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## Viktor Yushchenko

### Ukraine's rebellious Wonk

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The first thing one notices about the opposition candidate is his face, full of scars and blisters that were absent from his once youthful, handsome visage just six months ago. And though Viktor Yushchenko, 50, raises bees in his spare time, he and his supporters from western Ukraine claim that there is nothing natural about his disfigurement, which they say is the result of a poisoning attempt by his political rivals in September.

The soft-spoken Yushchenko is very much an International Monetary Fund kind of man, committed to liberalizing the state-run economy. The fact that his wife is American has even led his enemies to accuse him of being a Western agent. The son of teachers from the agricultural corner of northeastern Ukraine, Yushchenko spent the early part of his career as a rural accountant and state banking bureaucrat. But he came to prominence in 1993 as head of Ukraine's new Central Bank, where he oversaw the introduction of the national currency and was credited with steering the country through the turbulence of the 1998 Russian economic crash. Tapped by President Leonid Kuchma as Prime Minister a year later, Yushchenko alienated Ukraine's financial oligarchs and overshadowed his unpopular boss, who fired him in 2001.

As head of the Our Ukraine opposition bloc, he has become a skilled political adversary, leading meticulously planned demonstrations and framing the election in stark, eloquent terms. "Our choice is very simple," he said just before the runoff. "Either we live according to the code of ethics of the criminal underworld, or we live like free and affluent people."