Andrew Wilson

The Russians are Coming (Again): The Role of 'Political Technology' in the 2004 Election

Abstract

This chapter argues that the lucrative political technology business is not a purely financial affair. It is also a means of spreading Russia's political culture and influence throughout the former USSR. The post-Bolshevik culture of cynical manipulation, 'organising victory' and the ruthless destruction of opponents also has its indigenous roots in Ukraine. That is, 'political technology' is more specifically a post-Soviet than a Russian phenomenon. Ukraine, however, has certain capacities to resist its advance. Civil society is currently stronger than in Russia. Ukraine has often been mythologised as an Antemurale in the past: as a forepost of Europe, of Renaissance art and Baroque architecture, and, to the OUN, of anti-Communism. It could also become the place where the forward march of 'political technology' was checked.

Introduction

Russia doesn't have too many export industries. Back in 1941 Yurii Lypa dismissively predicted that Russia's main sources of foreign revenue in future years would be the 'export…of wood and oil'.[1] Now Russia has 'political technology'.[2] Having spent three years writing a book on this peculiar local industry,[3] the purpose of this chapter is to provide a few pointers as to what surprises Ukraine might expect from its practitioners in this year's election campaign.

Given their notoriety, what do political technologists actually do? There are many sub-types of the genre. In Russia there is a growing fashion for 'administrative technologists', whose job is not to arrange expensive campaigns or create entire new parties, but simply to secure privileged access to crude 'administrative resources' (dead souls, judicial registration or deregistration, etc) that are increasingly openly deployed in Russian elections. 'Traditional' political technology is already almost old-fashioned. The most *respectable* old-style agency in Moscow, founded in 1992, is called Nikkolo-M, and uses Machiavelli's image on its business cards. Machiavelli, however, dispensed his advice directly to would-be princes. Political technologists have added an extra layer. They see themselves as puppet masters, scene-setters, political programmers. The elite that employs them, on the other hand, is seemingly inert; or, more exactly, totally deideologised, 'relatively uninterested in governing', preferring to concentrate on the 'exchange of unaccountable power for untaxable wealth' and therefore to pass on the manipulators' role.[4] Political technologists also

---

[1] Yurii Lypa, *Rozpodil' Rossiï*, (L'viv: Academy of Sciences, 1995, reprint of the edition published in New York by Hoverlia in 1954), p. 65.

[2] I will not over-burden the reader by constantly placing 'political technology' and similar terms in parentheses; although I should. Such terminology does not deserve the dignity of accepted euphemism.

[3] Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Mimicking Democracy in the Post-Soviet States*, (Yale University Press, forthcoming).

[4] Stephen Holmes, 'Potemkin Democracy', in Theodore K. Rabb and Ezra N. Seleiman (eds.), *The Making and Unmaking of Democracy: Lessons from History and World Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 109-33, at p. 118.

have a particular self-image. They see the organisations and companies they have built as 'factories of thought',[5] and themselves as the only real political strategists in the former Soviet space, rescuing the former USSR from the chaos that mere naïve politicians brought to it. Interestingly, many are former dissidents, who still think of themselves as playing the same game of outwitting the slow and the conservative. Many are of course former KGB. It is no accident that another key Moscow agency is called the Foundation for *Effective* Politics (FEP). Above all, political technologists flourished in the environment of the 1990s, when, in the words of Gleb Pavlovskii, founder of FEP, 'the authorities still had control over all the main instruments of rule - a near-monopoly in fact – but, on the other hand, they couldn't do anything with them. This was the great paradox…So they [the technologists] would go to Boris Nikolaevich [Yeltsin] and say, "you can't do this, but we can"'.[6]

Political technologists also work in a specific milieu, by definition a type of middle ground. This is no longer totalitarianism, as there are actual competitive elections to be manipulated. Nor is it traditional authoritarianism, with the classic formula of cowing the population, imprisoning the opposition and stuffing the ballot box. On the other hand, it is of course not democracy as Robert Dahl or even Joseph Schumpeter understood it; an open contest of clearly-defined and articulated interests, with a competitive struggle for the vote of a well-informed electorate. It is democracy as it might have been in Jorge Luis Borges' version of the China of the 'first Emperor, Shih Huang Ti…who ordered the erection of the almost infinite wall [and] also decreed that all books prior to him be burnt'.[7] In other words, political technologists flourish in specific circumstances: in a Potemkin democracy with an amoral elite as paymaster, with amorphous electorates to manipulate (at least in the 'muddy' middle between better-defined extremes), and extremely weak civil societies, limited external interference and alternative sources of information.[8]

Again, more exactly, what do political technologists do? One possible definition of the work of political technologists 'behind the wall' is that they seek to create and manipulate virtual objects, so that their projects collectively become a type of virtual reality, the appearance that is accepted as reality if it succeeds in dominating the state media that dominate information space in most of the former USSR. Again, however, virtual democracy is still partial democracy. It would be closer to the truth to say that this virtual reality overlaps with, interpenetrates and interacts with, more normal reality. To borrow a term from poststructuralist literary theory, political technologists work within intertextual reality. In literary theory, this idea of 'intertextuality'[9] challenges the orthodoxy of 'authorial intention' by situating any given text at a crossroads of multiple axes – between reader and author, text and other texts, between one system of codes and another. In this view of the world, so-called 'authors' lose control of their texts once they are launched into a sea of possible interpretations. Fortunately, this metaphor is good news for post-Soviet politics. Political

[5] The title of issue number 10, 2002 of *So-obshchenie* , the political technologists' nearest thing to a house journal. See www.soob.ru

[6] Author's interview with Gleb Pavlovskii, Moscow, 8 November 2002.

[7] Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Wall and the Books', *Labyrinths* , (London: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 221-3, at p. 221.

[8] The author is grateful to Hryhorii Nemeriia, who provided a similar list at a conference in the UK on 3 February 2003.

[9] The term was coined by the French theorist Julia Kristeva. See Kelly Oliver (ed.), *The Portable Kristeva* , (New York: Columbia University Press, second edition, 2002).

technologists are not omnipotent. They cannot reshape the whole world in their image. The virtual reality of their designer projects interacts with other forms of meaning. A given party, person or event can be read totally differently in different circumstances. Post-Soviet Communist parties like the KPU and KPRF, for example, have real members and a real electorate. The 'inner parties', however, makes their compromises with the regime and are surprisingly active on the commercial front. If there is imperfect information, the two realities may not interact: 'the electorate doesn't vote for a list, but for a brand'.[10] But this assumption may be false: *one* reason why the KPU lost votes in 2002 and the KPRF in 2003 was that they were tarnishing not so much their own name, as the oppositional 'brand'. In other words, the KPU has been cynically allowed space and time to rebuild its image after 2002, so that it can again function as a (partially) virtual object in 2004.

In Ukraine, furthermore, 'managed democracy' (a much better English translation of *upravliaemaia demokratiia* is 'directed democracy') does not (yet) exist in the complete form developed in Russia by the end of the 2003-4 election cycle. At the very least there will be a genuine contest in Ukraine in 2004; a contest, moreover, not just between particular politicians and parties, but a clash of two different political cultures, between, broadly, 'political technology' and a genuine opposition - although one of the standard techniques of political technology is to try and blur that line. What happens in Ukraine in 2004 will therefore be a vital benchmark for the prospects for real democracy in the region as a whole.

Are Political Technologists Worth Paying For?

The first use of Russian political technologists in Ukraine was in 1998 for the likes of Hromada, but was relatively small scale. The role of Russian specialists in 1999 has been highly mythologised. The bigger names alleged to have worked for Kuchma remain extremely coy about their role.[11] Many aspects of the campaign were far from creditworthy, although according to one insider account, the impact of Russian specialists was much exaggerated: 'their biggest effect was psychological'.[12] In 2002, on the other hand, the presence of several teams of Russian technologists was widely reported, but the effectiveness of their efforts sceptically assessed.[13] After the spectacular successes of Unity and the Yeltsin succession project in 1999-2000, Russian political technologists were too often ascribed almost magical powers: after the Ukrainian elections in 2002, too often the opposite.

It was a fair criticism that many of their efforts in Ukraine were cheap copies, barely adapted to specific local circumstances. KOP, Women for the Future and the SDPU(o) all ran campaigns that were far too abstract. Particular projects also had particular flaws: the original image-based campaign for the SDPU(o) was hijacked by Medvedchuk's personal bio-clips; the KPU(o)'s TV ads effectively mined a certain type of nostalgia, but also advertised the lack of real politicians, indeed any actual

---

[10] Aelsei Makarkin, 'KPRF nakanune vyborov', www.politcom.ru/partii27.php, 29 October 2003.

[11] Author's interview with Aleksii Sitnikov, 4 November 2002.

[12] V"iacheslav Yakubenko, 'Yak ya pratsiuvav imidzhmeikerom Kuchmy', *Den'* , 14 October 1999.

[13] For one sober analysis of the failings of key projects, see Vasyl' Stoiakin, 'Vybir "tovaru": Chomu v Ukraïni ne vdalysia "krasyvi" kampaniï', *Den'* , 8 May 2002. Andrew Wilson, 'Ukraine's 2002 Elections: Less Fraud, More Virtuality', *East European Constitutional Review* , vol. 11, no 3 (Summer 2002), pp. 91-8; available online at http://www.law.nyu.edu/eecr/vol11num3/focus/wilson.html

humans, in the 'party'; KOP simply had a bad name. Nevertheless, political technology more broadly conceived was far from being a complete failure. One key way in which Ukraine is different is that one-shot strategies have never worked. Ukraine has never had the equivalent of Unity in 1999 or the anti-oligarch campaign in Russia in 2003. In 2002 it took at least four 'projects' to prevent Our Ukraine's wining plurality (23.6%) in the elections becoming a majority. The first, the would-be Ukrainian 'party of power', For a United Ukraine, won only 11.8%. Maybe one half of this vote came from 'administrative resources'.[14] But not all. It is often overlooked that the Block's PR had *some* , albeit limited effect. Would-be 'United Ukraine' was not like Russian 'Unity', however. 'Power' in itself, even as supposedly reinvigorated by Putin, is not as effective a rallying cry in Ukraine. Vlada is not vlast'. Most Ukrainians are used to thinking of power as something exercised by other people, somewhere else. Unlike Unity in 1999, with its keynote images of the Unity bear attacking a snarling wolf (i.e. New Russian) wearing a purple jacket and gold chain and putting Russia's house of state in order, For a United Ukraine's main slogan was negative: 'somewhere there is war, but [there is] peace with us'.

The second project was the black PR against the so-called *nashisty* , which may have trimmed Our Ukraine's vote by 5-10%, mainly in east Ukraine.[15] The third were the various covert 'satellite' projects of the powers-that-be. KOP, Yabluko, Women for the Future et al failed to cross the 4% barrier, and therefore the original maximalist plan, with the satellites contributing to a pro-Kuchma coalition (*mnogosloinyi pirog*) in the Rada, clearly also failed. But these projects were also designed as *mukhi* . Any small bite out of the potential vote for the potential opposition(s) – collectively some 10% - was worth paying for. It was only after the opposition's victory had been minimised in this way, and Yushchenko demoralised by the *peones* and *pecadores* , that operation number four, hovering up independents and intimidating and purchasing defectors to reverse the arithmetic in the Rada, became possible. According to the ever-precise Marat Gel'man, the winner in any given set of parliamentary elections is not simply the one who gets the most votes. 'The winner is the one who can make their configuration in parliament'.[16] Step four would not have been possible, however, without steps one to three.

Two lessons for 2004: *mukhi* will again be important; and more than one type of political technology will again be employed to try and ensure victory – the failure of one should not be welcomed prematurely as the failure of them all. As yet, however, no magic formula has been found to boost one particular candidate. In 1999 the Kremlin's technologists successfully created 'Unity' as a virtual neophyte party, but after four years could not run a similar campaign in 2003. However, the 'anti-oligarch' project proved to be the perfect virtual object, a powerful loadstone capable of realigning all elements of the political system: launching the success of Rodina and the rebirth of the LDPR alongside the more obvious triumph of United Russia, as well as, inversely, sealing the fate of both Yabloko and the KPRF (supposedly for taking

---

[14] See, inter alia, Mykola Riabchuk, '"Bezlad" zarady "zlahodu"', *Krytyka* , no. 4 (April) 2002, pp. 6-13.

[15] According to KIIS data, Our Ukraine was polling at 33% on 10 March before the propaganda onslaught in the last two weeks of the campaign; Kiev International Institute of Sociology, 'Before and After Parliamentary Elections 2002 in Ukraine', available at www.kiis.com.ua

[16] Cited in Leonid Amchuk, 'Lytvyn z usmishkoiu sotsial-demokrata', www2.pravda.com.ua/archive/?202529-1

Yukos and other oligarchs' money). The political technologists employed in Ukraine, however, have yet to find their 'big idea' for 2004. Hence the 'toad's eye' technique (see below).

Another important conclusion to be drawn from 2002 is the relative weakness of the Ukrainian mass media. This may seem surprising, given the breadth of government control. However, no single Ukrainian channel has the reach of ORT or RTR (Rossia), newspapers are not as widely read, and propaganda is often simply too crude. 'Media-killers' need an audience – even if programmes like 'Prote' are scheduled before the football. Despite introducing some key campaign legenda at the margins in 2002 (the supposed universality of corruption, 'extremism' within Our Ukraine); the political technologists failed to deconstruct the binary heart of the campaign, which was basically a dual referendum on the authorities' various misdemeanours since 1999 as against the socio-economic achievements of the Yushchenko government in 1999-2001; and much of the Ukrainian electorate was impervious to their message.

Project 'Stop Yushchenko'

In principle, Russian 'technologists' could work for anybody. They are after all defined by their *prodazhnost'*. One neglected aspect of the overthrow of Shevardnadze in Georgia in 2003 is that the Russian company Image-Kontakt, having previously worked for the Union of Georgian Citizens in 1999 and 2000, appeared to have switched sides, reportedly to work for the Zhvania-Burdjanadze Block. However, it's a safe assumption in Ukraine in 2004 (despite one or two rumours to the contrary) that only the authorities want to, or can afford to, employ the better-known technologists this time around and that their role is to 'stop Yushchenko'. Phase one of this mega-project (the actual voting in 2002) was not particularly successful; phase two (the aftermath, creating an artificial 'majority' in the Rada) rather more so. Much unfinished business is involved for phase three.

Given their failure to deconstruct the binary stereotype in 2002, Russian political technologists have been trying to do so ever since. The basic stratagem is dubbed *zhab"iache oko* ('toad's eye'), in other words the attempt to make the electorate forget their original enthusiasm for Yushchenko by creating a constant series of diversions for the dim-witted toad: the constitutional reform project, the language issue, the nationalist 'threat', the agreement on a 'Unified Economic Space', arguably even the Tuzla conflict with Russia all may have their particular purpose as individual projects, but collectively make up the political 'show'. The spectacle, in other words, is everything (Russian political technologists take Situationism far too seriously).[17] Carefully staged events have no after-life, even if on paper they commit Ukraine to something as important as the Unified Economic Space, which is capable of doing so much damage to its relations with the EU.

Cloning, *dovedenie do absurda*

---

[17] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* , (Paris, 1967 – for a translation, see the 1995 Zone edition).

Another way of obscuring what was once apparently clear involves the political programmer's favourite virtual object, the clone. 'Cloning' is too often narrowly associated with the annoying, but often effective, tactic developed by the 'St. Petersburg school' of sponsoring candidates (or parties) with the same name as your opponent. In Uzhhorod in 2002 there were six candidates called Ratushniak.[18] More broadly, political technologists like to create 'double objects', that either dilute the perceived advantages of their clients' opponents or multiply their clients' specific weaknesses into apparently universal failings. 'Project Putin' involved finding a candidate who could serve as a virtual mirror of the regime's most dangerous opponents – and of course of Yeltsin's weaknesses. Putin's Chekist past symbolised the old order like Primakov, but he was younger and more vigorous. 'Unity' was assembled as a 'regional' project like OVR, but with more virtual impact.

The Ukrainian authorities are already attempting to clone the opposition's best assets. Yushchenko's past career at the NBU is being replayed by Tyhipko, with his PR men even presenting the introduction of the new and shinier hrivnia as somehow equivalent to the original launch of the actual currency in 1996. 'Young', pragmatic reformers such as Khoroshkovs'kyi or even Kinakh (backed by the Industrialists and NDP) claim similar achievements to the Yushchenko government in 1999-2001; Yanukovych is advertised on www.proua.com as equally capable of opening doors to the EU, and so on (at least before his recent attacks on 'Euroromanticism'). With GDP growth at such high levels, the struggle to appropriate credit could not be more important. If (rightly) the popular mind continues to associate the current recovery with the sea-changes in economic policy made in 1999-2001, Yushchenko still benefits: if recovery can be linked to present 'stability' instead, the credit goes to those who succeeded him. The fact that growth has accelerated since 2001 has little to do with the authorities (it has more to do with Chinese demand for steel), but is potentially their biggest single positive asset. It is surprising how often the election is discussed in purely political terms. In the West, reelection for almost any government would be assumed with GDP growth at over 9%

---

[18] 'Mask, I Know You… Some Details of the "Twins Show" in the 2002 Election Race', *UCIPR Research Update* , no. 6, 11 February 2002.

Conversely, as with the 'cassette 2' scandal in 2002, there will be many attempts to paint Yushchenko and/or his allies as 'just as bad' as the authorities: such as the attempt to blame budget theft on the budget committee run by Our Ukraine financier Poroshenko; or the black PR of the verdict against Yushchenko's former deputy at the National Bank, Volodymyr Bondar, for alleged foreign currency misoperations back in 1997. As so little mud stuck in 2002, Russian political technologists' first instinct will be to up the ante. The Rybkin affair was an obvious try-out, though the attempt to replay old Russian kompromat - linking your main opponent with 'bad oligarch' (Berezovskii) finance - once again showed that virtual objects that work well in Russia do not necessarily have the same effect in Ukraine. This summer's 'Tyomshenkogate' will be the first of many faux-scandals. Scandal works best at the last minute. Americans, who vote in November, are used to the idea of the 'October surprise'. Now that Ukrainian election scheduling is the same, the term should enter the Ukrainian vocabulary too.

Divide et impere

There is plenty of scope in Ukraine for this most basic of tactics. The three-headed opposition (a doubtful four, if the Communists are included) of March 2002 is far too tempting a target. Russian political technologists have a long history of exploiting opposition alliances or round-tables as virtual objects capable of embodying the images of indecision and disunity. Despite conventional thinking that a more united opposition weakens the authorities, there is no paradox here at all. If this particular virtual object did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it. Ukraine of course has plenty of experience of this with the 'Kaniv-4' in 1999 (as well as the use of Vitrenko against Moroz, the emergence of three Rukhs, at one time the promotion of Tymoshenko against Lazarenko, etc, etc). In 1999 Vitalii Shybko of the Socialist Party accused *both* Tkachenko and Marchuk of working for Bankiv'ska 'to neutralise the more powerful figure of Moroz'.[19]

In March 2004 **www.provokator.com.ua** published details of a supposed project to split this year's opposition by exploiting the ambitions of the Socialist Party.[20] The cynicism is of course absolute. To political technologists, the SPU is just another virtual object to manipulate. The fact that it was the main target of such manipulations in 1999 is irrelevant. Yesterday's enemy is today's ally if there is enough money and unsatisfied ambition to fuel the process. It is no different from the Kremlin supporting Rodina to split the KPRF vote in 2003 and then, volte face, with Glaz'ev, like Petrushka threatening to break free of his masters, covertly backing the Communist candidate Kharitonov against Glaz'ev in 2004. The SPU has shadowy business interests to protect, plenty of politicians with personal ambition, and one eye on the next parliamentary elections in 2006. The last election is the only one where the SPU has really run alone. It may see more security in a renewed alliance with the KPU or even SDPU(o) in two years time.

---

[19] Tetiana Korobova, '"Kanivs'ka chetvirka" – za Marchuka', *Den'* , 26 October 1999.

[20] *The alleged document 'Ne upustit' shans!' published at*
www.provokator.com.ua/p/2004/02/26/090819.html
indicates an intent to exploit a coincidence of interests, and only hints at wider plots.

A similar story will unfold on the right. Even if Tymoshenko cannot be bought, some of her supporters and/or the penumbra of virtual rightists like Dmytro Korchyns'kyi can objectively play the role of harrying the opposition from the right, attacking Yushchenko's every 'compromise' and pressurising him to move away from the centre ground, where he must stay to win. The constant legal harassment of Tymoshenko is designed in part to return her to prison. It also seems aimed at ensuring there will always be at least one force maintaining the whiff of revolution in the air, to scare the most conservative parts of the electorate back into the authorities' 'safer' hands. The website **www.aznews.narod.ru** seems entirely dedicated to the purpose of forcing Tymoshenko to play this 'objective' role – not to mention http://timoshenkogate.narod.ru. Others will play a more obvious provocateur role: 'extremists' whom Yushchenko supposedly condones or cannot control, waiting in the wings to seize real power in the wake of a Yushchenko victory. Russian political technologists are after all Russian, and 'Ukrainian nationalism' is often over-prominent in their demonology.

Finally, within Our Ukraine it is a safe bet that not all the cuckoos that earned a place on the 2002 list have yet left the nest. The exodus from the opposition's ranks in the Rada ended at the authorities' request – when they had the majority they thought they needed. Even if few original 'moles' remain, a predicted election war chest of up to $300 million can easily create new ones. Furthermore. it will be entirely characteristic of the style of certain Russian groups to create mock-scandals within the opposition camp: 'defectors' with lurid stories to tell or opposition supporters who mysteriously self-destruct, basically providing kompromat on themselves.

Even if fomented disunity within the opposition(s) does not affect Yushchenko's vote directly, it will brake his momentum. Even if all parties and politicians belatedly call on their supporters to rally behind him in the second round, the damage may have been done. The state and oligarch-controlled mass media is unlikely to give much publicity to their efforts.

Virtual 'Third Forces'

Yanukovych versus Yushchenko makes only partial sense. Ditto the promotion of the Communists as an extra hurdle for Yushchenko. The KPU leadership would no doubt be amenable, but Symonenko is more likely to take votes off Yanukovych than Yushchenko. The authorities' technologists therefore need to create a 'third force' more capable of taking votes off Yushchenko if the picture is to be completed.

Traditionally, 'third forces' have been manipulated by political technologists for one of two reasons. In the first scenario (Russia 1996, Ukraine 1999), the incumbent is unpopular, so his technologists seek to guarantee a confrontation with an even more unpopular opponent (in both cases the Communist leader). Potential 'third forces' (Yavlinskii-Fedorov in 1996, Moroz in 1999) must therefore be weakened to make sure the election remains artificially polarised. In Belarus in 2001 the strategy was basically the opposite. Lukashenka was the genuine choice of a plurality of voters, if not necessarily a majority. However, Lukashenka wanted to avoid a polarised election that would encourage all the potential anti-Lukashenka voters to congregate at one pole. Artificial third forces like Haidukevich were therefore promoted to keep Hancharyk's vote down to 15.4%.

Ukraine in 2004 more closely matches the second scenario. Although the powers-that-be are far from being as popular as the populist Lukashenka, it is in their interest to make it more difficult for Yushchenko to consolidate the centrist vote in the second round, even if they cannot prevent him from getting there. A sure test of any third forces that does appear will be a measure of real equidistance. Fake third forces are never neutral. They are also hired guns, paid to focus their criticism on the opposition. Zhirinovskii turned his fire on Fatherland-All Russia in 1999, then on Ziuganov in 2000, the KPRF again in 2003, then all of Putin's pygmy opponents (including one he had himself supplied) in 2004. Haidukevich mainly attacked Hancharyk in 2001. KOP showed their true colours by attacking Yushchenko and, especially, Tymoshenko, in 2002.

The 'President of Half of Ukraine'

In one sense, all of the trickery listed above is mere tactics. The most important 'project' is the attempt to narrow Yushchenko's potential social basis of support. If Yushchenko can be squeezed into in a smaller 'box', the smaller projects will have more effect. If he is striding ahead of the field, they can be laughed off. Many of the Russian technologists think that the simplest solution is to reinvent the East-West divide that won Kuchma his original victory in 1994; and, absurdly but cynically, portray Yushchenko as the main cause of that split.[21] Any association with 'extremists' is therefore played up, though Russian political technologists' definition of who is 'extreme' may be rather broad (interestingly, Novokom's 'red-brown' campaign for Leonid Hrach in 2002 was not a success). The threat from the so-called Galician autonomists will be exaggerated (the best antidote to 'separatism' in west Ukraine being of course a Yushchenko victory), and there will be attempts to associate Our Ukraine with Crimean Tatar extremism – itself basically a virtual creation, given the surprising restraint the leaders of the Medzhlis have shown these last ten years. For practical reasons (reducing the role of international supervision in the Autumn elections) the campaign depicting Yushchenko and associated 'grant-eating' NGOs as tools of the West has already begun; but its role is also to reverse 'Our' Ukraine's successful image-building in 2002. That is, to win the contest defining who is *svoï* and who is *chuzhi* .

Ukraine in 2004 is not Ukraine in 1994, however. Kuchma's image-makers then successfully sold him as a Dnieper Ukrainian everyman, a pragmatist opposing the 'romantic nationalist' and prolix wordsmith Kravchuk. Hence the famous slogan of 'Deeds, not words'. This time, however Kuchma is the incumbent, the nationalist 'threat' would have to be completely virtual rather than simply wildly exaggerated, and Yanukovych's enormous frame and the big shadows over his past are difficult to squeeze into the everyman persona. Moreover, to date Ukrainian elections have never been won by politicians or parties who are too obviously identified with periphery regions.

---

[21] Stanislav Shumlians'kyi, 'Rozkol Ukraïny yak virtual'na realnist'', *Krytyka* , no. 11 (November) 2002, pp. 2-5.

Conclusions

Lucrative as it is, the political technology business is not a purely financial affair. It is also a means of spreading Russia's political culture and influence throughout the former USSR. The post-Bolshevik culture of cynical manipulation, 'organising victory' and the ruthless destruction of opponents also has its indigenous roots in Ukraine. That is, 'political technology' is more specifically a post-Soviet than a Russian phenomenon. Ukraine, however, has certain capacities to resist its advance. Civil society is currently stronger than in Russia. The Committee of Voters of Ukraine did sterling work in helping to minimise the extent of blatant electoral fraud in 2002. Hence the Medvedchuk-Communist onslaught against 'foreign-backed' NGOs in the build-up to the election. It also still has some free media. Hence also the campaign of harassment against all remaining independent voices. It is no exaggeration to say that the battle for free and fair elections will be decided long before polling day; and that the West should be doing much, much more to try and combat this twin campaign. The most effective antidote to virtual trickery is simple information. The third factor, the role of countervailing pressure from outside, ought to be working more obviously in Ukraine's favour. Ukraine is a big enough country to guarantee interest, but not so big as to be granted excess leeway in view of geopolitical status, as too often with Russia.

However, the unfortunate truth may be that the EU is preoccupied with the May expansion and that Republican America is preoccupied with Iraq. This would be an enormous tragedy. Effective engagement and protest will make much more of a difference in Ukraine than it was every likely to in Russia in December 2003 or March 2004. The West still has plenty of carrots that the Ukrainian leadership would grasp – and the Ukrainian elite would find it much more difficult to preserve its status in a truly isolated Ukraine. Ukraine has often been mythologised as an Antemurale in the past: as a forepost of Europe, of Renaissance art and Baroque architecture, and, to the OUN, of anti-Communism. It could also become the place where the forward march of 'political technology' was checked.