

Theme 2

Constitutions, Electoral Choices & Their Consequences

IRENA LASOTA

Ivlian Haindrava, a former MP in Georgia and a member of the committee that drafted the Georgian Constitution, will present the second session topic, “Constitutions, Electoral Choices and Their Consequences.” He is also a long-time and leading member of the Republican Party, which has been the most consistent party promoting liberal democracy in Georgia, and is currently an adviser to the president of Georgia on national security issues. His respondent is **Arif Hajili**, who is the recently elected chairman of the Musavat Party, the leading opposition party in Azerbaijan.

Presentation

Adventures of a Constitution: The Case of Georgia

by **Ivlian Haindrava**

This analysis is supposed to cover a 25-year period, from the late 1980s to the present time. However, the first “five-year plan” for the South Caucasus (1989-1994) provides little for researchers to study in the realm of constitutionalism, or in choosing models of government (presidential, parliamentary, or “mixed”), or in determining election systems, much less other “abstract issues.” What was going on in Georgia and Azerbaijan at that time (Armenia is a slightly different story in this context) can be better analyzed by sociologists, psychologists, and even psychiatrists rather than political analysts. This was a time of ethno-political conflicts, rampant paramilitary activity, riots, coup d’états, economic collapse and hyperinflation, constitutional and legislative disarray, and social and mental chaos caused by a total disruption of the population’s usual way of life.

It would be wrong, however, to ignore one significant aspect of this time. 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. Even so, the elections were preceded by bloodshed and violence—there were brutal crackdowns carried out by the Red Army on peaceful anti-Communist demonstrators in Tbilisi on April 9, 1989 and also in Baku in January 1990, as well as earlier ethnically colored violent conflicts in Sumgayit in Azerbaijan (1988) and Sukhumi and Tskhinvali in Georgia (1989). There was even more bloodshed in the early 1990s as the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia escalated. But this is separate topic. Here, I focus mostly on the adventures of the Georgian constitution.

In October 1990, the first multi-party elections in the USSR (which it still was at the time) toppled the Communist government in Georgia and brought to power the electoral bloc called Round Table–Free Georgia, led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia. In the following days, Gamsakhurdia was elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet, or Supreme Council, in accordance with the provisions of the constitution of the Georgian Socialist Soviet Republic (GSSR). A referendum on independence was held on March 31 the next year. Based on the overwhelming result in favor, Georgia declared independence ten days later on April 9, 1991. The country, however, continued to use the GSSR constitution, since there was no alternative. At virtually every session of the Supreme Council, the constitution was revised and amended, and then almost every amendment was revised and recast again. With nearly all paragraphs of the constitution repeatedly altered, the first post-independent Georgian constitution was rather awkward reading.

In May 1991, on the basis of this amended constitution, Gamsakhurdia won presidential elections by 87 percent of the vote, and thus became the first president of independent Georgia. But in the winter of 1991–92, around the time that the Belavezha Accords were signed dealing the death blow to the Soviet Union, Gamsakhurdia was overthrown and ousted from the country. A Military Council (MC) took over. The two strongmen who joined their forces against the first president—one was in charge of the National Guard, a quasi-regular army, while the other commanded paramilitary units—had mentalities and behavior that were incompatible with constitutional norms. So they decided to reinstate the constitution of the short-lived Georgian Democratic Republic, a state that existed only three years (1918–21) before being conquered and annexed by Bolshevik Russia. The argument for using it was that it provided for a parliamentary system of government without the office of president. In practice, the document had never been fully implemented: it was adopted on February 21, 1921 just a few days before Tbilisi fell to the Red Army troops on February 25. This constitution, although it was highly democratic, could not meet the challenges and realities of the post-Soviet or post-coup Georgia. But for the two leaders of the Military Council, it suited their play book perfectly.

In March 1992, the Military Council was replaced by the so-called State Council, a quasi-parliament, whose members were *selected* (not elected) by its chairman, Eduard Shevardnadze, the last foreign minister of the Soviet Union who by that time had returned to Georgia from Moscow. The basis for the members' selection could be understood by no one but Shevardnadze. The State Council, however, soon passed a law on parliamentary elections establishing a "soft" preferential system that ensured broad representation.¹ Parliamentary elections were conducted in the autumn of 1992. Although they were held in the midst of hostilities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the elections created a legitimate legislative authority for the country. In an election held simultaneously with the parliamentary polls, Shevardnadze was elected "Chairman of Parliament–Head of State" (the official title of his post). It was maybe the first and the only time in history that a parliamentary speaker was chosen by a direct national vote and not by the members of parliament.

One of the first actions of the "short" Georgian parliament of 1992-95 was the Law on State Power, a basic law that laid the foundation for governance.² The law awarded the chairman of parliament far-reaching powers as head of state, putting him in charge of the executive as well as the legislative branches. Still, the presence of the above-mentioned paramilitary units remained a serious problem for Shevardnadze until he was finally able to get rid of them by sending the former Military Council strongmen, one after another, to jail.

A State Constitution Commission (SCC) was established in 1993 to draft a new constitution and the draft was presented for parliamentary debate in 1995.³ Without going into lengthy detail about how the SCC drafted and discussed the document, it should be noted that the "tug of war" between advocates of a presidential model on the one hand and a parliamentary system on the other ended with the victory of the former. The new constitution was passed by parliament on August 25, 1995. To give

¹ Since 1990, Georgian parliaments have been elected according to the so-called "mixed" majoritarian-proportional system, which combines voting by party list and direct elections by district. But the number of parliamentary seats and the formula to allocate parliamentary seats between majoritarian and party-list members, as well as their basic election principles (how many seats are allocated according to single-mandate or multi-mandate constituencies), have frequently changed. Since 2008, the parliament has had 150 members, with the present allocation between majoritarian and party-list members being 73-77. — Author's Note.

² It was dubbed "short" by analogy with the English Parliament of 1640, since it had an unusually short tenure by modern parliamentary standards of just 3 years (although its English analogy lived only three weeks). — Author's Note.

³ This author was a member of the SCC. — Author's Note.

the story a spicy twist, as Shevardnadze was getting into a car to go to the ceremony to inaugurate the new constitution, a car bomb was detonated nearby in an apparent attempt to assassinate the head of state. But the unsuccessful attempt was hardly motivated by frustration with constitutional provisions or the constitutional model in general.

It is noteworthy that Georgia's neighbors also adopted new constitutions at about the same time—Armenia on July 5, 1995 and Azerbaijan on November 12, 1995, both by means of national referendum—and the timing was hardly a mere coincidence. During the entire period of the “first five-year development plan,” Western leaders preferred to stand aside and watch from the sidelines, 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. But, it seems, the West finally realized that nothing good was coming of all the regional wrangling and contention and that “sitting on the fence” indefinitely was a wrong tactic, especially since these countries were in dire need of Western assistance. Indeed, one can only imagine what would have happened to Georgia in these terrible times but for Western humanitarian aid. So the West decided that it could and should set some conditions. The first was that the lawlessness had to stop and governing processes should be brought into a legal, meaningful constitutional framework.

All three countries opted for the presidential model of government and in all three countries charismatic leaders retained their presidential posts: Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia, Heydar Aliyev in Azerbaijan, who had replaced Elchibey during a military coup d'état, and Levon Ter-Petrosyan in Armenia. But Armenia was still a different case. Unlike Shevardnadze and Aliyev, who were both experienced communist party functionaries and had served as members of the Soviet Politburo, Ter-Petrosyan was a dissident. After new constitutions came into effect in these countries, Ter-Petrosyan suffered a different fate than his counterparts.

Shevardnadze and Aliyev tightened their grips on power, albeit not without difficulty, and imposed a hard authoritarian rule in their countries. In Georgia, based on the new constitution, Shevardnadze was elected president with 73 percent of the vote in direct but non-competitive elections held in November 1995. Following his takeover of power from Elchibey in Azerbaijan, Aliyev had quickly staged new presidential elections in 1993 (according to official sources, he won 98 percent of the vote). Meanwhile, Ter-Petrosyan, Armenia's president during its successful military campaign in Nagorno-Karabakh, was re-elected in 1996 in an election considered by many to be a real contest (although some observers alleged that the process was far from fair). In February 1998, however, Ter-Petrosyan was forced to step down under pressure by certain forces who objected

to his proposed compromise on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. He was succeeded by Robert Kocharyan, a former middle-level Komsomol functionary, in interim presidential elections. Armenia's problems did not end, however. On October 27, 1999, the country was shocked when a group of gunmen broke into the National Assembly during a plenary session and shot dead, point-blank, Prime Minister Vazgen Sarkisyan, parliamentary speaker Karen Demirchyan (Kocharyan's principal opponent in the presidential elections), two vice speakers, one minister, and three MPs. A number of people were wounded.

The year 2003 was the next milestone for the South Caucasus. Robert Kocharyan, who had consolidated his power after the "parliament shooting," was re-elected as president of Armenia in the second round. In Azerbaijan, Aliyev the First handed over power as planned to his son Ilham, Aliyev the Second, although the transition was marked by significant vote fraud.⁴ In Georgia, surprisingly, a new president, Mikhail Saakashvili, took office as a result of parliamentary elections and the protest movement that followed them.

This article does not intend to give a detailed account of the Georgian Rose Revolution of 2003, nor explain the political technology behind the father-to-son handover of power in Azerbaijan—these themes have been already researched and analyzed many times by various authors. By 2003, however, it became obvious that the three South Caucasus countries were moving in different directions. Armenia fell into political and economic stagnation, halted any democratization, and became increasingly dependent on Russia.⁵ Azerbaijan, flooded with cash from growing oil revenues, hardened further its authoritarian policies domestically while in foreign policy it sought balance between Russia and the West, without getting too close to either. Georgia, meanwhile, entered a new phase, shrewdly described by some as "authoritarian modernization," with a foreign policy aimed at Georgia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

⁴ Ilham Aliyev officially assumed power through presidential elections held on October 3, 2003 after which police used force against demonstrations in favor of opposition candidate Isa Gambar to protest the staged outcome. An international election monitoring team of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe chronicled massive vote fraud and manipulation (see the IDEE Observer Mission's "Votum Separatum from the OSCE/ODHIR Preliminary Report About the Presidential Elections of October 15, 2003 in the Republic of Azerbaijan," which may be found at www.idee.org/azerbajanelections.html). — Editor's Note.

⁵ In the 2008 presidential elections, Kocharyan could not stand again after two consecutive terms and was succeeded by another functionary, Serzh Sarkisyan. His main contender, ex-president Ter-Petrosyan, charged that the vote was rigged and called for protests. Nine people died in clashes with police. — Author's Note.

Mikhail Saakashvili's first step after being elected president in snap presidential elections in January 2004—with 96 percent of the vote—was to rewrite the constitution, especially its power-related clauses. The changes transformed Georgia from a “classic” presidential republic (at least on paper) into a super-presidential system, whereby the president assumed absolute power. The parliament's role was limited to rubber-stamping decisions of the government (headed by the president). The judiciary, whose legacy of endemic corruption from the Shevardnadze and Soviet periods was significantly reduced, nevertheless became more dependent on (and responsive to) the government. Both foreign and domestic analysts agreed that the system of checks and balances, although ensured on paper by the 1995 constitution, was effectively dismantled.

The usual justification for concentrating absolute power in the president's hands was the need for rapid and radical reforms—something everyone agreed the country needed. But it is hard to understand why Saakashvili, enjoying initially huge approval ratings at home and abroad, decided to blatantly ignore democratic principles, cripple the constitution, and use heavy-handed policies against his own people—all to satisfy short-term political needs.⁶ Those who think that this assessment is exaggerated or incorrect should look at annual reports of Freedom House, which show that Georgia's democracy index improved 0.01 points in 2003-2012. In other words, in the area of democratization, the country was stuck for almost a decade. In fact, there were *declines* in the summary scores in governance, the judiciary, and independence of media but these were masked in the overall scores by progress cited in the fight against corruption resulting from radical administrative reforms (including of the police) and adoption of a robust fiscal policy during Saakashvili's first-term. Tax revenues started flowing into the national treasury instead of, as previously, the pockets of bureaucrats. There were similar successes in the fight against organized and small crime. Large-scale infrastructure projects made a noticeable positive impact on the country. But successes and failures of the Rose Revolution are analyzed in other studies.

With the events of 2007-08, Georgia evolved from a period of “authoritarian modernization” into a period simply of “authoritarianism.” The government used brutal force against peaceful protesters and raided an independent TV company in November 2007;⁷ openly rigged early presidential elections in January 2008 to ensure a second-term victory for Saakashvili in the first round; and engineered the political dominance of

⁶ In all, 30 revisions were made to the constitution during Saakashvili's nine-year rule, compared to 3 amendments in the period of 1995–2003. — Author's Note.

⁷ The European Parliament responded to these events with a rather strongly worded statement, dated November 29, 2007. — Author's Note.

Saakashvili's National Movement for a subsequent four years through parliamentary elections in May 2008 that offered little hope for fair competition. On top of these events, the August 2008 Russian-Georgian war ended with disastrous consequences for Georgia.

The government switched to self-preservation mode and was determined to do whatever it took to remain in control. Its reformist zeal and creativity faded away. A large-scale campaign of repression was undertaken against political opponents, while high-level corruption became widespread, proving once again the old adage that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Georgia, however, gradually approached the next round of elections. Parliamentary elections were scheduled for the autumn of 2012 and presidential elections for the next year, which would mark the end of Saakashvili's second and last presidential term. Wary of the potential damage to his image in the West (his image at home had long been tarnished), the Georgian president did not dare to follow in the footsteps of his Azerbaijani counterpart by removing the two-term limit on presidential terms in the constitution (Ilham Aliyev did this in a staged referendum in March 2009). Instead, Saakashvili began preparing a backup plan—a second "landing strip" in the post of prime minister—by again adapting the constitution to his needs. So, in October 2010, the parliament passed constitutional amendments that curbed presidential powers and expanded the powers of prime minister, but only to come into effect immediately after the October 2013 presidential elections, with the expectation that Saakashvili and the National Movement would remain in power.

Of course, government authorities announced that this constitutional change was a fundamental step paving the way for the transition from a presidential to a parliamentary system. In reality, however, it led to a huge (for a small country like Georgia) controversy. Saakashvili's team did not bother to clearly define the proposed system changes in the constitution. Simply, Saakashvili would continue to call the shots as usual with little, if any, regard for the constitution, so they did not care how the new power-sharing arrangement between the parliament, president and government would read on paper. They also increased (again through constitutional amendments) the requirement for approval of any future constitutional changes from two-thirds to three-fourths of parliament as a precautionary measure against potential future shifts in the balance of political forces in parliament as a result of the October 2012 parliamentary elections.

Everybody knows the rest of the story. Saakashvili's party lost the October 2012 elections to the Georgia Dream coalition by a large margin (about 20 percentage points) and had to give up control of the parliament and

government. Saakashvili remained president for yet another year in a transitional period known as “cohabitation,” during which the president still had vast powers but found himself in opposition to the parliamentary majority and the governing cabinet chaired by the prime minister, voted upon by parliament. It was a Georgian-style cohabitation, which means that it was full of conflicts and tensions. However, the country managed to make it through this period peacefully and, as expected, the candidate of the ruling Georgia Dream coalition, Giorgi Margvelashvili, was elected the new president of Georgia in October 2013.

With the end of months of antagonism and nerve-wracking conflicts during the period of cohabitation, it seemed the country would have the opportunity to sigh with relief and state institutions would be able, at last, to work in an efficient and coordinated manner. But in reality there was nothing of the kind. The new version of the constitution, which came into force immediately after the presidential elections, substantially reduced presidential powers but not sufficiently enough to correspond to that of “classic” parliamentary models (such as Germany or Israel). This led the Venice Commission to assess the new Georgian system as a “mixed model.”⁸ Being elected by a direct popular vote, the president has the highest level of legitimacy, adding more political and moral weight to his position on a par with the parliament.

Moreover, after the presidential elections, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the main architect of the change of government in Georgia as leader of the Georgia Dream, voluntarily resigned from the position of prime minister, handing over his post to a young political newbie, Irakli Gharibashvili, whose popularity was based entirely on the support given him by Ivanishvili. On a personal level, the new prime minister was no more respected than the new president, another nominee of Ivanishvili. Soon afterwards, relations deteriorated between President Margvelashvili and Ivanishvili, who continued to influence the country’s politics despite formally quitting the political arena. The government, as a result, began trying to infringe on the president’s remaining legal powers.

Notwithstanding subjective factors such as personal relations and political competition, the attempts to curb presidential authority have been largely the result of the shortcomings of the new constitution inherited from Saakashvili’s regime. There was no clear division of competences and responsibilities between the president and prime-minister in a number of spheres, leaving room for arbitrary interpretations. The constitution provides a rather vague description of the available channels of

⁸ See the opinion of the Venice Commission on Georgia’s draft constitutional changes issued on July 31, 2010 ([http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL\(2010\)062-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL(2010)062-e)) — Author’s Note.

communication among the president, parliament, and prime-minister, and Georgia lacks respected traditions or unwritten rules to guide such matters. Worse still, there is actually no chance of correcting these constitutional flaws, since the parliamentary majority does not have enough votes for approval by three-fourths, the new requirement, while the minority, Saakashvili's party, is determined to sabotage any attempt to "fix" the constitution in the hope that infighting and discords within the ruling coalition will play into its hands in order to regain power.

So, while the parliament did set up a commission to draft necessary amendments to the constitution, it is unlikely to achieve any changes given the position of the minority party not to give its support and, in any case, given the lack of consensus within the ruling coalition on the necessity for the country's final transition to a classic parliamentary model. And there is no way to change the constitution in Georgia other than by parliamentary approval, there being no provision for referenda on constitutional matters. It remains to be seen how, if at all, this vicious circle will be broken, even as regular, sometimes even curious, conflicts between the president and prime minister do damage to the country's image.⁹

Apart from these negative aspects of the transition, however, there are also positive aspects. 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 positive assessments.) The country managed to pass through the cohabitation period without serious damage. A coalition of political parties came to power and although it is dominated by one political group, nevertheless it is a new and useful experience for all the coalition members. The country has a viable opposition: the parliamentary minority is not just vocal, it has a decisive voice in all matters that require parliamentary approval by a super majority of votes. Georgia has taken a big step away from authoritarianism. While the process is not yet irreversible and authoritarian practices continue even today, the myth of a "strongman ruler" is gradually losing hold as more 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. Mass media have become independent as never before.

All these changes are reflected in annual reports of Freedom House, which now rate Georgia as a "semi-consolidated democracy" (a democracy after all!), while Armenia is ranked a "semi-consolidated authoritarian

⁹ For more detailed discussion of this issue, see, for instance, "The President and the Prime Minister" by Lincoln Mitchell, September 23, 2014 (<http://lincoln-mitchell.com/georgia-analysis/2014/9/22/the-president-and-the-prime-minister>). — Author's Note.

regime” and Azerbaijan is considered a fully “consolidated authoritarian regime.” Georgia has signed an Association Agreement with the EU and even became a special partner of NATO. These new associations may bring more dangers than security guarantees in the present-day situation, but this is a theme to be discussed separately.

Conclusions

Every country has its own unique history and experience. It would be wrong in theory and unfeasible in practice to replicate the Georgian case in another country. But some lessons can and should be learned: there are both mistakes to avoid and some successes that can serve as examples for other countries. The ongoing adventures of the Georgian constitution (as well as the situation in Armenia and Azerbaijan) allow drawing out some conclusions:

1. In the South Caucasus, the political will of the dominant rulers still prevails over constitutions, although with varying degree in different countries.

2. Personal relationships among leaders often substitute for institutional rules. Key decisions are still made outside the legal framework and this tendency seems likely to continue for some time to come.

3. Political parties remain weak. Parties with an established system of values, which do not change according to shifts in the political environment, are a rare occurrence. As a result, the political system in general is still rather fragile and unstable.

4. Due to insufficient knowledge and experience of democracy, it may take decades to convince the people that it is better—and safer—to live by the rule of law than by arbitrary decisions of a charismatic leader.

5. Attitudes of Western partners towards post-Soviet states are incoherent, biased, and lax. The oft-stated and reasonable principles of “more for more” (more assistance for more progress in reforms) and of “supporting the people, not their leaders” are used selectively.

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Response

Arif Hajili

As usual, Mr. Haindrava made a very interesting presentation. For my part, I will try to explain the situation as it developed in Azerbaijan.

The fight for independence and democracy began in 1988 as a result of the events in Nagorno-Karabakh, where separatists demanded to join this autonomous region of Azerbaijan to Armenia. Very soon, the reaction to Soviet backing for the Nagorno-Karabakh separatists as well as a revival of the democratic traditions of the Republic of Azerbaijan from 1918–21 propelled the emergence of the Azerbaijan Popular Front as a movement for national independence and democracy. On the main square of Baku, hundreds of thousands of people gathered for weeks at a time. By 1989, we were sure the Azerbaijan Popular Front would have won elections to the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet that were supposed to take place in December, but the communist authorities and KGB structures made this impossible. Soviet troops entered Baku on January 9, 1990 to stem mass demonstrations and martial law was announced.

Supreme Soviet elections took place at the end of September and October 1990 that were partially democratic, with some contested seats. Indeed, they were more democratic than today, when there are no opposition members of parliament and only members of “controlled” parties, but still we could win only a minority of seats to the new parliament.

In September 1991, the first presidential election was held. Ayaz Mutalibov, the Azerbaijan Communist Party leader who one year earlier had made himself president when the Supreme Soviet declared Azerbaijan’s sovereignty, claimed victory in a fraudulent electoral process with limited competition. But the defeat of the August 1991putsch in Moscow had strengthened considerably the independence movement in Azerbaijan and in October the Popular Front forced the Supreme Soviet to declare Azerbaijan’s full independence. A nationwide referendum confirmed this declaration in December, just before the formal dissolution of the USSR. In the wake of military defeats in Nagorno-Karabakh, we succeeded in forcing Mutalibov to resign and the Supreme Soviet called new presidential elections for June 1992. Abulfaz Elchibey, the head of the Azerbaijan Popular Front, was elected the new president in democratic elections by a wide margin of the popular vote against seven candidates. Isa Gambar became the chairman of the National Council, to which the Supreme Soviet ceded its powers as the new parliament, now called the Milli Mejlis.

For a period of thirteen months, we held power. We adopted a lot of democratic laws and we drafted a new constitution. We passed laws

on freedom of assembly, association, speech, political parties, and others. At that time, it was easy to conduct public meetings and demonstrations. There were independent print and broadcast media. In May 1993, Azerbaijan successfully negotiated the full withdrawal of Soviet troops. But the situation deteriorated quickly. The withdrawing Russian troops left most of the weaponry at the military base in Ganja, which were then used by pro-Russian forces led by Surat Huseynov to attempt a military coup aimed at overturning the democratic government just at the point when it was going to sign an oil deal with Western companies. Power was seized by Heydar Aliyev the former Communist Party and KGB leader who had been a member of the Soviet Politburo and enjoyed clear support from Russia. He quickly held a new presidential election that he “won” by fraud, with a supposed 98 percent of the vote.

With the 1993 coup, there was a total reversal of democracy. A new constitution was adopted giving authoritarian powers to the president in 1995. Independent media was repressed. Journalists were arrested. Political prisoners filled the jails. Freedom of assembly was stifled. There was a continual deterioration of rule of law and democratic rights. Since 2003, when Heydar’s son, Ilham, became president, the situation has become even worse. Now, the few independent newspapers left have only very small print runs and journalists are being arrested. Increasingly over the last twenty years there has been very limited possibility to take part in public debate or to speak freely on television. The opposition is blamed for everything. There are more than 100 political prisoners. In our party’s corridors, there are many former prisoners who have been released but can’t find jobs. Many youth activists and journalists are imprisoned and there is a new crackdown on NGOs. The arrest of Leyla Yunus and her husband is the best known case. But many others, including Musavat activists, have been arrested.

The role played by Western institutions to support a return to democratic processes has also diminished. In the 1990s, for example, OSCE representatives successfully demanded amendments to the election law, even if its provisions were not observed, and also insisted on passing the law on free assembly. Today in Azerbaijan, the OSCE has lost both its influence and its credibility because it abandoned support for democratic elections and institutions. And recently, after it did protest repression, the OSCE’s Office of Democracy and Human Rights (ODIHR) was forced to close its office in Azerbaijan. Requests sent to Azeri government officials to reopen the office are being ignored. It is another proof of how little the Aliyev government cares about Western opinion.

It is wrong to say the Azerbaijani people are not ready for democracy. We had democracy in the past, if briefly, in both 1918–21 and in 1992–93.

Independent international observers documented overwhelming support for democrats in the 2000 and 2003 elections and the brutal steps the government took to ensure the results. The increasingly totalitarian dictatorship prevents more and more successfully any independent organization of democrats or opposition and stifles the voices of independent journalists and thinkers. Elections are blatantly falsified and the protocols from the districts are simply made up. Half of the precincts did not even count the ballots. The government does not allow independent monitors to observe the elections. There are no opposition members of parliament.

Opposition political parties still have some minimal resources and we are trying to consolidate our structures and increase our influence in society. Despite many difficulties, we are continuing to struggle and to enter into coalitions and alliances. But without access to the mass media and without freedom of assembly, we cannot win against the escalating repression. In 2000 and 2003, the Musavat Party and Isa Gambar would have won free elections. We felt and documented the support of society. But we also know that we cannot achieve democratic change without the support of Western institutions and politicians. Without such support, the current government can completely falsify elections and prevent democratic change.

In the elections of 2003, our friends helped us, like IDEE, which brought almost 200 observers. They assessed the voting objectively and made clear how the authorities falsified them to prevent the opposition candidate's victory. In 2015 parliamentary elections, we are convinced that we would still have the support of society and that the opposition parties could win free elections. We are optimistic as far as the future is concerned. With support of Western governments, we could make this jump.

Discussion

IRENA LASOTA

To begin the discussion, I propose to look at the questions that were presented and especially at the question of what mistakes were made [see Appendix 2: Program and Theme Questions on pages 179–182]. In the presentations for the first two sessions, we have winners, losers, winners who were once losers and losers who were once winners. How much did the outside interference of the Soviet Union or Russian Federation make a difference? How much were the changes planned or accidental? Does it make a difference to have a parliamentary or presidential system in a transition from authoritarianism to democracy?

MILJENKO DERETA

Founder and former Director, Civic Initiatives

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 see how elections often legitimize non-democratic parties or systems. Within 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. This concept is not finished: with Putin's politics, the imperialist policy of Russia has been revived. In that regard, I am very pessimistic because I see that this aggression and the rise of non-democratic politics are not being met properly by the European Union or the United States.

A second point: when talking about dictatorships, I had the same initial illusion as some Belarusian democrats that Vincuk Viačorka described, 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. Yet one can see that the impact of Estonia did not extend to Belarus. There was not an exchange of experience; there was no interaction or learning. Another example of where bottom-up change worked is Kosovo. It had a 15-year-history of civil disobedience to the Serbian regime preparing a parallel society to come to power. This is the type of model that can create and sustain changes.

Without social revolution, there is no political revolution. You have to introduce new values that are accepted within society. That is a very difficult and long process and requires a subversive education. You have to prepare a new generation for such a change. The most controlled part of our system today in Serbia is education, followed by the media, which is the only other means to introduce alternative views to society. It is why after two years in parliament, after learning that this institution had no real substance, I returned to working in civil society, where the real work starts. Ivlian Haindrava said that the Georgian model cannot be replicated, but we can still learn from it and find out if there is something common in our experiences. This type of dialogue is important, not to relate this or that experience but rather to see what is common and to see if there are different models within that commonality—pluralism—that can be adopted.

As for Europe, we must define what it is. Formally there are two Europes: there is the European Union of 28 countries and the Council of Europe with 50 members. It is a difference of 22 countries. But there is a tendency to make this one Europe, even if these 22 other countries are not accepted as part of one Europe. The European Union does try to impose one model but even when countries are accepted in the EU it seems now a short-term result. When a Viktor Orbán can talk about illiberal democracy as a separate model, speak openly against various groups in society, and promote the concept of the Hungarian nation existing above society, there is obviously a short-term result.

Serbia changed constitutions six times in the last 20 years, with the last one written in one night having a preamble stating that Kosovo is forever a part of Serbia. And now, the process is such that changes are impossible. After the 2003 assassination of Zoran Djindjić, who really wanted change, the same political parties that provoked the wars in the Balkans again rose to power. The European Union views these and related parties as prospective partners for adopting reforms and changes. For the EU, agenda items are more important than principles, so no one cares that in Serbia there are no free elections, no free media, or that civil society is under enormous pressure.

ISA GAMBAR

Former Chairman, Musavat Party, Azerbaijan

I believe that we should pose very concrete questions and find real solutions. For one, we should answer the question: What are the best methods for changing authoritarian systems to democratic systems? I believe that decent people should find the answer to this question. We should bring together people capable of thinking and answering it. Since the revolutionary years of 1989-91, no one has really answered this question. There are a lot of details of events that are described, think tanks have done important analyses, but no one today discusses how we can achieve democracy in current authoritarian regimes.

Many countries still have not made the crucial step towards this transition, so it is important to find answers to this question. Frequently, people talk about a conspiracy of world powers to promote democracy, but this is clearly not happening. This seminar, the people and experts here from different countries, can start the process of answering this question. I am an expert on Azerbaijan and know something about what is happening in other countries, like Iran and even Russia. We are ready to work towards this direction. If we decide to continue this work we can bring others from other post-Soviet countries and encourage them to work with us.

We discussed which model is better: the presidential or parliamentary system. I am convinced that in our countries, we need first a presidential system with a strong leader to bring about decisive reforms. Perhaps we all agree that after the first period the best democratic system is a parliamentary system. But all of these arguments can be sorted out and solutions found for generations following us. We have a very good young generation in Azerbaijan. The most numerous group in Aliyev's prisons are young people. It shows that young people are supporting democracy and are a hope for the future. Our generation still has some energy to work towards democratization. I am optimistic about the future.

IRENA LASOTA

We have here participants from the former Soviet Union those who have the best experience, like the Estonians and Lithuanians, and those with the worst experiences, like Russia and Kazakhstan. There is then the question how come the transitions from the communist system, even with the support of the West, were often carried out by the ones who had perpetuated this system until then? How did think tank analysts decide that all of the Caucasus should have this type of election or this constitutional system? At IDEE, we try to find people who think differently but first of all who think—this is a very rare quality today since usually people are just repeating something of what other people have said. We welcome trying to find not just one way but many ways. As for sharing, we do share a lot of experience and not necessarily just at this table. The leader of the democratic opposition in Uzbekistan, Abdurahim Polat, told me once that the program of the Uzbekistan Popular Front was modeled on that of the Estonian independence movement. “We could never have come up with it on our own,” he told me. So there is a sharing of experiences.

ARKADY DUBNOV

Independent journalist, Russian Federation

We have different experiences but we do have something in common: we are from the same generation. A majority of our lives were spent living in the Soviet Union or Soviet bloc. Among us are romantics and cynics. I, myself, am a cynic. From the more cynical point of view, there may be different success stories—like the Baltic States—but the Caucasus and Central Asia had many fewer success stories based on various factors. The Baltic success stories can be explained in part by the shorter experience under communist dictatorship and its previous independence. The intelligentsia was also an engine for the transition. But another factor had to do with energy resources. The Baltic States have no oil or gas. Look at the authoritarian regimes: most of them have economies based on oil and gas, Russia included.

Second, it is difficult to avoid authoritarianism among countries that remain in a state of war or are in a state of 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. In Azerbaijan, the party in power says the same as in Armenia that it is fighting against the external enemy. In Armenia's case, it doesn't have oil and gas and thus is fully dependent on Russia, including its military.

In my view, the West has played a tragic role in the democratization of the post-Soviet world. Someone mentioned that the West focused on leaders and not the people. Bush assisted Mikhail Gorbachev. Clinton favored Boris Yeltsin. This didn't help us. There was only a small period of time when there was hope for real reforms, from 1991 to 1993, until the October 3 attack on parliament. I still remember that day because it was a defeat of our hopes, in large part because of the attitude of the West and its institutions that sanctioned Yeltsin's attack.¹⁰ The Baltic States had parts of the society that maintained their own national identity and could create their own institutions, but we others did not have that.

In Ukraine, Mr. Kelam said principles are in conflict with pragmatic approaches. My question to him is where are the principles and where is the pragmatism?

SERGEY DUVANOV

Independent journalist and human rights activist, Kazakhstan

I highly appreciate the presentations in this session. In one country, there is a process underway that was begun by Saakashvili not using democratic methods, but the process got underway. There is now a separation of powers and one can see a free media and a real opposition. But in other countries we see much more of the unfinished business. In Georgia, democracy is at a developing level; in Azerbaijan, there was a full devolution back to authoritarianism. In Kyrgyzstan, there were two revolutions, but the process of transition was not triggered yet. There is no process underway in Kazakhstan and there is no question about a revolution. There is no social class that could or would implement such a transition. So, I do

¹⁰ On orders of President Boris Yeltsin, on October 3, 1993, army units attacked the parliament building (called the White House) to forcibly disband the Congress of People's Deputies, which had refused Yeltsin's presidential decree dissolving the Congress and ordering new elections to be held together with a constitutional referendum. The attack ended a year-long economic and constitutional crisis. The use of force by the military and interior ministry over a two-day period resulted in at least 187 killed and 495 wounded according to official government figures. Western governments generally supported Yeltsin's use of force. — Editor's Note.

not think we can just adopt the language of revolution from one country to another country.

We, the human rights activists, participated in endless seminars to find out common mechanisms but there is no common mechanism. Situations are totally unique. As for Kazakhstan, we could not use the example of Georgia. The situation of civil society is totally different. But even in such a low level of development as exists in Kazakhstan we try to implement some steps.

ISA GAMBAR

Maybe I did not make myself clear. Of course we are all very different, but I think we can speak about basic principles for making change. In 1992–93, we, the democrats, were in power in Azerbaijan, but nobody gave us any advice. We were inexperienced. Someone, for example, could have told us that it was necessary to carry out screening or lustration. Instead, we were naïve. We thought that we could achieve social harmony and that different political forces could cooperate, regardless of their past. We didn't realize that without some form of lustration, without stripping powerful communists from power, it would be impossible to continue the process. I am not speaking about the same program for all of us, but there are some clear-cut principles and we can hear about them and all political forces supporting democracy can hear about these values and principles. There are universal values and universal means of reaching democracy. All children are different but we create all children in the same way.

GÁBOR DEMSZKY

Former independent publisher and Mayor of Budapest, 1990–2010

In our region, there is a lack of democratic tradition as well as a lack of a middle class. We lack a class of people who owned property, over generations, and, because of that ownership represent certain values and interests. 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. Certain elites can rule democratically but it is still a governed democracy, a directed democracy, because there is no civil society or middle class, there is no strong social foundation or mediating factor.

I think there is no one-way solution. It doesn't matter if there is a presidential system or a parliamentary system. In both systems, a party can win a totally democratic election and destroy democratic foundations, changing the constitution, controlling the media, redistributing the wealth, and taking the property from people and giving it to their friends, and in this way create a post-communist mafia state. In Hungary, it happened in

a totally democratic way, through two elections. But now the opposition has no significant media while allies of the ruling party, Fidesz, control nearly all the press and broadcast frequencies. You can listen to different radio stations but you hear all the same thing. In 1989, we organized a referendum against the presidential system because we were afraid that the communists would take advantage of such a system to dominate the state during the transition. The people said no to a presidential system, and no to a party-state dictatorship. But now Hungary is turning back to dictatorship by means of democratic elections in a parliamentary system.

TUNNE KELAM

Arkady Dubnov asked me what 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 the West, especially of Germany, was ambiguous: yes, you were brave, but don't push too close to us. Keep your distance. We are not finished assimilating ten new members that joined us in 2004. The semi-official position was that the EU has got no capacity to integrate new members from the East for the foreseeable future. This attitude was for me the West's contribution to the failure of the Orange Revolution. The policy of pragmatism means thinking first of your own interests. In the current crisis, had the EU reacted more forcefully and clearly to Mr. Putin, this also might have changed things. But Mr. Putin still sets the agenda. He has the initiative and the European Union is reacting by lagging two steps back. Such inadequate reaction does not help to stop the aggression because the Western message is that aggression pays off. It is the same old problem.

As for the success of the Baltic countries, we do have a different experience compared to other post-Soviet countries, but we also share with you the same fullness of Soviet experience. What accounted for this success? First, in the Baltic countries, especially in Latvia and Estonia, we faced a really existential situation, the prospect of becoming a minority in our own country because of the Kremlin's forced migration policies. Since the 1970s, an internal clock was ticking in each and every Estonian counting down the time when Soviet migrants would become the majority in Estonia. If this would have happened, the chance to restore national independence would have been lost forever. We *had* to do something.

It is also true, as Arkady said, that the experience of 20 years of independence between the two World Wars was crucial. Legal and political continuity became our only lifeline, which was embodied in the US policy of non-recognition of the 1940 Soviet annexation. For half a century, the most spectacular feature of this policy was recognizing Baltic legations in

exile within the diplomatic corps in Washington—to the great irritation of the Soviet Union. Every year, the US president sent a letter of congratulations to the Baltic diplomats on their independence days stating that the US was looking forward to the day when their independence would be regained. There were also strong elements of cultural, ethical, and historic continuity, the continuity of civil society tradition. Many people in the Soviet-occupied Baltic States remembered the recent past and told their children how different life was before the 1940 invasion.

Finally, we need to thank Moscow's steps from 1991. If Yeltsin had not had the same colonialist Soviet attitude, then the Baltic States might have retained their Soviet-time economic dependency on the Russian Federation. However, after the turn of 1991–92, when the Russian Federation applied an energy blockade, with no oil or gas coming to the Baltic States, there was no choice but to move decidedly towards the West.

VINCUK VIAČORKA

I want to respond to several points. I want to emphasize: Georgians and Moldovans, Azeris and Belarusians are ready for democracy, have a history of democracy, and have an experience of democracy, both distant and recent, that can be drawn upon and used. As for the role of elections and democracy, there are other cases of non-democratic forces taking power through elections. The German experience of January 30, 1933 is one example and the Belarusian example is another. Lukashenka came to power democratically in 1994 but thereafter, once he became president, elections and referenda ceased to be democratic.

And here, we have another important issue. Arkady spoke somewhat sarcastically that we complain about the lack of Western support, that the West does not help us. But I was not complaining and am not angry at the West. I simply pointed out that the West *should* try to help. For us, the West is a well-defined political space with institutions that protect certain values. When the West sends signals that those values are relative, it undermines the position of those who are supporting and defending those values in our countries where there are more difficult circumstances. Tunne Kelam said that there is a tendency to try to treat dictators as educable and that it is not possible to re-educate them. But dictators do pretend that they are re-educated, using the words that refer to genuine institutions in democracies for their own false institutions. The dictatorship says “we have a parliament, we have elections, there is an opposition and if there are shortcomings in our democracy we can fix them.” But it is all false. In our circumstances, these words are meaningless. There is a pseudo-parliament and a pseudo-opposition. Unfortunately, it seems difficult for some to

distinguish between real democratic and non-democratic institutions, whether it is out of naïveté, or cynicism, or plain incompetence.

As far as electoral systems are concerned, we have to keep in mind that regimes such as Lukashenka's Belarus have had already three or four elections that cannot be considered democratic in any way whatsoever. Elections have been transformed into mere rituals for re-legitimization of the regime for the next term with no space for alternative views and messages. In this situation, possible changes in a democratic direction are not necessarily going to be related to elections. Euromaidan was not related to any election but one can see how it led to significant consequences in Ukraine. Unfortunately, Western counselors and advisers, by their inertia, are driving our opposition politicians and democratic forces to adopt specific behavior and strategies, such as taking part in electoral farces. It does not make any sense in our political situation to take part in them.

IVLIAN HAINDRAVA

Vincuk has tackled a very important issue: the role of the West in our countries. Let me add that my impression—I might be wrong—is that autocratic leaders like Aliyev in general are quite smart. The model has been established some time ago: whenever there is an increase in criticism from the West, Aliyev implies that if you press him too hard, there is always Putin to turn to. "I can have thousands of political prisoners and Putin will back me." When Aliyev played this card, the Western pressure stopped. So he is not worried about pressure from the West. He also used the ploy of being secularist: we have these dangerous fundamentalist Islamists and we put them behind bars, and if we are not in power the Islamists will threaten to seize power. So Aliyev removes by force the secular opposition from the political scene and then the space is left only for him or the fundamentalists. He gives the impression that he is the better evil than Islamic fundamentalism. The dictators of the Maghreb countries did the same thing and they did not become democratic. This is the state of Western diplomacy: we do not know what will happen next, so we will accept the current evil.

There are strategic challenges in the global world—for example, Islamic terrorism, Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and so on. All of these require a concerted approach over decades, but Western democratic leaders know they are in office only one or two terms. This is not enough to develop this strategic approach when they must devote time to their election campaigns. Putin, on the other hand, can take a strategic approach with long-term objectives because he knows he will be in power for a decade. He believes he is in a better situation than Western democratic leaders, who plan from one election to another. This is a real problem.

VYTAUTAS LANDSBERGIS

Former President of Lithuania and Member of European Parliament

When we speak about the role of the West, we must talk also about our role as part of the West. The role we play can be just as important as what the “West” does. We do not always have to ask for help and assistance. We can say we don’t want to be sold to bad people. The point is not whether the people in the West are good or bad. They are as they are. So, when we see how the West is changing or is stable, we must point to some good things, some civilizational principles that we have inherited and adopted that obliges us to certain behavior. But when we treat something as “either or”—either you are for us and help us or you are bastards—if that is the case then we will find ourselves appealing to Putin, because Putin is against those “bastards.”

The world is divided into democracies and non-democracies and non-democratic states can be divided into anti-democratic states and semi-democratic states that would like to be democratic. These are our political circumstances. We live under certain conditions and it is not simply the Eastern dictatorships or the Western democracies.

In this situation, we have to do something to improve our situation, to benefit ourselves, looking at this backdrop and seeing why we are not doing something better. And not just complain and complain about those who are not good to us. They are not too good to us, but we are not so good either, and we have to improve ourselves, too, so that we become a part of this West that is not good enough. We must help this West so it does not degrade itself. So I want to change this viewpoint here when we speak about the West. It is not something separate from us. It is a certain reality that we must take into account.

TUNNE KELAM

In Estonia and other Baltic States, the continuity of values from independent statehood was mixed with the heavy mental, moral, and social legacy of Soviet times. But the perception of these values probably helped us avoid ethnic conflict. Estonia could well have become another Bosnia. Everything was set for this. There was a big part of the population that was very hostile to independence and there were tens of thousands of Soviet troops stationed in Estonia. The so-called Interfront organized hostile anti-Estonian demonstrations. It needs still to be evaluated what helped to avoid ethnic clashes, vengeance, and violence. One can only conclude that the restoration of Estonia as an independent nation state, despite being burdened with such a crushing Soviet legacy, was an absolute miracle. It was a miracle that no one died a violent death during the four years of transition from a communist system to an open and democratic

one from 1987 to '91. On the other hand, there was a price to be paid for this politically smooth transition. The Soviet legacy had its own continuity. Part of the unofficial deal was that the communists were allowed to take full advantage of the new liberalized society. Many of them had even a competitive edge due to their previous influence, managerial skills, and networks, which enabled them to gain most from the privatization of state property that they had managed as directors.

There is an essential topic that we must discuss: the moral and political assessment, the verdict, on the crimes of communism. It is not about obsessing about the past. It is our duty, but even more importantly there is a powerful political substance to having an authoritative moral and political verdict of communist crimes. In my opinion, it can be done only by combining the moral forces of the West and the post-communist countries. One couldn't expect Germans to condemn their Nazi leaders without Western pressure. But after 1989, there was no Western pressure on us to condemn the totalitarian communist system and its crimes. One can conclude that the pragmatism of continuity prevailed on both sides. The first instinct of the recent communist elites as well as their Western partners was to accommodate as usual. This means that instead of any moral verdict, recent communist leaders, now turncoats to the free society, were greeted in the West as prodigal sons. But in contrast to the Biblical prodigal son, these newly born democrats had exercised no repentance. Having established their new power positions, they took care that nobody was going to point a finger at their recent past. One example: the mass media in a number of post-communist states is more and more controlled by tycoons who played a significant role in the communist times. These negative trends, which aspire to suffocating fair competition and compromising the liberal democracy, have their source in the lack of a moral verdict on the communist regimes.

Today, the communist legacy plays a very important role in our countries. What is the basic instinct of totalitarian power: to prevent the emergence of democratic alternatives and to sweep them aside as soon as they are noticed. This mentality plays a powerfully negative role in society. The trend, even in Estonia, is to concentrate political, economic, and media power into the hands of new Cosa Nostras representing the old communist mentality of trying to control everything, just under a more liberal rubric.

IVLIAN **H**AINDRAVA

I agree with everything that Mr. Landsbergis said down to his pauses and intonations. I am the last person in Georgia who is prone to accuse someone else for our shortcomings and for our lost opportunities. Of course, we are the ones to blame. But I would say to Mr. Landsbergis,

whom I consider a representative of the West even if he belonged to the same system that I grew up in, that 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. But I am concerned about the future of liberalism—the liberalism that Francis Fukuyama said had won. The process of events is not going according to Fukuyama's prediction.

VYTAUTAS LANDSBERGIS

We knew that the Soviet Union would collapse and what would remain was Russia. What we needed to figure out was how to survive and how to step away from this huge entity. It was a pragmatic necessity. We tried to distance ourselves from something bad and we thought we were heading to something good. What is next when we see that it was not perfectly good, but only something better? We have seen the many mistakes that democracies have made by not fighting for their principles and just agreeing to do big business with criminals.

The concerns of Western democratic civilization are essentially Marxist in nature. Everyone talks about consumption, the market, income, profit. In the East, they consider all these categories as means to enslave people. I said in the European Parliament—and Tunne will remember what I said—if Western democracies want to survive with dignity they must consider the possibility of life without Russia. If Russia suppresses people and demands that the West tolerates its indecent behavior, maybe we should consider that we should survive without Russia, without tyranny. Maybe we will be poorer, but we want to survive. It means an entire change of vision; perhaps it is utopian, perhaps a crucial necessity.

ARKADY DUBNOV

I would like to point to certain contradictions when speaking about the behavior of the West. Vincuk says the West is a political space of values backed by institutions. I also liked Tunne's description of the clash within the West between principles and pragmatism. Mr. Landsbergis just mentioned that Europe should not continue the liberal obsession with boosting the level of consumption to the point that it is dependent on tyranny, meaning Russia and its energy. But how does Europe view this? Europe wants to diversify supplies of gas from Russia and so needs gas from the Caspian region. How do the EU countries do this? They look to Azerbaijan and

Turkmenistan, a tyranny on the order of North Korea. So the EU makes an ally of these countries. It goes away from one tyranny and chooses another tyranny. What is the answer to this conundrum? I do not know. This is the clash between good and evil.

SERGEY DUVANOV

I am not sure who is my opponent in this discussion but I would like to add my views to it since there is a polarity of views. What is the role of the West in regards to the Maidan in Ukraine, or towards Georgia, or Moldova, or the Baltic States? When we dispense with the Russian conspiracy theories that the Maidan demonstrations and even the demonstrations in Hong Kong are the conspiracy of the US or the West, then we can discuss the role of the West in relation to the people who have taken to the streets, who have taken to the square. So, when I heard that the US embassy is responsible for the demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, I laughed. I know what happened there. Both Russia *and* the West overlooked the people in the square. The people in the streets of Bishkek took the president's building as the local opposition was sitting at a roundtable with the government. It was not about US embassy activities. Maidan also happened: people went to the streets. It did not happen because of Western conspiracy.

But we cannot say that the problems in Ukraine today are because no one helps it after Maidan. What is the role of the West? Let us ask ourselves what would have happened to Georgia 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.

So, let us fantasize that the West backs the opposition in Kazakhstan. As much as it wants. A billion dollars or more to change Kazakhstan into a democracy. The opposition would simply devour this money. Civil society does not exist in Kazakhstan. Real opposition has been done away with. No money would be invested in any real activities. You can only support something that is there already, something with roots, when people have taken to the streets. You cannot impose democracy. Civil society is about the soul of the people. It is not about the knowledge or tools. It is not a set of tools how to do things. The West can educate NGOs how to organize seminars and offer training, but it can't create civil society when it is not there. We want to put our responsibility, this burden, on the West. The West is trying to help us. Sometimes it is totally ignorant and investing in futile activities. But they do try to help us. A diplomat told me: please do create something that we can help. I speak of Kazakhstan. Maybe it is different in your countries. But in Kazakhstan, this is my fault. In the course of 25 years, I and my colleagues could not win against our opponents.

MILJENKO DERETA

When it comes to the support of the West, in many cases I think it is wrong to call it support. Very often the West is doing harm when it wants to help. I will quote a British Conservative MP, Rory Stewart, who spoke of this problem in relation to his work in Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere:

The idea that foreigners can come from another country, with a very limited understanding of the country, language, and culture and can impose a very vague plan on another society, it is not just disappointing, it is scandalous. The first thing that the international community needs to do is acknowledge its limits, how little it knows, how little it can do, how little influence it has, that we do not speak these people's language very well, that we are isolated in compounds, that we don't spend nights in people's houses, that we don't have a long-term commitment to these countries, that we are impatient. On the other hand, we need to acknowledge that the local society has much more energy and much more power than we ever imagined. We talk about these countries as if they are blank spaces whereas in fact there is an incredible amount of local energy, institutions, practices, and local politicians often have more influence to achieve a lot more than we can.

The West has partial, short-term, and often contradictory interests. The key is long-term commitment and, please, some patience, not to limit help to short periods of time and expect extraordinary results. There is no possible democracy if there is no time.