

# Ukraine's orange revolution

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By David Hearst

Europe

IF HE had a face to lose, Vladimir Putin, that Darth Vader of the post-Soviet empire, has lost it over Ukraine. Having congratulated Viktor Yanukovich, the Ukrainian prime minister, on his "victory" two weeks ago, Putin has now conceded that the vote was flawed and that a recount should be held quickly, on the opposition's terms. If this is the "soft imperialism" Putin is accused of, it is very soft indeed.

Moscow's weakness could not be in sharper contrast to Washington's ability to project its power and its proxies into the post-Soviet world. Every central Asian regime must now be wondering whether the tactic of parallel counts in a dodgy election will be turned on them if they fail to toe the line. Ukraine's orange revolutionaries are making large claims about the victory they achieved recently when the supreme court annulled the presidential run-off. Viktor Yushchenko declares that Ukrainians have emerged as citizens of a western nation.

But take the tone of moral righteousness out of the great Ukrainian debate and Yushchenko's democrats will find their path blocked in two directions — westward and eastward. The orange revolutionaries have only to march a few kilometres westward from Lviv before they hit a 3m-high electrified fence fortified by watchtowers.

The barrier running along Poland's borders with Belarus and Ukraine was originally erected in Soviet times, but it has been enthusiastically reinstated by the EU, the very author of an enlarged Europe that now pro-

the west for Yushchenko). But are 10 million people who did not vote Yushchenko all to be dismissed as latterday Soviet clones? Do they only jerk into life when Putin and the revamped KGB press the remote control? What do they want? How do they think they are going to get it? Virtually no one has bothered to find out. The entire western media coverage of the Ukrainian upheaval has been limited to Kiev. There have been few if any camera crews in the cities of Kharkov, Donetsk, Dnepropetrovsk. These are streets through which western champions of the well-funded orange revolution should walk before declaring Yushchenko and his friends tribunes of freedom.

There is a faultline running through Ukraine that is a product of its history and people. To talk about the history of Ukraine as simply one of Russian occupation is to disenfranchise the voice and identity of a large chunk of its population. If you are not a Uniate Catholic from western Ukraine, you are likely to be Russian Orthodox from the east or south. Remember that Kiev was a Russian city — the Orthodox church traces its roots to the baptism of Kiev in 988 — before Moscow was even thought of.

If Ukraine's regional polarization continues as a result of the political crisis, the future for Ukraine does not look bright or orange at all. One model for what could happen in Ukraine is Moldova, Europe's poorest state on Ukraine's southwestern border. Two regimes — both now communist, but one facing westward to Romania and the other facing eastward to Russia — fought a bitter if brief war 12 years ago. The Romanian-speaking Moldova is largely a rural economy. The Russian-speaking

enlarged Europe that now professes to run to Kiev's aid.

The Poles shuddered when ordered by Brussels to re-establish a new line of division across eastern Europe. They were especially sensitive to shoring up the Ukrainian border where the cauldron of the Second World War is still warm.

The idea that Europe, in its current xenophobic state, will embrace 48 million Ukrainians on an average salary that makes Romanians rich by comparison, is an absurd illusion. It may give an inner glow to those who believe that Europe's power lies in its ability to radiate democracy to its darker, outer fringes. But the hope that the union will be in any hurry to abandon those watchtowers would be a serious mistake for the fledgling citizens of a free Ukraine.

The second barrier facing them lies to the east and south. There are more than 10 million Russian-speaking Ukrainians here in an industrial belt that produces 80 per cent of the country's national income. The exports from the Donbass coal mines, steel mills and factories go northward and eastward, not westward.

These 10 million Ukrainians may be just as fed up as Kiev and Lviv are with the post-Soviet oligarchs and with the corrupt semi-authoritarian regime of Leonid Kuchma, the outgoing president. They may have groaned at Putin's cack-handed appearances on the campaign trail and the blatant attempts to fix the vote for Yanukovich in the east (as also certainly happened in

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Transdnistr is an industrialized enclave. Twelve years on, two parts of a riven state are still staring sullenly at each other across a river, defying every conceivable formula for power sharing.

This is not a path that Ukraine wants to travel. If Yushchenko's revolution is to work, it will have to be one that works in all parts of Ukraine. Only by running Ukraine as a multi-ethnic state facing both east and west does it stand a chance of becoming a real democracy. But if the inheritors of the post-Soviet quagmire are using popular frustration as a cover for ethnic revenge, the fruits of this revolution will be sour indeed. — *Dawn/Guardian Service*