

Final Seminar Report

25 Years After 1989:

Reflections on Unfinished Revolutions

1989 is a natural marker for recent history. The year saw the unexpected overthrow of entrenched communist regimes that had been imposed by the Soviet Union after World War II and that had constituted the Warsaw Pact. Their overthrow was the direct and inspiring result of popular revolutions, uprisings, and election victories in favor of political democracy and liberal freedoms. The tearing down of the Berlin Wall by the city's citizens, East and West, symbolized the people's power in bringing an end to the Cold War.

However, singling out the year 1989 limits the overall historical significance and meaning of this era in time. 1989 was just a mid-point in the collapse of Soviet communism. As was emphasized by **Vytautas Landsbergis**, the leader of Lithuania's Sajūdis movement and the country's first president following its restoration of independence in 1990, the rebirth of freedom did not stop at the Soviet bloc countries but extended to the entire Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, "a union that was not a union of republics that were not republics."

Economic breakdown—the usual explanation for the collapse of Soviet communism—was certainly significant but hardly suffices to describe the political ferment and civic awakening that took place across a regional expanse crossing two continents in which two dozen countries of the Soviet bloc regained (or gained for the first time) their full independence and sovereignty in the space of two years.³

As remembered by many of the participants in the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe's seminar held in Warsaw, Poland, the period of 1975–93 was one of true political synergy that crossed regions and time zones, as well as all geopolitical, religious, and national boundaries. The process began around the time of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act and was reflected in the creation of the Workers Defense Committee (KOR) in Poland; Charter 77 and the Committee for Defense of Political Prisoners in Czechoslovakia; informal organizations and samizdat in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria; and in national minority, dissident, and "Helsinki Watch" groups throughout the Soviet Union, whose leaders shared their hard lessons

³ The rebirth of freedom extended to the People's Republic of Mongolia, which, while not formally a part of the USSR was fully dominated by it. Multi-party elections were introduced in 1990; the first non-communist president was elected in 1993. The collapse of communism also extended to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but its six republics separated in 1990-92 less peacefully.

of democratic resistance in the Soviet Gulag. As these movements for freedom and independence grew, and especially with the rise and stubborn resistance of the Solidarność trade union in Poland, their representatives from throughout the Eastern bloc countries gathered together to learn from each other and gain strength from their respective efforts at confronting the Soviet colossus.

A recommitment to serious policies for aiding democratic consolidation and expansion means listening to the veterans who helped to overthrow communism. . . . [I]t was their values and political imagination that helped bring about one of the most fundamental transformations of the twentieth century. They were right then. They deserve to have their voices listened to now.

This synergy was born of anti-communism and anti-Sovietism—people’s opposition to totalitarian government control as instituted through a single political ideology and imposed with great brutality by a central empire on a broad swath of nations, ethnic groups, and communities. This synergy was fueled, however, by people’s desire *for* something—personal freedom, liberal democracy and economic prosperity—and it was propelled by the demand of societies for what had been taken away from them, their national independence, human dignity, and fundamental rights.

Yet, over the twenty-five years since the transformative events of 1989–91, it became increasingly clear that the results of the democratic revolutions failed to meet the original promise of the region’s inspiring political and social movements. There have been profound consequences. In the spirit of the region’s earlier political synergy, IDEE regathered veterans of the democratic revolutions of 1989–91 in a focused seminar to reflect on those events and on what has happened since. The seminar was neither inclusive of all countries nor comprehensive of all subjects. Rather, it sought to address a range of common themes in order to analyze what happened across the region, assess the different outcomes and current state of the post-communist countries, and discuss strategies to address that era’s unfinished business. The following is a detailed report of the seminar, with summaries of the presentations and a description of the dialogue among the seminar participants during the eight sessions (biographical profiles of the participants and the full program are on pages 56–63). The papers, presentations, and transcript of the discussion have been prepared in a special issue of IDEE’s publication *Uncaptive Minds*. (Both the Special Report and the *Uncaptive Minds* special issue are available on IDEE’s new web site, www.idea-us.org.)

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1989-91: Revolution, Evolution, or Devolution

In the seminar's first session, **Vincuk Viačorka** began by refuting the widely held presumption that there were no preconditions for democracy in countries like Belarus, Ukraine, or Azerbaijan and that their independence resulted from inertia upon the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of Belarus's most experienced civic and democracy leaders, Viačorka asserted that "There *were* the internal conditions to prepare for democratic change and independence in the then-Soviet and communist countries." Well before perestroika, he said, "groups committed to the ideals of independence, human rights, and democracy re-emerged in the dissident period of the '60s to '80s" and then "exploded in number and breadth beginning in 1985." He recalled his own early organizing of independent student clubs and underground youth publications in the early 1980s, as well as other early initiatives involving intellectuals and workers. He noted:

Small but motivated groups committed to real values can at the proper moment shift a whole society. This is what happened when these many groups came together to form the Belarus Popular Front movement in 1988.

After sustained citizens' protests and actions, the Belarus Popular Front succeeded in gaining a foothold in the Soviet parliament in partly free elections held in 1990. With pressure coming from mass demonstrations, the BPF could use its parliamentary caucus to successfully push for a declaration of independence but it did not press decisively for fully free elections to parliament. This clearly diminished chances for a fuller transformation:

[T]he most important factor was that the pro-democratic, pro-independence opposition was not allowed to exercise power: it remained in opposition as post-communist structures continued to exert political dominance.

As a result, devolution—the stopping of democratic progress and the reestablishment of authoritarianism—happened in "a simple process." The Communist Party-dominated parliament and government nomenklatura blocked economic reforms and measures for building an independent state. Belarus's social and economic crisis worsened and public disenchantment with the results of "democracy" grew. In 1994, elections ended up restoring dictatorship. A former kolkhoz manager, Alexander Lukashenka, won the presidential election in 1994 in a populist campaign that took advantage both of economic hardship (blamed on "democrats") and also of divisions among democratic political forces. He promised to restore Soviet-era "stability," but underlying this message was an ideology to preserve "a political space embrac-

ing Soviet ‘values.’” After his initial victory, Lukashenka quickly consolidated power by carrying out an illegal constitutional referendum and establishing full control over the media, the military, and security police (which retained the name KGB)—all with full support of Russia.

Democrats lacked sufficient experience to rebuff these strong anti-democratic forces. Pro-democracy political parties and civic groups could not coalesce, partly due to being infiltrated by Belarusian security services, which acted in coordination with post-Soviet security and intelligence networks. A significant contributing factor to Belarus’s devolution to dictatorship, however, was the West’s inattention to the newly established independent countries. As Viačorka recounts:

[A]fter the dissolution of the USSR... the newly emerged or restored states of the region (with the exception of the Baltic States) almost disappeared from the range of vision of large Western powers. One can see the result now of this disparaging attitude and neglect by Western leaders to the countries that restored their independence... Russia carries out its aggression against Ukraine... [but it] and other countries are *still* regarded as “New Independent States”—unlike Russia.

Lukashenka’s dictatorship is perpetuated through a combination of Russian political, economic, and military backing and citizens’ fear of the regime’s repression—disappearance, arrest, job dismissal, denial of state benefits, reprisals against children, among others. Still, in Viačorka’s view, “it is wrong to conclude that Belarusians are not “ready for democracy.” Beyond the hopes of today’s younger generation, there is a “social layer built over 35 years” of civic and political activism on which to achieve democratic change.

Many European policy makers, however, determine their policies not on such democratic expectations but on considerations of *realpolitik* and business interests. Diplomats thus try “to convince Belarusian democrats that they can re-orient Lukashenka... and that Lukashenka is the best hope for defending Belarus’s fragile independence against the neo-imperialism of the Russian Federation.” Viačorka argues that

Such wishful thinking flies in the face of nearly twenty years of Lukashenka’s entrenched dictatorship... As the recent experience of Ukraine shows, the geopolitical strategy of aligning Eastern European countries toward the EU cannot be played with unreliable partners like Yanukovich—or Lukashenka.

In adopting this strategy, Western institutions and policy makers “[undermine] the position of those... supporting and defending [Western] values in our countries.” At the same time, Belarusians are the ones ultimately responsible for achieving democracy:

We in Belarus must find a key to open the slammed door. The Lukashenka regime seeks to avoid this by preventing any kind of social self-organization and especially any self-organization on the basis of values of freedom and independence... [But] beyond any economic crisis, which inevitably worsens, there is a line of tolerance beyond which the humiliation of individual dignity will not go and ultimately leads to a desperate fight for freedom.

As the session's respondent, Estonian independence leader **Tunne Kelam**, a member of the European Parliament since 2003, supported Viačorka's analysis:

What Vincuk said is very important. It is not necessary for the political class to take the lead to make major changes in society. It is often the people who lead and the political class that follows. The past 25 years have demonstrated that nothing is impossible. Everything is possible.

Kelam recalled his first lesson in imagining the realm of the possible as an art historian student in the 1950s. His professor was among those who before World War II had traveled widely on the Continent and, despite the risk in Soviet-occupied Estonia, he listened to foreign radio regarding developments in post-war Europe such as the development of the Common Market. While Soviet propaganda called the Common Market "a conspiracy of imperialist monopolies" and predicted it was ultimately doomed to fail, his professor believed that

European countries would overcome their national differences and find a mutually beneficial solution, based on their common cultural heritage and spiritual values. This was the biggest qualitative change in European history. A new reality was built. Why is it still so difficult to imagine that other realities will become true?

In 1972, he and several dissident colleagues decided to challenge the existing reality and send an open letter to the United Nations demanding free elections and an end to Soviet occupation. Describing their strategy, he said:

At the time, such demands sounded absolutely crazy. The point, however, was not to get a formal answer from the UN Secretary General, but rather to signal Western public opinion that there are people who have not accommodated to the reality of violence and lies, who insist on Estonia's right to . . . [restore] her independent statehood.

Kelam described the process of convincing others to believe in "a new reality." Starting in 1987, Estonia became a "hotbed of democratic citizens' initiatives." Citizens began not with demands for radical change but with "the demand for the truth": the publication of the secret protocols of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which were still not formally acknowledged by the Soviet Union as the basis for the invasion and occupation of the Baltic States. Underlying the demand, of course, lay the legitimacy of restoring Estonia's independence, which citizens' initiatives began to pursue in earnest in 1989 with a campaign to register prior citizens of independent Estonia and their descendants (including ethnic Russians). Despite the inherent risk, more than 80 percent of those eligible to do so—790,000 persons—made the declaration that "I consider myself as a citizen of independent Estonia, not of the USSR." An election among these free citizens to an alternative Congress of Estonia was held in February 1990 (Kelam was its first elected chairman). A large part of the communist nomenklatura recognized that the momentum for independence was unstoppable and "joined the bandwagon." Thus, he said, starting from 1988,

The Soviet authorities were no longer able to control the pace of events. Instead, they had to limit themselves to reacting to citizens' initiatives, lagging more and more behind the stream of changes that accumulated a new political quality. Within two years the paradigm of the Estonian people changed dramatically. From accepting the Communist Party as the only legitimate source of political change, they came to believe that only an independent Estonia could bring about real reforms.

Kelam spent much of his response discussing the West's weak response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and its further aggression against Ukraine. "Sadly, until now, the reaction of the European Union shows that aggression can be profitable," he stated.

You can seize foreign territories, expand your state by using military force, violate international commitments, and despite all this enter peace talks as equal partners. Nobody can oppose peace talks, but these cannot become a goal in itself, substituting for the damage caused by aggression. The harsh fact remains that for the peacemakers the price of the bargain usually includes accepting the gains of the aggressor. True, the annexation of Crimea will not formally be recognized as legal, but in practice a big European state has been dismembered.

In initial discussion, **Charles Fairbanks** stated the view that the events in Ukraine had begun a new phase in the post-Cold War era. He described three periods. The first, lasting until the mid- to late 1990s, was "one of tremendous evolution and uncertainty in the direction countries would go in and how free they would become." The second was one of "consolidation, where some firmer distinction of free and unfree countries became apparent, but there was a potential still for evolution for the unfree countries." He feared that Russia's annexation of Crimea and further aggression in Ukraine, however, has begun a third period:

Here, there is a danger that the issue of freedom for the whole former Soviet space, except the Baltic States, will be frozen by a combination of Western indifference to Russian power and the exercise of that power, whether it is exerted directly... or indirectly by creating frozen conflicts that prevent countries from evolving in a democratic direction.

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Constitutions, Electoral Choices & Their Consequences

A broader discussion of different outcomes in the region was introduced in the second session. As the main presenter, **Ivlian Haindrava**, a former MP for Georgia's liberal Republican Party and currently deputy national security adviser to the president, described the experience of Georgia in its "adventures" to establish a stable constitution and related this experience to the other South Caucasus states. In doing so, he analyzed the current state of Georgia's transition from Soviet communism following the successful—and rare for the region—transfer of power through elections in 2012–13.

To begin, Haindrava emphasized that despite the violence used by Soviet authorities in 1989 to quell protests and stir up ethnic division,

The Communists were removed from power peacefully, through elections, amid mass anti-Soviet demonstrations. In all three South Caucasus countries, the Communists were succeeded by leaders of dissident movements: Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Georgia, Abulfaz Elchibey in Azerbaijan, and Levon Ter-Petrosyan in Armenia.

Subsequently, however, all three countries would adopt authoritarian presidential systems of power. Gamsakhurdia was overthrown in early 1992 and ultimately replaced in power by the former Soviet foreign minister and Politburo member Eduard Shevardnadze. A new constitution approved in 1995 established a strong presidential system with Shevardnadze in a position to organize his election as president. In Azerbaijan, former Soviet Politburo member Haidar Aliyev, who took power from democratically elected President Abulfaz Elchibey in 1993 during an attempted military coup, quickly instituted an authoritarian presidential system under a new constitution in 1995. After Armenia adopted a new constitution in 1995, Ter-Petrosyan won presidential elections in 1996 but was also forced to resign two years later for advocating compromise with Azerbaijan on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. He was succeeded by his vice president, Robert Kocharyan, a more authoritarian figure who emerged from the Soviet nomenklatura. Presidential systems were consolidated in both Armenia and Azerbaijan in rigged elections in 2003.

In the same year, however, Georgia took a different, although not direct, path toward a more genuine democratic transition. Flawed parliamentary elections led to the Rose Revolution and resulted in the replacement of Eduard Shevardnadze by Mikhail Saakashvili, a young reformer who emerged from Shevardnadze's Citizens' Union Party. After winning snap presidential elections by an overwhelming margin, Saakashvili had a new constitution adopted with

“super-presidential powers.” Saakashvili used his powers to adopt swift reforms addressing government finances, lower-level corruption, and government administration, but his regime grew more authoritarian and corrupt at upper levels. Managed presidential and parliamentary elections held in the first half of 2008, before the war with Russia, limited the potential opposition and allowed Saakashvili and his party, the National Movement, to consolidate—and increasingly abuse—its power for the next four years, proving again the adage that “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

Instead of amending the constitution to allow a third presidential term (as happened in Azerbaijan), Saakashvili arranged a “second landing strip” for himself by having the constitution amended to switch to a parliamentary system of power with the intention for him to be selected prime minister when the new system took effect at the end of his second presidential term in the fall of 2013. Saakashvili’s plans were upended, however, when a new political coalition called Georgia Dream, led by billionaire Bidzhina Ivanishvili, delivered a surprising and decisive defeat to the ruling party in parliamentary elections held in 2012—the clear result of the population’s revulsion at the government’s authoritarian and elite-driven policies. A tense but managed period of cohabitation ended when the Georgia Dream’s candidate won the presidential election in October 2013.

Haindrava stated that Georgia still faces many difficulties in establishing a stable constitutional system. There is a lack of clarity in the constitution between parliamentary and presidential powers, and unclear governing authority following Ivanishvili’s resignation as prime minister and his selection of a less trusted politician to fill the post. But there are “many positive aspects” to recent developments and “Georgia has taken a big step away from authoritarianism”:

For the first time in its recent history, Georgia has accomplished a peaceful transition of power through parliamentary and presidential elections. (Municipal elections in June 2014 also received an overall positive assessment.)... A coalition of political parties came to power and ... [there is] a viable opposition. ... Mass media have become independent as never before.

Haindrava draws several conclusions from the experiences of both Georgia and the other South Caucasus states. One is that the lack of political parties with “firm values or platforms” makes the position of parties “quite fragile” (a phenomenon examined more fully in Session 3). As a result, “the political will of leaders has had a greater impact on political developments than constitutional frameworks.” In addition, the lack of democratic experience and democracy’s uneven development encouraged a greater belief “in the principle of strong leadership as opposed to the rule of law.” But, while Georgia’s transition is far from complete, the country’s recent political evolution has diminished “the myth of a “strongman ruler” in society:

[M]ore and more people realize that the country is better off relying on properly functioning state institutions, a system of checks-and-balances, and the rule of law, rather than on the benevolent attitude of a charismatic leader.

Arif Hajili, the newly elected chairman of Azerbaijan's main opposition party, Musavat, provided an interesting contrast to the experience of Georgia. He described the country's initial successful period of democratic governance, which was achieved due to the rise of the Azerbaijan Popular Front in 1988 and popular support for its determined demands for regaining independence and pressing for a free presidential election. After the Popular Front's leader, Abulfaz Elchibey, won the presidency in June 1992, a pro-democratic majority gained control of parliament, although not through new parliamentary elections but the abdication of some members. A wide range of democratic reforms and laws were adopted that echoed the liberal period in Azerbaijan's democratic rule in 1918–20 under the original Musavat government.

As noted by Haindrava, Elchibey was overthrown after one year in power by Haidar Aliyev—with the clear backing of the Russian Federation. “With the 1993 coup,” Hajili said, “there was a total reversal of democracy.” A new constitution adopted in 1995 formalized authoritarian rule and Aliyev further consolidated his power through a series of undemocratic parliamentary and presidential elections. The regime has grown more repressive under Haidar Aliyev's anointed successor, his son Ilham, who took power in a fraudulent election in 2003 and whose term in office is now unlimited.

Musavat emerged out of the Azerbaijan Popular Front and was reconstituted as a registered political party in 1991. It has been the main opposition to the rule of the Aliyevs and continues to function, but under increasingly difficult circumstances, as described by Hajili:

The opposition is blamed today for everything. There are more than 100 political prisoners. . . . Elections are blatantly falsified and in the last elections the district protocols report numbers that are simply made up. Half of the precincts did not even count the ballots. There are no opposition members of parliament.

Hajili argued, however, that “It is not accurate to say that the Azerbaijani people are not ready for democracy. . . . We had democracy in the past, if briefly. It is totalitarian dictatorship that prevents it.” He appealed for Western help—moral, political and financial—in supporting Azerbaijan's democratic forces. As an example, he pointed to IDEE's election observer mission in 2003, which catalogued the clear fraud carried out by the regime to ensure Ilham Aliyev's victory and prevent the main opposition candidate, Isa Gambar, from winning.⁴ He believed that consistent support for Azerbaijan's democratic forces would help them bring about real change.

In the discussion, there were two dominant themes: (1) participants examined the characteristics of the different positive and negative outcomes in the region, and (2) they analyzed the differing roles and significance of the West and the Russian Federation in these outcomes and to the current state of the region.

Serbian civic leader **Miljenko Dereta** began by pointing to a broader pattern of anti-democratic developments in the region:

I come from Serbia, which had a success that later became a defeat. . . . Hungary was a great example of a success but now, in free and fair elections, a non-democratic party has won. Elsewhere, we can

⁴ For IDEE's report and a description of the mission, see <http://www.idea.org/azerbaijanelections.html>.

see how elections often legitimize non-democratic parties or systems. I had the initial illusion . . . that in changing the leadership at the top, you changed the system. But in authoritarian regimes, there is dictatorship at every level of power. So when you cut the head, the dictatorship remains below in all the institutions at every level of society. The top-down approach does not bring about a real change. The Estonian approach, the bottom-up approach of citizens' mobilization, works better.

In explaining the different levels of success and failure within the former Soviet "space," **Arkady Dubnov**, a deputy editor of the *Democratic Russia* newspaper in the early 1990s and a veteran independent journalist specializing in post-Soviet regimes, saw several other factors. In his view, the Baltic States were more successful largely due to their inter-war heritage as independent countries and their shorter period of Soviet totalitarian rule. A second factor was their lack of energy resources: energy-rich post-Soviet states all had anti-democratic regimes. A third factor differentiating the countries is that "it is difficult to avoid authoritarianism among countries that stay in . . . a state of [war] mobilization in the face of a real or imagined enemy. I see no possibility for Armenia, for example, to be democratic, no more so than the Gaza Strip. The party in power in Azerbaijan says the same as in Armenia. . . ."

Another veteran independent journalist, **Sergey Duvanov** from Kazakhstan, commented on the contrast between Georgia, where a democratic transition "at least has now begun, even if it began by undemocratic methods," and Kyrgyzstan, where "there were two revolutions, but the process of transition was not triggered." Meanwhile, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan had "full devolution." In Kazakhstan, he said, "We were defeated by our ideological enemies."

While acknowledging the importance of Estonia's "bottom-up" citizens' movement for the success of the country's independence movement, **Tunne Kelam**, agreed with Dubnov that the previous period of independence played a significant role. "This was our lifeline, together with the policy of the US to continually recognize the independence of the Baltic States from that period." This point was emphasized later in reference to the need for maintaining a consistent non-recognition policy toward the annexation of Crimea.

Kelam identified some other factors explaining Estonia's success. One was that the Baltic nations found themselves in a "desperate situation," in danger of becoming minorities in their own countries due to the Soviet policy of encouraging Russian migration to occupied countries. "We had to do something," Kelam said. Otherwise "our nations faced destruction." Another factor was the negative attitude of the Kremlin toward independence. Boris Yeltsin's Russian Federation carried out an energy blockade of the Baltic States in the winter of 1991–92; it "left us no alternative but to move to the West." An additional factor was that "the old communists were allowed to stay in their positions" in part to placate a large proportion of the ethnic Russian minority that was "totally hostile" to independence." It was a "high price" that "enabled them to gain most from the privatization of state property."

Gábor Demszky, a former Hungarian dissident and mayor of Budapest from 1990 to 2010, added that there was one common element affecting the whole region: the overall "lack of democratic tradition as well as a lack of a middle class." He continued,

That is something we are missing in all the countries and it explains why all the countries east of the Elbe are different from the countries west of

the Elbe. It is why many of us are living in governed or led democracies or dictatorships.

Miljenko Dereta, agreed with Demszky but he believed a larger social problem also needed to be addressed: the endemic poverty in many of the countries resulting from the breakdown of the communist economy and subsequent liberal reforms. He pointed to the 21 percent overall unemployment and 50 percent youth unemployment in Serbia, levels that are not uncommon in the region. “We will not solve anything,” he stated, “unless we start to address the issue of jobs and poverty in our countries.”

The second major theme of the discussion concerned the roles played by the Russian Federation and the West in the different outcomes observed in the region. The presentations and discussion made clear that the major and decisive factor in the non-democratic and anti-democratic outcomes in the “post-Soviet space” was the role of the Russian Federation and its support of national actors in those countries who were tied to its interests. Even before the Soviet Union’s dissolution, there was a consistent policy to foster ethnic or civil conflicts, manipulate the sides in those conflicts, engineer coups, and strengthen the positions of authoritarian rulers. This ongoing intervention reflected the Russian Federation’s Soviet and historical imperial mindset and the prevalence of Soviet KGB and military networks in Russia’s governance.

Participants, however, also focused on the West’s role in the region, both previously and currently. On one level, there was a clear acknowledgement of the importance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union as “among the most remarkable achievements in human civilization.” Participants generally agreed on the overall positive effect of expanding both institutions to Central and Eastern European countries and the Baltic States. Through this expansion, **Sergey Duvanov** argued that the West had created a new geographic marker inhibiting the Russian Federation’s aggressive policies:

What is the role of the West? Let us ask ourselves what would have happened to Georgia [in 2008] or to Ukraine now without the West. We wouldn’t have Ukraine as it is today. Putin would have devoured it already by elections or by force and annexation. And only thanks to the West did Russia stop its tanks in Georgia at a certain point.

Participants did not wish criticism of Western policies to deflect from the ultimate responsibility they felt their own citizens bore for the fate of their countries. **Ivlian Haindrava** commented, “I am the last person in Georgia who is prone to accuse someone else for our shortcomings and for our lost opportunities.” At the same time, he expressed the general sentiment of participants that the US, NATO, and the EU had failed the region in many respects, both in the past and currently. In discussing the South Caucasus, for example, he states that, during the initial period of transition (what he called the “first five-year plan”),

Western leaders preferred to stand aside and watch from the side lines, with bewilderment and even fear, as these turbulent processes unfolded in the South Caucasus. They gave Russia a free hand to sort out its relationship with its former vassals.

Other participants said the same was true for much of the “post-Soviet space.” In the case of Belarus, **Vincuk Viačorka** had related in his presentation how Westerners encouraged restraint from the outset of the region’s transition, advising “Don’t hinder Gorbachev. Don’t be radical. Don’t demand decommunization or—a terrible word to them!—independence for Belarus.” He reminded participants of President George H.W. Bush’s speech in Kyiv in early August 1991 admonishing Ukrainians against “suicidal nationalism” and encouraging support for a “a politically strong Gorbachev and an effectively working central structure.” Such policy directives from the US president were indicative of Western leaders’ myopic support for “controlled,” top-down change directed by Moscow and these leaders’ disdain for popular movements and their immediate demands for sovereignty and democracy. Twenty-five years later, he rued, “[T]he West wrongly adopts the idea of introducing democracy to Belarus by the smallest doses over several generations, parceled out under Lukashenka and his successors.”

Tunne Kelam argued that the consistency of such “pragmatism” as the basis for Western policy had a number of unfortunate consequences affecting the current situation:

[W]hat is a policy of principles and what is a policy of pragmatism? I think the Ukrainian crisis has arisen due to the hesitation and pragmatism of the European Union following the Orange Revolution in 2004. Then, there was the opportunity for reforms. But the attitude of Germany was obvious: yes, you were brave, but don’t think that we want you in our club. . . . We are not digesting another new member after accepting ten new members in 2004. This attitude was the reason for Ukraine going backward. Now is the same process. If the European Union had reacted properly to Mr. Putin, it might have changed things.

Miljenko Dereta expressed alarm at the general lack of response to developments in the region:

[W]ithin the European Union, there is no real reaction to the non-democratic paths that Hungary and other countries have taken. And with the Russian aggression in Ukraine, things are even going backward to an idea that we thought had been defeated, the idea of the eternal Soviet Union. . . .

Former **President Landsbergis** offered a more skeptical view that “the West is as it is” and that “this is a state of affairs we must accept.” But **Ivlian Haindrava** expressed the dismay felt by participants at such “a state of affairs”:

I suffer very much when the democracies blur the lines, when Putin has supporters from the left wing and right wing in the West, when the West commits mistake after mistake, whether it is in response to the Arab Spring or any other situation. I am depressed by the threats to liberalism that I see even within Europe. This is what I care about. There is little effectiveness in what the Western countries do in our region. There have been a lot of funds spent in vain or worse: these funds have gone to strengthen dictators. I have no ready-made answer to stop this.

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Post-Communist Development of Political Parties & Oppositions

The third session explored the development of political parties in the post-communist period and how the lack of a stable multi-party system had affected the region. The presenter was **Arkady Dubnov**, who described the situation in the Russian Federation. The respondents were **Isa Gambar** from Azerbaijan and **Gábor Demszky** from Hungary. In the discussion, there arose a larger examination of the development of political parties in the region, including in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and the Czech Republic as well as a focused conversation on the situation in the Russian Federation and the danger it poses for other countries.

Arkady Dubnov began by stating, “today we can see that it is no more than a myth” that “democracy won its place in Russia.” The Russian Federation’s creation was “the result not of an ideological fight but simply due to the Soviet Union’s collapse.”

While Dubnov continues to believe that there were some initial chances for Russia going on “a democratic path,” they depended on massive Western assistance that was not forthcoming. In Dubnov’s view, democracy’s chances were ended in the armed attack by Boris Yeltsin on parliament in October 1993. Although it was considered a tragic necessity to “prevent a Red-Brown coup d’état,” the violent means used by Yeltsin confirmed the uncompromising and anti-democratic road being taken. That road was further paved in the manipulation of the 1996 presidential elections that ensured Yeltsin’s victory over Gennadi Zyuganov, leader of the reconstituted Communist Party.

Today, with the recreation of “the party of power” in Putin’s United Russia, there is no real political pluralism or viable democratic political party. All “opposition” parties are

single-personality parties based on their leader: Zyuganov’s Communist Party, Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), even Yavlinsky’s Democratic Party. There are differences among these parties, but they are all based on the character of the leader. The Communist Party would dissolve without Zyuganov; the same for Yabloko without Yavlinsky. Regardless, they exist in the political context where the United Russia Party is dominant.

As to the future, Dubnov was not optimistic:

We can see devolution of Russia in all directions. The country is moving toward autarchy as the outside world further isolates Russia. Its technological development has devolved. The country operates on the basis

of legal nihilism and is ruled by force and violence. . . . Unfortunately, the West still focuses on Russia's leaders and not on the society and the nation. It is another example of the tragic clash of values of principles and practices as mentioned yesterday.

In the discussion, Dubnov pointed to small signs of dissent emerging within ruling circles, but noted that the sanctions policies of the West did not differentiate among the elites. He feared that existing or additional sanctions would likely reinforce Putin's state propaganda messages that placed blame for Russia's economic problems on the West.

Isa Gambar described the unusual history and development of the main opposition party in Azerbaijan, Musavat. Musavat is one of the few successfully restored historical political parties in the entire post-Soviet region. The original party was founded in 1911 on a platform of Western liberalism and was the leading political force in the creation and governance of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918, the first democracy in the Muslim world. In its brief two-year existence, the Musavat-led government established and protected full freedoms for its citizens, including the right to vote for women, well before other democracies. After the Bolshevik Red Army takeover in 1920, Azerbaijan was forced into the Soviet Union. Musavat was severely repressed and its members filled Soviet prison camps. Musavat's founder, Mammad Amin Rasulzade, managed to escape and he re-organized the party in exile and led anti-communist and anti-fascist international coalitions in the '30s and '40s. After Rasulzade's death, the party continued in exile and also supported attempts to rebuild the party underground within Azerbaijan. After the success of the Azerbaijan Popular Front, which based its platform on that of the original Musavat, the party was formally re-registered in Azerbaijan in 1991 with Gambar as the first chairman. As the Speaker of Parliament in 1992–93, he oversaw the adoption of a package of liberal legislation similar to that adopted by the first Republic. Gambar expressed disagreement with Dubnov's assessment of the Soviet collapse as being non-ideological:

I would argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union *was* the result of an ideological struggle, one between liberalism and Bolshevism. In Azerbaijan, liberalism, represented by Musavat, fought against Bolshevism for 100 years.

He continued:

The crux of the matter is that in Russia there is a different notion of what democracy means. In Russia, people view democrats as having caused the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic collapse in Russia. In Azerbaijan, democratic parties are seen as the leading force for achieving independence.

After Haidar Aliyev's seizure of power from Abulfaz Elchibey in 1993, Musavat was prevented from running in 1995 parliamentary elections and it boycotted the 1998 presidential elections in protest of a blatantly anti-democratic electoral law. But Musavat's popularity was clear in the next round of elections that the party participated in, both the 2000 parliamentary elections as well as the 2003 presidential elections, requiring the government to resort to heightened repression and blatant fraud to prevent the opposition party's victory. Subsequent elections left no possibilities for genuine electoral competition. In response to Ilham Aliyev's

rigged constitutional referendum in 2009 that removed limits to presidential terms, Musavat adopted new statutes that restricted the terms of its chairman. Gambar served out his last term and at a congress in September 2014, a contested internal party election was won by Arif Hajili.

Gambar expressed his continued belief that Musavat would win free and fair elections, citing alternative vote counting in prior elections and opinion poll results. Going back to the previous session's discussion, Gambar argued that the opposition's mistakes were much less consequential when compared to the impact of "policies of Moscow and Washington." On the role of Russia, he stated,

I am not being original when I say that the current situation in Azerbaijan is the result of the Kremlin's policies. . . . [T]he frozen conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh was created by Moscow and it is Moscow that did not and does not allow this problem to be solved. There is a joke in Russia that a post-Soviet state that wants to stay independent must pay a real estate tax of 20-30 percent. Georgia has paid with Abkhazia and South Ossetia; Moldova pays with Transdniestria; now Ukraine pays with Crimea and possibly eastern territories. It is not a singular phenomenon.

Moscow participated directly "in the military coup in 1993 that caused the collapse of democratic government." The West, meanwhile, has been ineffectual in its human rights policies toward Azerbaijan. Gambar also focused on the inadequacy of "democracy promotion" organizations, which generally give direct support only to independent media and civil society organizations but exclude such support for opposition political parties. As well, there was a lack of support for independent trade unions, which he said could have played a real role in mobilizing workers to protect their rights. In fact, he reported that much of Western support has not even gone to democratic groups but to government-created or supported NGOs (referred to as GONGOs) that only help reinforce the government's control.

Gábor Demszky recalled the development of political parties in Hungary, which held the first free elections among the communist bloc countries in the spring of 1990 and experienced one of the longer periods of relative political party stability in post-Soviet bloc countries. Between 1994 and 2010, the Socialist Party, in coalition with the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz), alternated power with Fidesz, which began as a liberal party but evolved into the main right-wing alternative. In 2010, Fidesz, led by Viktor Orbán since 1990, won a decisive victory and its near majority in the polls translated into a two-thirds majority in parliament. Since then, Hungary has seen anti-democratic trends. Fidesz's main orientation was no longer "ideological but rather focused on increasing and maintaining its power." The Media Law it passed has limited criticism of the government and legislative changes favored Fidesz's electoral hold in the 2014 election. Demszky asserted that since taking office,

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has curtailed democratic values by systematically limiting freedom of press and religion, weakening the system of checks and balances, and disregarding the rule of law.

Orbán now refers to authoritarian regimes as models for a new statist ideology. In such a situation, Demszky stated "we are in opposition not to a government but to a system."

In the discussion, several participants assessed the lack of stable political party development in their own countries.

Smaranda Enache, director of one of Romania's most important civic organizations, Liga Pro Europa, described the long-term effects of the original takeover of Romania's political system by the "second-rank" communist nomenklatura through the National Salvation Front and then Ion Iliescu's Social Democratic Party of Romania. Although the Democratic Convention, a coalition of political parties and civic groups, won the 1996 elections, it was not a permanent breakthrough. "The communists had succeeded already in hijacking the Romanian economy to become the new bankers and capitalists and to reconsolidate the security services," she stated. The Social Democratic Party regained power in the 2000 elections while a previously independent historical party was infiltrated and taken over by leaders with "deep roots" in the communist system. Today,

There is not one party in the Romanian parliament that is loyal to the principles of the anti-totalitarian and anti-communist movements that brought the people to the streets of Bucharest and so many other cities in December 1989 and in 1990.

Independent journalist **Tatiana Vaksberg** described a similar phenomenon in Bulgaria in which the United Democratic Forces initially vied with the post-communist Socialist Party. Still, like the Democratic Convention, the UDF had only "one stable period of governance, between 1997 and 2001." Thereafter, King Simeon II returned from exile to re-enter politics through a populist party named after himself but having no clear political platform. The current prime minister is head of a political party formed in 2006, the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), which he led to a third successive election victory in parliamentary elections on October 5, 2014. The leader is

a man named Boiko Borisov. He is a graduate of the Academy of the Ministry of the Interior and was a bodyguard of Todor Zhivkov, the former communist leader for 27 years, as well as for King Simeon II, the Bulgarian tsar, after he returned to Bulgaria. This biography shows the whole problem of the Bulgarian transition.

Vaksberg concluded that "we do not have democratic parties at all. . . . They are simply a gateway for criminals to enter executive and legislative branches of power and gain greater and greater sway."

Petruška Šustrová, a former Charter 77 spokesman and now an independent journalist, pointed out that the most stable political party in the Czech Republic, considered among the most successful transition countries, is the Communist Party. It won 15 percent of the vote in the 2013 elections. While there are other stable parties like the Czech Social Democratic Party, others have receded and "in the last decade, new parties are appearing without any clear agenda." While Czech political parties are "generally democratic," their platforms tend to be "blurry," and so voters choose generally "based on the candidate and not the party." She concluded:

I understand people who are skeptical toward democracy when they do not know who is ruling, why they are ruling, and think that their vote really doesn't matter. But things are worse in other countries.

Miljenko Dereta, a former MP (2012–13) as a member of a small left-liberal coalition, noted that liberal pro-democracy parties in Serbia had failed to maintain any popularity following the assassination of Zoran Djindjić in 2003, leaving the country’s politics dominated by parties that were originally responsible for the wars of the 1990s. This reflected a common difficulty in all the countries that has prevented the development of a stable multi-party system:

The democratic left option does not exist in the Balkans or elsewhere. If you identify on the left, you are a communist. We know this is not true, but without an alternative political offer to the workers, you will not have a real stable democratic political system.

Other discussion focused on the threat posed by Vladimir Putin’s “managed democracy.” **Ivlian Haindrava** warned that Putin’s hybrid ideology posed new dangers for the West:

As Arkady described . . . when the Soviet Union collapsed, nothing replaced the former ideology. [Alexandr] Dugin’s Eurasianist idea existed before him but he has turned this into an official ideology, whether we like it or not. It is natural to fill a political void with a conservative, nationalist ideology. Putin’s conservatism, however, differs from English conservatism, which tends inward, away from the EU. Putin’s conservatism joins together Soviet and Russian imperialism . . . and [the Eurasianist ideology] is being transformed into a clear and evident challenge to the democratic world. It is an anti-liberal and anti-democratic ideology with global consequences.

Vincuk Viačorka put the situation in equally stark terms:

Vladimir Putin . . . recreates the totalitarian imperial challenge that existed from before 25 years ago. Some of us thought this had disappeared, but now we can see this threat has reemerged. Putin made it clear when he said that the major geopolitical tragedy of the twentieth century was the collapse of the Soviet Union. He has been consistent in his policy to reverse this so-called catastrophe in the twenty-first century by shedding the blood of his own nation and the blood of other nations.

Vytautas Landsbergis identified a common foundation for Soviet and Russian imperialism and the frightening nature of the threat it poses to democracies:

Before, there was the fanatical belief that the Soviet Union was the leader of the world proletarian revolution. . . . What lay behind this fanatical belief was the use of revolutionary violence, or simply violence, for the higher goal of Soviet communism. This use of revolutionary violence was the foundation of Soviet communism and the use of violence is the underlying idea of the current revived threat of Russian imperialism. There is a banner outside the ruling United Russia party: it shows Putin as the savior of a girl (representing the nation) by having seized the Crimean peninsula. The idea is that Russia, raped by the West, is saved through the rape of territory. . . . The savior is saving Russia from being raped by raping others.

What is the Unfinished Business?

A Panel Discussion

**Mustafa Dzhemilev, Tunne Kelam,
Vytautas Landsbergis & Isa Gambar**

While the previous sessions discussed the challenge posed by the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin, this panel addressed directly the issue of the annexation of Crimea and Russia's further military aggression in Ukraine. The panel included Isa Gambar, Tunne Kelam, and Vytautas Landsbergis, who were introduced by Irena Lasota as "the very conscience" of the democracy and independence movements of Azerbaijan, Estonia, and Lithuania, respectively. Kelam and Landsbergis are also both members of the European Parliament. The main presentation was by **Mustafa Dzhemilev**, the dissident hero of the Soviet human rights movement and the recognized national leader of the Crimean Tatars, who today, as MP of the Parliament of Ukraine, tries to save his nation from existential threat under Russian occupation.

In May 1944, at six months' old, Dzhemilev was among an estimated 238,500 Crimean Tatars, nearly the entire national population, who on orders of Stalin were brutally herded into cattle cars by police and transported to Central Asia and Siberia from the Crimean peninsula—their homeland since the 14th century. Half of the population died from starvation, exposure, disease, and execution. Dzhemilev survived with his family and from a young age took action to resist Soviet dictatorship and defend the national rights of the Crimean Tatars. He was arrested a total of six times, the first time at age 21, and spent eighteen years in prison between 1966 and 1986. While in prison, he developed relationships with many other human rights activists (in his memoirs, Andrei Sakharov refers to Dzhemilev as his mentor). During this time, Dzhemilev went on numerous hunger strikes to protest inhuman treatment and to demand basic human rights.

Committed to principles of non-violence, human rights, and democracy, Dzhemilev helped rebuild the Crimean Tatars' historic autonomous and self-governing institutions in exile in Central Asia with the aim of undoing Soviet injustices and repatriating the Crimean Tatars to their national homeland. As head of the Crimean Tatar National Movement, he led the return of between 250,000 and 300,000 Crimean Tatars back to the peninsula beginning in 1988. From 1991 to 2013, Dzhemilev was the elected chairman of the national Mejlis, or parliament, which directs the political and social affairs of the Crimean Tatar community. He has also served since 1998 as a member of the Ukrainian parliament. He was re-elected to the parliament in the extraordinary elections of 2014.

Today, Dzhemilev is barred from returning to Crimea by the illegal authorities appointed by the Russian Federation following the occupation and forcible annexation of the Autonomous Region of Crimea. From Kyiv, Dzhemilev acts again to save the Crimean Tatar nation from existential threat and to reverse the Kremlin's act of military aggression. He is widely recognized as a national hero throughout Ukraine, a status reinforced by his active participation in the Euromaidan movement and his defense of Ukrainian sovereignty and democracy.

Mustafa Dzhemilev's account of the repression being suffered by his people was chilling for all the participants: widespread disappearances, killings, beatings and arrests of activists; deportations and travel bans; denial of all rights; punitive fines for congregating in groups of more than two; destruction of libraries; the closing down of educational institutions and independent media; repression of elected community institutions; wanton seizures of property and books (a list of 200,000 banned books was being added to daily); constant police raids and intimidation by non-uniformed thugs; mass firings from state institutions; and denial of state benefits. "From the beginning," there have been threats of a second mass deportation.

In short, the Crimean Tatars, representing less than 20 percent of the population, are being terrorized and they face a worse threat:

With military actions in Ukraine, there will be the justification for destroying the "fifth column" in Crimea, namely those who do not support or accept the annexation of Crimea, and firstly the Crimean Tatar people. We know they have lists of people who would be targeted for liquidation and we cannot exclude mass actions against Crimean Tatars.

Given Russia's further aggression, Dzhemilev now worries that the West will forget Crimea and the Crimean Tatars or appease Russia by accepting the annexation:

The situation is dire. We are concerned that the topic of Crimea has disappeared from view and people stop talking about the annexation. No Western nation now recognizes the annexation, but we fear that nothing will be done, that it will be similar to the situation of Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. . . . [L]ike in 1938, some Western nations might be willing to negotiate over the issue. Not many talk openly about it but some EU MPs and even the Czech Prime Minister speak of it.

He pointed out that "the annexation is clearly against Russian interests," both as a burden to its economy and as the direct cause of "Russia's isolation in the world community." Unfortunately, a large majority of Russians "are pleased with this situation," he said. "If you steal someone else's territory, this is a matter of pride."

Asked to address "how it might be possible to liberate Crimea," he replied:

Of course, if I knew how to liberate Crimea, I wouldn't be participating in conferences, I would be liberating Crimea. So if we are not to liberate Crimea yet . . . [w]hat then can be done? What are we asking for? First, we want the issue of the annexation of Crimea not to disappear from the headlines, from the world media. We must speak about what is

happening in Crimea and we must speak about how Crimea should be liberated and returned to the sovereign control of Ukraine.

Tunne Kelam contrasted the different circumstances from 25 years ago, when national movements for independence gathered in Tallinn full of hope, and today.

[W]e must ask ourselves if anything has changed. What mistakes have we committed? What could we have done to prevent this? When we listen to Mustafa now, I must admit that I did not imagine 25 years ago that we would still be talking about lawless societies, rampant corruption, KGB-based governments, oligarchic power, aggression, dismemberment of countries, torture and killings of civilians, the muzzling of free media. Seen from the vantage point of 1989–91, this all should have been unimaginable. And yet, the free countries of Europe and the US are not able to face the reality that the world has changed again. Or has it changed after all?

Although he still believed that “everything was possible,” as he stated in his earlier presentation, he also re-emphasized that “nothing is guaranteed if citizens will not stand up to defend what they have achieved: liberty and rule of law.” He concluded, “There is no guarantee that progress from human bondage to freedom and abundance will continue.”

Vytautas Landsbergis also reminded participants of the contrast in time and that 25 years ago the Democratic Russia Movement was “on our side,” backing the Lithuanian independence movement’s demands. “What can I say about the unfinished business? . . . There would have been enormous difference if Russia had been able to stay democratic.” Other choices were made, however, both in Russia and the “post-Soviet space.” He continued:

I remember [former Soviet dissident and Russian human rights activist] Sergei Kovalyov writing in 1999 that democracy was over and the KGB was the ruling party in Russia. It was not a party, of course. He meant it as a system of ruling, of government, as in the Soviet Union. Russia was going backward—a restoration of anti-democracy, of the Soviet ancien régime coming back in a new form.

Today, he said, the region faces a new division

between democracy and non-democracy or rather between democracies and non-democracies. The European Union and NATO are democracies in contrast to non-democracies. And among the non-democracies there are anti-democracies that see democracy as a threat to be destroyed. So, if one country adopts democracy, such a neighbor thinks it must be destroyed.

Isa Gambar spoke more optimistically about the possibilities for addressing the “unfinished business.” He began with a pragmatic analysis. “Twenty-five years have passed and we may say that the transition period in the post-Soviet states is over.” There were three categories of countries that emerged. The first includes the three Baltic States, which “made key and

necessary reforms [and] achieved political and economic freedom.” They succeeded to become members of NATO and the EU and “[t]hey have completed the transition as democracies.” But,

[t]he transition period is also over in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and other countries of the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States]. Unfortunately the transition period in these countries ended in authoritarian, corrupt regimes that are part of the Kremlin’s policy. The third category comprises Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, and maybe Kyrgyzstan. They are still in the period of transition.

Gambar noted, “No one today discusses how we can achieve democracy in current authoritarian regimes.” Democratic movements in post-Soviet states are generally isolated from each other and also have no opportunity to learn from more successful transitions. Now, he said, “we must try to look forward and answer questions for the future.” He argued in favor of a “common strategy” to address the “unfinished business,” by which he meant not a strict “guideline or framework of change” but rather “a set of fundamental values and methods for solving problems in our societies based on the democratic values and methods common for all of us.” He proposed creating a common “think tank to share recommendations and strategies on general issues and how they apply to our particular countries.”

Gambar also expressed greater optimism about possibilities for change in Russia and supporting those who resist the current regime’s aggressive and imperialist policies:

We heard today that it will take decades to make changes in Russia. I disagree. I believe Russian society does have the potential to reach liberal democracy. We see this possibility in demonstrations of tens of thousands of people in Moscow. Do you think it is easy to organize a demonstration in Moscow in support of Ukraine or against the annexation of Crimea? Thousands of people did find the courage to take to the streets.

Still, he said, one cannot base policies on expectations of swift democratic change in Moscow. Thus,

We must work in our post-Soviet bloc countries effectively. We must support these nations to change without counting on the politics in Moscow. A lot can be done if the right decisions are made, the right policies are adopted. Positive changes can be achieved and democratic reforms can be made in the post-communist space.

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Decommunization & Transitional Justice

This session addressed the essential theme of how the region had confronted the communist legacy following 1989–91. While there was a difference of opinion expressed as to the policy of lustration as a means of decommunization, there was general agreement on the profound negative influence that communist party and state security networks had in all the countries in inhibiting democratization and contributing to non-democratic or anti-democratic parties succeeding in elections. There was also general agreement on the importance of compensating victims of communism, opening files for investigating the past, and the importance of other cultural and historical initiatives in confronting the communist legacy. Surprisingly, such decommunization policies are not the norm but the exception. The weakness of democratic progress in the region and the continuing anti-democratic influences of the former communist nomenklatura were linked directly to the lack of decommunization and transitional justice.

Petruška Šustrová, a former Charter 77 activist who served in the Ministry of Interior in 1990-91 before resuming her career as an independent journalist, analyzed efforts by Czechoslovakia and subsequently the Czech Republic to deal with communism's legacy. The Czech Republic has two laws considered models for the region. The first is the Law on Lustration, adopted before the federation's break-up on November 4, 1991, which stated that "people who used to work in the state security services could not hold certain official positions." As in other countries, lustration was a contentious issue, but the Law set out to address some very clear concerns:

The Ministry of Interior at the time knew that before the communist system collapsed the lists of the state security apparatus had been handed over to the Soviet KGB and there was a real fear that such lists would be used to blackmail individuals to serve Soviet interests in our country. There was also a strong view that people who held key positions in the communist government and structures should not hold high public positions in the new democratic system.

While lustration played "an important role in Czechoslovak and then Czech politics and one can even say that there was some misuse of the law . . . there were no political purges. This was a groundless accusation." Indeed, the burden for proof was put quite high for establishing a person's status as a police agent and meriting screening from specified official positions.

In Šustrová's view, what is clear today is that a large part of the Czech electorate overlooks former ties to the security services or the communist regime. This is evident by the 15-19 percent of the vote regularly received by the Communist Party and the near 20 percent received by a new party, called ANO 2011 ("ano" means "yes" in Czech). ANO has a populist anti-

corruption platform and is led by a former official of a huge state enterprise, Andrej Babiš, now a billionaire. Although a court in Bratislava determined Babiš not to have been a police agent under the strict considerations of the Law on Lustration, nevertheless the Czech electorate “knew who they were voting for.”

The second model legislation was the Law on the Illegality of the Communist Regime, which was adopted in the Czech Republic in 1993 and “expressed the will of the majority of parliamentarians to deal honestly with the past.” While the law had mostly a declarative purpose, it also provided a basis for rehabilitation of victims of the communist regime. It did not, however, establish any public proceeding for reviewing the illegal acts of former officials.

As important as these laws were, Šustrová argued that “now the issue of communist legacy has more to deal with other public institutions.” First of all, she said, this is “the task of education and media.” In this regard, a law adopted in 2004 opening the files of public administration (instead of waiting the usual period of 30 years) has proven central to the task of journalists and researchers to find out the truth about the past. In addition, she said,

[H]istorical works, films, textbooks, art works have a large impact compared to scientific or research papers. Education also plays an immense role. We must remember that there are new generations that did not experience communism.

Surprisingly, however, she reported that the Ministry of Education does not focus on such civic education but rather on the sciences, leaving the task to NGOs to fill.

Levan Berdzenishvili, an MP in Georgia for the liberal Republican Party, which is a member of the Georgia Dream coalition that won the 2012 parliamentary elections, was the session’s respondent. He stated that, notwithstanding his own support for the policy of lustration and his own introduction of lustration laws, the issue in Georgia became moot. The proposals for lustration laws were never acted on under either Shevardnadze or Saakashvili. A law was adopted recently by the current parliament, but it had limited application. A large reason is that the Soviet KGB removed all the relevant files, making any process for determining who was an agent of the security services nearly impossible. Even as someone who was imprisoned in the Gulag, Berdzenishvili has not been able to obtain his own files from Moscow.

In his view, there was a larger overall difficulty facing Georgia in overcoming its Soviet past, namely subservient attitudes toward political authority:

I decided that lustration is not enough. There is a lot of very communist thinking even among people who are very anti-communist but still they have very communistic attitudes. . . . [O]ur parties do not know what they want other than what the leaders say. They have no real program in response to the challenges of today. But all the members can cite precisely the day’s comments by the Prime Minister. And they know what will happen if they express any disagreement. It is a very Soviet attitude. . . .

He agreed with Šustrová that the education system is central to addressing the communist legacy. He observed that textbooks “are fair concerning the history of Georgia” and even include the history of dissidents like himself, who founded the Republican Party in 1977, but

“you cannot find in these history books what was the essence of the Soviet Union and how freedom differs from slavery.”

Gábor Demszky expressed significant disagreement about the issue of lustration: “The biggest mistake that I committed was to begin with lustration.” In Hungary, he said, he helped guide a lustration law to passage in 1990, but ultimately he felt it was not possible to define clearly who was to be considered for screening. In his view, the lustration law distracted from a more important task, which was to give “those people who were under surveillance or interfered with [the legal right] to get information from the secret police archives.” In the end, he argued that the main difficulty with lustration is that it did not succeed:

What is the problem? The secret police agents are today the same. Everything has changed: the constitution, the governments, the parties. Who has remained? The agents, the network, and the apparatus. It is still a state secret who are the police agents: it is protected information for 60 years. And so the governing elite can do whatever they want with them.

The participants were in general agreement on the negative impact of former security services in the region. **Miljenko Dereta**, for example, said that in Serbia “it is not the former communists who control the parties but the former secret services. It is the secret services that came to power and ran the parties.” **Smaranda Enache** recalled that in Romania in 1990 the students demonstrating for democracy had included among their demands “to bar from official or public positions for 5 years people in the communist nomenklatura and paid officers of the Securitate, the Romanian secret police.” But their demand was never adopted. The lack of such screening, she contended, had allowed the entrenchment of the communist nomenklatura in post-Ceaușescu Romania. Enache described how 17 years later “President Băseșcu established a commission on the crimes of the totalitarian regime and a law was passed condemning the communist government as a criminal regime, but there was no action resulting from it. There was no consequence. . . . The communists still own the banks, the media and all the rest of it.” She concluded:

After twenty-five years we must recognize that the communist regime was a criminal regime and giving such a regime impunity has been a cancer on society. . . . I am absolutely convinced of two things. One is that in dealing with the collapse of a criminal totalitarian regime one must, as it happened after the defeat of the Nazi regime, bar the persons responsible for that regime from public positions. Second, such a policy of lustration must be combined with full access to victims of the police files and to allow criminal actions to be filed in court.

In Bulgaria also, **Tatiana Vaksberg** reported that there was very little lustration and “strangely, the archives were opened by the communists, not the democrats.” The reason was that “they knew that the population had no interest in the information in those archives.” As a result, when the files were opened in 2006, it had no effect.

In a previous session, **Tunne Kelam** expressed frustration at the “absolute lack of interest to our history and to our past” on the part of European Parliament members from Western

European countries. These members would counsel, “Don’t think of the past. Let us look to the future.” But, he said,

[W]e realized that there is no possibility of building a common future without settling accounts with the past. It can’t be pushed aside. There are tens of millions of victims who suffered and one cannot just ignore the suffering of these victims. If we don’t assess the history of communism equally with Nazism and other totalitarian systems, then there can be no moral or political justice for current systems.

He described how he, fellow MEP Vytautas Landsbergis, and others had succeeded, albeit with difficulty, in getting the European Parliament to pass a resolution on “Totalitarianism and European Conscience” in 2009. The resolution established August 23, the anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, “as an all-European day of remembrance of all victims of totalitarian systems.” It also created a European Platform of Memory and Conscience to be a formal institution for gathering oral and written history and to investigate the crimes of totalitarian regimes. Unfortunately, few countries officially marked the August 23 date and the European Platform had not been fully funded. Still, “we have got half-way.” He concluded,

What is very important is for all of us to address the past and to create a balanced version of modern European history.

There was agreement that throughout the region there had been little justice provided victims of communism. Berdzenishvili reported that in Georgia, the courts determined that everyone had been a victim of the communist regime and given compensation of 200 Lari, approximately \$300 USD, thereby minimizing actual suffering of former political prisoners. (He noted this amount is 50 times less than that established by the European Court for Human Rights as minimum compensation for victims of human rights abuses by governments.) Furthermore, while several institutions and commissions had been established in different countries to explore and investigate the past, there had been no country that adopted a formal process allowing for genuine national reconciliation, unlike a number of other countries from around the world that transitioned from dictatorship to democracy.

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Civic Institutions, Civic Participation

The seminar had four expert presentations on the subject of civil society—meaning the full range of organizations, associations, and groups established by citizens outside the control of the state—in the region. Two papers were delivered by **Smaranda Enache**, the director of Liga Pro Europa, and **Miljenko Dereta**, the co-founder and long-time director of Civic Initiatives in Serbia. They were followed by two respondents: **Ales Bialiatski**, the director of the Viasna human rights organization in Belarus who recently had been released from prison, and **Maria Dubnova**, an independent journalist and writer from the Russian Federation. Together, the four presentations drew a portrait of the complex challenges still facing civil society in the region, including repressive governments, restrictive legislation, and corruption.

Smaranda Enache described Romania’s specific development over the previous twenty-five years as an instructive example of the “unfinished business” in the region. She started by reminding the participants that Romania had one of the most repressive, Stalinist communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. . . . The repression of freedoms and human rights was complete and before 1989 Romania did not have any genuine civil society. All organizations and associations that existed were created by the Communist Party.

This factor was soon forgotten by Western countries but it had a lasting impact on Romania’s development. In December 1989, a citizens’ revolt starting in Timișoara sparked a genuine democratic revolution to overthrow the regime of Ceaușescu, but it was easily supplanted by “second-rank” communists who quickly seized power through the National Salvation Front (NSF) led by Ion Iliescu. Despite a genuine revival of Romanian society, including restoration of historical parties and the emergence of civic and student groups, democratic change was limited. Iliescu’s hardline faction of the NSF won elections in 1992 and established political dominance through control of the reconstituted security services and transferring ownership of the economy and media to the nomenklatura. A true democratic breakthrough occurred only in 1996, when the Democratic Convention, a coalition of historical parties and civil society groups won parliamentary elections and its presidential candidate, Emil Constantinescu, defeated Iliescu.

Although the new government achieved some political and economic reforms and successfully reoriented Romania toward the West by beginning accession talks to NATO and the EU, it was unable to maintain public confidence due to several factors: its own internal divisions, the determined opposition of Iliescu’s Social Democratic Party of Romania, and economic and political manipulation by the re-entrenched nomenklatura and security services.

In the 2000 elections, Iliescu won back the presidency and his party garnered a large plurality to lead a new government. “Romania experienced the total collapse of the democratic forces and along with them the prospect for building a non-communist multiparty system.” In essence, “the original parts of the National Salvation Front” succeeded in defeating or co-opting the anti-communist political parties. Thereafter, parliamentary control alternated between the renamed Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the National Liberal Party (PNL), itself “hijacked by a new leadership of former communists.” Iliescu was succeeded as president by the PNL’s new leader, Traian Băsescu, a “politician with deep roots in Ceaușescu’s communist system.”

After the “romantic times” of the 1996 breakthrough, civil society organizations also lost credibility by mistakenly adopting an uncritical stance toward the Democratic Convention and Constantinescu while in power and thus not maintaining their role as independent actors and public watchdogs. Some parts of civil society further “lost touch with the grass roots” and compromised their positions in later elections by choosing a pragmatic course to support the “better” PNL against the “worse” PSD, rather than maintain distance from the political parties. Meanwhile, the government, especially under Iliescu but also under Băsescu, actively subverted independent civil society organizations and promoted “government-oriented” NGOs supporting the new elite.

Two factors further complicated the position of democrats. The post-communist parties, seeing no future in a pro-Russian orientation, adopted a “conversion” strategy and embraced a major goal of democratic parties and civil society organizations: membership with the EU and NATO.

The civic groups hoped that once Romania was admitted to Euro-Atlantic institutions, the government would be pressured to continue and deepen its reforms. But this proved mistaken and, step by step, the influence of pro-democratic civic groups was further diminished as Western governments preferred to engage in dialogue with the Romanian government [and] willfully overlooked the failings of their new partner.

A second factor was “the harmful consequences” resulting from the “financing philosophy” and “highly rigid financing mechanisms” adopted by the EU, which tended to benefit GONGOs and business-oriented NGOs. They “are the ones generally with the capacity to deal with [the EU’s] bureaucratic requirements,” including matching funding and adherence to detailed regulations generally devised for advanced economies and stable democracies as opposed to struggling and nascent ones.⁵ Smaller and less well funded pro-democratic civic groups are overburdened administering such EU projects. Worse, having little domestic support, these organizations must rely on such EU funding and so often re-direct their focus away from national or local needs to meet ever-fluctuating EU funding priorities, which change annually to satisfy the needs of different constituency groups. By pursuing such funding, NGOs

⁵ Such regulations are not just burdensome, but sometimes dangerous for the individuals and organizations such funding is supposed to help. Belarusian NGO activist Ales Bialiatski was sentenced to imprisonment by the Belarus regime for receiving funds for his organization Viasna through a bank account in Poland that had been opened only due to funder requirements. The Polish government divulged the information to Belarusian authorities.

“lose the very reason and goals of their initiatives.” The EU Commission thus effectively “discourages genuine civic initiatives.”

Reflecting on the overall situation in Romania and in Eastern Europe, she warned, “We in the region all run the risk of having democracies without democrats in our countries. It is a very dangerous prospect. It is the ante-chamber of arbitrary government and authoritarianism.” But, in a more positive postscript following the seminar, Enache described the unexpected victory of Klaus Ionnis, the independent mayor of Sibiu, over the SDP candidate, incumbent Prime Minister Victor Ponta, in presidential elections in November 2014. She ascribed Ionnis’s victory largely to a revived civil society mobilizing citizens in protest of Ponte’s attempted manipulation of election procedures (in the first round of voting, Ponte ordered restrictions in voting access for Romanians temporarily living abroad, mostly younger voters likely to support the non-SDP candidate). Newer NGOs with younger leaders used innovative tactics to successfully stand up for “citizens’ most basic right to vote.” Enache concluded,

A wave of optimism now animates Romania. . . . It is too early to draw conclusions about the new civic society. Its mobilizing efficiency is impressive, but its agenda and values are less strategic and clear. The task in the next years is to combine the skills of the new generation of civic leaders with a renewed sense of social responsibility, democratic solidarity, and active historical memory.

Complementing Smaranda Enache’s presentation, **Miljenko Dereta** focused on the negative characteristics of civil society development in the region and how they were refracted in Serbia. First, however, Dereta emphasized an essential aspect of the 1989–91 revolutions:

[I]n the process of bringing down communist regimes in the region, civic groups played the role of non-existing political parties. They were the ones to challenge the regimes in power. . . . These groups were successful in achieving difficult and complex political changes and perceived themselves as having not only the responsibility but also the right to remain an important factor in the political life of their countries. Once in power, however, some of them faced unexpected and unpleasant surprises. Presumed political allies showed no enthusiasm to let civil society representatives enter a space politicians wanted to control.

Over time, Dereta said,

New self-proclaimed “democrats” in power remembered well the danger of an engaged, active citizenry to the “stability of the state,” now meaning to their own positions in power, and they continually limited citizen participation through restrictive legislation or procedures, or simply in practice.

Thus, civil society was often marginalized. In many countries, including Serbia and Hungary, “competitive authoritarianism” took hold wherein free elections resulted in the election of non-democratic political parties. He warned,

In this new reality, the definition of the NGO sector will come from Putin. In the Russian Federation, civil society organizations are now defined as foreign agents if they receive support from outside the country. . . . Such thinking will spread like wildfire in the region because regimes are waiting for an excuse to take action against those who are critical of them. Here, we are all agents.

Civil society thus faces a fundamental challenge. Civic organizations, still unable to rely on domestic sources of support, remain dependent on the foreign funding that authoritarian governments are again defining as a threat to national security. What worsens the situation is the ineffectiveness, short-sightedness, and bureaucratization of Western donor institutions. Similar to the phenomenon described by Ms. Enache, he explained what happened in Serbia:

Slowly, and especially after the changes in 2000, funding shifted to state agencies such as USAID and then the EU Commission. They introduced criteria that very few NGOs could fulfill as well as procedures more appropriate for businesses and state bureaucracy than to citizens' associations. In that process, civil society organizations have confronted a high level of inflexibility, bureaucratization, and expectations by donors for minimum investments or matching funds.

Dereta described how civil society in the region devolved due to its reliance on foreign funding:

[I]n the old times we used to have a project. We had an idea that was a reflection of the needs of people. . . . We saw the problem, we defined it, and we proposed a solution to it. Then we looked for donors. The hardest change came when the donors assumed the role of setting the agenda and priorities, which was diametrically opposed to how civil society worked and completely changed the culture of civil society organizations.

As a result, he said, "Civil society organizations no longer know who they serve. [They] are not looking anymore to their constituencies but are trying to satisfy the donors' requirements." The consequences are significant: growing citizens' mistrust of local, national, and international institutions and a significant decrease of involvement of citizens in civic activities. Such distrust means that change is driven by unorganized social movements that are unable to sustain themselves or the momentum for change. It is a recipe for "turning success into defeat."

As the first respondent, **Ales Bialiatski** reflected on the wave-like pattern of citizens' action in Belarus and why civil society could not sustain democratic changes in the early 1990s. One thing that "was lacking," he said, was a determination to call citizens to the streets to act decisively for democratic changes. "Practically speaking, we, the democrats, were the ones who did not take advantage during these critical junctures," he stated.

Like Arkady Dubnov, he believed that one of the reasons Lithuania and Estonia were more successful in sustaining the changes was their period of independence in the inter-war period before Soviet occupation. The older generation could relate its more democratic expe-

periences to a younger generation. These were experiences that “we were deprived of... by the Red Army.” He also agreed with Vincuk Viačorka, however, that the civil society experiences developed over the last 25 years were a base on which to build for the future. He observed:

We can clearly see that youth activism is looking for forms of effective activity. We represent the old structures. We have a lot of successes, but we have a number of disadvantages, especially by acting on the same path as the last 25 years. We are ready to help the new energy of initiatives with the hope that it gives a new political impulse. We can clearly see that we are returning to the starting point.

In her remarks, **Maria Dubnova** had a stark assessment of the situation in Russia:

Today, all the features of the Soviet regime as they appeared during the latter stages of the Soviet Union—that is, the period after the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979—are returning.

She described a fully controlled judiciary in which state authorities use the courts to repress both civil society and private business. In the latter case, “one of every six businessmen is the subject of criminal prosecution.” What dominates political and social life, however, is the state propaganda machine, especially television broadcasts:

They pour out outright lies that cultivate hatred. And this wave of hatred is hard to control. It generates an image of “the enemy”: there are internal enemies, such as liberals, national traitors, and fifth columnists, and then there are external enemies, such as the West or the US. Every word of Russian media must be mistrusted. Any truthful information must be found from alternative sources, which are scarce and being made even scarcer.

Civil society reflects more humanitarian and liberal forces in Russia but it has no influence on state policy. And with the passage of the new law on NGOs, the state has begun “witch hunts” against civil society activists as “foreign agents.” Phones are tapped; threats of violence are commonplace. “All of this is reminiscent of the late Soviet regime,” she stated. At the same time, there are differences from the Soviet period:

In the Soviet days, there were some guarantees of economic welfare. Today, there is the ghost of destitution, especially among the elderly. There is also no development of the fields of science and technology. And the level of cynicism among state authorities is even higher.

Dubnova reminded participants that Russians had experience living through hard periods. All the lessons from the Brezhnev era of how to survive had again become relevant. She stated that Russians face the same dilemmas as in the past:

People are ashamed that they do not have the will to fight. All the questions return: where to live? how to live? These are questions not about the comfort of oneself or even the welfare of one’s children, but about political and existential well-being. It should not be so.

In discussion, **Vytautas Landsbergis** described Russia as a country in which “a minority runs a society where the majority accepts living in a madhouse.” It becomes an urgent priority, therefore, to support the minority of “normal people” who reject “the madhouse.”

Maria Dubnova welcomed Landsbergis’s remarks but reminded the participants of the elemental challenge facing those who resist:

All of us who participate in peace marches, we threw away our TV sets. But it is not about watching television. Today, participation in civil society in Moscow, in Russia, is a personal act of courage, a personal decision. It cannot be a mass movement. . . . People need to have courage to act and it is a personal decision. . . . We are not sure if it will have direct impact, whether or not it will have an impact on the whole society.

Sergey Duvanov, comparing Kazakhstan to other countries, described the state of civil society there as perhaps even “worse”:

When we speak of civil society in our country, it is within the parameter of the Soviet expression “sovok,” shorthand for *homo Sovieticus*, in which the relationship of the individual is subservient to the state. . . . The citizen exists for the state, not the state for the citizen. This is the attitude of citizens within the realm of Soviet ideology.

In this situation, **Duvanov** questioned the approach of Western donors to the country:

Here is the paradox: for twenty-five years we tried to build civil society and the building blocks were not citizens but subjugated citizens, the willing slaves of the state. Can you imagine the following situation: a majority of civil society organizations support the concept, “Crimea is ours,” meaning Russia’s. This is not an independent civil society. . . . This is what Kazakh civil society looks like and these organizations receive most of the grants from Western governments and foundations.

Vincuk Viačorka related a similar difficulty in Western approaches to non-democratic countries using the example of the EU’s Eastern Partnership (EaP) program, which includes six post-Soviet countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

The Eastern Partnership was an initiative to bring some of the countries of the former Soviet space into the economic development and civilization of the European Union, but unfortunately there has been little success. There was a typical bureaucratic approach that identified governments with nations and societies. At the same time, the bureaucrats ignored the societies. . . .

Irena Lasota, commenting on Smaranda Enache’s and Miljenko Dereta’s criticism of the practices of Western donor institutions, stated:

The problem goes beyond imposing specific agendas and selecting recipients on an unprofessional or even worse basis, although this is part

of it. Many Western donor institutions and endowments have built and justified their programs on the myth that democracy was built in the entire post-Soviet world from outside by their funding programs. It is a very dangerous myth because it strips the people in the region of their self-esteem as important actors in building democracy and forces them into a “business” model in which “democrats” compete among themselves for the donors’ money in a process where the donors choose who are the “best” democrats. But no amount of money can inculcate values and courage. Many donor organizations are led by people who had only a theoretical approach to democracy but without any practical experience. For example, they had the theory that an opposition can win only if it unites. In practice, this meant uniting the dissidents with KGB fronts and parties led by agents.

She also reminded the participants that the West’s “compromise of basic principles” is not recent but has been consistent. The Community of Democracies in 2000, for example, invited the Russian Federation to participate even after Vladimir Putin, newly installed by Boris Yeltsin as Prime Minister, had just launched the second war against Chechnya, an action resulting in the mass slaughter of civilians. The State Department had co-financed a parallel conference of civil society organizations to support the Community of Democracies initiative, but it was completely separated, “held far away from the political leaders.” Any “real expression of civil society,” she said, “was silenced.” Civil society representatives were prevented from adding anything to the government-set agenda, such as a protest at the inclusion of Russia in the Community of Democracies at a time it was committing genocide. Indeed, “those that organized a separate protest were later defunded by government-backed donor institutions.”

Miljenko Dereta added that such dismissal of civil society’s opinion was common among “our political elites,” who really did not support civil society as such. For them, “[There] is a certain degree of disdain in which they hold citizens. They don’t really need them. . . . Civil society [is] perceived as competition if it expresses disagreement with them. They expect us to support them uncritically.”

Eric Chenoweth concluded that “by now, it is necessary to put democracy promotion in quotation marks” and that most Western donor organizations and endowments today “have very little to do with promoting democracy and mostly to do with maintaining bureaucracies and self-justification.” He continued that there remain some “intelligent foundations and individually some good programs,” but

In truth, “democracy promotion” has become a charade that cannot hide a simple fact: over the last 25 years, there has been very little democracy promoted, much less achieved, in the spending of billions and billions of dollars. . . . Any time an opening occurs due to the courage of citizens facing up to repressive dictatorship, the “democracy promotion” industry takes credit for it. But no one takes responsibility for 25 years of overall failure, the many reversals of democratic progress, and the success of dictatorship in pushing citizens back, whether it is in Iraq or Egypt or in the post-communist space.

What Happened to the Dream of Independent Media?

One of the key tools for bringing about change in the Soviet bloc was free speech. Democratic forces were often organized around samizdat, underground publications, and then, as it became possible, legally registered independent publications and broadcast stations. Yet today, most media in the region, print and broadcast, remains state-controlled or dominated by financial interests tied to state power or former state security networks. Traditional print and broadcast media, especially television, retain a large influence on the societies in the region, whose access and reliance on alternate information sources through the internet is much less significant than in more technologically developed economies and democracies. In the final theme of the seminar, the question was raised why and how independent media had become so weak. What happened to the dream of independent media? The presentations and discussion revealed how alarming the state of media is in the region.

Independent journalist **Tatiana Vaksberg** identified the failure to establish independent means of publication and broadcasting as an early mistake of the opposition following the ouster of the longstanding communist ruler Todor Zhivkov in November 1989—one that affected development of independent media in Bulgaria for the subsequent decades. The United Democratic Forces (UDF), the main opposition coalition made up of political and civic groups, chose not to try to establish its own independent facilities for production and distribution of regular newspapers and instead demanded access to state printing presses so as to create one daily and one weekly newspaper with a large distribution. Indeed, this became one of the main preconditions for participating in a roundtable with the Communist Party to negotiate terms of the transition. As a result,

The first daily, *Demokratiya*, and the weekly *Svobodna Narod* (Free People), which started in February 1990, were granted circulation of 70,000 copies each. Other newspapers followed. This determined the development of the media in Bulgaria. . . . [I]t became clear that a very strange kind of press freedom was born: free media that never really fought for their freedom.

The Bulgarian Student Association, which was a member of the UDF, also decided not to produce its own newspaper: “It was one of *our* most important mistakes—not to insist on producing an independent student newspaper and relying on one single opposition newspaper instead.” Other independent publications appeared but most also relied on state printing presses. In the end, it turned out that many key publications, were run by secret police agents, a fact that became apparent only in 2009 with the opening of police files.

“Over the years,” Vaksberg explained, “Bulgaria’s media went through a spectacular decline in freedom and public confidence,” with one recent poll showing only 3 percent public confidence in print media. Many news publications evolved into tabloids having unclear ownership but clearly connected to illegal business interests. They were also subsidized in the form of state advertising campaigns explaining government policies. As a result,

European authorities often criticize Bulgaria for the lack of media freedom. They are especially critical of the law that allows anonymous companies to own media. This means that shady business circles, including those involved in illegal activities, can possess a media outlet without any transparency. They claim to be authoritative sources for news and analysis on political and economic issues, however any Bulgarian journalist can tell you which publications are funded by trafficking in women, or by arms sales, or by Russian organized crime.

She described Bulgaria’s largest recent scandal involving media. A family member of a prominent MP received a large credit without collateral from a bank that the state had directed nearly all government enterprises to use. The credit was used to buy “a dozen national newspapers, one television station, a publishing house, and also the companies controlling general distribution of newspapers and other publications at kiosks.” By the time this came to light, ownership had been transferred to a hidden offshore company and the government, responding to EU criticism, closed the bank as unfit. In doing so, however, it caused a huge debt crisis for private mortgage owners who lost their savings with the bank’s closure. The scandal can hardly be considered “a surprise,” she said, “given the media’s relationship to state security, the modern-day state-funded corruption, and the non-transparent ownership of media.”

In his response, independent journalist and human rights activist **Sergey Duvanov** recounted how Kazakhstan’s independent media was systematically crushed by an authoritarian government despite all efforts by independent journalists to continue. The dream of independent media had in fact started to be realized in the period of *perestroika* and *glasnost* and continued in the first years of independence. “[T]here was a renaissance of free media and free speech,” he said. “It was an epoch when everything was possible.” He and colleagues from the opposition began an independent newspaper and, with financial assistance from the US, a television channel. “There was no censorship,” he recalled. “[Our live] program communicating with people over the phone . . . led in the ratings. There was a flourishing independent newspaper business.” Most independent media reflected the broad goals of the dissident movement for “building Europe here in Kazakhstan.” This epoch lasted only four years, however. As the former Communist Party leader-turned-president Nursultan Nazarbayev slowly consolidated power in the 1990s, “the authorities realized the danger of free media and that they were losing control over the public.” In methodic fashion,

The authorities limited television and radio frequencies in favor of private companies that were allied to the government; this put us out of the broadcast media. In print media, it was the same. People were forced to sell their shares in an independent company that published the largest newspaper.

A holding company controlled by Nazarbayev's family "came to own the largest newspaper, television, and radio." Some independent newspapers continued to publish but ultimately were shut down. The authorities then repressed independent journalists like Duvanov with imprisonment, often on made-up charges:

So in the end, the information space was totally "cleaned up." There is a refusal to register any new media; there is total control over print-runs; there is censorship and any independent media are closed using a variety of laws and bureaucratic mechanisms.

The few examples of independent newspapers are "very limited, so much so that . . . they cannot influence the situation or the minds of people." He concluded:

I am not expecting you to pity us in Kazakhstan. But I would like to discuss why it happened. How could we have four years of free media and then have that free space devolve into nothing? The simple reason this happened was that we were in no way equal to our opponents, which comprised the entire state apparatus.

Maciej Strzembosz, a former student leader during martial law in Poland and today a film and television producer, offered a different response. He discussed various strategies, including legislative models he helped introduce in Poland, for establishing greater independence for production of television and film and in this way helping to overcome the strong residual practice of governments attempting to control media. "Politicians, by definition, are not credible when they say they want independent media," he said. But even when broadcast media are state-owned or controlled, it remains possible to influence society. In this regard, he stressed the importance of four key contributors to television and film media—producers, artists, journalists, and celebrities—"without whom television could not survive." He continued,

The real task is how to get those four groups to help foster the idea of citizen, how to make them part of a citizens' movement, how to persuade them that the country and they themselves will be better off if there is a better media, if there is a better society, and if democracy is observed.

He described how this concept was strengthened in Poland with legislation aimed at ensuring that these four groups gained financial independence through royalties. From taxes on those royalties, it was possible to create non-governmental mechanisms to foster independent production of film and television and radio shows. A cinematography law established an industry tax that financed the Polish Film Institute, now with a 40 million Euro budget and widely credited with re-sparking the creative Polish film industry.⁶ A newer law has created a similar fund to provide 50 percent financing for television and radio shows. Another has instituted financing for "public service" videos by non-governmental organizations.

While he acknowledged that the challenge in many countries was difficult, and could be seen as impossible in a country like Kazakhstan, even in such situations there were various ways to use media and new digital technologies through the internet to influence society.

⁶ One of the films provided financing through the Institute, "Ida," won Poland's first Foreign Film Award at the 2015 Oscar Awards.

There was full discussion of the state of media in the region and whether the ideas suggested by Strzembosz could be implemented in “non-normal” countries. **Gábor Demszky** and **Miljenko Dereta** expressed skepticism, describing how in their countries media laws had been used by the government to gain control over not only news production but financing of culture and film production as well. They also described how influence over advertising firms and production had further restricted independence of the media. In these two countries, Dereta stated, “one an EU country and one a candidate of the EU,” there is little reaction from the EU:

We must convince the European Union representatives in Belgrade that what is happening is against their standards and that they should pay attention to it. Most often, they are just whistling away such concerns.

As recounted by **Vincuk Viačorka**, **Isa Gambar**, and **Arif Hajili**, Belarus and Azerbaijan had similar experiences as in Kazakhstan. In both countries, it was stated, there was a progressive strangling of independent media with government controls and repression. In both, there are now few independent media outlets and these are so limited they cannot reach a wide audience. In neither country are there possibilities for access to television, which is entirely state-owned. Independent journalists and editors are imprisoned and killed. Arif Hajili reported that among Azerbaijan’s more than 100 political prisoners, many were independent journalists.

Strzembosz reiterated, however, that “government cannot control culture.” He pointed to the example of underground publishing in Poland and the popularity of independent singers and songwriters as key means for countering state propaganda during the communist period. With newer technologies, it was possible to circumvent further state controls through digital distribution and the internet. He described a program for Cuba initiated through the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe: “We used money from the Polish Film Institute to translate into Spanish the most important Polish films and smuggled them to Cuba. We can do the same for you if you are interested.”

Other means for breaking through more restrictive media environments were discussed. **Vincuk Viačorka** explained that, apart from the internet, the successful initiatives for reaching Belarusan society had been the US-funded Radio Liberty, two radio stations broadcasting from Poland (Radio Racjya and Euroradio), and Belsat, the satellite TV channel also operated in Poland. He appealed for their continuation despite threats to cut funding. Arif Hajili described a plan for an internet news channel that could circumvent media restrictions, but it also required foreign support, which was not yet forthcoming.

What was clear from both the presentations and the discussion was that the “dream of independent media” had not been realized in most of the region. The Russian Federation represented the most gross case of the use of media to propagate “lies and hatred” in service of an imperialist state policy. But even in Estonia, an example of a more successful democratic transition, Tunne Kelam reported that media had become concentrated in the hands of financial interests tied to the main post-communist party, aiding in its recent successes. As well, Western media companies that had helped create a platform for independent media through ownership of press and broadcast outlets were now selling their assets to post-communist or even criminal financial interests in many countries.

Closing Session

25 Years After 1989: What is the Unfinished Business?

In the concluding session, participants reflected on the state of the region and the unfinished business twenty-five years after 1989. **Charles Fairbanks** served as rapporteur, providing a framework for the conversation. He emphasized several points from the individual sessions:

- Public protest against current dictatorships can emerge at any point. Given possibilities for democratic uprisings, Fairbanks proposed that there should be more discussion of the “weaknesses of the enemy.” In his view, “Contemporary authoritarianism—or competitive authoritarianism as political scientists call it—definitely has weaknesses that can be exploited.”
- Although formal constitutions have proven to be less important than informal mechanisms of establishing power, Fairbanks also noted that several democratic breakthroughs had occurred from specific formal limitations within constitutions, such as term limits in Georgia and Ukraine that forced authoritarian politicians and parties to face opposition in elections.
- There was an urgent necessity for reinvigorating programs supporting civil society. “All civil society,” Fairbanks explained, “even if it advocates unpleasant causes, constrains the government and forces the government to respond to the society and thus builds democracy.”
- Among the most important problems facing the region, however, is the “weakness of political parties,” especially in “countries like Ukraine and Georgia that have an opening to democracy but not yet consolidated democracy.” Many parties, he stated, tend to make the state “their constituency, instead of citizens.”

Fairbanks stressed further the importance of politics:

What can be achieved through a free press or civil society and everything else we discussed is tremendously important but if what we want is a free government ultimately it depends on elections, institutions, and politicians, who are a very flawed breed of people but there have to be such people to make democracy work.

Yet, Fairbanks stressed also a point that Isa Gambar and several other participants raised, namely that Western support did not go toward political party development or even toward consistent support for democratic forces in opposition to authoritarian governments.

Fairbanks pointed out two other serious problems that had been raised regarding Western policy in the region. One fundamental problem was the Western attraction to “liberalism without democracy”:

In many of these societies, there are only two alternatives: democracy without liberalism or liberalism without democracy, which is the formula of Saakashvili among others. I think the latter formula of liberalism without democracy, which we in the West are attracted to, is self-contradictory and won't last. Democracy should be the priority.

The other problem was the “desire to give people freedom but then to want to control the way they use it.” In this regard, he pointed to **Miljenko Dereta**'s comment that “the West does harm even when it tries to do good.” Still, he found in this criticism of Western practice a hopeful aspect: “[O]ne can argue more easily about how to do good as opposed to whether or not one ought to do good.” He predicted that the “West's contemptible policy” in response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine “will get worse,” but that ultimately the Western countries would be forced to adopt a stronger policy.

Eric Chenoweth asserted that the weak Western response to the heightened aggression of the Russian Federation was part of a basic pattern of inaction in response to earlier cases of Russian military aggression. The war against Chechnya, first undertaken by Boris Yeltsin in 1994 and then resumed by Vladimir Putin in 1999, represented “clear evidence of the restoration of a brutal, murderous mentality in the Kremlin,” yet “the West was totally indifferent in its response.”

Chenoweth also argued that there was a general pattern of indifferent and ineffectual response to democratic openings in Eastern Europe and a failure to support democratic forces more vigorously when they mounted serious challenges to dictatorship, as in Belarus and Azerbaijan. “In fact,” he said, “there was never any coordinated policy to support democratic breakthroughs.” It was thus the responsibility of those “in this room” and others of similar outlook to continue efforts like the International Human Rights Conferences organized by Zbigniew and Zofia Romaszewski and the Centers for Pluralism meetings of IDEE as a means to expand

a regional network of activists who have common principles, common ideas, and common grounding in the concept of democracy, and to use these networks to revive the democratic idea and democratic practice within non-democratic countries.

The discussion of what needed to be done in the region quickly focused on the priority for a coordinated and consistent response to Russia's occupation of Crimea and its further military aggression in Ukraine. Unfortunately, **Ivlian Haindrava** saw little hope for such a policy, noting that “One hundred and sixty years ago, Britain and France fought for the Crimean peninsula and . . . stopped the expansionist policy of Russia. . . . Today, one suspects they couldn't find Crimea on a map even using Google.” While Haindrava described the European Union as “the most progressive integration project of humankind,” recent developments make clear that EU policies and practices are in no way a match for the current policy of Russia:

[W]hat is the vision of Europe? What is EU policy? Unfortunately, my observation is that we see the bureaucratization of policy. In the EU, politicians and diplomats are exchanged for bureaucrats. If anyone had illusions that it was possible to do something with politicians and diplomats substituted by bureaucrats, the latest events should disabuse

them. . . . Even together, Van Rompuy or Barroso [the presidents of the European Council and European Commission in 2014], are hardly a counterbalance to Putin. In the meantime, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder receives remuneration from Gazprom.

Arkady Dubnov agreed with Haindrava that the EU represented the “highest achievement of political democracy” but noted that bureaucratization of policy was inevitable in such an alliance. He believed that little could be expected from the EU regarding democratization. He related a conversation he had with current German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier when he worked on the EU’s policy toward Central Asia:

For him, Central Asia had only two aspects: as a potential market for the EU and as a source of energy supplies for the EU. These were the two things that the EU was interested in. For Steinmeier—a left Social Democrat—democracy and human rights issues were not important.

Miljenko Dereta concurred with Dubnov’s assessment:

Human rights are the last issue being discussed in Europe at this moment. Economic aspects of the survival of the European Union are currently more important. It does not want to talk about values. Europe reacts to the provocation of Russia but without knowing how to deal with the aggression against Ukraine.

Isa Gambar restated his proposal for a think tank, or forum, for exchanging ideas on best practices and strategies for achieving democracy in authoritarian countries. However, he also reflected on how countries’ fates were often determined by a combination of factors from within and from without and that often “the situation in our countries depends on decisions elsewhere. It is not an easy truth, but it is a truth we must recognize and consider in our future work.” In this regard, it is not always a matter of “who is ready for democracy.” Germany was divided from 1945 to 1991. The West developed into a democracy and in the East the Soviet Union imposed a communist dictatorship. Neither was “ready for democracy” after World War II but one side developed democracy while the other did not. He concluded, “The problem is not whom we more resemble; the problem is around us, in Moscow and other centers.”

Vincuk Viačorka argued for a broadening of Europe’s horizons and the understanding of the EU of what constitutes Europe:

Do we have the right to discuss the mistakes of the European Union? Yes, we have, because we Belarusians feel part of Europe, not in an institutional sense but in a geographical and axiological sense. . . . We are part of this moral and political space. We have a right to talk about it, the same as in 1985 when Ales and I could not imagine that thousands of our compatriots would take to the streets and demonstrate for democratic values but they did.

The most immediate task, though, is to confront the threat of Russian aggression. On this point, Viačorka expressed anxiety as to whether the West was equal to the task:

Today we must be united and strong. We must scream out about the new situation resulting from the Russian aggression against its neighbors: the “gendarme of Eastern Europe” is beating someone who is trying to liberate himself. . . . We see bloodshed in Ukraine because people are willing to fight and die for European values, yet Europe remains calm. If the EU ignores it and the US cannot find the strength to counteract it, how can we be optimistic in assessing the potential of the democratic world to defend its own values and itself?

Petruška Šustrová, however, stated that there was a reason for optimism—and for a call to action—found around the participants in the seminar:

[T]he situation is not so dire [as before]. . . . We are now in Warsaw and here there is a perfect, beautiful word—Solidarność, solidarity—people here in this room around this table remember what this word was and is. It is our responsibility to use all our efforts and take all the possibilities to influence the West and people in the West to return to the straightforward approach in dealing with the East.

Ivlian Haindrava reinforced Šustrová’s point:

We have to bring all of our possibilities and forces together, listening to each other. Here at this table we are experts of the post-Soviet space; we are better experts than those in Berlin, Brussels and Berlin. We still have a lot to do, a lot to finish, and certainly we have to do it together.

In this regard, **Smaranda Enache** appealed for a long-term view:

We convene here as actors and beneficiaries of a 25-year-period of transition from communism in the understanding that in this new historical environment our experience is of paramount importance. To continue the civic transformation of the post-totalitarian regimes, to guarantee the survival of pluralist democracies in the future, to overcome the variety of blatant challenges and insidious risks to liberal values, we need to reflect on the failures of the last 25 years in the region and to resume our unfinished business.

And **Miljenko Dereta** concluded:

[W]e lived in a fairy tale believing that the “business” of democratic development of states and societies could ever be finished. We know, of course, this is a naïve presumption and that we will not have time to rest or enjoy the fruits of our activities. Nevertheless, when we review the last twenty-five years, a lot has been achieved, not equally in each country but at least now we have among us friends who share our value systems, our goals, and are willing to help us to achieve them.

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