in Ukraine's presidential elections last Sunday, many in the West, but also in Ukraine, proclaimed the Orange Revolution dead. The opposite is true. Five years

on, its democratic gains are stronger than ever. The elections met international standards. The plethora of Ukrainian political TV shows with exit polls, politicians and experts from opponent camps demonstrate vibrant media pluralism. Ukrainians, like any other Western citizens, held their politicians accountable for broken electoral promises, in this case those of the Orange Revolution.

But there is no mood of celebration; rather, the pre-election fatigue persists. What is wrong then? First, old perceptions (especially from Western media and policy-making circles) about pro-Western Orange (Tymoshenko and Yushchenko) versus pro-Russian (Yanukovich) leaders prevail. There is no such thing; since the Orange Revolution, all politicians are pro-Ukrainian. In addition, Tymoshenko has faced the ad hoc coalition of the two Viktor since the very beginning. Second, there is democracy in Ukraine, but still 'rent-seeking' governance. While Ukrainians, the real keepers of the Orange Revolution, are behaving in the 'Western way' as voters, the whole political elite self-servingly misuses public office for the benefit of their sponsors. Let's not call it the 'Eastern way', but the combination of democracy and such governance conforms to a marked 'Ukrainian standard'. This is the reason why many Ukrainians see no difference between candidates. Seemingly, government will continue to be based on the model developed under former president Kuchma. The higher turnout in Eastern Ukraine and the considerable number of votes against all' has given Yanukovich a narrow victory. However, it was not Yanukovich who won, but the fragmentation of the Orange team that cost Tymoshenko victory.

How Ukraine handles the shift from the Orange Revolution hero Yushchenko to its villain Yanukovich will determine whether the country can change its governance model and embed European standards. The way of state functioning is what is at stake and not the country's geopolitical orientation. The Ukrainian elite wishes to keep the country in the grey zone, where it can most benefit. This is where oligarchs enjoy monopoly and can further siphon off Ukraine's resources - while using geopolitical arguments to avoid Western conditionality. This limits greatly the process of European integration, as oligarchs evidently have little interest in European competition.

The middle class is an emerging force that could push the country forward. These are the people who have taken out loans in foreign currency, but are paying back their debts, thus taking a responsible stance towards their misjudgement. A rare, but important act in Ukraine. The country needs more responsible citizenry as only they can mould a more responsible elite. The Orange Revolution was their first serious attempt at shaping politics. Now they need to hold the new president accountable, just as they did with Yushchenko in the first round of the elections. This battle needs to be supported, as democratic consolidation will be a long process. The EU needs more patience to deal with Ukraine; provide more targeted assistance; and believe less in the geopolitical rhetoric of its leaders, but focus on their deeds.

New Viktor is not badly positioned to bring more European standards to Ukraine. According to EU diplomats, as Prime Minister he pursued more concrete steps towards EU integration than Prime Minister Tymoshenko. There is no better European message for Yanukovich: he can complete the Orange Revolution and make history by ensuring not only a sustainable democracy, but also by changing Ukraine's governance in a profound and long-lasting fashion.

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INSECURITY

Get that Nobel Peace Prize ready for Karzai, the Taliban terrorists: Bribes for Peace?

By Andy Dabilis

Here's something to think about when you're in the unemployment line or among the working poor of the vast middle class, the new hoi-polloi of the 21st Century, asking for another bowl of porridge, trying to figure out how to pay your child's college loan, living from check to check: the United States, European Union and other western governments are going to pay the salaries of Afghanistan cops for the next 15 years, keep shoveling money to the country's corrupt President Hamid Karzai, and bribe the insurgents of the Taliban - who've killed thousands of American, European and NATO troops - to stop fighting. Of course, you will also pay the Taliban members who will become part of the government. Aren't these the guys we've been fighting for the last eight years? You remember the Taliban? They were the guys who liked killing women for showing their ankles or eyes, a mindset that doesn't change the way money changes hands, so where did this scheme come from?

Why didn't we think of this during World War II? Just give Hitler what he wanted (wait, Chamberlain tried that but obviously should have offered him all of Europe except for England) to try to appease him. Hitler was crazier than Karzai though and this is a new era, so maybe this notion of paying people to stop killing people isn't such a bad idea after all. It probably won't work on the suicide bombers of al-Qaeda, who may now have to target the Taliban for being soft on democracy and for agreeing to be part of a government that talks to people like British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who could make terrorist suspects at the detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba talk just so they wouldn't have to listen to him drone on, torture banned by the Geneva Convention because it's slow death by boredom. "We must reach out to all of our countrymen, especially our disenchanted brothers, who are not part of al-Qaeda, or other terrorist networks, who accept the Afghan constitution," Karzai said, although he should have called them brothers-in-arms. And who wouldn't want to accept a Constitution which allows you to steal at will and be bailed out by the UN, US and EU when the well runs dry. It's better than being an American or European banker or a woman with a no-limit credit card at a shoe store.

How much longer is the United Nations, which endorsed Karzai's fraudulent re-election and tried to cover it up; the US, which never saw a dictator it couldn't buy; and the EU, which never passes a three-card Monte game without being taken, going to be hoodwinked by that Afghan phony? Karzai - and, get this, the allies agreed with this reasoning - said only Taliban members who've renounced violence, who aren't still tied to al-Qaeda, who promise not to kill anyone else and who cross their hearts and hope to die if they do will be allowed back into society and the government, so you have to hope they do and not forget themselves (Sorry I blew up the mosque, I had a little flashback there.) Just how do you know they aren't informers and infiltrators? Stamp the back of their hands? If it works, of course, you could pay the Ku Klux Klan in the US and Nazi skinheads in Germany and around Europe to stop beating up black people and immigrants because extortion works almost as well as does violence.

The exact rules for paying terrorists to stop slaughtering innocent people and NATO soldiers haven't been set yet, so they're free to keep killing while Karzai's trying to figure it out, and he has to wait for the donor checks to clear before being deposited into his personal bank account. He's in luck so far, because already more than \$140 million has been pledged, although Karzai said he'd prefer the nice round sum of about \$500 million because he's got a big family and how long can they keep cultivating poppies for heroin? Presumably, the repentant wing of the Taliban, at least those who aren't killed by their own former comrades for thinking about switching sides, won't be allowed to take their Blood Salaries and use the money to buy weapons and start fighting again, or donate to al-Qaeda's nuclear bomb fund. If they do, the EU could go



Anti-Taliban Afghan demonstrators protest ahead of the Afghanistan Conference outside Lancaster House in London, 28 January 2010, where British Prime Minister Gordon Brown hosted world leaders trying to find some solution to the ceaseless war in Afghanistan. [ANITA ANDREWS]

after them with one of those unregulated collection agencies that hound Americans and Europeans in debt to pay up or else ("You're two months behind on your Visa, so pay up or we'll send the Taliban after you!")

When this lunacy was first floated recently, Karzai said his puppet government had invited Taliban insurgents to a peace council of elders as part of efforts to find a way out of a conflict which is trying the patience and resources of Afghanistan's Western allies. Let's hope he told them to check their guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at the door, but just in case he'd better vary the route his UN-US-EU paid limousine takes. A UN official who didn't want to be identified because he's too embarrassed to be linked to this craziness said that members of the Taliban's leadership council had secretly the UN's representative for Afghanistan - that would be Norwegian dove Kai Eide, who is charged with hiding Karzai's corruption - to discuss the possibility of laying down their arms. Wouldn't you have loved to be a fly on the wall for that meeting. "Mr. Eide, meet Mr. Terrorist. All those in favor of giving the Taliban what they want so we leave this meeting alive please raise your right hand before it gets blown off."

A UN diplomat familiar with this plan said the Taliban wanted it. "They requested a meeting to talk about talks. They want protection, to be able to come out in public. This desperation is being resorted to because the war in Afghanistan has been going on for more than eight years and there's no end in sight, and Karzai apparently thinks that if you can't beat the Taliban, hire them. At a London conference last month, the Gullible-29, that's the US, UN and the 27 members of the EU, said they want Afghanistan's incompetent and Taliban-riddled police force and army to take control of some provinces by the end of this year or early next year so that NATO forces can get out while the getting's good.

That doesn't jibe with the surge of 30,000 more American troops sent into the country by Obama, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for it, but maybe the US soldiers can carry cash instead of weapons and hand it over while Obama's polishing up his War Prize award and the Nobel crowd gets a couple more ready for Karzai and the Taliban. We'll have to hope that the Taliban will be honest politicians, who, when they are bought, will stay bought, which is more than you can say for those in the UN, US and EU.