

# Importing Orange? Prospects for Belarusian Democratization

By Luke Forster

**Abstract:** Eastern Europe's recent wave of grassroots democratic breakthroughs has removed entrenched authoritarian regimes from Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), and Ukraine (2004). Is there hope that this trend of Color Revolutions will continue and topple Alexander Lukashenko's oppressive dictatorship in Belarus? Luke Forster examines this question by offering a list of requirements for a Color Revolution and applying it to a case study of Ukraine's Orange Revolution and the Belarusian presidential elections of 2006.

## **Between Two Worlds**

The implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991 was widely hailed as an ideological triumph of democracy over authoritarianism. After a forty-five year long standoff, Europe finally seemed safe for democracy. However, old habits die hard, and the mid-1990s saw

many Eastern European nations backsliding into autocracy. While a number of these new dictatorships persist, a second wave of pro-democracy movements has ousted authoritarian regimes in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), and Ukraine (2004). These “Color Revolutions” were large-scale, grassroots movements of oppressed peoples demanding an end to the repression, corruption, and fraud in their governments.

But has the advance of democracy halted? Why have some ex-Soviet republics undergone bottom-up democratic breakthroughs while their neighbors still remain bogged down in repression? Although Eastern Europe may sometimes seem half a world away from America, it is nonetheless vital that American policymakers study the region’s recent democratic breakthroughs. As America has always been concerned with promoting democracy, liberty, and the rule of law, it is crucial that we examine how and when democratic breakthroughs emerge. The contemporary nature of the Color Revolutions (a twenty-first century emergence) makes them doubly important. Without a detailed understanding of these movements, it will be difficult to identify which countries are and aren’t ripe for democratic breakthroughs. Furthermore, in a gigantic geopolitical chess game, Ukraine and Belarus lie directly between two powerful players, Russia

and Europe. Putin's concentration of power in Russia, Europe's increasing thirst for Russian energy, and the strategic East-West pipelines all increase the stakes of the game, making previously-overlooked nations of Eastern Europe suddenly important in the international arena.

This paper will focus on post-Soviet democratization through a comparative case study of Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution and Alexander Lukashenko's persisting dictatorial regime in Belarus. The following pages will attempt to answer two questions: First, what conditions must be present in a country for a Color Revolution-style democratic breakthrough to occur? And second, what are the prospects for a peaceful democratic transition in Lukashenko's Belarus?

### **Historical Background**

When the Iron Curtain came crashing down with the fall of the USSR, its satellites and member republics suddenly found themselves in a power vacuum. Almost overnight, they had independence thrust upon them, and for the first time in decades (centuries for some) they had to deal with the problems and privileges of self-rule. Some states

such as Poland and the Baltics were drawn to Europe and quickly and easily embraced democracy and capitalism. Others are still struggling with democratic rule, and some, such as Ukraine and Belarus, have fallen back down the slippery slope of authoritarianism.

In 1994, Leonid Kuchma was elected president of Ukraine with the slogan, “Deeds not words,” and a platform promising economic growth and positive change.<sup>1</sup> His predecessor, Leonid Kravchuk, had run the economy into the ground through neglect and inaction, allowing the GDP to fall almost 23 percent in 1994 alone.<sup>2</sup> Kuchma’s successive regime fared no better, and his “deeds” led to further economic stagnation, large-scale corruption, and the rise of a thug-businessman class of “oligarchs.”<sup>3</sup>

By late 2004, Ukraine had had enough of Kuchma’s abuses. A grassroots opposition movement headed by Kuchma’s ex-Prime Minister Victor Yushchenko arose and quickly grew in size and power. By the 2004 presidential elections, Yushchenko had enough support to run against Kuchma’s hand-picked successor and Russia’s preferred candidate, Victor Yanukovich.<sup>4</sup> Both candidates performed well in the first round of the presidential election, forcing a run-off between the two. However, this second round was marred by massive and obvious fraud from Yanukovich’s supporters. When he was declared the victor,

one million Ukrainian citizens peacefully took to the streets in protest, finally forcing the authorities to acknowledge the elections as fraudulent. In a third round of elections in December of 2004, Yushchenko fairly and decisively defeated Yanukovich, becoming the legal and legitimate president of Ukraine.<sup>5</sup>

In many respects, the former Soviet republic of Belarus has changed little since 1991. The economy is still state-run (the government controls about 80% of the nation's industry),<sup>6</sup> familiar Soviet symbols adorn the streets, and the country is firmly in the iron grasp of single political strongman, Alexander Lukashenko.<sup>7</sup> Belarus' courtship with democracy was sincere but brief. The presidential election of 1994 was the only one in the country's short history to be free and fair.<sup>8</sup> Amid a race of prominent communist and nationalist politicians, Lukashenko won an unexpected victory as a dark horse candidate running on an anti-corruption platform.<sup>9</sup> Within two years, Lukashenko had twisted Belarusian democracy into authoritarianism, passing a 1996 referendum which gave him near-absolute power.<sup>10</sup>

Since then, not much has changed in Belarus. Lukashenko regularly harasses opposition groups and politicians, heavily censors the media, and shows little regard for the democratic system under which he was elected. Numerous journalists have disappeared or

mysteriously met violent deaths in recent years,<sup>11</sup> and Lukashenko unveiled a monument to the Soviet secret police this May.<sup>12</sup> Political oppression is a part of everyday life in this European nation, and Belarus stands out as an international anomaly among democratic neighbors such as Poland and Lithuania. In such a repressive atmosphere, could a pro-democracy movement possibly succeed? Could another Orange Revolution strike in Belarus?

### **The Makings of a Color Revolution**

In the winter of 2004, Ukraine ousted an oppressive and fraudulent regime. Why is its neighbor, Belarus, unable to do the same? In order to solve this contradiction, one must first ask what social and political conditions must be met before a successful Color Revolution can occur.

The three following conditions existed in Ukraine, as well as Serbia and Georgia, prior to their respective Color Revolutions. First, a well-organized and disciplined opposition force existed and was led by a skilled and popular leader. Second, a moderately-developed civil society existed, bolstered by a degree of media freedom and the presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), especially election-monitoring organizations. Finally, the ruler in power was

unpopular, caught off guard by the size of the demonstrations, intimidated by international pressure, and in less than total control of the various branches of government.<sup>13</sup>

Once these three conditions are met, a Color Revolution is possible, and it is likely that a sufficiently large number of demonstrators will emerge and oust the entrenched regime from power. This sufficiently large, or threshold number of protestors actively calling for reform represents a sufficient condition for a Color Revolution. In other words, once the final condition is met, a successful democratic breakthrough is inevitable.

By examining the presence or absence of these conditions in Belarus during the 2006 presidential elections, it is possible to theorize approximately how close the opposition came to a democratic breakthrough. Such an analysis will also identify what changes in the opposition, civil society, and the regime in power will need to occur in order to allow a successful democratic breakthrough.

### **The Role of the Opposition: Leadership**

Removing an entrenched dictator from power is an extremely dangerous and difficult task, and an opposition group without a skilled leader and a disciplined and organized following has little hope of succeeding. Victor Yushchenko was the ideal opposition candidate and

leader for the Orange Revolution. His term as Ukraine's prime minister from 2000-2001 was marked by much-needed and effective economic restructuring, tax reform, and a turn-around of the falling national GDP.<sup>14</sup> As a result of his policies and his opposition to Ukraine's oligarchs, Yushchenko quickly became widely popular, especially among the growing middle class. His political standing (more of a technocrat than a politician),<sup>15</sup> and his centrist leanings alienated few constituents and extended his appeal to a wide range of supporters.<sup>16</sup> His alliances with other politicians (notably the more radical Yulia Tymoshenko and his sometimes ally, the socialist Alexander Moroz) further increased his base of support.<sup>17</sup>

The Belarusian United Opposition's candidate, Alexander Milinkevich, lacked Yushchenko's widespread fame and appeal. In one June 2005 opinion poll, Lukashenko's popularity was rated as 41.7%, while Milinkevich's was only 0.8%.<sup>18</sup> While scant and unfavorable media access was one cause of his lack of popular appeal, Milinkevich's strongly pro-Western, pro-market platform was also to blame. While some citizens certainly yearn for economic reform and a shift towards Europe, many Belarusians favor the stability of Soviet-style authoritarian rule. During the 2006 election, Milinkevich offered nationalism and the uncertainty of marketization (both controversial

terms in post-Soviet states), while Lukashenko promised another term of stability and full employment.<sup>19</sup> While Milinkevich's liberal platform earned him popularity in Europe and America, it alienated a large section of the electorate. A wiser policy might have been for him to avoid prickly economic and nationalist issues and run under a centrist platform, as Yushchenko had done, in order to appeal to the largest number of constituents.

### **The Role of the Opposition: Organization and Discipline**

Organization and discipline are critical to victory in any conflict, not least of all in political struggles. Without common goals, techniques, and resources, the various elements of an opposition will undermine each others' efforts, send mixed and confusing signals to the populace, and be easy prey for the authorities in power.

Furthermore, unless order is kept among protestors, violence will likely break out between demonstrators and security forces, putting lives at risk and giving those in power justification for a swift crackdown.

The opposition movement of the Orange Revolution was extremely well organized, disciplined, coordinated, and effective on all levels, following the tried-but-true methods outlined in Gene Sharp's

guidelines for peaceful democratic breakthroughs.<sup>20</sup> Its discipline can be seen in the remarkably peaceful nature of its campaign- violence was never considered as an option, even by the students and youth which supported Yushchenko. Indeed, it was a youth group, Pora, that was instrumental in organizing and carrying out the Orange Revolution. The group was not only crucial in bringing protestors to the streets, but also in forming an overarching protest strategy, networking with NGOs, educating citizens on their legal rights, and training activists. Most importantly, Pora firmly adhered to a policy of nonviolence, and it was its discipline which prevented violent clashes from occurring with Ukrainian security forces.<sup>21</sup>

The unity and organization of the Orange movement is most visible in the actions Yushchenko took on November 22, the day following the second round of elections. Boldly (and perhaps also unconstitutionally), Yushchenko declared himself president and took oath before parliament.<sup>22</sup> Such a strong move would not have been possible if he had not been sure of his solid and unified base of support. Likewise, or if he had delayed instead of immediately taking action, Yushchenko would have lost the opportunity to fully capitalize on the public outrage over Yanukovych's electoral fraud.

While organization and discipline were hallmarks of the successful Orange Revolution, unity and coordination were significantly absent in the Belarusian opposition following the 2006 presidential election. While organizing the post-election protests against Alexander Lukashenko, Belarusian opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich and his colleagues committed two fatal organizational blunders. First, they failed to effectively schedule demonstrations in the crucial days following the election. Following the first day of protests on March 19, Milinkevich sent most of the demonstrators home, suggesting that they resume the demonstration the following day.<sup>23</sup> He later changed his mind, rescheduling them for March 25.<sup>24</sup> This delay sapped the protest of its momentum, wasted five crucial days, and gave the Lukashenko regime ample time to arrest the few demonstrators which remained.<sup>25</sup> The Belarusian opposition's second organizational mistake was that it lacked a single, definite focus. Instead of focusing on a single demand, the opposition leaders simultaneously and chaotically called out for new elections, a run-off between Lukashenko and Milinkevich, a recount of the ballots, and the creation of a new government.<sup>26</sup> With so many contradicting goals, there is little wonder that the opposition failed to accomplish any of them.

## **The Role of Society**

Regardless of how active an opposition group may be, a grassroots democratic breakthrough can not occur without widespread public support. It is possible to send a message to an autocrat with a few thousand protestors, but it takes tens or hundreds of thousands to remove an entrenched autocrat from power.

The willingness of a society to take assertive political action is dependent upon many variables, including its history, its political culture, the development of its civil society, and the likelihood of punishment from the regime in power. Ukraine was a fertile ground for mass protests, having perhaps the most highly developed civil society in the post-Soviet world,<sup>27</sup> a comparatively large middle class,<sup>28</sup> and relatively strong democratic values.<sup>29</sup> Its close proximity to democratic Europe was also influential, and it is notable that most of Yushchenko's support came from the western, generally pro-Europe region of Ukraine.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, Belarus' civil society is not nearly as well-developed as Ukraine's. In many respects, it is difficult to Belarusians to unify behind a common national goal. Belarusian national identity is almost entirely nonexistent- the Belarusian language has long been

marginalized by Russian,<sup>31</sup> and the country's historians are unable even to come to a consensus on their nation's history.<sup>32</sup> In this "denationalized nation",<sup>33</sup> Soviet rule sticks more strongly in the minds of the populace than anything uniquely Belarusian.<sup>34</sup>

While the persistence of the Soviet mentality may seem anachronistic, many Belarusians (especially the elderly) hold fond memories of the USSR. Belarus prospered economically under Soviet rule,<sup>35</sup> and Belarusian Communist leaders such as Piotr Masherov became true national heroes.<sup>36</sup> Thus Soviet political culture endures, and Lukashenko's success is largely dependent upon his ability to harness this "Soviet Belarusian Patriotism".<sup>37</sup>

However, political culture can change through various means, most importantly through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and by exposure to alternative ideas and opinions via an independent media. Prior to the Orange Revolution, Ukraine was saturated with a large number of NGOs, many of them Western-funded programs which emphasized democratic values and procedures.<sup>38</sup> Such institutions were instrumental in informing voters and protestors of their legal rights, training the Ukrainian opposition, and offering practical advice on how to detect and combat electoral fraud.<sup>39</sup> These NGOs also helped Ukrainian organizers network with foreign

democrats and protestors, allowing them to draw on the experience of others. Finally (and arguably most importantly), NGOs are able to conduct exit polls and parallel vote counts during possibly fraudulent elections. These techniques not only offer a contrast to the official count and help identify fraud, but also give the voting population a set of figures almost immediately after an election.<sup>40</sup>

Access to the media is also a crucial factor in a bottom-up democratic breakthrough. If the authorities monopolize a nation's media, the opposition will likely receive no, or purely negative, coverage. One of Ukrainian President Kuchma's fatal mistakes was to allow Petro Proshenko, an opposition supporter, to purchase a television station,<sup>41</sup> and later rent a satellite for international television broadcasting.<sup>42</sup> Channel Five, as well as numerous print and internet sources, gave the Ukrainian opposition a crucial method of reaching the public and soliciting votes and support.<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately, autocrats as well as democrats value the lessons of past experiences. Alexander Lukashenko has gradually increased pressure on NGOs in Belarus through a variety of means, limiting them both in number and in influence.<sup>44</sup> He has taken similar steps with the media, and has almost fully severed the opposition from any print, radio, and television outlets,<sup>45</sup> causing Belarus to be ranked

among the top ten most heavily censored nations in the world.<sup>46</sup> Not even the internet and cell phone access are safe- Lukashenko's military is steadily developing methods of electronic suppression, including mobile truck-mounted communication-jamming devices.<sup>47</sup> While cell phones and internet access were instrumental to the opposition's ability to quickly spread information and mobilize during the Orange Revolution, Lukashenko now seems to have the potential to lay a blanket of static over the capital during crucial moments. Finally, the Belarusian authorities prohibited any exit poll or parallel count in the 2006 election, denying the opposition a statistical comparison to the official count.<sup>48</sup> In consideration of the lack of a mature Belarusian civil society, NGOs to assist the opposition and conduct electoral exit votes, and media freedom, it is understandable that the opposition in Belarus encounters severe difficulties in mobilizing large numbers of supporters.

### **The Role of the Incumbent**

Thus far, this paper has discussed "bottom-up" conditions which enable a democratic breakthrough. However, the condition, abilities, and actions of the regime in power are at least as important as the opposition and development of civil society in determining

whether a democratic breakthrough may occur. Lucan A. Way goes so far as to state that “...competitive politics [are] rooted much less in robust civil societies, strong democratic institutions, or strong democratic leadership than in the inability of incumbents to maintain power or concentrate political control.”<sup>49</sup>

Popularity is a crucial source of legitimacy for autocrats. Logically, the more citizens oppose the regime in power, the more they will be willing to publicly demonstrate against it. However, there is another, slightly less obvious result of an autocrat’s popularity. In 2004, Victor Yanukovich ran for president in an unquestionably fraudulent election, and the following widespread demonstration prevented him from assuming office. The 2006 Belarusian presidential race was also obviously fraudulent, but Alexander Lukashenko met considerably less resistance in assuming power. Although nobody may ever know for certain, it seems very likely that Lukashenko actually won a majority of votes in the first round, even without the authorities’ “adjustments”.<sup>50</sup> Presuming that Lukashenko was legally elected president of Belarus, the opposition loses a powerful issue to protest against. While they can certainly protest the fraud, brutality, and repression of his rule, they can no longer play their trump card- a stolen election.

Preparation is a second decisive factor. Like Slobodan Milosevic,<sup>51</sup> the Kuchma group never expected to be removed from power.<sup>52</sup> While they certainly predicted that there would be a protest following the election, they could not estimate its eventual size and duration and thus took no steps to prevent it.<sup>53</sup> Had they done so, it seems possible that they could have suppressed the Orange Revolution in its early stages. By acting decisively in deploying police and military forces in Kiev, blocking off the square in which the demonstration was held, and quickly arresting protestors, the authorities might have discouraged protestors from gaining momentum and succeeding in creating a mass movement.

In contrast to Kuchma's fatal confidence and slowness to act, Lukashenko seems to prefer to err on the side of caution. As stated above, even without his massive fraud campaign, it is likely that he might have won the election, and even without his harsh repression of the protesters following the election, it seems unlikely that the demonstration would have attained the same scale as in Kiev.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, the weeks prior to the 2006 election saw Lukashenko at his most intimidating. Nine journalists were beaten by plainclothes policemen to discourage defections in the media,<sup>55</sup> and one citizen was sentenced to two years of hard labor for "malicious hooliganism"

(spray painting pro-opposition slogans on a wall).<sup>56</sup> Most ominous were Lukashenko's own words. Speaking of opposition demonstrators, he warned "God forbid any of those people... should commit any sort of act in our country. We will twist their heads off as if they were ducklings."<sup>57</sup> In such a deliberately tense, threat-laden atmosphere, it is little wonder that the opposition met great difficulty in coaxing citizens out onto the streets.

A final important characteristic to consider when evaluating an incumbent's vulnerability is his responsiveness to international pressure. An autocrat who is concerned about his international reputation and wishes to avoid diplomatic and economic sanctions has a weakness which can be exploited by the opposition. For instance, although Kuchma and Yanukovych generally leaned towards Russia, they were nonetheless eager to be seen by Westerners as legitimately elected democrats (even if only to avoid sanctions).<sup>58</sup> Yushchenko and his team exploited this susceptibility by renting a television satellite to provide live footage of the post-election protests to any foreign station that wanted it.<sup>59</sup> As a result, Kuchma and Yanukovych soon found themselves to be the focus of the West, making repression of the demonstrators appear to be diplomatic suicide.

Generally speaking, Lukashenko cares very little about the opinions of the West. Diplomatically and economically, he has put all of his eggs in one basket, Russia. Far from trying to ingratiate the West, Belarus ranges from being apathetic to openly hostile towards the EU and America. In 1995, the Belarusian military shot down a hot air balloon which strayed into Belarusian airspace, killing two Americans. Tellingly, Lukashenko waited 24 hours before informing the U.S. of the incident<sup>60</sup> and apologized for their deaths only three weeks later.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Lukashenko often portrays America and the EU as a major security threat to Belarus in order to maintain public support for his militaristic rule.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, diplomatic pressure from the West remains generally ineffective against Belarus.

### **From Protest to Breakthrough**

If the previously discussed conditions regarding the opposition, society, and the regime in power are met, it is likely that the fourth and final condition will emerge- enough demonstrators actively demanding reform. Certainly, “enough protestors” is not an exact term, and the precise figure necessary is different on a case-by-case situation, depending on such factors as the size of the nation in question and the relative strength of the incumbent. It took a million protestors on the

streets to remove Kuchma and Yanukovich in Ukraine<sup>63</sup> and Milosevic in Serbia<sup>64</sup>, but only tens of thousands to oust President Shevardnadze from Georgia.<sup>65</sup>

A satisfactory number of demonstrators, combined with the three previously-discussed three conditions, constitutes a sufficient condition for a democratic breakthrough. A sufficiently large crowd of demonstrators not only sends a very clear message to the incumbent, but can also block off government offices and stop traffic. As the number of demonstrators grows in size, so too does the likelihood that unions, civil servants, news reporters, and even security forces will defect, wrenching the government's tools of control away one by one and rendering it helpless.

Finally, an important correlation exists between the number of active demonstrators and the difficulty in suppressing the protest. Breaking up a large demonstration is much more dangerous and difficult than dissolving a small one. Arrests and police batons are usually enough to end a protest of a few thousand, but tanks and thousands of soldiers may prove necessary to suppress larger groups, increasing the likelihood of unintended violence and deaths. Furthermore, security forces are much more likely to refuse orders or defect when commanded to suppress a large-scale demonstration,

partially because there is a greater likelihood that individual soldiers will have family members or loved ones involved in involved in the demonstration.<sup>66</sup>

### **What Is Possible? A Look into Belarus' Future**

Clearly, Belarus currently lacks the mature civil society, the strong opposition, and the faltering autocrat necessary for a grassroots democratic breakthrough, and it would be unrealistic to expect that Belarus could experience a Color Revolution in the near future. However, the Belarusian situation is not a hopeless one, for two reasons. First, conditions change over time. It is reasonable to expect that the political, economic, and social landscape ten years from now will be significantly different from Belarus today. Second, bottom-up mass movements are not the only vehicle of change. Just because the Serbian, Georgian, and Ukrainian revolutions set a pattern of change doesn't mean that their trend is universal.

As argued above, a Belarusian Color Revolution is not possible at the present time. Logically, there are three ways in which the situation could improve: civil society could further develop, the opposition could become stronger, or Lukashenko's near-total grip over the country could loosen. However, the development of civil

society and the size and abilities of the opposition are both limited by the oppressive authorities. If society is to mature or the opposition to grow, they must be given more space from Lukashenko. Thus, it stands to reason that Lukashenko's control over Belarus must be weakened before positive change may occur.

In an essay examining Lukashenko's endurance as an autocrat, Vitali Silitski describes four pillars of support for his rule.<sup>67</sup> At least one of these roadblocks to democracy must be overcome if the opposition is to stand a chance against Lukashenko. The first obstacle is the "Soviet Belarusian Patriotism" which saturates Belarusian culture.<sup>68</sup> In the absence of genuine Belarusian nationalism, Lukashenko has encouraged Soviet pride as an alternative, reinstating Soviet-era symbols during a 1995 popular referendum.<sup>69</sup> While popular among those nostalgic for the stability and full employment of the USSR, this mindset does not place a strong value on democracy or other Western values. If an alternative national outlook were to emerge, such as genuine Belarusian nationalism or Europeanism, Lukashenko would encounter more difficulty continuing Soviet-era repression and censorship.

Lukashenko's second pillar of support is the Belarusian command economy. Against all expectations, Lukashenko's state-run

economy has shown remarkable flexibility and hardiness. Many observers claim that it can not keep the nation afloat indefinitely,<sup>70</sup> but so far it has indeed been effective enough to regularly provide near-full employment and pay pensions and wages on a regular basis.<sup>71</sup> Transitions to democracy and capitalism are often associated with economic downturns, and as long as Lukashenko provides a stable day-to-day economy, many Belarusians are willing to tolerate the less desirable aspects of his rule.

A third roadblock to democracy is Belarus' relationship with Russia. As Belarus' sole ally, Russia has helped prop up Lukashenko's command economy with preferential prices on natural gas and oil<sup>72</sup> as well as providing much-needed political backing.<sup>73</sup> The two nations have for years discussed the possibility of combining into a union state, but have taken few actual steps to turn their plans into reality.<sup>74</sup>

Silitski's fourth and final reason for Lukashenko's endurance is his ability to detect and remove potential threats to his power in their early stages. His ability to "preemptively" remove opponents highlights three important aspects of his rule.<sup>75</sup> First, Lukashenko is a cautious, alert, and decisive autocrat. Second, he has effective intelligence-gathering abilities. Third, he does not hesitate to violate the democratic and legal norms of the Western world. Under such

conditions it will be difficult for the opposition to grow or win significant victories.

Of Silitski's four reasons for Lukashenko's continued rule, the weakest two appear to be Lukashenko's support from Russia and his command economy. It is likely that Lukashenko's eventual downfall will stem from a fall-off in one or both of these. Alexander Lukashenko's regime is kept afloat by several sources of legitimacy, but the most important by far is his ability to maintain a stable economic atmosphere. If there is a sharp fall in employment, a severe rise in inflation, or arrears in wages and pensions, his popularity ratings will likely see a sharp decline, and larger segments of society will cease to support him. Total economic collapse is also a possibility, especially if Russia ceases to provide Belarus with energy subsidies.

Such a scenario seems very possible in the near future.

Russia's recent blitz to monopolize Central Asian oil and natural gas is a massive political move, and if Putin is successful, he will be Europe's sole provider of fuel.<sup>76</sup> However, Russia's energy transport monopoly can not be complete without the Belarusian-owned Beltransgaz pipeline, which Lukashenko is understandably reluctant to sell.<sup>77</sup> Gazprom recently announced a quadrupling of natural gas prices to Belarus (up to market values), scheduled to go into effect January of

2007.<sup>78</sup> This price hike could likely destroy the Belarusian economy, and can be interpreted as a veiled threat from Putin- sell a majority share in Beltransgaz, or be cut off from Russian fuel subsidies.

Lukashenko has not yet responded to this pressure, and his position as ruler of Belarus may well depend on how he deals with this dilemma.

The possibility of Russia abandoning Belarus, its long-time ally, is a very real one. While Russia has provided hundreds of millions (perhaps even billions) of dollars annually to Belarus in gas subsidies and deferred payments,<sup>79</sup> Belarus offers few benefits to Russia, other than a border ally and a transport route to the distant Russian province of Kaliningrad. Furthermore, Russia already suffers in the international arena from Putin's authoritarian nature. Having a close ally such as Belarus only exacerbates the problem. By constantly siding with "the last remaining true dictatorship in the heart of Europe" (Condoleezza Rice's words),<sup>80</sup> Russia harms its relations with the Western world. By abandoning Lukashenko and looking for more democratic allies, Russia could improve its international standing and relations with the West.

Lukashenko seems well aware that Belarusian-Russian relations are in danger of failing, and in recent months has been frantically trying to improve relations with a number of nations. He

seems to be pushing to cement the long-delayed Belarus-Russia union state,<sup>81</sup> as well as reaching out to improve economic and political relations with potential allies such as China,<sup>82</sup> Azerbaijan,<sup>83</sup> and Iran.<sup>84</sup> Notably, these are all nations with questionable human rights records, and Lukashenko's own dubious history will likely estrange him from many Western nations.

### **Conclusion**

Eastern Europe's recent wave of grassroots democratic breakthroughs is a source of inspiration and hope to oppressed people of the region. However, a mass movement may not occur unless certain conditions are met. Society must be prepared for such a movement, and it needs free media to spread unbiased information. The opposition must be non-violent, well-organized and led by a popular leader. Finally, the incumbent must be caught off-guard and while he is weak. Only under such conditions may a protest escalate to the size necessary to force an entrenched autocrat from power.

Unfortunately, these conditions do not exist in contemporary Belarus. Alexander Lukashenko holds the nation in a tight grasp, and is unlikely to loosen it willingly. However, change comes in many forms, and Lukashenko's rule is based on uncertain foundations. If

Belarus falls out of favor with Russia, or enters severe economic trouble, the winds of change may blow freedom into Belarus once more.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Bohdan Harasymiw, *Post-Communist Ukraine* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute for Ukrainian Studies Press, 2002), 387-390.

<sup>4</sup> Taras Kuzio, "Russian Policy toward Ukraine during Elections," *Demokratizatsia* 13, no. 4 (2005): 491.

<sup>5</sup> Vicki Hesli, "The Orange Revolution: 2004 Presidential Election(s) in Ukraine," *Electoral Studies* 25, no. 1 (2006): 173.

<sup>6</sup> Valentinas Mite, "Belarus: Lukashenko Enters Third Term Fraught With Economic Dangers," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, April 12, <http://www.rferl.org/features/>

<sup>7</sup> Denis Krivosheev, "Belarus' External Relations," in *Contemporary Belarus*, ed. Elena Korosteleva, Colin Lawson, and Rosalind Marsh (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 165.

<sup>8</sup> John S. Dryzek and Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communist Democratization*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82.

<sup>9</sup> Lucan A Way, "Authoritarian State Building and the Sources of Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave," *World Politics* 57, no. 2 (2005): 251.

<sup>10</sup> Rainer Lindner, "The Lukashenko Phenomenon," in *Independent Belarus*, ed. Margarita M. Balmaceda, James I. Clem, and Lisbeth L. Tarlow. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002) 88-90.

<sup>11</sup> "Belarus- 2006 Annual Report," *Belarus News and Analysis*, March 6, 2006, <http://www.data.minsk.by/belarusnews/index.html>.

<sup>12</sup> *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, "Belarus Unveils Monument to Secret Police," May 26, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Michael McFaul has published his own list of requirements for a Color Revolution, listing seven necessary factors. These are (1) a semi-autocratic regime, (2) an unpopular ruler, (3) an organized and unified opposition, (4) the ability to quickly notify the populace of electoral fraud, (5) a degree of independent media, (6) an opposition that is able to quickly mobilize large numbers of demonstrators, and finally (7) divisions among the regime's armed forces. For further elaboration, please see *Transitions from Postcommunism*, Michael McFaul, *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 16, Number 3, July 2005.

While McFaul's list details many important prerequisites for a peaceful democratic breakthrough, it is lacking in several ways. First, although he discusses free media and NGOs, he does not consider the value of a mature civil society and political culture in his requirements. A society must be receptive of democracy before a widespread democratic movement can occur, and this will not happen if a nation remains in a Soviet mindset, as is the case in contemporary Belarus. Second, McFaul does not list a skilled and popular opposition leader as a requirement. Personalities matter, and a large-scale opposition movement can not succeed without

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a leader capable of winning votes, forming coalitions between opposition parties, and planning and efficiently carrying out an opposition campaign. Finally, McFaul focuses primarily on “bottom-up” factors, paying more attention to the grassroots factors than the strengths and weaknesses of the regime in power. In addition to McFaul’s requirements that an autocrat be unpopular and in incomplete control of his military, this paper adds the requirements that the regime in power must be responsive to international pressure and unprepared to handle a large-scale opposition demonstration.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution*, 45-48.

<sup>15</sup> Adrian Karatnycky, “Ukraine’s Orange Revolution” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 2 (2005): par. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution*, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Adrian Karatnycky, “The Fall and Rise of Ukraine’s Political Opposition: From Kuchmagate to the Orange Revolution” in *Revolution in Orange*, ed. Anders Aslund and Michael McFaul (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 44.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Wilson, “Will the Orange Spark Ignite in Belarus?” *Eurozine*, (2006): par. 8, <http://www.eurozine.com>.

<sup>19</sup> Nerijus Prekevicius, “One President, Three Challengers,” *Eurozine*, (2006), <http://www.eurozine.com>.

<sup>20</sup> Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A conceptual Framework for Liberation* (Bangkok: Committee for the Restoration of Democracy, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Pevol Demes and Joerg Forbrig, “Pora- ‘It’s Time’ for Democracy in Ukraine,” in *Revolution in Orange*, ed. Anders Aslund and Michael McFaul (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 85-100.

<sup>22</sup> Karatnycky, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution*, par. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Prekevicius, *One President, Three Challengers*, par. 47.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, “Minsk Riot Police End Demonstrations, Detain Some 250” March 24, 2006, [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org).

<sup>26</sup> Prekevicius, *One President, Three Challengers*, par. 47.

<sup>27</sup> Anders Aslund and Michael McFaul, *Revolution in Orange*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, *Will the Orange Spark Ignite in Belarus?* Par. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Sestanovich, “Ukraine’s Democratic Strengths,” *WashingtonPost.com*, November 19, 2004, <http://washingtonpost.com>.

<sup>30</sup> Gerhard Simon, “An Orange-Tinged Revolution,” *Russian Politics and Law* 44, no. 2 (2006): 18.

<sup>31</sup> Stasys Katauskas, “Belarus: Hopes for Democracy and Doubts About National Identity,” *Eurozine* (2006): par. 4. <http://www.eurozine.com>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., par. 11.

<sup>33</sup> David Marples, *Belarus: a Denationalized Nation* (Singapore: Overseas Publishers Association, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> David Marples, “The Prospects of Democracy in Belarus,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 51, no. 1 (2004), 32.

<sup>35</sup> Marples, *Belarus: a Denationalized Nation*, 20.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen White, Elena Korosteleva, and John Lowenhardt, *Postcommunist Belarus* (United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 3.

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- <sup>37</sup>Vitali Silitski, "Still Soviet? Why Dictatorship Persists in Belarus," *Harvard International Review* 28, (2006): 47.
- <sup>38</sup>Oleksandr Sushko and Olena Prystayko, "Western Influence," in *Revolution in Orange*, ed. Anders Aslund and Michael McFaul (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 134-135.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup>During the first round of the 2004 Ukrainian elections, the authorities took nineteen days to count the votes, supposedly to give themselves time to perform more elaborate and widespread fraud than they had expected necessary. (Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*, 123).
- <sup>41</sup>Vera Rich, "We Told You Lies, and We Ask You for Forgiveness..." *Index on Censorship* 34, no. 1 (2005): 88.
- <sup>42</sup>Olena Prytula, "The Ukrainian Media Rebellion," in *Revolution in Orange*, ed. Anders Aslund and Michael McFaul (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 118-119.
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- <sup>47</sup>Michael Fiszer, "Belarus Tests New SIGINT, Electronic Attack," *Journal of Electronic Defense* 29, no. 1 (2006): 31-32.
- <sup>48</sup>Andrew Wilson, "The Belarusian Election: Who Best Learnt from the Orange Revolution?" *Eurozine*, (2006): par. 4, <http://www.eurozine.com>.
- <sup>49</sup>Lucan A. Way, "Authoritarian State Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave," *World Politics* 57, (2005): 232.
- <sup>50</sup>Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, "Presidential Election: Myths or Reality," <http://www.iiseps.org/e3-06-1.html>.
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- <sup>52</sup>Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*, 122.
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