

Presidential Elections in the Ukraine: A Lesson for Russia

By [Boris Shmelev](#)

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

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The fierce disputes held during the presidential election in Ukraine are over; now it is time for cold analysis. Kiev and Moscow view the election as an accomplished fact and plan to deal with existing and future problems.

Russia wants Ukraine to be prosperous and stable, and Viktor Yushchenko wants the same. To keep the country whole, the new president should take into account the interests of Russians in Ukraine, who acted as a consolidated political force during the election. This is also in Russia's interests.

Mr. Yushchenko will pursue a policy of integration with the EU and adapting Ukraine's economic system to European standards, which suits Russia well. Russia is also striving for integration with the EU, working jointly with Brussels to implement the "four spaces" concept.

The new leadership of Ukraine will not ignore or try to block integration on the post-Soviet territory initiated by Russia – if it is profitable for Kiev to take part in it. I believe that economic requirements will take the upper hand, the more so that accession to the EU seems to have been postponed for a distant future. But Ukraine must live and develop its economy now, and this will be extremely difficult to do without Russian markets and deliveries, and cooperation with Russian companies.

On the other hand, the policy of joining NATO, proclaimed by President Yushchenko, is not acceptable to Russia, especially because the West refuses to consider the possibility of Russia's full membership in the alliance. It is believed in West European capitals that Ukraine might join NATO in five to seven years, but nobody knows what might happen to the bloc by that time. So, Russia has not lost anything as a result of the Ukrainian election.

The EU and NATO are not ready to admit Ukraine now. What does the West really want? To turn the new Ukrainian president into a harsh opponent of Russia in post-Soviet states? This may explain the active involvement of the West in the Ukrainian election on the side of Mr. Yushchenko.

The consolidation of power in Russia over the last few years and its growing foreign policy activity to serve its national interests both scare and irritate the West. The apparent crisis in Russia-West relations was not provoked by Moscow's desire to develop cooperation on the basis of common interests, in contrast to the view held by Washington and Brussels that common values should be the cornerstone.

The trouble is that Russia, as a self-sufficient state and the leader of a distinct Slavic-Orthodox civilization (according to Samuel Huntington), is trying to become a self-sufficient center of power, a pole of international relations.

The West is trying to prevent this and to remove Russia as a geopolitical rival from the global chessboard.

What politicians infer, journalists and analysts say or write out loud. The West sent a clear signal to Russia during the Ukrainian election – either it plays by Western rules or suffers marginalization and defeat. Everything is repeated in history, and so Russia-West relations are returning to an old and well-trodden path. Age-old problems in their relations are resurfacing in new historical conditions, but with a different lineup of forces that is not in favor of Moscow.

What should Russia do in this situation? The answer is obvious: It must be strong. So far, Russia is losing the geopolitical game because it is not competitive politically, economically and ideologically, and hence is not attractive. It has nothing to offer the world, and the newly independent states will not rally around Russia because of nostalgia for their common life in the former Soviet Union. The joint struggle against international terrorism is not a firm foundation either.

Russia should devise a new Historical Project that would be an alternative to the Western Universal Idea and yet correspond to the interests of both Russia and the newly independent states. But there is no such project and it is not known whether it will ever appear. Moscow should be consistent in upholding human rights on post-Soviet territory. It must not fight for human rights in the Baltic states and yet close the eyes to what Turkmen-bashi is doing to Russians in Turkmenistan.

Its foreign policy must not fly into hysterics over the apparent crisis of confidence in relations with the West. Instead, the Kremlin should pursue a constant political dialogue with Western leaders and Brussels, sign agreements and honor its commitments under them, and take into account reasonable recommendations made by European organizations on the development of democracy in Russia.

We may not like it, but we will have to coordinate our policy in post-Soviet countries with the EU and the US, respect their interests and agree to reasonable compromises. We must prepare for a day when the clash of Russian and Western interests in these countries will become increasingly fierce.

The events in Ukraine represent one more reason to think about what is happening in Russia and may happen in the future, and to try to change the situation for the better.

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Boris Shmelev is director of the Center of Political Studies

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