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Activity of youth movements in Ukraine at the turn of the XX–XXI centuries

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Abstract. The purpose of the study is to analyze the evolution of the youth protest movement in Ukraine in the late 1990s — early 2000s. A comparative historical method and an interdisciplinary approach are applied. The author’s scientific contribution consists in the fact that for the first time in Russian historiography, such problems as the role of Ukrainian youth and students in the Revolution on granite and the “Ukraine without Kuchma” campaign are seriously studied, as well as the history of the creation of the youth organization “Pora”, which was destined to play one of the key roles in the Orange revolution in Ukraine at the end of 2004. The author comes to the conclusion that the genesis of the Ukrainian youth protest movement at the turn of the XX–XXI centuries is distinguished by a significant originality, and its result was the emergence of a phenomenon unique for the Ukrainian socio-political space — the organization “Pora”. It is emphasized that this structure was created on the theoretical and practical basis of previous anti-government campaigns, in which Ukrainian youth took a direct part. At the same time, it was guided by the experience of similar foreign movements that had previously successfully applied the methodology of nonviolent struggle against the ruling regimes developed in the West. Like its European associates, “Pora” has made a significant contribution to the victory of the Color revolution in its own state.

Keywords: Revolution on granite, Ukraine without Kuchma campaign, Color revolutions, Orange revolution

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Деятельность молодежных движений на Украине на рубеже XX–XXI веков

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Аннотация. Цель исследования — анализ эволюции молодежного протестного движения на Украине в конце 1990-х — начале 2000-х гг. Применены сравнительно-исторический метод и междисциплинарный подход. Научный вклад автора состоит в том, что впервые в отечественной историографии серьезному изучению подвергаются такие проблемы, как роль украинской молодежи и студенчества в «революции на граните» и кампании «Украина без Кучмы», а также история создания молодежной организации «Пора», которой было суждено сыграть одну из ключевых ролей в «оранжевой революции» на Украине в конце 2004 г. Автор приходит к выводу, что генезис украинского молодежного протестного движения на рубеже XX–XXI вв. отличается значительным своеобразием, а его итогом стало появление уникального для общественно-политического пространства Незалежной феномена — организации «Пора». Подчеркнуто, что данная структура была создана на теоретическом и практическом базисе предыдущих антиправительственных кампаний, в которых самое непосредственное участие принимала украинская молодежь. При этом она ориентировалась и на опыт аналогичных зарубежных движений, ранее успешно применивших разработанную на Западе методику ненасильственной борьбы с правящими режимами. Как и ее европейские единомышленники, «Пора» внесла значительный вклад в победу «цветной революции» в собственном государстве.

Ключевые слова: революция на граните, Украина без Кучмы, цветные революции, оранжевая революция

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Introduction

The “orange revolution” took place in Ukraine at the end of 2004. It was the third consecutive successful political regime change operation in the Eurasian space since the beginning of the XXI century, following the “bulldozer revolution” in Serbia and the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia. Conducted according to an identical scenario with the help of “soft power” technologies

imported from abroad, they represented a unique phenomenon in the history of modern times, called “colour revolutions”. The youth organizations adhering to the principles of non-violent struggle against the authorities played a huge role in the victory of anti-government forces in all three cases.

During the “Orange Revolution” the use of “colour” technologies reached its pinnacle, so the Ukrainian case is rightly considered as “exemplary” in the study of the phenomenon of “colour revolutions”. The factor of participation of the youth and students in the events of 2004 is not an exception in this context. Moreover, unlike Serbia and Georgia, by the time the acute socio-political crisis began, Ukraine had already had a unique and very rich history of such structures, which determined a significant originality of the youth protest movement on the eve and during the “Orange revolution” and largely predetermined the final success of the opposition. It should be noted that both the “Orange Revolution” itself and the participation of the youth movements in the “colour revolutions” held in Serbia and Georgia in 2000–2003 have already been in the field of view of researchers [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. However, a direct analysis of the activities of the youth movements in Ukraine in the late XX — early XXI centuries in the domestic historiography has not yet been carried out. It seems necessary to eliminate this gap.

“Revolution on granite”

The first youth opposition groups in Ukraine emerged in the late 1980s. For instance, two youth organisations, which had been formed in Lviv, when it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, resumed their activities — “Prosvita” (founded in 1868) and “Plas”t (1911). “Student Brotherhood” was founded in May 1989 in Lviv, and in December of the same year in Kiev the “Ukrainian Student Union” was founded by the natives of the central and eastern regions of the republic. In March 1991 they united into the “Union of Ukrainian Students”. Among the demands of these informal student organisations (the only fully legal all-republican youth structure remained the Komsomol almost until the collapse of the USSR) were the introduction of religious holidays, the increase of national consciousness among Ukrainian students and the youth, the closure of nuclear power plants in Ukraine and the punishment of those responsible for the Chernobyl accident [7. P. 145–146]. At the turn of the 80-90s of the XX century, they were actively involved in the rich social and political life of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, making an important contribution to Ukraine’s independence in 1991.

The most striking anti-government action of that time was the student hunger strike, which went down in history as the “revolution on granite”. It was organized in Kiev in October 1990, a few weeks after the adoption of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine. The protest was directed

against the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, V. Masol, whose appointment was perceived as a concession to the communist regime. The students made five demands to the authorities: holding multiparty parliamentary elections no later than spring 1991; refusal to sign the Union Treaty; nationalization of Communist Party's property; return of Ukrainian conscripts to Ukraine; and Masol's resignation. The striking students declared: "The time has come to choose: either we will achieve that Ukraine will become independent and democratic, or we will remain a colony of the empire, spiritually poor denationalized people" [8. P. 173–174]. It should be noted that to achieve these goals then exclusively non-violent methods were used.

About one hundred thousand students of Ukrainian technical schools, vocational schools and universities, mostly from Kiev, Dnipropetrovsk and Lviv, took part in the large-scale protest action, which amounted to one fifth of the republic's student community. On October 2, 1990, about a hundred activists set up tents on the granite-covered (hence the name of this "revolution") October Square, later renamed Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti), and went on hunger strike. Another hundred and fifty students, who did not participate in the hunger strike directly, maintained public order, provided first aid and communicated with the media. In a number of major cities, including Donetsk and Luhansk, thousands of students demonstrated in support of the hunger strikers in the center of Kyiv. In the capital itself, the "revolutionaries" managed to paralyze traffic partially, surround the Supreme Soviet and occupy a number of buildings of Taras Shevchenko University. Moreover, they had an opportunity to appear live on one of the TV channels and present their demands to the authorities. The core of the protesters were members of the above-mentioned "Student Brotherhood" and "Ukrainian Student Union" [8. P. 174].

On October 17, the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic adopted a resolution "On Consideration of the Demands of Students on Hunger Strike in Kiev since October 2, 1990" [9], which satisfied the political demands of the striking students. V. Masol was forced to leave his post; nevertheless, new parliamentary elections were postponed until 1994, which prevented a complete restructuring of Ukraine's political system, as the young radicals desired. "Revolution on Granite" did not achieve all its goals, but its participants gained invaluable experience of non-violent struggle against the regime, which they had already used in the post-Soviet period. Many activists of the 1990 student strike subsequently took a direct part in major protests against the current government, especially during the "Ukraine without Kuchma" campaign and the Orange Revolution, and made an important contribution to the emergence of new anti-government movements in Ukraine.

“Ukraine without Kuchma” campaign

In the early 1990s, youth and student political activity in Ukraine almost came to naught for a while. High unemployment, non-working social elevators, and general disappointment with the socio-economic and socio-political course of the leadership of the newly independent state led to the withdrawal of young people from big politics for a whole decade. Everything changed at the beginning of the XXI century. The emergence of a new protest wave among Ukrainian youth was associated with the “Ukraine without Kuchma” campaign.

The immediate occasion for its start was the disappearance and death in the fall of 2000 of a popular journalist, editor-in-chief of the Ukrainian Pravda website, H. Gongadze, known for his anti-corruption investigations. Soon after the discovery of the journalist’s decapitated body, some audio recordings were made public, in which a man with a voice very similar to the President of Ukraine L. Kuchma one gave orders to the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to “radically solve the issue of Gongadze” [10. P. 20]. This “tape scandal” became the trigger for the beginning of a large-scale anti-presidential movement under the slogan “Ukraine without Kuchma”, the backbone of which was formed by a number of opposition parties and social movements, including the youth and student organisations.

The “Ukraine without Kuchma” campaign was taking place from December 2000 to March 2001, and at its very beginning, the All-Ukrainian Public Resistance Committee “For Truth!” was established in Lviv by the students of local universities. This was an absolutely new phenomenon in the socio-political life of Ukraine. Its work was attended by figures of the “revolution on granite”, which allowed for a kind of “passing of the baton” from the older generation of youth “revolutionaries” to the new one. Thus, one of the key roles in the work of the Committee “For Truth!” and the campaign “Ukraine without Kuchma” as a whole was played by M. Svistovich, an active participant of the October events of 1990. Ten years later, he initiated a street protest, which was later joined by thousands of people. Together with his colleagues, Svistovich created a special website “Maidan”, where everyone could publish news, opinions, rumors, thus breaking through the information blockade by the authorities. As the Western researcher M. Colin notes, it was even possible to receive messages from civil servants, police and the Security Service of Ukraine [11. P. 102–103]. The site became very popular (as far as it was possible at the initial stage of the spread of the Internet in the country) and played an important role in planning and coordinating the protests.

In mid-December, on the initiative of several former activists of the “revolution on granite”, a small tent encampment was set up on Maidan Nezalezhnosti. Its participants demanded the resignation of the country’s top leadership and an impartial investigation into the circumstances of Gongadze’s death. On March 7, 2001, the camp was dismantled, and two days later there were violent clashes between protesters and law enforcement officers in the center of Kiev. The police detained several hundred people. According to a member of the Committee “For

Truth!” A. Gusak, ordinary citizens who supported the protest were just not ready for a real confrontation with the authorities: “We were ready, but people were not, and we could not mobilize them... We could not find the key to their hearts” [11. P. 104]. After that, the authorities managed to take control of the situation.

Despite its defeat, the “Ukraine without Kuchma” campaign had serious consequences for the development of the opposition youth movement in Ukraine. According to American researcher T. Kuzio, this socio-political crisis seriously undermined the legitimacy of the ruling elites, discredited the incumbent president, and created a group of supporters of radical change ready to take a very active part in the 2002 parliamentary elections and the 2004 presidential race. “Most importantly,” writes T. Cuzio, “they awakened the traditionally apathetic youth from their political lethargy” [12. P. 373]. It is worth noting that, as in the case of the “revolution on granite,” the factor of experience that the young protesters gained was of great importance. Moreover, it was then that they began to master the skills of non-violent resistance developed in West and to use some of the infamous 198 methods of nonviolent struggle against political regimes of the American political technologist G. Sharp [13. P. 101–110]. Many activists of the campaign “Ukraine without Kuchma” and the Committee “For Truth!” were then able to successfully apply them during the “Orange Revolution”.

It is no coincidence that protesters from the Ukrainian youth and students dissatisfied with L. Kuchma’s rule established contacts with representatives of similar youth movements in other countries at that time. For example, representatives of the Slovak organization “OK’98”, who participated in the late 1990s in the ousting of Slovak Prime Minister V. Mečiar, after joint seminars in Bratislava, helped Ukrainian like-minded people to create the “Coalition for Freedom of Choice”, which united many small non-governmental organisations. Its main task was to discredit the authorities during the parliamentary elections of 2002; later, it was used as a basis to launch the “Freedom Wave” campaign to fulfill the same tasks during the presidential elections of Ukraine in 2004 [14. P. 186].

Establishing ties with members of the Serbian youth organization “Otpor” was also of great importance. It made a huge contribution to the overthrow of S. Milosevic during the “bulldozer revolution” in Yugoslavia in the autumn of 2000. Already in the spring of 2001, the first Ukrainian-Serbian seminars were held in Ukraine to discuss the specifics of fundraising, public relations, security issues and, in general, technologies of non-violent struggle against the ruling regimes. After the victory of the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia in 2003, representatives of the Georgian youth movement “Kmara” joined this team. Student activists from Lviv signed a declaration of partnership with the anti-government Belarusian organization “Zubr” [15. P. 14].

It is worth noting that Western non-governmental organisations played an important role in the process of sharing experience in overthrowing legitimate governments. In each regional center of Ukraine with the financial, organisational

and methodological support of various American and European foundations, such as the George C. Marshall Foundation (USA), the Westminster Foundation (UK), the Alfred Moser Foundation (Netherlands), the European Education Foundation (Poland) and others. In the early 2000s several dozens of training seminars were held where young people could learn the basics of tactics and strategies of non-violent resistance to the authorities [14. P. 187].

V. Borovyk, one of the leaders of the youth organisation “Pora”, created in the spring of 2004, and it played one of the key roles in the victory of the “orange revolution”, noted that the development of the methodology of the movement’s activities was based on the authentic Ukrainian experience of non-violent struggle for independence in the late 1980s, civic actions within the framework of the campaign “Ukraine without Kuchma”. Borovik said that the development of the methodology of the movement’s activities was based on the authentic Ukrainian experience of the non-violent struggle for independence of the late 1980s, civil speeches within the framework of the “Ukraine Without Kuchma campaign” and the “Committee for Truth”, as well as successful international experience, especially the Polish Solidarity campaign, the Slovak OK’98 campaign, the Serbian “Otpor” movement, and the Georgian “Kmara” movement. “It was a unique experience for Ukraine,” writes Borovik, “because it took into account the peculiarities of the socio-political situation and the relevance of the problems, the scale and number of the population of Ukraine, its administrative, cultural and geographical features, foreign policy and regional factors, the possibilities of resource provision and partnership cooperation” [15. P. 6].

Birth of “Pora”

The “Pora” movement appeared in the spring of 2004 and initially consisted of two factions — “Black Pora” and “Yellow Pora”. The former was guided by the experience of the Serbian “Otpor” and Georgian “Kmara”, copied their decentralized structure and strategy of non-violent struggle against the ruling regime, was generally more radical and worked at the “grassroots” level. “Yellow Pora” came out of the “Coalition for Freedom of Choice”, was more hierarchical, had much more solid funding and had close ties with the political opposition led by V. Yushchenko and the “Our Ukraine” bloc. At the same time, it was also in contact with European youth movements that had participated in the earlier “colour revolutions” and adhered to their methods of confrontation with the authorities. The leader of the “Black Pora” was M. Svistovich and the leader of the “Yellow Pora” was V. Kaskiv; both of them were activists of the “revolution on granite” and the “Ukraine without Kuchma” campaign.

It is interesting that the founders of the two factions in the new youth movement literally simultaneously came up with the same name for the organisation. Out

of several dozen variants of the name, the choice fell on the name “Pora” because it implied the need to dismantle L. Kuchma’s regime as soon as possible (note that the names of the Serbian “Otpor” and Georgian “Kmara” literally mean the slogan “Enough”, which is close in meaning). However, there were other arguments: “‘Pora’ means the same thing in Ukrainian and Russian, which is very important in a bilingual country,” direct members of the organization noted later in their work. — In addition, the word “time” can be used both as a noun (the time has come) and as an imperative inclination with a call to action (time to think, time to choose, etc.)” [16. P. 135]. Western researcher of Ukrainian origin O. Mykolayenko noted that an additional reason for choosing the name of the movement was that it provided a symbolic link between the modern stages and the historical struggle for national independence. In his famous poem “It is not time” (“Now is not the time”), written in 1880, as the author notes, Ukrainian poet I. Franko proclaimed that “Now is not the time to serve the Moscsals and Poles. . . . It is time to live for Ukraine” [8. P. 186].

Both factions of “Pora” functioned in a coordinated and almost synchronous manner, but first of all we should speak about “Yellow Pora” as a really powerful and organised actor of the “Orange Revolution”. It was on the initiative of “Yellow Pora” that a meeting of 70 of its regional leaders was held in Uzhgorod on April 14–18, 2004; at the same time the governing bodies of the movement were created — the Rada and the Coordination Center, which was headed by V. Kaskiv. It included both youth activists and representatives of the Ukrainian political and financial elite [15. P. 6–7]. Yellow was chosen as the main colour of the campaign, with additional use of black and red colors. The logo was the image of a ticking clock and the rising sun in a triangle, which symbolized the countdown to the arrival of a new government to replace the rotten, in the opinion of the members of “Pora”, system, which they called by the term “Kuchmism” [14. P. 188–189]. The organizational structure of “Pora” was largely based on the qualified personnel of the NGO network, to which, first of all, the members of the “Coalition for Freedom of Choice” belonged. Eventually, more than 150 different national and regional NGOs united under the umbrella of “Pora”. 95 % of Pora’s members were young people, mostly students, with a wide range of political views, from liberals to nationalists. The organisation had branches in 20 universities throughout Ukraine [17. P. 88; 12. P. 367].

Conclusion

The study of the direct activities of “Pora” on the eve and during the “Orange revolution” is beyond the scope of this article. Though, it should be noted that this movement was one of the key participants in the operation to dismantle L. Kuchma’s regime. According to the statements of “Pora” leaders, its official goal was “to ensure democratic presidential elections in 2004” [16. P. 127], for which the young activists did their best. They were the first who set up tents in the center

of Kyiv, which laid the foundation for the notorious “Maidan” (tent encampments were established in a dozen other Ukrainian cities), and then began picketing and blocking administrative buildings in the Ukrainian capital. It was they who managed to organize an all-Ukrainian student strike. Finally, given the weakness of the opposition media, it was the young radicals from “Pora” who managed to break the information blockade by launching their own website, which became extremely popular, as well as distributing 40 million copies of printed materials, holding more than 750 regional pickets and public actions and organizing 17 mass rallies [16. P. 127].

In conclusion, it should be said that the evolution of the youth protest movement in Ukraine in the late XX — early XXI centuries has followed a very peculiar path. The key moments in its genesis were two major campaigns of 1990 and 2000–2001 — “Revolution on Granite” and “Ukraine without Kuchma,” respectively. This process culminated in the emergence of a completely new phenomenon for the political life of the country — the youth organization “Pora”, which was guided by the experience of similar movements, primarily in Serbia and Georgia, and had strong ties with both the political opposition and foreign sponsors. At the same time, despite the huge role played by “Pora” in the victory of the “Orange revolution”, it was unable to build on its success and quickly withdrew from the political scene in Ukraine, nevertheless making a significant contribution to the process of Ukraine’s self-destruction as a sovereign state.

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