

**Developing a framework for
understanding the complexity of
external support for nonviolent
social movements**

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Introduction

The “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine 2004 stirred up a discussion about the role of external support for social movements. There is a tendency to see this kind of support in black and white, either as something desirable or as something completely unacceptable that destroys a “pure” movement. Debates about financial support have been most vocal: one has to be either for or against US sponsoring of revolutions around the world. This paper will look at the complexities of external support, and try to get beyond the either/or discussions.

Financial support can be very important, but it is far from the only kind of support. I will explore both the many different kinds of support one can give and receive, and the different kinds of meaning one can attach to both giving and receiving. It is intended as a tool to develop the analysis, and I am more concerned with raising questions than providing answers. Examples for the text are mainly drawn from the external support for the democracy movement in Ukraine, which developed into what is now known as the Orange Revolution in 2004, but it is not a thorough analysis of that particular case. It is my hope that the suggested framework for analysing external support can be applied to all kinds of nonviolent social movements working for social change. “External” is here used to cover everyone outside the borders of the state of Ukraine, but the term “external” is problematic, because as soon as one starts to give any kind of support, one has become a part in the struggle and can no longer be considered to be an outsider. Another problem is that the borders between donating and selling services are not clear cut.

The Orange revolution did not come out of the blue in 2004, but was the culmination of a democracy movement which has its roots back to the early 1990’s. This movement, consisting of hundreds of organisations working for democratisation had grown stronger during the last 4 years. The disappearance and murder of the independent journalist Heorhiy Gongadze in 2000 created the emotional chock and anger that would lead to increased demands for democratisation¹. The parliamentary elections in 2002 gave the different NGOs concerned with democracy and human rights important experiences in coalition building, which was crucial for the orange revolution. The primarily youth and student movement PORA, which was inspired by the Serbian Otpor movement from 2000 and Georgian Kmara movement from 2003, played an important role in voter education and mobilisation in the months prior to the presidential election of 2004.²

¹ Nadia Diuk, "The Triumph of Civil Society," in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*, ed. Anders Åslund and Michael McFaul (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006) pp. 75-76; Majken Sørensen, "Ukraines orange revolution efteråret 2004 [Ukraine's Orange Revolution Autumn 2004]," *Sociologisk Årbok*, no. 2 (2005) pp. 41-42.

² Pavol Demes and Joerg Forbrig, "Pora - "It's Time" for Democracy in Ukraine," in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*, ed. Anders Åslund and Michael McFaul (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006) p. 86, 88-96; Sørensen, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution efteråret 2004 [Ukraine's Orange Revolution Autumn 2004]," p. 42
Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*, 1st ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press New Haven and London, 2005)p. 73-76.

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What

To begin the analysis of external support, we can start with a simple question: What kind of support are we talking about? First of all, I find it useful to separate between different kinds of support, and suggest a division into five main categories: 1. financial; 2. material; 3. practical; 4. participation; and 5. symbolic. The categories are fluid and an analysis of different cases might lead to additional categories.

Financial

Financial support is to give money to the movement, a theme Johansen writes about separately for this seminar. Some questions arise from this financial support: Is the financial support given with conditions or is it unconditional – can the receiver do with the money what they want? What do they use them to buy – posters and stickers or western consultants? Would they have had a chance of getting these things without the money? Do they get the money in secret, or in the open? Are the conditions secret or open (if there are any)? Are there unspoken conditions –and if so, does anyone feel obliged to obey them? Or pretend to obey them? Considering this kind of questions will help the analysis. Debate about the amount of money that went to Ukraine will probably never end. A wide range of different figures have been mentioned – something we will return to when talking about the identity of donors.

Material

It is also possible to give material support – instead of giving money; one can give all sorts of material assistance – e.g computers, tents and t-shirts. Since the result will come out as the same no matter if you are given already printed stickers or money to buy stickers yourself, the border between these two categories is fluid. In this context it is important to ask some other questions: Did the receiver ask for what they are given? Did the donor give what he thought the receiver wanted, or did he give what he had, or what he wanted them to have? Is a group given what it asks for, or what the donor think it want, or what the donor want to give?

Practical

Another kind of support is practical but not material. It can be different kinds of training, for example in nonviolence, branding of a movement, web design or radio broadcasting. If you receive practical training, how much control does your trainer get over your new skills? Activists from Otpor in Serbia have given practical training to many groups around the world, including PORA in Ukraine, which no one has attempted to hide.³ This kind of practical training take two forms - one side is the transfer of knowledge and skills, but perhaps even more important is the inspiration they provide by their very example – they can tell that it was possible to bring down Milosevic, and therefore it is also possible to bring down other dictators. The practical support is not a manual that can be copied from one country to another, but guidance about thinking strategically about your own and the regime’s strengths and weaknesses.⁴

³ PORA mention Otpor several times in its “concept” PORA, *Concept of National Informational, Educational and Mobilization Campaign* 2004 available from

<http://pora.org.ua/en/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=11&Itemid>

⁴ Personal communication with Ivan Marovic from Otpor, Belgrade June 13th 2006

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The regime changes that have taken place in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine were all centred around elections, and here a different kind of practical support, election monitoring, seem to be important.⁵ This can be done by local observers, but it can also be a form of external support. Traditionally international observers will do neutral observations, but an alternative result and the dissemination of the alternative result will be done by local organisations. In Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) generally has credibility in election monitoring, and observe both the election campaign and the election itself. The International Election Observation Mission in Ukraine (IEOM), was the biggest election monitoring effort ever in terms of the numbers of international observers deployed.⁶ There is of course no way of knowing exactly how much election fraud is committed, and in the case of Ukraine, it has been claimed that also Yushchenko's side was using fraud, but that this fraud was never investigated because it was not the side that was "supposed" to commit fraud.⁷

Participation

Linked to practical support, but going one step further is for outsiders to physically participate in a movement's activities to support them. There are no organised examples of this from Ukraine, but International Solidarity Movement (ISM) in Palestine is an example of how this can be done, where international activists participate in Palestinian demonstrations and actions without claiming to be neutral observers.

Symbolic support

All the four other kinds of support also include symbolic aspects – all kind of giving is also a moral and symbolic support. But there are types of support which are purely symbolic, and they belong in this category. Symbolic support can take different forms with varying degrees of impact – it can range from individuals signing a support letter or famous persons publicly supporting an opposition movement, to heads of states receiving opposition movements as official guests, which is a powerful political gesture. Given by the right people at the right moment, symbolic support can have a tremendous impact, because of the great value there is attached to some gestures. In Ukraine, one such gesture was the visit of Poland's foreign minister, who was also chair-in-office of the Council of Europe, on November 12th, before the second round of the election. He did not meet with Prime Minister Yanukovych or President Kuchma as originally planned, but with the opposition candidate Yushchenko and the head of the Central Election Commission.

Symbolic support influences both the nonviolent movement and the regime in power, but the influence can go in many directions. One can imagine a regime that will be discouraged if its former friends now support the opposition, but one can just as easily imagine situations where moral support from the "wrong people" will discredit the

⁵ In the example of Ukraine, Sushko & Prystayko write that election observation is one of the most powerful tools for western influence Oleksandr Sushko and Olena Prystayko, "Western Influence," in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*, ed. Anders Åslund and Michael McFaul (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006) p. 136

⁶ Sushko and Prystayko, "Western Influence," pp. 137-138

⁷ Johannes Wahlström, "Spelet om Ukraina [The Game over Ukraine]," *Ordfront* May 2005.

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movement. In Serbia, the support that Otpor received from the NATO countries, which had just bombed Serbia discredited Otpor in the eyes of some people. A movement does not necessarily want symbolic support from everybody; because moral support from some groups or persons can discredit the movement in the eyes of the local people they are trying to win over to their side. This goes for all the different categories of support, but the problem with symbolic support is that it does not “cost” anything for the donor, and it is difficult for the receiver to decline it or say that we never received that, as you can with financial or practical support.

In the case of Ukraine, the public statements from the USA and the EU are all concerned with democratisation and support for free and fair elections, and not with support for individual candidates⁸. It is not necessary to publicly support their favourite, as long as he is the one to gain from more transparent elections.

Who

After having considered **what** can be given, it is time to turn to **who** is giving and receiving. Again the picture is more complex than the democracy movement in Ukraine receives support from the USA: Who is the USA, and who is the Ukrainian democracy movement? Support can come from something as different as individuals and small local organisations to private institutions, political parties, NGOs, aid agencies, and the ministry of foreign affairs in a donor country. It can be given to individuals, to an unstructured network, to hierarchical organisations, political parties, or independent media. To illustrate the complexities of identities, we can look at one example from Ukraine: Financial support to the democracy movement came from the USA without any doubt. But from whom did the money come, and who did they go to? Some newspapers like to suggest some kind of conspiracy: “... *The campaign is an American creation, a sophisticated and brilliantly conceived exercise in western branding and mass marketing that, in four countries in four years, has been used to try to salvage rigged elections and topple unsavoury regimes. Funded and organised by the US government, deploying US consultancies, pollsters, diplomats, the two big American parties and US non-government organisations...*”⁹

The problem with the conspiracy is that it is not difficult to find out who gave what. Wilson has a long list of open sources about who gave what amount to whom for what projects, including USAID, National Endowment for Democracy and the Renaissance Foundation.¹⁰ USAID alone gave US\$1.475 million for election-related activities, and some of it went through other institutes like Freedom House.¹¹ The Democracy movement/Orange Revolution is a very broad and varied phenomenon – there were different political parties supporting Yushchenko in the “Our Ukraine” coalition, hundreds of NGOs working on different aspects of democratisation, including election monitoring, voter education, the student/youth movement PORA, which is also a coalition, independent media and research institutes doing opinion and exit polls which in Ukraine was crucial in providing an alternative election result to discredit the

⁸ Sushko and Prystayko, "Western Influence," p. 128-129

⁹ Ian Traynor, "US campaign behind the turmoil in Kiev," *The Guardian*, November 26 2004. (Chauvier 2005b)., Traynor 2004

¹⁰ Wilson, *Ukraine's orange revolution* pp. 183-189

¹¹ Sushko and Prystayko, "Western Influence," p. 135

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official result.¹² The money went to different projects and institutions in Ukraine, but also to the government side, including the Central Election Commission responsible for the official election result.¹³ It has been suggested that US\$65 million went directly to Yushchenko, but it has not been proven.¹⁴

For the purpose of this article, it is not necessary to know who exactly how much money went to Ukraine, but it is important to acknowledge that mapping both donors and receivers are complex processes.

Separating the function from the meaning of giving and receiving

We should separate between the **function** of the support that can be observed from the outside, and the **meaning** it has for both the giver and receiver. – what can money buy that could not be bought otherwise, how does moral support tip the balance of power, what can training give a group that it did not have before, does an increased number of election monitors make it possible to observe more voting stations, and do they as foreigners have more credibility? These things can generally be observed from outside the movement.

But then there is the equally important question of what subjective meaning the individuals attach to the giving and receiving, which we can only know anything about if they tell us about how they feel about it or why they give or receive. They can offer this information by themselves, or we can ask them, but we have no way of knowing whether they are telling the truth about their feelings and reasons. They can have an intention to deceive us, they can be deceiving themselves, they can have multiple reasons and feelings but only share the most “honourable” with us. The why question is difficult to answer unless you can read peoples minds, but we can some indicators by asking them, and other indicators by observing them: What do they say they do? What do they actually do? What is the result? Do they change what they say or do if the result is not what they say they want? Also myths not based on reality have a real impact.¹⁵

Why give and receive?

An analysis of external support must also include considerations about the **motivation** for giving and receiving of all the different “who”s identified. Giving can be based on a feeling of a moral obligation to give to someone less privileged than you, or it can be based on an assumption of getting something in return, either in the short or the long run. Receiving can be based on a sense of need, of not being able to get what you want through your own resources, or it can be part of a longer relationship of reciprocity. All the “who”s identified above can have different reasons, and there is not necessarily a correspondence between the motives of the donor and the receiver. The donor can have an expectation of getting something in return, while the receiver

¹² Michael McFaul, "Conclusion: The Orange Revolution in a Comparative Perspective," in *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*, ed. Anders Åslund and Michael McFaul (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006)pp. 175-176

¹³ Wilson, *Ukraine's orange revolution* p. 186

¹⁴ Jean-Marie Chauvier, "Ukraine: a new cold war," *Le Monde Diplomatique* January 2005. make the US\$65 million claim, and e.g. Wilson, *Ukraine's orange revolution* p. 187 is sceptical about it.

¹⁵ Sushko and Prystayko, "Western Influence," p. 125

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can be motivated by a sense of urgency and accept support from anyone willing to give without any intentions of “paying back”. It is possible to imagine conflicting motives within the same donor or receiver. It is difficult to get a clear answer to the why question, again it can be helpful to look at what both the donor and receiver say, what they do, and what the result is. E.g. it is much easier to believe statements about the importance of democratic standards and free and fair elections if the same standards are expected elsewhere in the world. A donor claiming support for free and fair elections in Ukraine is more convincing if he does not support dictatorships elsewhere in the world at the same time. If there exist contradictions between what is said and what is done, one has to look for other potential motives that can be less honourable, such as expectations of increased influence, for example in political, economic or military areas.

Conclusion: Why a balanced analysis is important

We have now looked at the different forms external support can take, the importance of being precise in establishing who is giving and receiving; and looked at some of the problems with analysing the motivations for giving and receiving. All these different kinds of support can be very important, and taken together they can look overwhelming. The border between external support and external interference is not always clear cut.

In the case of Ukraine the extent of the external support has led to many conspiracy theories about how the Orange Revolution was planned and scripted by the CIA. Although the external support does look massive, strategic thinking in the democracy movement should not be confused with scripting. If you as a movement have years of experience with election fraud behind you, it makes sense to think ahead and plan for an expected election fraud. That protests are organised beforehand and do not happen “spontaneously” should not lead one to jump to conclusions about the impact of foreign influence.

In my opinion, saying that the Ukrainian Orange Revolution was planned in Washington shows lack of respect for the millions of people who were outraged by a stolen election, and without whom there would have been no mass mobilisation and no Orange Revolution.

How can conspiracy theories be countered? If enough people believe in myths about foreign manipulation, the myths influence events themselves. There can be reasons for not wanting to counter conspiracy theories, because they make you look much more powerful and will therefore demoralise the other side. But if you want to counter them, the route goes through transparency, which has also happened in Ukraine: Otpor in Serbia is very open about its support for other movements and has never made a secret out of it; PORA right from the beginning wrote that it was determined to counter election fraud¹⁶, and US institutes like Freedom House, USAID and

¹⁶ PORA's first newsletter states: *“In short, the main goals of the PORA campaign is to deliver objective information on elections and candidates to every citizen; to explain to voters the importance of their participation in the elections; and to help ensure the legitimacy of elections and to protect their results from falsification”* (emphasis in original) PORA, *Times of Change* no. 1 August 2004 available from

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National Endowment for Democracy have never made it a secret that they support activities for democracy in Ukraine. This article has only used examples from western support for the democratisation movement in Ukraine, but Russia also supported Yanukovich's side, and western consultants were probably also employed by Yanukovich.¹⁷ Examples like these are not included because it is support for the existing power-holders and not for a social movement.

http://pora.org.ua/en/component/option,com_docman/task,view_category/catid,95/Itemid,0/order,dmdate_published/ascdesc,ASC/

¹⁷ See Sushko and Prystayko, "Western Influence," pp. 152-253 for different figures.

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