

INTERVIEW WITH MAKSIM STRIKA

BY ALESSANDRO SAVARIS

Interview with Professor Maksim Strika, member of the *Ukrainian Republican Party* and personal friend of the Ukrainian journalist Georgji Gongadze, killed in 2000,¹ and of the ex Ukrainian Premier Julia Timosenko.

Professor Strika, I think that the main question for many analysts now is: which were effectively the results of the Orange Revolution? The actual Ukrainian political life is infact dominated by the so called “prorussian forces” headed by Yanukovic and the ex-Orange leaders Jusenko and Timosenko look unable to interfere or contrast the majority’s decisions. Which are the causes of this situation? And do you think there is a possibility to change this situation?

I personally think this is a very crucial moment for the Orange leaders and for everybody who believed in the Orange ideals. The actual majority, the so called “pro-russian” one, headed by Yanukovic, is infact dominating the political life of the country and the President and the opposition, formed by *Nasha Ukraina* and the *Timosenko’s Blok*, look unable to contrast or influence the decisions of the majority. I think that the cause of this is clear: the Orange forces,

especially President Jusenko, were unable in these last three years to promote the democratic and economical development of the country.

There are also two things to consider in order to better understand the actual political situation of Ukraine: the first one is that the Ukrainian political life is still based on a logic of domination, and not of cooperation between the different political forces. The attacks of the actual majority against the President, that had taken place in the last months, were an example of it, they were a sort of revenge for what happened during the Revolution, when the *Party of Regions* and the other pro-russian political forces suffered an humiliating defeat.

The second thing to consider is that there is still a split in the country, between the pro-russian Eastern Ukraine and the pro-western Western Ukraine, and the differences between this two parts of the country are still strong. However, if the ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences are still strong, the “ideological” difference between the political parties is less strong.

There was an evolution I think in these three years so what we actually have is a pro-russian *Party of Regions* that is less pro-russian then before.

¹ Gongadze was one of the main critic of the former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma. The public diffusion of a dialog, illegally recorded by Mykola Melnichenko, ex-body guard of Kuchma, between Kuchma and some of his collaborators regarding the kidnapping of Gongadze, who was presumably ordered by Kuchma, caused the first and massive street protest of Ukraine, the *Ukraina bez Kuchmi*.

But I know that there is also an economical reason for this: in the Party of Regions the so called *pro-business* part of the party, headed by Rinat Akhmetov (the richest Ukrainian oligarch and deputy of the *PR*) does not want that Russia interfere a lot in the “Ukrainian affairs”, especially in the business ones. Is it true?

Yes. Actually the Party of Regions is divided in many groups, the so called *pro-business* one, headed by Akhmetov; another group, more pro-russian, that is still strong, headed by the Azarov, and another one, headed by Yanukovic, that is “in the middle” between the other two parts.

The *pro-business* part does not want Russia to interfere in their business, and for this reason they are promoting many economical reforms too, in order to attract new foreign investments.

So what do you think the opposition can do in order to change the current situation? The Ukrainian journalist Roman Chayka, that I had the opportunity to interview few days ago, told me that if there will be new parliamentary elections the composition of the *Rada* will not change a lot, and there will be still a dominance of the actual majority.

Do you agree with this vision?

Yes, I think Chayka was right. New parliamentary elections will not change the actual composition of the Parliament, that will be anyway dominated by the *Party of Regions*, the *Communists* and the *Socialists*. This is a very strange situation for the country because it seems that the President and the actual opposition are unable to do anything in order to change this situation.

Chayka also reported that that the main goal of the majority will be to have 300 votes in the *Rada* in order to make a new constitutional reform and to reduce the powers of the President. Do you also think there is this kind of risk?

Yes. I think this is a really concrete risk.

What about Julia Timosenko?

I think that Timosenko is a very clever and bright person, but her actual political approach to contrast in every way the decisions of the majority, is not useful I think.

As I told you, in the Ukrainian political life there is still a logic of domination and not of cooperation, for this reason she is actually trying to defend her prerogatives and wants to contrast

in every way Janukovic. At the same time, Janukovic is a having his revenge for the defeat he had suffered after the Revolution on President Jusenko; and Jusenko is still trying to get back his previous prerogatives and powers.

What about your party? The *Ukrainian Republican Party*?

Well, as I think you know we suffered a defeat in the March 2006 parliamentary elections and for this reason we have now only 3 seats in the *Rada*. We had a great opportunity during the Orange Revolution but as other parties we registered a bad result in the parliamentary elections of last year, so I think we should be ready to play a more active and effective role of opposition force in the next future. For this reason we are trying now to find some new ways of active opposition that will let us play a more active role in the next future.

So the actual political situation of Ukraine, two years after the Orange Revolution, is characterized by the dominance of the so called “pro-russian” political forces and by the defeat of the Orange Camp. But do you think this is really a bad thing for Ukraine?

I mean that the victory of Jusenko was considered to be a great opportunity for the country to enter the Western European sphere of influence and to assimilate the Western democratic values, but what we had in these last three years was a deeply unstable political life, and bad economical situation. The Ukraine we actually have is of course not the Ukraine the Orange leaders or the EU and the US were expecting to have but it is still an independent, economically developing and less pro-russian Ukraine, with a more independent foreign policy and less Russia’s dependent economy.

So can we say that the actual situation was a defeat for the Orange camp and for every Ukrainian who believed in the ideals of the Revolution but was not a defeat for Ukraine as a country?

Yes. I think you are right. The actual Ukraine is not the Ukraine the Orange leaders or the Western democracies were expecting to have but it is not also the Ukraine we had before the Orange Revolution. We have to consider that not everything that the actual majority did in the last months or will do in the future will be something bad for Ukraine. I do not also think that a defeat for Jusenko or for Timosenko means a defeat for Ukraine, Ukraine can play now a more central role as an international actor between Russia and the EU, and the Ukrainian economy is also growing up again, differently from what happened in the last three years.

So what about the Orange Revolution? Can we say that it was anyway a necessary step for Ukraine?

Yes, it was. And if, on one hand, the results of it are not the results we were expecting to have, on the other hand, I think we should be optimistic about the future of Ukraine.

You have to consider that the Orange Revolution was something unexpected for almost everybody, so if it was a sort of shock for the former Kuchma’s camp, it was also a shock for the Western oriented political forces, that were unable to use this occasion in order to promote a more democratic and equal development of the country.

For this reason I think the previous Orange forces should be ready in the next future to catch every occasion of active opposition or collaboration with the actual parliamentary majority, in order to contribute to the promotion of our country.