

# The Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity: Similarities and Differences

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## THE ORANGE REVOLUTION AND THE REVOLUTION OF DIGNITY: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

“Compared with today's events in Kyiv, the Orange Revolution seems a children's party” – a foreign media outlet wrote when violent clashes on Hrushevskoho Street in Kyiv erupted between protesters and police and when the first blood was shed. And it's hard to disagree ... While the Orange Revolution of 2004 was a kind of joyful “festival of democracy” with songs, dances, humor, and blossoming of folk art, the "Revolution of Dignity" of 2013-2014, as it is now called, included tragic events of the kind that had never happened in the independent Ukraine.

These two impressive popular revolutions in Ukraine do have a number of elements in common. They both started on November 21 (nine years apart), on the day of the Archangel Michael, the official patron saint of Kyiv and the head of the “heavenly army.” People often spoke about the mystical underpinnings of the protests, asserting that heavenly forces led by the Archangel Michael inspired people to fight against the regime. It is not surprising that the more than one hundred activists killed on the Maidan were promptly dubbed the “Heavenly Hundred.”

The geography of the revolutions was also similar. The main events unfolded in Kyiv, around Maidan, but the protests also spread to most regions in western and central Ukraine. Thousands of inhabitants of the western regions, especially Galicia, came to Kyiv during the first weeks of the protests and camped on Maidan. In contrast, the majority of Ukrainians from the eastern and southern regions did not support either the 2004 or the 2013-2014 revolution. But there were active Maidan participants drawn from these regions – including among the perished heroes of the Heavenly Hundred.

Maidan was the heart of the both revolutions. It encompassed a stage where politicians, civic activists and musicians performed round-the-clock and where large-scale rallies were held each weekend, as well as a tent camp, field kitchens and buildings seized by protesters. It is worth noting that the building of the Kyiv City Council was the first to be occupied both in 2004 and in 2013 and played an important role in the protest infrastructure.

Finally, the antihero of both revolutions was Viktor Yanukovich – in 2004 as the incumbent prime minister and presidential candidate from the Party of Regions whose second round victory was falsified and sparked the Orange Revolution. In 2013-2014, Yanukovich was the legitimately elected incumbent President who progressively arrogated greater powers to himself, including by the illegitimate amendment of the Constitution. In office from 2010, he abandoned electoral promises – such as the European integration of Ukraine, the increase of

social support for socially vulnerable groups, and transparency of authorities' activities, to name just a few – and engaged in large-scale corruption schemes. Ukrainians shared a popular joke based on Nokia's advertising slogan: "Yanukovych – connecting people."

Despite these similarities, the two Ukrainian revolutions were significantly different.

Firstly, the Orange Revolution was partly prepared in advance – though its scale surpassed all the expectations of its organizers. It was expected that the presidential election in November 2004 would be rigged. The April 2004 mayoral election in the Western town of Mukachevo was marred by enormous fraud. It was accompanied by a rolling crackdown on civil society. For this reason, protests were planned from early 2004 in case of serious electoral falsifications – even tents were bought in advance. However, the organizers had planned to bring tens of thousands of activists; they did not expect that hundreds of thousands, and eventually a million people, would join the protest.

In contrast, the Revolution of Dignity was not prepared and was unexpected. Most people were dead certain that the people disappointed by the consequences of the Orange Revolution would not go to the streets at least until the next presidential elections (planned for early 2015) and that Yanukovych would remain unchallenged until then. When several hundred appeared on Maidan on the evening of November 21, protesting against the government's refusal to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, virtually nobody expected that this would be beginning of the end for Yanukovych himself. Perhaps, this protest called Euromaidan would have gradually disappeared. But the bloody crackdown on the peaceful and unarmed students on November 30 mobilized multitudes. On December 1<sup>st</sup>, between 300,000 to 1,000,000 people (according to various estimates) went to the streets. Khreschatyk was flooded with people as during the best days of the Orange Revolution.

Secondly, while the Orange Revolution was bloodless, it had one phase and lasted only 18 days; while the Revolution of Dignity lasted three months, included three different phases and saw much bloodshed. The Orange Revolution aimed at revising the falsified results of the presidential elections and reached its goal with the help of peaceful and non-violent resistance, due to the might of the people's power. A relatively quick victory was made possible due to the unwillingness of the then-President Leonid Kuchma to be remembered as a bloody dictator and his resolute refusal to use force against people.

The Revolution of Dignity included several phases that were significantly different in view of the nature of the protests and the demands of protesters. The first phase was the student Euromaidan that lasted until the bloody crackdown on students on November 30. Its main demand was the signing of an Association Agreement with the EU. The second phase was the Maidan-festival that lasted from December 1 to January 19 – the day when violent clashes

between protesters and the now infamous riot police unit called *Berkut* (“mountain eagle”) erupted. This was the cheerful, peaceful and positive revolutionary phase, with daily concerts, performances and blossoming street art, which resembled the Orange Revolution. But none of the demands of this Maidan phase were fulfilled.

In this second phase the protesters’ demands had already expanded to include the resignation of Yanukovich and early elections, though the minimum demand was the punishment of those guilty for the violent crackdown on students and the resignation or sacking of Interior Minister Vitaliy Zakharchenko. Had these minimum requirements been met, perhaps the revolution would have ended at this point. But the authorities did the opposite – they poured fuel on the fire by adopting a series of draconian laws on January 16 that severely restricted popular rights and freedoms, including civil society activity. These laws turned Ukraine into a *de facto* strict dictatorial regime.

This unprecedented pressure led to the violent clashes that emerged on January 19 on Hrushevskoho Street (leading to the parliament building, the *Verkhovna Rada*), where protesters threw Molotov cocktails and stones at riot police, while policemen responded with stun grenades and plastic bullets. This unrest marked the beginning of the revolution’s third phase, when songs and dances on Maidan stopped, an increasing number of protesters dressed in camouflage, helmets, and (usually makeshift) body armor, and the Maidan started to be called “*Maidan Sich*” (like the Ukrainian Cossack *Zaporizhska Sich*, or encampment). I have called this phase the “revolution of despair,” since many protesters grew despondent about the potential of non-violent resistance and chose open confrontation with law-enforcement officers.<sup>1</sup>

The first victims of Maidan appeared on January 22, during the attack of the *Berkut* unit. Within a month, on February 18-20, around 100 protesters were shot or beaten to death and approximately 1,000 were injured during clashes near *Verkhovna Rada* and on Institutaska Street. This third phase of the revolution was the most uncompromising. The resignation of President Yanukovich and conduct of early presidential elections were central, non-negotiable demands. This stage of the revolution finally ended in victory – when Yanukovich fled Kyiv on February 21 rather than face justice for the murders of the protesters. His escape was preceded by the deal with opposition leaders brokered by EU Foreign Ministers Radek Sikorski (Poland), Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Germany), and Laurent Fabius (France), according to which early presidential elections were to have been scheduled no later than November 2014. But it was obvious that people of Maidan were not ready to wait that long.

Therefore, the revolution 2013-2014 was much longer and dramatic than the Orange

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<sup>1</sup> See the January 25, 2014 blog post “Revolution of Despair”, at: <http://democratizationpolicy.org/revolution-of-despair>.

Revolution and did not fit in the scenario of quick and bloodless “color revolutions.” It required more courage, stamina, dedication and heroism from its participants. The participants of the Revolution of Dignity remained on the Maidan three months despite freezing cold and snow, erected barricades from sacks filled with snow, and faced with wooden shields the heavily armed *Berkut* riot policemen. On February 18<sup>th</sup>, the Maidan stopped a *Berkut* armored personnel carrier from entering the square virtually with their bare hands. The city’s metro system was completely closed for several days. The sacrifice of tens of thousands of Kyiv citizens who supported the Maidan encampment with food, money, shelter and who participated in rallies and pickets was also remarkable.

In this context, another important difference of the Revolution of Dignity from the Orange Revolution should be noted. While in 2004 the main civic and youth movements, such as *Pora!* (“It’s time!”), *Chysta Ukraina* (“Clean Ukraine”), *Znayu!* (“We know!”) and others, were active long before the revolution itself, in 2013 most important initiatives and movements supporting the protests appeared after the revolution had already started, often with the help of social networks. These include: the Civil Sector of Maidan, Automaidan, Euromaidan SOS, and others.

The third important difference is the role of social networks. While in 2004 social networks were barely used in Ukraine, in 2013-2014 social networks (primarily Facebook and Twitter) played a crucial role in the genesis of ideas and coordination of protesters’ actions. A rally on Maidan on November 21 was launched by a Twitter message by the well-known journalist Mustafa Nayem who called all those who disagreed with the Ukrainian government’s reversal of its European integration policy to come to the Maidan. During the course of the revolution, Ukrainians constantly exchanged news on Facebook, created new communities and initiatives, wrote messages about what was needed on the Maidan and widely shared them.

The fourth important difference between these two Ukrainian revolutions is the issue of political leadership. The Orange Revolution had its unchallenged political leader – Viktor Yushchenko. Crowds on the Maidan chanted his name, he was treated as the leader who could implement all of the demands of the protesters – due to his successful record as a prime minister and his political program attuned to the expectations of millions of Ukrainians. As the revolution progressed, Yulia Tymoshenko gradually emerged as another revolutionary leader. In contrast, the Revolution of Dignity was largely leaderless and lacked a political figurehead. Though three leaders of the main opposition fractions in the parliament – Vitaliy Klitschko, Arseniy Yatseniuk and Oleg Tiagnibok – regularly appeared on the Maidan’s stage, the protesters perceived them as political instruments that would serve to fulfill *their* demands, but that they were not the actual leaders of the Maidan. The Maidan protesters made the demands to authorities and only then did the opposition leaders present them to the ruling elites and the international community. Popular demands and expectations were not only chanted, but

written on numerous posters – from “Ukraine is Europe” to *Bandu – het* (“out with the gang”) and *Zeka-het* (“out with the criminal”).

However, the absence of a leader was problematic for protesters themselves. In mid-January, when the revolution seemed to reach a stalemate, none of the Maidan demands were fulfilled and draconian laws were adopted, protesters at the next “*viche*” (large rally) on the Maidan on January 19 demanded a leader to assume responsibility for all activities and elaborate further resistance tactics. I remembered one poster addressed to the three opposition leaders – “Choose a leader or go away.” People were also chanting “Leader! Leader!” Arseniy Yatseniuk responded with the following: “Do you want a leader? I will tell you the following – the leader is Ukrainian people!”

And we should admit that Yatseniuk was absolutely right. On that evening of January 19, the protesters went to Hrushevskoho Street (more exactly – to the building of *Vekhovna Rada*, but their way was blocked by the “*Berkut*” riot police, and this moment marked the beginning of a new, dramatic phase of the revolution which led to its final victory. This clash managed to remove an increasingly authoritarian leader who usurped all branches of power and did not shrink from employing brutal violence against protesters. A decade after the Orange Revolution, this victory is yet more proof of the might of people power. The revolution's full set of demands is still far from being fulfilled. First among these was the call to completely change the governing system in Ukraine. This challenge is yet to be met, and becoming harder under the efforts by Moscow to rollback the revolution.