

ENOUGH! KMARA AND THE ROSE REVOLUTION IN GEORGIA

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Unlike in western democracies, popular and well-organized student movements in the former Soviet Union, and particularly in the Caucasus, have been less than significant from a political perspective. No longer: with its appearance in April 2003, the Georgian youth movement KMARA (Enough) quickly seized a central spot in the political life of this weakened postcommunist country. KMARA is widely acknowledged to have played an instrumental role in bringing about the Rose Revolution that ended President Eduard Shevardnadze's three-decade-long reign.

The Rose Revolution, effectively the first bloodless change of power in the Caucasus region's history, brought with it renewed hope that democracy could triumph in Georgia and the region, something many believed was intrinsically foreign to this part of the world. Observers, among them Georgia's new president, Mikheil Saakashvili, have referred to the Rose Revolution as among the inspirations for a "new wave of democratization" and as having led to increased attention and support for democracy activists in the former Soviet Union. The Georgian experience convinced western policymakers that regime change to democracy is indeed possible in the former Soviet Union and will not lead to much-feared civil war, as long as certain conditions are present.

Despite the attention the Rose Revolution received both inside and outside the country, the actual extent and impact of western assistance available for the struggle was remarkably limited. Why, of all post-Soviet countries, was Georgia the one where such a democratic breakthrough was possible for the first time? What factors and actors made the revolution possible? How important and substantial was western assistance? The following analysis endeavors to explore these questions.

Shevardnadze's "Liberal Autocracy"

Many writers and scholars have attempted to classify the kind of regime that existed in Georgia and that could also be found in other countries of the former Soviet Union. According to democracy theorists Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, the regime would most probably fit into the broader category of "post-totalitarianism".¹

1 Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Postcommunist Europe* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996), pp. 42-51.



Georgian political scientist, Ghia Nodia, defines Shevardnadze's regime as a "liberal autocracy" or even a "liberal oligarchy".² However, the defining characteristic of the regime was that a number of fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and freedom of association, were more or less allowed, despite the regime's overall authoritarian tendencies.

When Eduard Shevardnadze was elected president of Georgia in 1995, the country was beset by ethnic and civil strife, with local warlords controlling individual regions. Seeking allies in outmaneuvering these warlords and aspiring to being considered a democrat abroad, Shevardnadze allowed for the emergence of alternative centers of power, including political opposition, independent media and civil society. Until 1999, this earned Shevardnadze an unjustified reputation as a success story of post-Soviet democratization among many western observers and governments.³ The 1995 Constitution was labeled as a significant step forward in the democratic development in Georgia. The government recognized the need for holding regular elections and the opposition was even able to score some successes in local ballots. Nevertheless, "real power" was to remain concentrated inside a restricted network of political elites. Shevardnadze believed that it would always be possible for him to win elections and that, if the necessity arose, they could be rigged. And, while there would be international criticism, it would soon fizzle out.

Importantly, allowing such freedoms as were permitted was not exclusively altruistic on the part of the government. Both the government and elements within the ruling elites saw such freedoms as a tool to outmanoeuvre political enemies. The relatively liberal climate and legislative framework, however, led to the development of a civil society that did not accept the rules and practices of the ruling oligarchy.⁴ Shortly after being elected president in 1995, Shevardnadze surrounded himself with a group of western-educated reformers, referred to as the "Zhvania-Saakashvili team", with the intention of developing Georgia's relations with western governments and international financial institutions, an important source of loans and grants, given the ailing economic situation of the country. The administration also hoped that the reformers would be useful for domestic public relations purposes.

With the reformers "contained" and with little influence on real policymaking, while the old, corrupt, party nomenclatura remained in key decision making positions,

² According to Nodia, "the assumption of the rulers was that they had to conform to certain basic norms of liberal democracy. To be clear, all this did not mean that the opposition should be allowed to actually displace the ruling elite from power through elections. The political system had to be "civilized", "progressive" and "reformist", but political power should be held within relatively small network of elites". See Ghia Nodia, "Breaking the Mold of Powerlessness: The Meaning of Georgia's Latest Revolution", in: Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch (eds.), *Revolution of Roses in the Republic of Georgia* (Nova Publishers, New York, 2004), pp. 96-97.

³ Laurence Broers, "After the 'Revolution': Civil Society and the Challenges of Consolidating Democracy in Georgia", paper presented at the University of London, December 2004, p. 1.

⁴ Ghia Nodia, *The Development of Civil Society in Georgia: Achievements and Challenges* (Citizens' Advocate! Program, Tbilisi, 2005), in Georgian.

President Shevardnadze thought the country could be run the old way. However, once the reforms initiated by the new team began to conflict with the interests of the nomenclatura and Shevardnadze's close (corrupt) allies, Georgia witnessed a turnaround. The reforms were all but abandoned.

In the meantime, however, the Georgian parliament had adopted more than 2,000 laws regulating aspects of private and public life. Perhaps most important of all was the General Administrative Code, making virtually all information in state bodies public. The code became a crucial weapon in the hands of civil society and investigative journalists for exposing the wrongdoings of officials and mobilizing the public to engage in political debate. However, the Shevardnadze administration believed that for as long as it could claim credit for the introduction of greater political freedoms (in contrast to the situation in many other post-Soviet states), challenges coming from civic sector could be simply contained and the scope of action of rebellious NGOs would be limited to writing complaints to international organizations.

The system was steadily being eroded, however, and over time Shevardnadze's assumptions would be proven wrong. Vested interests and informal political deals became well-embedded in the political and economic life of Georgia. The state soon had difficulties to discharge its key responsibilities, so reduced was tax revenue as a result of rampant corruption.⁵ It became increasingly difficult to satisfy the manifold interests of the variety of groups surrounding the president.⁶ Georgian politics at that time did, indeed, bear the hallmarks of what some scholars describe as the "blackmail state".⁷ The government's inability and lack of will to confront the problem of corruption led to the suspension of International Monetary Fund programs already running and planned.

It was impossible for the president to maintain even a semblance of his image as a reformer. When in 2001, the authorities attempted to shut down *Rustavi 2*, an outspoken private TV channel, the reformers surrounding the president abandoned the administration and went into opposition. By this time the decision had been made. President Shevardnadze dropped the pretence of being a reformist leader once and for all. While, admittedly, Shevardnadze can justly claim credit for the fact that civil society in Georgia developed significantly during his term in office, he, nevertheless, considered it his major mistake. In several interviews after the Rose Revolution, he stated that he regretted not having made sure that the mechanisms necessary for "managing democracy" were put in place in Georgia.

⁵ Lawrence Broers, "After the 'Revolution': Civil Society and the Challenges of Consolidating Democracy in Georgia", paper presented at the University of London, December 2004, p. 2, op cit.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Keith A. Darden, "Blackmail as a Tool of State Domination: Ukraine and Kuchma", *East European Constitutional Review*, vol. 10, no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003).

From the perspective of political culture, Georgia was a typical post-Soviet society. Popular attitudes towards any kind of participation, particularly political participation, were significantly conditioned by experiences of the Soviet era and, therefore, nihilistic and distrustful. In the public mindset, all elections were unfair and, therefore, a change of government through elections was not considered a viable prospect.⁸ Such attitudes were particularly widespread among young people. Political parties and politicians were considered with great suspicion. In people's perceptions, joining a political party or its election campaign was considered an act of personal material self-interest and an attempt to enrich oneself. Truth be told, many people did get involved in politics for the wrong reasons and some did, indeed, succeed in lining their pockets.

In this context, political parties were clearly an insufficient condition and a weak instrument for mobilizing a public so reduced by political apathy. An additional obstacle was that the youth wings of the political parties were relatively weak. Further, civic campaigns carried out in Georgia before 2003 were limited in reach to small circles and urban areas and were not easily understandable for the common Georgian layperson. The one positive effect of this was that people living in outlying regions of Georgia were less exposed to previous campaigns and generally had a higher motivation and enthusiasm, making their mass mobilization easier.

Three actors are believed to have played a crucial role in making the Rose Revolution possible: the youth movement KMARA and civil society more broadly, the opposition parties, especially Mikheil Saakashvili's National Movement, and *Rustavi 2*, the most prominent independent media actor at that time. Each of these groups played a distinctive role in making successful democratic and nonviolent change possible in Georgia. The identities and roles of these groups during the revolution will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

The Emergence of Civil Society in Georgia

The emergence of civil society in Georgia began in the post-Stalinist era of Soviet history. Embryonic elements of civil society developed in universities and different unions that existed under the control of the state. In the context of Krushchev's attempt to develop the "human face" of the Soviet state, these associations were permitted to voice some, although admittedly very little, criticism. These groups were pivotal in the events of 1978, when Georgians defended the official status of the Georgian language, as well as in the turbulent events of 1989, that later led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the late 1980s, environmental issues were articulated as part of the national question and became a strong motivation for civil

⁸ Summary of 32 focus groups conducted by BCG Research, August 12-19, 2003.

society to organize.⁹ Simultaneously, political parties concerned with similar issues began to emerge, producing issue overlap.

The landscape changed considerably after 1995, when Eduard Shevardnadze's ruling Citizens' Union of Georgia offered NGOs the possibility to participate in its "reformist" political agenda. This led to another wave of development in the civil sector. Many NGOs emerged around the ruling party and its political competitors, all of which were seeking legitimacy in the eyes of the public. As a result, there was a real boom in the establishment of NGOs, with their number rocketing to 3,000, of which approximately 500 became recipients of two or more grants from western donors. Despite these impressive numbers, membership of NGOs was not widespread and many organizations consisted of little more than their founding member or members, looking more like generals without armies than civil society organizations. Finally, NGO activity was largely concentrated in the capital, Tbilisi, and did not manage to develop countrywide outreach. Understandably, NGO impact on political decision making was rather weak, dependent on political, rather than genuine grass roots, support.

The government's decision to allow limited liberal freedoms was a political calculation and did not demonstrate commitment to an open society. Nevertheless, it led to the development of a civil society that did not accept at face value the rules and practices of the ruling oligarchy.¹⁰ However, Shevardnadze and his aides continuously thought that while he could claim credit for greater political freedoms, challenges coming from the opposition or the civic sector could be easily contained. Rebellious NGOs were seen as weak, lacking leverage and intrinsic agency. Civil society was not taken seriously and Shevardnadze lived to regret his own complacency.

The Emergence of KMARA: "These Young People"

Shortly after his resignation, Eduard Shevardnadze was quoted as saying "I did not think I should pay serious attention to these young people running around waving flags and painting graffiti on the streets. I was wrong". Few could have anticipated that "these young people" would come to occupy such a central spot in Shevardnadze's memoirs.

The origins of KMARA can be traced back to 2000, when a group of reform-minded students established student self-government at Georgia's largest institution of higher education, Tbilisi State University. This group's primary concern was the situation in higher education. It campaigned for radical reform of the education

⁹ Levan Tarkhnishvili, *The Democratic Transition of Georgia* (Warsaw, 1997).

¹⁰ Ghia Nodia, *The Development of Civil Society in Georgia: Achievements and Challenges* (Citizens' Advocate! Program, Tbilisi, 2005), in Georgian, op cit.

sector, which since Shevardnadze's return to Georgia had witnessed an ongoing and dramatic decline in quality and an increase in bribery.¹¹

This group's activities were successful, widely publicized and included a campaign that involved legal action against the university administration and revelations of corruption in education to the media. With time, however, it became increasingly evident that no reform would be possible in higher education without a change of government.¹² During the student protests following Shevardnadze's attempt to shut down *Rustavi 2* in October 2001, a second group of student activists formed, calling themselves the Student Movement for Georgia. The two groups joined to form KMARA in early 2003, in an attempt to broaden the scope of civil society activity to mobilize the masses.

Several other NGOs, namely the Liberty Institute, the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) and the Association for Law and Public Education (ALPE) shaped the creation of KMARA. They were instrumental in facilitating the creation of both material and networking opportunities for KMARA. The Liberty Institute was responsible for coordination with the political opposition, training young activists, regional outreach and public relations. They also networked with international NGOs, the concrete result of which was a trip to Belgrade to meet OTPOR activists and subsequent visits of OTPOR and OK '98 campaign activists to Tbilisi in early 2003 to inform their Georgian counterparts about how civic campaigns emerged in Serbia and Slovakia, respectively. GYLA ensured legal representation and services for KMARA activists and ALPE was active in developing training activities and public awareness-raising on topics such as fair elections, police brutality and corruption.

After 2001, civil society was patently aware that further elections were going to be rigged and that mass mobilization would be necessary to defend democracy and fair elections. Mobilization efforts had proved their worth in other countries where authoritarian regimes were ousted by mass protests. Finally, it was clear that the traditional actors of Georgian politics would not be able to achieve the much-needed democratic breakthrough alone. These realizations prompted the creation of KMARA.

KMARA's campaign differed from those of the political parties in that it had countrywide outreach, making significant efforts to include traditionally isolated communities, ethnic-religious minorities and the rural population. In addition, nonviolent resistance was the form of protest chosen. Both the political opposition and the general public were in favor of nonviolence, boosting the popularity of the campaign and providing a strong counter-argument to the often-cited bogey: mass

11 Tinatin Zurabishvili and Tamara Zurabishvili, "Serving Bilateral Interests? Corruption in the System of Higher Education in Georgia", in: Evangelina Papoutsaki and Tinatin Zurabishvili (eds.), *Caucasus Higher Education in Transition* (Civic Education Project, Tbilisi, 2005), pp. 41-55.

12 In one notorious case, the person named as the most corrupt member of faculty as a result of a survey conducted by the group was publicly promoted and praised the day after.

mobilization inevitably leads to bloodshed. Also of significance is that KMARA made it clear that it was not running for political office and positioned itself as a civic force, thus, creating the conditions for cooperation with opposition parties.

Initially, the long-term planning of KMARA and the broader opposition coalition targeted the presidential elections scheduled for 2005. However, a number of factors, including mass fraud, the high level of mobilization among the population and the nonviolent discipline of the protest movement made it possible to achieve the sought-after democratic breakthrough as early as November 2003, when parliamentary elections were held in Georgia.

The Political Opposition

Having joined Shevardnadze's administration in 1995, the reform-minded "Zhvania-Saakashvili team" found themselves "contained", without significant influence on the executive branch. President Shevardnadze believed the country could still be run the old way and reform was quickly abandoned in the wake of attempts by the reform team to confront the corruption of the regime.

The crisis point was reached with the government's attempt to shut down *Rustavi 2* TV in October 2001. Reformers faced the difficult decision of whether to continue to attempt to change the situation from inside the government or to strike out on their own and start an independent political struggle: the familiar choice between change from within or from outside the system. Mikheil Saakashvili, then Minister of Justice, resigned and formed the National Movement Party. After an attempt to rescue the old Citizens Union of Georgia, Zurab Zhvania followed suit and formed the United Democrats Party. He advocated a more moderate strategy and more gradual change than did Saakashvili.

Saakashvili's main strategy could be summarized as the radicalization of the political situation and the widening of the political space. He realized that even with fair elections, something no one believed would be possible, several rounds would be needed for the National Movement and other opposition parties to build their electoral and organizational strength. He was aware that it would be difficult to retain a disciplined and networked political force throughout this long period and that it was necessary to show concrete results to his supporters in the form of a breakthrough.¹³ At the same time, it was clear that in the existing political space, and with the people already involved in the political process, a breakthrough was impossible, demonstrating the need for new and more motivated elements to get involved in the struggle. The 2001 rallies demonstrated that mobilizing urban-educated groups alone was insufficient for such a breakthrough to succeed. The enlisting of supporters beyond those groups had to be ensured. Groups that

¹³ Personal interview with Levan Ramishvili, Tbilisi, June 25, 2005.

emerged as targets of further mobilization efforts included members of the lower middle classes, provincial populations and middle-aged persons.

One of the National Movement's most important achievements was its success in effectively reaching out to the populations in the (rural) provinces. In contemporary Georgian history, the last occasion when the provinces played a significant political role was when they supported Zviad Gamsakhurdia in the lead-up to the civil war in 1991. In fact, any opportunity to take part in post-Gamsakhurdia Georgian politics had been effectively destroyed for that group and Saakashvili made numerous efforts to re-open politics for this highly frustrated segment of the public. As Saakashvili radicalized the political space and opened it up for more alienated groups to participate, he also bolstered his reputation as a brave anti-regime oppositionist. He suggested that the reason for his split with Shevardnadze was that his strong anti-corruption position was unacceptable within the government.

These political realities worked together in Saakashvili's favor, as particularly illustrated during the National Movement's rallies in Kvemo Kartli and Adjara, held in the immediate run-up to the elections in November 2003. No visible opposition activity had taken place in either of these provinces. Kvemo Kartli, a province to the south of the capital, Tbilisi, is inhabited by more than 400,000 ethnic Azeris, most of whom do not speak Georgian and chose to stay out of national politics. Traditionally, the central government easily succeeded in securing votes in this region, boosting the numbers of the pro-administration "electorate". Adjara, ruled by pro-Russian dictator Aslan Abashidze always served as a political base for the Revival Union Party. As expected, demonstrations in both of the provinces provoked a violent reaction from the government.¹⁴ The courage of the National Movement to step into so-called "politically protected areas" largely influenced its swift advance in the approval ratings and eventual victory in the elections, even though the rallies were disrupted and violence was used. Hundreds were beaten in Adjara and the National Movement's office in Batumi was burned down. The rallies were also important for prompting people in these regions, who had been too overcome with fear and apathy to participate in politics, to get involved.

These rallies showed the opposition's, and especially the National Movement's, success at broadening political participation by energetically and courageously confronting the Shevardnadze regime. As a result, more Georgians took an active role in voting, and then in defending their democratic freedom to vote in free and fair elections, as the fraud became apparent.

¹⁴ Within the framework of the cooperation, KMARA made available more than one hundred activists for the demonstration in Batumi.

Election Dynamics

The mass protests that eventually led to President Shevardnadze's resignation continued for exactly 20 days: from November 3 to November 23, 2003. Following the November 2, 2003, parliamentary elections, official results positioned Shevardnadze's For a New Georgia bloc in the lead with 21 percent, followed by Saakashvili's National Movement, the Labor Party, the United Democrats, the Revival Union and the New Rights Party, respectively. These results sharply contradicted exit polls conducted by *Rustavi 2* and parallel vote tabulations carried out by the election watchdog, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy.¹⁵ This prompted, on November 3, a small number of demonstrators to gather in Freedom Square in central Tbilisi, growing in numbers every evening. As long as the numbers of protesters remained relatively small the government chose to ignore their demands. Even after the National Movement and United Democrats announced they were merging forces, the government took no action.

In the run-up to the elections, opposition and civic groups, including KMARA, could not anticipate a scenario that would result in Shevardnadze stepping down, given that the presidency was not even at stake in the parliamentary elections. From the beginning they tried to be realistic, hoping for enough support during the parliamentary elections so that the momentum could influence the presidential elections in 2005, at which point Shevardnadze's last term would expire. But, a number of factors accelerated Shevardnadze's demise, including the blatant electoral fraud in the results from the Adjara province, the total unwillingness of the government to even consider a compromise and the discipline, nonviolence and organizational capacity of opposition groups.

Unfolding the Campaign

Following an initial planning phase in early 2003, which included the representatives of two Serbian organizations (the youth movement OTPOR and the Center for Free Elections and Democracy [CeSID]), the name KMARA began to appear in public through mass graffiti actions. KMARA's first public action was held on April 14, 2003 when more than 500 young people marched from Tbilisi State University to the state chancellery. The student protestors carried flags from the Soviet period bearing the faces of Shevardnadze and leaders of his newly formed For a New Georgia bloc, stressing its implication in Georgia's Soviet past. The protesters condemned the government's alleged intention of rigging the forthcoming November 2 parliamentary elections. The day was purposefully selected to coincide with the anniversary of the student demonstrations that took place in 1978, when Communist Party Secretary Eduard Shevardnadze of the then Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic sided with the

¹⁵ Available in Georgian at <http://www.esp.ge>.

protesting youngsters against the planned abolition of the official status of Georgian as the state language.

From this point onwards, Eduard Shevardnadze's government pursued three strategies to contain KMARA and other democratic opposition groups: attempting to discredit the movement, simply ignoring it and exerting limited repression, particularly in the regions. At a press conference held on April 21, 2003, Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia, leader of the National Democratic Party and spokesperson for Shevardnadze's For a New Georgia bloc announced that "Russian special forces are planning a large-scale (...) operation under the code name 'Enough'".¹⁶ The government further accused KMARA of being the National Movement's youth branch and of paying each activist US\$ 500 per month to stay involved.¹⁷

Outraged by KMARA graffiti in front of the Palace of Youth where the congress of the Socialist Party was to be held, party chairman and new Shevardnadze ally Vakhtang Rcheulishvili went as far as accusing KMARA of being part of an Armenian conspiracy. At his monthly press briefing, Eduard Shevardnadze told journalists that on his way to work he stopped his limousine to check whether anyone was reading the KMARA graffiti, stating that "(...) nobody was reading them". In addition to the violence that took place in Adjara, other repressive measures were taken throughout the country. Wary of a strong backlash, the police preferred to beat or intimidate activists, rather than arrest them (although, Adjara was an exception in this respect).

KMARA engaged in the kind of activism that cultivated a certain "mythology", portraying it as much more powerful than it actually was. This bluff-strategy began with the trivially simple, but strikingly powerful, graffiti campaign. Inspired by the OTPOR experience, a group of twenty KMARA founding members painted tens of thousands of KMARA graffiti on the streets of Tbilisi. Within two days of Irina Sarishvili's statement to the press, the graffiti was top of the national news, with journalists emphasizing that the biggest KMARA sign had been daubed in front of the Tbilisi office of the National Democratic Party. Next morning, the authorities mobilized the fire service to remove the graffiti, but soon stopped, realizing the irony of the situation. During the following weeks, the ongoing appearance of KMARA graffiti in nine of Georgia's main cities made headlines nationwide.

Other activities carried out by KMARA varied from assertive nonviolent "actions" to university round table debates with the aim of involving students and recruiting new activists for the campaign. Popular personalities were invited to speak at the roundtables. This attracted attention to events and raised the level of participation

16 Giorgi Lomsadze, "Amid Controversy, Georgian Student Protest Movement Grows", Eurasianet, <http://eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav061003.shtml>, accessed June 4, 2005.

17 Interior Minister Koba Narchemashvili first made this claim. Georgian special services, skilled in spreading rumors from KGB times, spent some energy on disseminating this rumor as well. As a result, even one of the authors' mothers was almost convinced by her colleagues that he was paid for getting involved in the campaign.

following campaign activities. KMARA also ensured the training of 800 activists focusing on basic skills for participation in civic campaigns with the support and expertise of the Liberty Institute and the Association for Legal and Public Education. Activists and new recruits attending were from different parts of the country and the training also aimed to develop skills for establishing KMARA cells back home.

With most of its activities pursuing the aim of mass mobilization for the elections, KMARA's get-out-the-vote campaign was of central importance. The campaign was carried out with the support of the Open Society Foundation in Georgia and aimed at raising public awareness about the elections and at encouraging active participation in voting. Various activities were carried out within the framework of the program such as TV advertising, concerts, sport competitions and the distribution of posters and t-shirts. This voter education campaign was also strongly supported by the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy.

Closely linked to the campaign, KMARA's monitoring team disclosed approximately 4,000 instances of election fraud during the parliamentary elections in 2003. Independent monitoring revealed that almost 30 percent of voters were excluded from voter lists and denied their right to vote. Public opinion surveys were crucial to revealing the fraud. Widely publicized by the independent media, these surveys helped inform citizens about the outcomes of the elections and gave them a chance to compare the official results with independent figures.

From the beginning of the campaign, a comprehensive inventory of human resources was undertaken. This inventory was based on reports provided by participating NGOs, the donor community, as well as other individuals. Building on that, it was important to develop networking with a variety of target groups including youth, senior citizens, students, orthodox parishioners, religious and ethnic minorities, local NGOs, local political activists and the local media. KMARA's public outreach effort was guided by baseline surveys regularly conducted in the various regions of Georgia. The surveys sought to identify the mood of voters and differences in attitudes between the various regions. The formulation of the main messages and slogans of the campaign were heavily influenced by the findings of these surveys. Public outreach activities were planned and implemented in three stages: branding, mobilization of volunteers and focusing on elections.

The “Secret” of KMARA’s Success

KMARA's success can be attributed to several key organizational characteristics. First and foremost, the movement had a horizontal structure. KMARA did not have any single leader or a significant hierarchy. By default, all activists were considered equal. The horizontal structure served two crucial purposes. If activists were arrested, the functioning of the organization could continue. While repression in Georgia never escalated into mass arrests, this structure proved to be highly

effective in Adjara where Abashidze's authorities took a more draconian approach. In this region, the tactic of many unrelated cells being active was crucial for the campaign's survival. This structure also inhibited government and other agents from infiltrating and discrediting the movement. In reality, of course, the movement did have leaders. Some activists had more weight than others. Nevertheless, the absence of a formal hierarchy made it easy for educated and motivated activists to make important contributions and to develop ownership for the campaign.

Keeping all activists busy was crucial to ensuring this sense of ownership and the highest possible motivation to participate among all activists. Headquarters was located in the capital and offices were established in nine other regions. The Tbilisi office coordinated planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national campaigns. All activists worked in four fields: public relations, fieldwork, training and finance. Each group consisted of sub-groups. The public relations group included sub-groups working on media relations, speakers, written materials and media monitoring; the field work group addressed issues of regional networking, Tbilisi headquarters' administrative issues and internal communication; the training group was responsible for training trainers and activists; and the finance group carried out financial planning and oversaw spending.

KMARA's most valuable resource was the time contributed to the campaign by volunteer activists. Starting with a core group of just twenty, the number of volunteers reached 3,000 during the campaign's peak. Most of KMARA's activities received funding through the Election Support Program of the Open Society Foundation in Georgia. The funds were not directly provided to the campaign as such, but the materials developed for election-related activities (TV ads, flyers, education materials, etc) were successfully used by the movement for wider purposes. The total amount of expenditure on KMARA activities amounted to approximately US\$ 175,000.

KMARA could initially rely on a very limited number of activists which made cooperation with opposition parties in the initial stages of the campaign important and intense. Facilitated by NGOs and contacts in the National Movement and United Democrats, the two parties' youth branches clandestinely made hundreds of activists available for the first KMARA rallies, particularly that of April 14, 2003, adding credibility to the movement and further underpinning its "mythological" power in public.

Other approaches to increasing KMARA's perceived power were the organization of actions simultaneously in different locations and mobility among activists. The first nationwide action was held on May 12, 2003, involving the mass distribution of leaflets outlining the provisions of the Georgian constitution on torture and illegal detention and the picketing of police stations known for misconduct. KMARA activists rallying in Tbilisi, Gori, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Poti, Telavi, Akhaltsikhe, Ozurgeti, Samtredia and Rustavi were joined by representatives of various human rights

NGOs.¹⁸ KMARA's proactive agenda and assertive behavior helped it to quickly evolve into a legitimate and formidable presence in Georgian politics achieving recognition of its brand at a very early stage.

A further essential feature of KMARA was that it declared that it did not aspire to power and consistently retained a clear distance from opposition parties. This attracted many young people, hitherto, not engaged. Activists made it very clear that their motivation for being involved was exclusively to ensure a change of regime and that they did not aspire to acquire political positions and the personal benefits that were associated with them. By and large, activists did not view their participation in the movement as a step in their careers, which allowed KMARA to avoid some of the typical conflicts experienced in hierarchical organizations in Georgia. Further, involvement in the movement was purely voluntary. Not a single activist was paid. While, after the revolution, a number of activists did accept appointments to positions in the new government, this should be viewed as proof of the effectiveness of KMARA to enable talented young people to develop and succeed, rather than as proof of any profit-making motive on their part.

KMARA's success was also ensured by its clever and continued use of humor in its various activities. In a politically apathetic society such as Georgia, accidental participation in or even viewing of KMARA's funny and positive actions aimed at making fun of the regime, produced sparks of participation among ordinary citizens, some of whom did not even intend to vote.¹⁹ At one such activity, KMARA activists put large-scale banners on display in streets where passers-by could have their picture taken flushing Shevardnadze and his government down a toilet. At another event, they staged a mock funeral, replete with flowers, in an effort to disrupt the presentation of the economic program of For a New Georgia in the garden of the state chancellery. Seven KMARA members were arrested and charged with hooliganism for this attempt to inject some humor into political protest.

The Media

There is wide agreement that another major factor in the success of KMARA, and later the Rose Revolution, was the independent media. In this relation, the independent TV station *Rustavi 2* has been described as “extremely important”.²⁰ Nevertheless, several observers have exaggerated the role of the media in the Georgian revolution. For example, and despite the fact that the printed press in Georgia is very diverse, ranging from liberal broadsheets to tabloids full of conspiracy theories, their very

18 Similar actions were held in Tbilisi on May 4, 5 and 13, July 22 and September 24, in Borjomi on July 6, in Rustavi on October 3 and in Poti on October 17, all in 2003.

19 KMARA's “positive” actions included rock concerts, book collections for schools under the slogan “Enough of the lack of education!” and the collection of rubbish.

20 Interview with Mikheil Saakashvili, in: Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch (eds.), *Revolution of Roses in the Republic of Georgia* (Nova Publishers, New York, 2004), p. 25.

low circulation prevented them from influencing public opinion substantially in the run-up to and during the Rose Revolution.

Nevertheless, the media was instrumental and in order to examine its role in the events of November 2003, it is necessary to take a step back into recent Georgian history. After the armed coup that ousted Georgia's first nationalist president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze was invited back to Georgia and into government. In the beginning, Shevardnadze's power was nominal, with members of the military council and heads of paramilitary groups, such as Tengis Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani, sharing in decision making.

Wishing to curb the power of his opponents, Shevardnadze fostered the emergence of a free press, in order to create space for a more experienced political player, such as himself, to claim political advantage.²¹ When in 1995, he succeeded in arresting both of these notorious figures and began to crack down on paramilitary groups, Shevardnadze turned to a team of young reformers who could "talk the same language" as the West to help him consolidate his position. The so-called "Zhvania-Sakaashvili team" also needed political allies. They, in turn, supported the emergence of independent media, of which *Rustavi 2* was the strongest and best known. The fact that at that time, no single actor in Georgian politics had a complete monopoly on power, made the development of independent media all the more possible. At the same time, *Rustavi 2* was a purely commercial channel and its leadership engaged in a complex of political games with a variety of political actors prior to the 1999 parliamentary elections.²²

When Shevardnadze's regime began to waver and reform was abandoned in 2001, the government tried to shut down *Rustavi 2*. This triggered mass protests among students. The entire government was sacked and *Rustavi 2* survived. Nevertheless, Shevardnadze's regime consistently tried to bring the TV channel into line using other means, including attempting to buy it out. After the commercial *Imedi TV* emerged as a strong competitor in 2001, the issue became one of survival, compelling the *Rustavi 2* leadership to develop closer ties with the opposition. *Rustavi 2* also provided a forum for NGOs to voice criticism of the government, enabling them to pursue their own agendas.²³ This signaled a certain radicalization of the political mood in Georgia.

In the context of the revolutionary process itself, *Rustavi 2* co-sponsored an exit poll that, coupled with parallel vote tabulation, proved significant for challenging the

21 Personal interview with Levan Ramishvili, Tbilisi, June 25, 2005, op cit.

22 Ibid.

23 James V. Wertsch, "Forces Behind the Rose Revolution", in: Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch (eds.), *Revolution of Roses in the Republic of Georgia* (Nova Publishers, New York, 2004), p. 136, op cit.

official, and fraudulent, results of the 2003 elections.²⁴ The poll was released and televised immediately after the closure of polling stations, at 8pm on November 2, 2003, and succeeded in reaching a wide public. This guaranteed public discontent would the official election results considerably differ from the exit poll. Being well aware of the “threat”, the government launched a campaign to discredit the exit poll, inviting a foreign pollster to carry out an “alternative” exit poll that, as expected, converged with the official results. The public popularity of *Rustavi 2* compensated for this and undermined the rival exit poll.

Explaining the Nonviolence of the Rose Revolution

A multiplicity of factors contributed to the fact that violence, much feared by both Georgians and western governments, was avoided in November 2003. The majority of Georgian revolutionaries were not committed pacifists, despite the fact that both KMARA and National Movement activists underwent intensive training in nonviolent protest techniques. When the parliament and other government buildings were occupied, the police had the legitimate right to use force, but chose not to. The protestors were perfectly aware that the risk of bloodshed was real, but many also believed that if bloodshed was inevitable, then so be it.²⁵

Importantly, the shadow of the violence of the civil war of the early 1990s still loomed large over ordinary Georgians, and even over the government to a certain extent. The semi-liberal nature of Shevardnadze’s power made the emergence and strengthening of democratic institutions and democratically-minded actors possible. When Zviad Gamsakhurdia was ousted, such elements were largely absent and their systemic functions were carried out by paramilitary formations and criminal groups. From the mid 1990s, government officials, including many in the police and the armed forces, had to get used to emerging critical pressure from democratic forces, even if limited. Their position became increasingly difficult after 1999, when their legitimacy began to be regularly called into question.²⁶ Shevardnadze was also not considered as having significant blood on his hands. Although power and position could be lost, it was not expected to result in cataclysmic violence.

During the protests that unfolded in the aftermath of the elections in November 2003, it became increasingly clear that President Shevardnadze’s reactions were limited and inadequate. Numerous factions around him were vying for position,

24 The undertaking was also funded by the British Council, the Open Society Foundation Georgia and the Eurasia Foundation and carried out by a U.S. polling organization called the Global Strategy Group.

25 Ghia Nodia, “Breaking the Mold of Powerlessness: The Meaning of Georgia’s Latest Revolution”, in: Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch (eds.), *Revolution of Roses in the Republic of Georgia* (Nova Publishers, New York, 2004), p. 100, op cit.

26 Chris Miller, *Understanding Strategic Nonviolent Struggle: Case Analysis of the Georgian “Rose Revolution”*, BA Thesis, 2004, p. 39.

contributing to the enlargement of the negotiation space for the opposition.²⁷ The fragmentation of pro-Shevardnadze groupings was enhanced by the fact that he did not have a clearly identified successor. When an army does not have a consolidated and efficient chain of command, it has difficulties winning battles.

As for the police and the military, the mere fact that their leadership agreed to negotiations indicated they well realized that with virtually the entire country involved in the protest movement, with the “critical mass” already in place, any attempt to use force would sooner or later result in their own downfall. The number of protestors is not only important to legitimize the revolution in the eyes of the public, but it is also key to overwhelming the police and armed forces at key moments in the revolution, such as when government buildings are occupied. Nevertheless, on November 22, 2003, the risk of violence was strongly felt. While opposition leaders knew that some units would not interfere, no news had been received from a number of special-forces units loyal to the president.

Of course, an important dimension of the whole process was the explicit nonviolent rhetoric and discipline maintained by KMARA. This approach is exemplified by the occasions KMARA activists distributed flowers to troops deployed around the city and when sandwiches were distributed to troops with the same care as given to fellow demonstrators.²⁸ At no point did any group related to KMARA promote or resort to violent actions in the name of the aims of the movement. The impact of this discipline was most apparent during the occupation of the parliament, during which only one window was broken, as the doors were too narrow for the number of demonstrators to get through. Despite the outbreak of a couple of fist fights between citizens and some members of parliament, assigned peacekeepers quickly subdued such incidents. Groups of volunteers stayed in the parliament and the chancellery buildings to ensure that looting and stealing did not take place.²⁹

The Role of International Actors

Western governments, particularly the United States, have been both vilified and lauded for supporting the Rose Revolution. Observers’ reactions have ranged from enthusiasm about the future of democracy in Georgia and the region to far-reaching conspiracy theories that frequently included crediting the U.S. Ambassador in Tbilisi, Richard Miles, with being the *eminence grise* of the revolution. The fact that Miles was also U.S. Ambassador in Belgrade during the revolution to overthrow Milošević only encouraged such thinking.

²⁷ A good example of this can be found in the interview with Tedo Japaridze, in: Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch (eds.), *Revolution of Roses in the Republic of Georgia*, (Nova Publishers, New York, 2004), pp. 53-60, op cit.

²⁸ Chris Miller, *Understanding Strategic Nonviolent Struggle: Case Analysis of the Georgian ‘Rose Revolution’*, BA Thesis, 2004, p. 48, op cit.

²⁹ The chancellery was voluntarily handed over by its head.

Western assistance to the Rose Revolution can be divided into two categories: assistance to lay the foundations for the elections by spreading democratic values and educating the public and immediate political support in the run-up to and during the revolution. Various western funding schemes for NGOs were important for civic education and informing the public about human rights. But, since the funding was foreign, the agenda was designed in western capitals and frequently focused on the entire region, neglecting problems specific to Georgia. In other words, most, if not all, of the western and US supported programs in Georgia existed in many other post-Soviet countries and, therefore, they cannot be credited with the democratic breakthrough.

Some observers have failed to understand that during the revolution, the participation of western actors was not always helpful. At times, it was even detrimental. For example, Georgian civil society members had to work hard to convince some Council of Europe officials that parties, such as the Revival and Industrialist Parties, could not be considered opposition parties. Not only was U.S. Ambassador Miles not the “mastermind” of the revolution, but, on occasion, his involvement proved problematic. In particular, he strongly discouraged decisive action by the opposition in favor of protracted negotiations and considered Mikheil Saakashvili dangerously radical. The OSCE was similarly reluctant in its critical preliminary report on the parliamentary elections of November 2, 2003.

Conclusion

KMARA's campaign was essential for raising public awareness on election-related issues and overcoming widespread political apathy, particularly among Georgian young people, in the run-up to the 2003 elections. The press conferences, weekly events, demonstrations, charity events and actions such as that entitled “Clean Up Your Street – Clean Up Your Country” all contributed to the popularization of the aims of the KMARA movement and made it a household name within a very short period of time.

The movement's countrywide network made it possible to organize “chain campaigns”. An action initiated in the capital was simultaneously supported by events in the regions, thus, creating the impression that KMARA was very powerful. Fear in government circles of the movement's popularity provoked counter measures, contributing to the further popularization of the movement. Overall, KMARA succeeded in informing citizens about their rights and the importance of the elections, considerably increasing turnout and complicating the business of electoral fraud. KMARA's effective capability to project nonviolent power allowed for the mobilization of large numbers of people eager to defend their vote when electoral fraud was disclosed.

After the Rose Revolution, KMARA activists, like all other Georgians, realized that their success had inspired many, to both the East and West of Georgia. They keenly shared their experience and enthusiasm with pro-democracy activists in Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus. Several options were debated as to the further development of the movement, including whether it should become a political party, turn into a civil rights NGO or simply dissolve.

A variety of factors made the Rose Revolution possible: the incumbent regime's systemic weakness, its history of liberal policies, the National Movement Party's success in radicalizing politics and broadening political participation, civic education efforts by civil society organizations during the years immediately prior to the Rose Revolution, free media and the actions of the radical, nonpartisan and nonviolent KMARA.

In Georgia, expectations of disapproval of rigged elections were reduced after the West showed a very reserved attitude to the presidential elections in neighboring Azerbaijan in October 2003. Nonetheless, the successful Rose Revolution convinced many western policymakers that nonviolent regime change was indeed possible in the former Soviet Union and would not inevitably lead to much feared civil war. Thus prepared, the West was ready to engage much more proactively in Ukraine and its Orange Revolution only a year later.

In providing this successful example of democratization, Georgian civil society also contributed to the international debate on democracy assistance in Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere. It demonstrated which forms of support are critical for making it possible for civil society to contribute to electoral change. These include the necessity to fund and train election observers capable of carrying out parallel vote tabulation and exit polling, ideally with support from similar organizations from other CIS countries. Politically active youth groups, such as KMARA, must be included, as should the broadest possible range of NGOs, advocacy groups, local initiatives and other civic structures.

At the same time, in countries with more repressive and authoritarian regimes like Belarus, where it is highly problematic and even dangerous to carry out comprehensive monitoring, there is a risk that the regime will control election monitoring projects and even successfully approach foreign actors to fund them. The importance of spending on civic education should not be underestimated, but this is a more long-term endeavor on which considerable money needs to be spent over time. Finally, international actors such as the European Union and the United States should abandon the illusion that rigged elections might “not be so bad” or “an improvement over the last elections” in post-Soviet countries.

Today, Russia is a resurgent revisionist power that views the advance of democracy in its immediate neighborhood as a threat to be avoided. In this respect, Russia has launched offensives in the context of its bilateral relations with big democracies, as

well as within multilateral organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Major stakeholders in the OSCE should not surrender to Russian pressure and lower the organization's standards on election monitoring. Not resisting Russian pressure to increase its share in monitoring missions risks a major loss of credibility. This can also put democratic activists and forces in danger.

Finally, pressure on remaining non-democratic regimes in the post-Soviet space should include sets of measures primarily focusing on the internal situation in the country. For example, pressure should be exerted on authorities to stop arresting people for distributing campaign materials and to release political prisoners. For that matter, western and European Union ambassadors could make good use of their diplomatic status and demonstrate alongside pro-democracy forces to make everyone understand that freedom is a right, not a luxury.

Chronology

April 14, 2003

KMARA holds its first public action. Some 500 students march from Tbilisi State University to the state chancellery to protest against the pro-government bloc called For A New Georgia.

April 21, 2003

The leader of the National Democratic Party, which is part of Shevardnadze's For A New Georgia bloc, Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia, accuses Russian intelligence of providing support to KMARA with the aim of destabilizing Georgia.

April 22, 2003

KMARA graffiti appear all over Tbilisi and subsequently in towns across Georgia.

May 12, 2003

KMARA holds its first nationwide action to condemn police brutality and corruption, with demonstrations taking place in Tbilisi and ten locations across Georgia. Further demonstrations are held over the following days.

June 2, 2003

President Shevardnadze threatens to expel organizations encouraging political instability. Presidential aides later confirm that these accusations were directed at the Open Society Georgia Foundation.

June 3, 2003

KMARA and five opposition parties stage a 5,000-strong protest in front of the parliament to demand the replacement of the central election commission, whose chairman and nine members subsequently resign.

July 13, 2003

Some 1,000 KMARA activists, human rights NGO representatives and members of the three main opposition parties gather in front of the internal affairs ministry to present a mock diploma "for adherence to President Shevardnadze and violation of the law".

September 20, 2003

Over 1,000 people gather in Mziuri Park in Tbilisi for a free concert organized by KMARA. Donations of Georgian books are requested from visitors.

October 2, 2003

50 KMARA activists collect food, clothes and toys for a local orphanage in Telavi. One activist is arrested but the charges are not made public.

October 10, 2003

KMARA activists gather in front of the state chancellery in Tbilisi and stage a mock funeral for Shevardnadze's For A New Georgia bloc. Seven activists are arrested.

October 20, 2003

KMARA activists invite passers-by in Tbilisi to be photographed with the “Bloc Toilet” campaign materials. KMARA and the opposition party National Movement organize a rally in Zestafoni demanding the resignation of President Shevardnadze.

October 23, 2003

The KMARA office in Tbilisi is vandalized by unidentified assailants.

November 2, 2003

Parliamentary elections are held in Georgia.

November 6, 2003

The deadline for the central election commission to announce the official results of the November 2 elections expires. Hundreds of people gather in Tbilisi demanding the resignation of President Shevardnadze. Thousands of riot police are stationed across the city.

November 7, 2003

Thousands gather in Tbilisi and Zugdidi demanding President Shevardnadze's resignation and claiming the parliamentary elections were rigged.

November 8, 2003

Large crowds remain in Tbilisi as army personnel in riot gear block the state chancellery. Hundreds of additional troops and riot police are ordered into Tbilisi from Eastern Georgia.

November 9, 2003

As mass protests continue in front of the parliament, talks are held between Shevardnadze and the three main opposition leaders, but quickly collapse. The central election commission suspends further vote counting and demands that the courts rule on the validity of the election.

November 11, 2003

President Shevardnadze meets with U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles to discuss the political crisis as demonstrators continue to protest outside the parliament.

November 12, 2003

The leader of the National Movement, Mikheil Saakashvili, calls for demonstrators to go on hunger strike until Shevardnadze resigns.

November 13, 2003

With approximately 10,000 protesters gathered in Tbilisi, government officials propose the conscription of all KMARA activists into the Georgian army. Meanwhile, Mikheil Saakashvili calls on citizens to withhold all tax payments. The central election commission calls for repeat elections in nine districts.

November 14, 2003

Thousands of demonstrators surround President Shevardnadze's office, but are blocked by police forces. Mikheil Saakashvili announces his supporters will collect 1 million signatures demanding Shevardnadze's resignation, as several opposition figures call for "full civil disobedience" beginning with November 17. The central election commission files a defamation suit against *Rustavi 2 TV* and KMARA for an advertisement claiming the parliamentary elections were rigged.

November 17, 2003

The Governor of Telavi, Medea Mezrishvili, resigns as demanded by a National Movement demonstration on November 16. Elections are reheld in some of the districts identified by the central election commission.

November 18, 2003

Several thousand people gather for pro-Shevardnadze demonstrations in Tbilisi.

November 19, 2003

After criticism from President Shevardnadze, the chairman of the state radio and TV corporation, Zaza Shendelia, calls a press conference to announce his resignation.

November 20, 2003

The central election commission announces the final results of the parliamentary elections: For a New Georgia 21.32 percent; Revival Union 18.84 percent; National Movement 18.08 percent; Labor Party 12.4 percent; Burjanadze-Democrats 8.79 percent; and New Rights Party 7.35 percent.

November 22, 2003

Over 20,000 protesters gather in Tbilisi demanding President Shevardnadze's resignation and new parliamentary and presidential elections. Mikheil Saakashvili leads the demonstrators to the state chancellery and issues an ultimatum to Shevardnadze: resign within one hour and apologize to the Georgian people. Saakashvili then leads demonstrators to parliament and proceeds to storm the building without resistance from interior ministry troops assigned to provide security. Protesters carry roses as they occupy the building.

November 23, 2003

Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, meets with President Shevardnadze and opposition leaders Nino Burjanadze, Mikheil Saakashvili and Zurab Zhvania. President Shevardnadze resigns late that evening in return for immunity from prosecution. Speaker of the Parliament Nino Burjanadze assumes responsibilities as interim president.

November 24, 2003

The results of the November 2 parliamentary elections are annulled by the Supreme Court.



KMARA poster: Shevardnadze and his allies with Marx, Engels, Lenin. The slogan reads: "You are a disease! Leave us!".



KMARA photo actions in Tbilisi: Have your picture taken with leaders of the pro-Shevardnadze "For a New Georgia" bloc on their way to prison or being flushed down a toilet.





Caricature masks of President Shevardnadze and leaders of the "For a New Georgia" bloc.



KMARA activists block one of Tbilisi's main streets in protest at the violent suppression of a demonstration in Borjomi in July 2003.



KMARA activists defending the parliament during post-election protests.



November 22, 2003. Demonstrators facing security forces raise their hands to show their protest is nonviolent.



December 22, 2003. Thousands of protestors gather at Freedom Square, Tbilisi.

IT'S TIME! PORA AND THE ORANGE REVOLUTION IN UKRAINE

Vladyslav Kaskiv, Iryna Chupryna, Yevhen Zolotariov

The election of the president of Ukraine in 2004 was a serious test for the maturity of Ukrainian civil society. The Orange Revolution broke out in the aftermath of obvious election fraud. Lasting seventeen days, it brought millions of Ukrainian citizens onto the streets in peaceful demonstration and protest. One in five Ukrainians participated in the Orange Revolution, making it the largest protest movement in Europe since the end of the Cold War. While not a single drop of blood was shed, the Orange Revolution led to a change of regime, established the rule of a legitimately elected president and fundamentally altered the image of Ukraine internationally. This democratic breakthrough demonstrated a high level of civic awareness among Ukrainian citizens and marked the birth of a new political era for the country.

One of the key driving forces behind the Orange Revolution was PORA, a civic campaign whose aim was to ensure the democratic election of the president in 2004. PORA was the first to erect tents on the streets of Kyiv and organized the famous tent city, blockaded administrative buildings and made a crucial contribution to the organization of the all-Ukrainian student strike that was key to the Orange Revolution. Prior to the revolutionary events, PORA informed and mobilized the public about the elections and the potential of election fraud. During the second half of 2004, PORA conducted national grass-root information, education and mobilization activities using “hand to hand” and “door to door” methods. In the absence of independent mass media, PORA volunteers became a key source of independent and alternative information for Ukrainian citizens. From March 2004 until January 2005, PORA distributed 40 million copies of print materials, involved in its work 35,000 permanent participants and an even larger number of regular supporters. PORA activists conducted more than 750 regional pickets and public actions, organized 17 mass rallies with more than 3,000 participants, set up the tent camp on Khreshchatyk in Kyiv (1,546 tents and more than 15,000 “residents”) and 12 other tent camps across Ukraine. The official campaign web site (www.pora.org.ua) was among the five most popular web sites in Ukraine in the run-up to and during the Orange Revolution.

PORA was a special phenomenon. Actors of civil society in Ukraine were, for the first time, able to exert influence on the political process, thereby, creating preconditions for the building of a new political nation. Boris Nemtsov, member of the Federal Council of the Russian Union of Right Forces, said that “for the first time in world history, within such a short period of time, (PORA) managed to solve organizational

and educational tasks of fantastic complexity: to create an efficient management structure, to involve and train thousands of activists, to mobilize the whole society, and first of all young people, for the active protection of their civil rights”.¹

This chapter presents an overview of factors underlying the emergence and development of PORА as a mass civic initiative, including a comprehensive description of the formation and development of the campaign, the main phases of its activity and analysis of the organizational and methodological principles key to its success. In doing so, the chapter will focus on what came to be known as Yellow PORА, not treating the related but distinct Black PORА.²

Post-Independence Ukraine and Democratization

In 1991, Ukraine seceded from the Soviet Union and subsequently established itself as an independent state. Rare among post-Soviet states, it managed to avoid interethnic conflicts and civil war. On December 1, 1991, Leonid Kravchuk was elected the first president of Ukraine. In 1994, he was replaced by Leonid Kuchma, who remained the head of the Ukrainian state for two terms, leaving office in 2004.

Since 2000, Ukraine has registered considerable economic growth. “In the course of the last four years, the average annual economic growth rate was 7.3 percent, industrial production increased by 16 percent and export volume, by 28 percent”.³ The country possesses a developed network of oil and gas pipelines, depositories and refineries and an advanced electrical power grid. Ukraine is also a part of an important Eurasian transport corridor. In early 2000, a team of reformers, led by Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko and First Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, entered government. They initiated reforms to curb the shadow economy and implemented a range of actions to improve living standards. Specifically, arrears in wages and pensions were largely paid off.

During this reform period, Ukraine declared its aspirations for European integration. This new approach triggered optimism in society and stimulated business and social activities. Steady economic growth and booming business characterized the period. However, the growing and influential middle and upper middle class of entrepreneurs and young professionals were becoming increasingly dissatisfied

1 Boris Nemtsov, speaking at the ceremony marking the completion of PORА activities on January 29, 2005.

2 Influenced by Serbia’s OTPOR and Georgia’s KMARA, Black PORА advocated a more spontaneous and decentralized approach, aimed at directly discrediting the Kuchma government.

3 From the speech of Anders Aslund in the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress, Washington, DC, on May 12, 2004. The full text of this speech can be accessed on the following website: <http://artukraine.com/buildukraine/uafuture1.htm>.