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ИНСТИТУТ ЕВРОПЫ  
РОССИЙСКОЙ АКАДЕМИИ  
НАУК

125009, МОСКВА, МОХОВАЯ УЛ., 11-3  
ТЕЛ.: +7(495)692-10-51/629-45-07  
ФАКС: +7(495)629-92-96  
[WWW.INSTITUTEOFEUROPE.RU](http://WWW.INSTITUTEOFEUROPE.RU)



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125009, MOSCOW, MOKHOVAYA STR., 11-3  
TEL.: +7(495)692-10-51/629-45-07  
FAX: +7(495)629-92-96  
[WWW.INSTITUTEOFEUROPE.RU](http://WWW.INSTITUTEOFEUROPE.RU)

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### Are there «color revolutions» without color?

*Pavel Kandel*

Candidate of Sciences (History), Head of IE RAS Center for Ethnic, Political and Interstate Conflicts

*Many people in Russia are inclined to perceive any mass anti-government protests as the next «color revolution». USA and their allies did make a lot to form such a perception of the world. But the wave of mass protests in South-Eastern Europe in 2013-2015 revealed that technologies of «color revolutions» can be used not only by external forces, but also by local opposition for attaining its own goals.*

American political science, summing up the experience of «velvet revolutions» in Eastern Europe in late 1980s, elaborated an instrumental technology of externally inspired nonviolent overthrow of authoritarian regimes. One of the founding fathers of the technology was American political scientist Gene Sharp. In his works «From dictatorship to democracy», «The politics of nonviolent action», «198 methods of nonviolent action», practitioners of «color revolutions» obtained the necessary recipes.

The first «test of pen» for them was the overthrow of S. Milosheвич. After the «October revolution» in Belgrade in 2000 Washington decided that the successful experience is worth mass reproduction. The authors tried to copycat the Serbian scenario, only changing its labels, in Tbilisi (2003), Kiev (2004), Minsk (2006), Erevan (2008), Chisinau (2009), Bishkek (2005 and 2010) and again in Kiev (2013-14).

Not all the attempts were successful. In countries where the existing regimes preserved their legitimacy in the eyes of population, and debilitation of enforcement agencies did not go by the book, like in Minsk and Erevan, the governments kept their power.

It is not surprising that, facing a similar event, the public opinion is habitually attributing it to the same cliché. But no matter how natural and justified a misconception may seem, it is still not true.

In 2013-15 a wave of mass anti-government protests swept through South-Eastern Europe, demonstrating evident application of «color revolution» technologies. But, if in the base scenario they were initiated and promoted by external forces (the US and EU specifically), the protests in question, often spontaneous and lacking external support, can be rightfully called «colorless revolutions». It is ridiculous, but symptomatic, that they did not receive the «signature» color brand.

As prescribed in «color revolution» manuals, the subject of elections was chosen as a proper excuse for mass anti-government protests in Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania. They, in turn, not incidentally resemble the events that previously took place in Slovenia and Bulgaria.

In order to understand the common logic of the events, it is worth mentioning all of them in brief. They were caused by different reasons and differ in scale and consequences. But they share the old common Balkan disease – corruption and autocracy of the ruling elite, and just as common dissatisfaction of population with their most outrageous demonstrations.

The power of example is even more important and evident in neighboring countries. It inspires the opposition to try the same scenario that led to successful change of power just across the border. This is how similarities in events in different countries appear. They all fall into the same scenario of gaining power with the help of «the streets»: use of protesting moods and mass demonstrations by the opposition, sometimes not invoked by it, to force the ruling party to preschedule elections, ideally – under supervision of a transitional government.

The elements of «color revolution» technology, published many times and widely known, are easy to spot. But the main link is missing: consistent, inspired and externally supported preparation aimed at overthrowing the government, undesirable for Washington or Brussels, in favor of a more loyal one. They had no such reasons, because in all the cases (except for Montenegro to a certain extent) both the ruling power, and the opposition had the same Euro-Atlantic orientation. In contrast to the usual blunt and high-handed manner, demonstrated by representatives of USA and EU in such cases, there was no evident external interference in such a key element of «color revolutions» as the «neutralization» of reinforcement agencies.

### **Slovenia**

The chain reaction was, probably, started in this formerly peaceful country. In December 2012 – January 2013 it was shaken with mass anticorruption demonstrations that shortly turned into protests against the whole political class. The events, coined as «All-Slovenian uprising», resembled the «Prague spring» of 1968. As a result, two governments collapsed in one year and preschedule parliamentary elections took place on July 13, 2014. They were impressively won – 34,4% of votes and 36 mandates – by a new political power, created by a famous lawyer M. Cerar a month and a half prior to the elections. In all the history of independent Slovenia no one attained the same result, even though the only advantage of «M. Cerar Party» was its novelty and the spotless reputation of its leader – Professor of Law at Ljubljana University and Legal Counsellor of the Parliament.

## **Bulgaria**

Something similar, but with a different outcome, took place in Bulgaria. In January 2013 the country witnessed chaotic mass demonstrations against sharp increase of electricity tariffs, that led to resignation of the right center government of «Citizens for European development of Bulgaria» (CEDB) and its head B. Borisov. A technical government and preschedule parliamentary elections were appointed. On May 12, CEDB managed, despite some losses, to confirm its status of the main political force (97 mandates compared to 117 at the triumph debut in 2009). But the other parties refused to enter a coalition with the winner. Minority government, headed by P. Oresharsky, was formed by a coalition of Bulgarian socialist party and Turkish party «Movement for rights and freedoms».

Social and economic situation in the country continued to provoke mass dissatisfaction, and the deeply offended politicians of the right center waited for their moment to attack the government. Soon the reason came up: the government promoted a candidate from the Turkish party with questionable reputation for the Head of Security service. Mass protests followed. Even through the candidate was immediately revoked, the demonstrations did not subside – backed by CEDB, longing for power. They became consistently anti-governmental and were accompanied by several attempts of motions of non-confidence to the government.

But only after the socialists were defeated at European Parliament elections, the government of P. Oresharsky resigned. It took another technical government and preschedule elections on October 5, 2014 for CEDB, headed by B. Borisov, to regain its power (32,67% of votes and 84 mandates of 240). But the positions of the former political favorite became significantly weaker, and voters demonstrated growing support for nationalists.

## **Romania**

Street riots played key role in changing government in Romania as well. After presidential elections in 2014, when the leader of the ruling Social democratic party, Prime Minister V. Ponta unexpectedly lost to the opposition candidate, political newbie K. Iohannes, there were several attempts to deprive the Prime Minister of its position. Reputation of V. Ponta was seriously damaged by the criminal cases accusing him of plagiarism, tax evasion, forging of documents and money «laundering», and on July 12, 2015, he was forced to resign as Head of the party. But the opposition's attempt of motion of non-confidence was not successful.

After a fire in a night club in Bucharest on October 31, 2015, that took away more than 50 lives, mass demonstrations for punishment of the guilty ones and government resignation commenced, forcing V. Ponta to resign. President instructed to form a technical government, headed by D. Cholos, former European commissioner on agriculture. On November 17, 2015 it was approved by the Parliament.

## **Macedonia**

Examples of the neighbors inspired Macedonia, where the «colorless» revolution, started by the opposition, gradually turned in what looked like the «Ukrainian scenario». After another victory on preschedule parliamentary elections (April 27, 2014) of the ruling since 2006 Internal Macedonian revolutionary organization – Democratic party of Macedonian national

unity, headed by N. Gruevsky, its traditional rival – Social democratic union of Macedonia, led by Z. Zaev, refused to recognize the election results and started to boycott the Parliament. This move was used by the opposition in Macedonia, and in Albania. But the ongoing political crisis in Macedonia deserves a special paper upon its outcome.

### Montenegro

The experience of Macedonian opposition inspired their colleagues in Montenegro. After presidential elections on April 7, 2013, the opposition accused the winner of forging the results, but had to give up, after not having received the support from European and international institutions. The events in Macedonia and the coming accession to NATO, not popular in the country, forced the opposition to use the Macedonian scenario, backed by a breakdown in the ruling coalition: between Democratic party of socialists and its long-time leader M. Jukanovich, at power since 1990, and its permanent junior partner – Social democratic party, led by the Parliament Chairman R. Krivokapich.

In September-October 2015, a part of opposition («Democratic front» and Socialist people's party) launched a campaign of regular mass meetings and demonstrations, demanding resignation of government, appointment of a technical government and fair elections. In the center of the capital city, they set up a permanent camp. On October 24, the most populated opposition meeting broke into clashes with policemen and was dissipated, the camp was destroyed, and criminal cases were opened against the opposition leaders. Those, who counted for a wave of national protest, missed their figures – the uprising subsided.

Not all of the opposition was involved in the street protests, part of it preferred to negotiate with the ruling regime<sup>1</sup>. Even in the Democratic front, that initiated the protests, there was no consensus on accession to NATO<sup>2</sup>. Just as naïve was the hope for benevolent intermediation of the EU on the verge of inviting Montenegro to NATO (1.12.15). Open pro-Serbian and pro-Russian moods of the protesters did not find sympathy in Brussels. But the protest leaders kept on insisting: no negotiations with the regime, refusing the offer of R. Krivokapich to have a broad discussion of all political forces on improving the election process.

The situation was aggravated by M. Jukanovich, who offered the Parliament to vote on the confidence to government. Social democratic party refused to support the government. The confidence debates on January 25-27, 2016 turned into rough disputes between two former allies. But before the vote M. Jukanovich declared his readiness to offer to the opposition the positions of four ministers and a Vice Prime Minister, thus turning the scales in his favor. The government did receive the necessary confidence with advantage of one vote. After more than two months of debates an agreement between the ruling party and the «constructive

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<sup>1</sup> Милан Кнежевић: СНП-у, Демосу, Демократама и УРА-и преостаје једино да се прикључе протестима јер је јасно да Ђукановић не жели да формира прелазну владу. URL: <http://www.nspm.rs/hronika/milan-knezevic-snp-u-demosu-demokratama-i-ura-i-preostaje-jedino-da-se-prikluce-protestima-jer-je-jasno-da-djukanovic-ne-zeli-da-formira-prelaznu-vladu.html>

<sup>2</sup> Небојша Медојевић: Нећемо учествовати у најављеним протестима против НАТО-а, Покрет за промјене се не противи чланству у алијанси али уз одржани референдум. URL: <http://www.nspm.rs/hronika/nebojsa-medojevic-necemo-ucestvovati-u-najavljenim-protestima-protiv-nato-a-pzp-se-ne-protivi-clanstvu-u-alijansi-ali-uz-odluk-u-na-referendumu.html>

opposition» on «free and fair elections» and introduction of representatives of the latter to the «pre-election» government was reached. The «Democratic front» found itself left behind and threatening with street riots, but it was already clear: the «revolution» was not going to happen.

### **Albania**

Albania went through similar scenarios. After the confident victory of socialists at parliamentary elections on June 23, 2013, the Democratic party started a six month boycott of the Parliament that ended only with the help of European Parliament deputies. Following another victory of socialists at local elections on June 24, 2015, the Democratic party, after a short pause, launched a counterattack in the streets. On December 8, 2015, it conducted a mass meeting in the capital, devoted to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the communist regime collapse, that turned into protests against the ruling socialists. The leader of the «democrats» L. Bashi called for civil disobedience campaign and transitional government for «fair» preschedule elections<sup>3</sup>. But there was no momentum to continue the campaign.

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The protesting moods, entering the streets, are often used by local opposition as an instrument for attaining its goals regardless of external factors. This technology can be considered a form of reactive adoption of political system, which so far helped it to cope with overloads of the prolong financial and economic crisis. But for how long?

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<sup>3</sup>Ljulzim Baša: Tehnička vlada ili izbori, trećeg nema. URL: <http://www.tanjug.rs/full-view.aspx?izb=218206>