

September 30, 2005

## **Don't go wobbly on the orange**

By Stephen J. Flanagan and Eugene Rumer

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WASHINGTON When Ukraine's president, Victor Yushchenko, fired Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and her cabinet, he disappointed Ukraine's fair-weather friends, who were inspired by the drama and poetry of its Orange Revolution earlier this year. That revolution was not the last step in Ukraine's long march toward democracy, stability and prosperity. There will be many more, not all of them forward, and the trip will be a long one. For Europe and the United States to lose patience with Ukraine now would amount to betrayal of its people, as well as our shared values and strategic interests.

Common sense and the experience of Ukraine's neighbors in Eastern Europe tell us that Ukraine's transformation will take decades, not years. Consider where Ukraine is coming from. It achieved independence in 1991 after more than three centuries of Russian and Soviet rule. Its economy was a product of Soviet central planning ravaged by the Chernobyl disaster; its government was a holdover from the Soviet era. Nearly a quarter of the country's population was Russian, countless others of mixed heritage had strong cultural and family ties to Russia.

In hindsight, Ukraine's achievements look remarkable.

It secured its independence from Russia. It returned to economic growth. It gained a place in the international arena, establishing strong ties to the United States, NATO, the EU and key European governments, and its military is a significant contributor to international coalitions from the Balkans to Iraq. After many fitful steps, it took a big leap toward democracy in the peaceful protests against electoral fraud last winter.

Ukraine isn't perfect. As in many emerging democracies, its politics are chaotic and rooted in shifting alliances among rival clans rather than coherent party programs and structures. Its laws are archaic, its military in need of reform and its bureaucracy notorious for stifling key initiatives. And it is corrupt - 122nd of 145 on Transparency International's list of countries ranging from least to most corrupt - better than Nigeria and Georgia, but worse than Congo and Uganda.

A UN-sponsored report in early 2005 recommended many reforms that Yushchenko should enact in his first year in office, including immediate accession to the World Trade

Organization and wide-ranging administrative, political, judicial, tax and legal reforms that took Eastern Europe's most successful nations over a decade to devise and realize.

Both Poland's "shock therapy" of frontloaded reforms and the more gradualist approaches pursued by Hungary and the Czech Republic required determined implementation of coherent reform programs between 1989 and 2003 to complete their transitions to flourishing market economies and democracies eligible for EU membership. While Ukraine's reformers would like to follow that path, they started from a much lower base and were further hampered by the legacy of autocratic politics, mismanagement and corruption inherited from the Kuchma period.

The current crisis in Ukraine is a setback for reformers, and the March 2006 parliamentary election may well become another. There will be others. That is to be expected in a country where more than a third of the electorate voted against the Orange Revolution and day-to-day life is full of hardships. Does this mean that the orange glow has dimmed? Not at all.

Ukraine is in the midst of a profound transformation, but much remains to be done. Acting Prime Minister Yury Yekhanurov's call for better relations with Russia does not mean a turn away from the West in a country still divided in finding the right balance between integration into the Euro-Atlantic community and maintaining longstanding ties to Russia.

Ukraine's stability and independence are essential to long-term U.S. and European interests in Eurasia. Now is not the time to be disappointed, but to stay focused and engaged, offering a helping hand and a critical eye.

What should we do? Stay the course we embarked on years ago: foster growth of civil society and the rule of law; provide technical assistance on key reforms, maintain security cooperation, and support training, educational programs and cultural exchanges.

Anything else would spell failure. Ours, not Ukraine's