

The (Social) Democratic Map of Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia

And the outlook for the future

Edited by Marina Ohanjanyan and Jan Marinus Wiersma

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A Note From the Editors

In 2010 and 2011 the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, together with other partners like the Party of European Socialists (PES) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D Group), and with the support and advice of the UK Labour Party, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Alfred Mozer Stichting, organized three thematic conferences in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. At those conferences representatives of political parties, the civil society and the academic world discussed with European colleagues the historic development of democracy and of social democracy as well as the current situation in their respective countries. This publication presents the results, findings and conclusions of those conferences. Drawing on these, we have come up with our own recommendations to the different actors that have a stake in the region, which can be found at the end of the publication.

We ask our readers to keep in mind that the conferences were a snapshot of a situation that may have – and often has – evolved since. Nevertheless, we believe the analyses described here will be of value for anyone interested in the region and its accomplishments, or lack thereof.

You will also notice that some of the conference reports (included in the appendixes) have been made anonymous: the names of the speakers were taken out (Central Asia with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Azerbaijan). This has been done on purpose, in view of the sometimes grave safety concerns for those involved.

Finally, it is important to note that the opinions in this publication are those of the speakers and writers who have contributed to it, and do not necessarily represent the views of the organizers of the conferences or the editors.

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The European Forum is dedicated to support the transformation and democratization processes in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Southeast Europe. By serving as a platform for co-operation between social democratic parties, organizations and personalities it aims to contribute to the development of (social) democracy. The European Forum keeps the international social democratic movement informed about the political situation in the countries concerned. In addition, the European Forum co-ordinates projects in these countries.

The European Forum and Its Work Towards Democratization

For almost two decades now, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity has bundled the strength of European social democrats in their efforts to help bring about democratization in the countries neighbouring the EU. In many cases we were successful, in others much more needs to be done.

The geographic area in which we work has changed over the years. The countries of Central Europe became established democracies and entered the European Union family. Our area of activity shifted to the East and the South. This is where we continue to be active in supporting general democratic development through our support to Social Democratic partners.

We have witnessed dictatorships, revolutions and wars, and have seen (almost) all of them come to an end – successful or otherwise. The dictators that still remain will undoubtedly also one day have to give up their rule, and then, after a period of turmoil and suspense, an even more difficult process of state-building ensues. The countries that we have been – and still are – active in have had to go through this process, all without exception, even if the manner in which they shed their dictators differs. And it is that process that we can play a crucial role in, by sharing our experience and knowledge of democracy and social democracy, state building and party building.

But of course, the vast amount of work has to be done by our local partners. They are the ones that have to build a democratic state, with all the difficulties and dilemmas that come with it, while not forgetting their social democratic ideals during the compromises that often have to be made for the sake of the country's peace and prosperity. All we can do is offer our assistance and utmost support for their efforts, and hope they will succeed without wandering off the winding path towards democracy.



Lena Hjelm-Wallén

President of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity

Foreword

The S&D Group has been very much engaged in developing better relations between the European Union and its Eastern Neighbours and Central Asia. The borders of the EU changed after the enlargements of 2004 and 2007, which gave a new urgency to helping the countries beyond these new EU-borders through their difficult transformation processes. The S&D Group was lucky to be able to count on new but experienced colleagues from the new member states who have shown a real commitment to the post-Soviet states. The European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, of which the S&D Group is an active partner, changed its priorities, moved more to the East and helped us to better understand what is happening there and assisted us in finding political partners.

As this publication shows, the work is not done. On the contrary. The EU attaches great importance to its Eastern partners but so far it seems to lack the transformative power it had in the new member states. This can partly be explained by the unwillingness of Brussels to offer these countries the perspective of membership. But also the slow process of reform hampers the progressive development of our Eastern partners. And unfortunately the democratic revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia did not have the successful follow-up that we hoped for. Belarus remains a sort of dictatorship where so far we have been unable to empower the opposition. Moldova is the only country where democratic progress has been visible during the last few years. Nonetheless I am not overly pessimistic. With the exception of Belarus, these countries show a healthy pluralism and a growing vocal opposition. This will hopefully stop the creation of de facto single-party states. And in Russia the outcome of the recent elections for the Duma, where the ruling party did not do as well as expected and tens of thousands of protesters showed their anger at illegal election practices, marks an important change. It might well be that the events in North Africa leave their traces in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus. What is certain is that the social media have become as important in for example Russia as they have been during the democratic revolutions of 2011. During the last decade there were signs of a serious split in Europe: under the same roof of the Council of Europe and the OSCE there was a growing contrast

between the multi-party systems of the West and the managed democracies in the East. Maybe this trend will now be turned.

Working with our Eastern partners has been challenging and there have been setbacks. The work environment was sometimes difficult because our efforts to promote democracy were not always appreciated. But we are able to work there, and the same can not be said about Central Asia. The fact-finding mission to this region made it clear that these countries operate in a context with distinct features that make it difficult to establish good relations at party level. The few social democrats that we met have to operate within authoritarian systems. The ruling elites emphasize that Central Asia is not Europe and that it has its own concept of democratic stability. Only the future can tell us whether their model is sustainable.

Mapping the east has been very useful. We have a much better idea of what we can and cannot achieve there and how we can be successful. This will help us to reorient our policies, not by giving up but by trying to find new inroads for democracy development and the establishment of even more positive relations.

Hannes Swoboda

President of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament

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(Social) Democracy in Europe's East: Time For a Different Approach?

By Marina Ohanjanyan (Project Manager European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity) and Jan Marinus Wiersma (Vice-President European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity)

Introduction

More than twenty years ago, when perhaps the biggest social experiment in modern history – communism, or the Soviet road towards it – came to a crumbling end, a new era began for Central and (South) Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia. In most of these countries a process of democratic transformation started. The European social democrats became actively involved in the post-communist countries, identifying and then supporting left wing movements and personalities. And not without success: in the new member states of the EU and in the (potential) candidate countries social democrats have played – and are still playing – an important role.

It was assumed that the same could happen in the countries that were part of the Soviet Union. But in 2012 one cannot avoid the conclusion that this analysis was wrong. With the exception of the Baltic States none of the post-Soviet states have followed the example of countries such as Poland and Slovakia. The new Eastern neighbours of the EU – Belarus, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Moldova – have not experienced the same kind of transition and have not made the same democratic progress. This applies also to the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia.

The European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, The Party of European Socialists (PES), the Socialist International (SI), the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats of the European Parliament (S&D Group) and the party foundations have all worked in these countries hoping to copy the good results they had in Central Europe and the Western Balkans. This expectation turns out to be unfounded, as is shown by the detailed mapping of the regions concerned that constitutes the basis of this publication.

We are faced with two main questions: why did the new member states of the European Union go through a different – and in our view successful – transition, while in the case of the post-Soviet countries examined here this did not happen? And how should this affect our work and working methods?

The Difference

The impact of EU accession

One explanation is proximity to the EU and the so-called ‘carrot’ of EU membership. The perspective of European integration (or the lack of it) plays an important role in the transition processes. Countries that were offered membership (Central Europe, the Baltics, Western Balkans) went through democratic reforms faster and more effectively than those not in that position. There was and is a clear goal for countries negotiating about membership. There’s mutual understanding – speaking the same political language – and the open and welcoming attitude of the EU in the 1990s (and even early 2000s) was very helpful in this regard. In the acceding countries EU accession was contested neither by the general public nor by the political elites, both being prepared to make the necessary sacrifices. They accepted that European democratic values had to be fully respected.

After the admission of the Central European and the Baltic states to the EU, the democratic movements in the rest of Eastern Europe started to see this as their destiny too. Where they came to power EU integration was put at the top of their priority list.

But having failed to realize this aspiration in the years immediately following the regime changes, the initial enthusiasm for EU membership disappeared. In Ukraine the Orange coalition was replaced by a new government that is closer to Moscow than Brussels. Relations with the EU have since deteriorated because of the imprisonment of the main opposition leader on doubtful legal grounds. In Moldova, where the EU is very popular at the moment, the same turn of events could take place in the near future, as EU membership seems very far off. Belarus and Russia are different stories: Russia because it never showed any ambition to join the EU, and Belarus because its leader is stifling any public discussion on the issue and has shown himself much more comfortable with the leadership of Russia – except for the short periods of time when he saw himself forced to turn to the EU for economic reasons. Belarus failed to use the window of opportunity to improve relations that presented itself when new EU members like Poland

offered it. The Belarus opposition, however, often considers itself European and its country part of the European family.

In the South Caucasus, where European integration is seen by many as something positive and is an official foreign policy goal of Georgia, there is a general understanding that it will not happen – at least not any time soon. As a consequence the main emphasis is put on achieving concrete results in the form of trade or association agreements with the EU, and visa liberalization.

Central Asia is a different category. The official ideology of most governments there stresses the special Eurasian character of the region. These countries will in fact never be able to join the EU, since they are not part of Europe, and they do not have that ambition. The EU is an important trading partner, but has fierce competition. In the first place from Russia, which has very strong cultural and economic ties with the post-Soviet states in the region. The most important of these, Kazakhstan, recently joined a free trade zone with Russia. Neighbouring China also has strong connections with the region, for example in the energy sector. There are intricate links in the form of regional Eurasian economic and security arrangements involving Central Asia, Russia and China. Most regimes in Central Asia reject Western models of democracy. On the other hand they see the EU as an important player whose political and economic clout can counterbalance Moscow and Beijing. And European standards are being introduced because of their intrinsic value.

It is obvious that the amount of leverage the EU has to promote democracy and the rule of law depends on the situation in each region. But it is also determined by the EU’s own ambitions, and these have changed since the enlargement rounds of 2004 and 2007. The once open arms of the EU are now closed. Within the EU the resistance to further expansion has grown because people fear the negative impact of labour migration, because they identify enlargement with Turkey and Islam or they think the EU has reached its limits. In reaction to this, politicians have more or less decided to accept no more new candidate members after the negotiations with the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey are concluded. Since 2006 the accession criteria have been applied in a much stricter way, with a strong emphasis on implementation capacity, which means in fact that for countries like Ukraine membership is not a realistic option for the foreseeable future anymore. On the other hand, one should keep in mind that the new Eastern neighbours that indicated they might want to join the EU have not shown a strong track record of reforms that would prepare them for eventual membership. The politicians who

advocated European integration have been very verbal about it, but did little to make their ambition credible. Of course both processes reinforce one another.

A Soviet Past

There is a clear difference in democratic development between the Central and Eastern European countries, which could fall back on national traditions after the collapse of communism, and the post-Soviet countries which – with the exception of the Baltic states – could not do so because they had been part of the USSR and before that, often for centuries, of the Russian empire.

Countries such as Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine became independent (and more or less democratic) by accident after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. There was no massive, conscious, popular demand for independence and democracy; it simply happened. In the case of Ukraine a real movement for democracy did not develop until 2004 – with the Orange revolution that was inspired by failed elections. In Moldova the voters decided only in 2009 to oust the ruling (post-) communist party from power.

In Ukraine, as already mentioned, the optimism of the people did not last very long. The Orange revolution leadership that took over the government in 2004 was not able to deliver on its promise of a rapid rapprochement with the European Union. The constant bickering between the president and the prime minister, and the failure to reduce corruption brought about a massive sense of disillusionment. In the end the voters turned away from the heroes of 2004 and elected president one of the people who had been responsible for the election fraud of 2004. In Moldova, where the turn-around came later, the political elites – a democratic coalition on the one hand and the Communist party on the other – have now for two years failed to come to an agreement on the election of the next president. Although the country is more democratic now, and the relationship with the EU has considerably improved, there are still many socio-economic problems that will not be solved in a matter of months (or maybe even years), and there is the danger of frustration of the voters who might turn against the reformists. An extra complication for this country is the existence of a semi-independent region within its borders, Transdniestria, which is a potential source of instability and hampers the building of a political nation in Moldova. Needless to say, change has not yet come to Belarus, and considering the divided nature of the opposition on the one hand and the extremely harsh repression on the other, democratic reform is only likely to come when its authoritarian leader, President Alyaksandr Lukashenko, hands over power.

In South Caucasus some independence movements manifested themselves when the Soviet Union collapsed, but in the end they were not always able to oust the old elites, who managed to stay in power under a new, nationalistic, banner. Attempts at jump-starting democracy took place in all three countries. This ultimately resulted in an authoritarian regime in Azerbaijan and in a monopolizing and corrupt – even if relatively free – oligarchic regime in Armenia, where the most recent attempt at popular revolt ended in violence in 2008.

In Georgia a turnaround came in 2003 with Mikheil Saakashvili's Rose Revolution, which was fed by the frustration of the voters with falsified election results. Although hailed as the great democrat from the very beginning, Saakashvili's rule is now showing some authoritarian tendencies, even if they are very subtle and covered by an extraordinary diplomatic ability to present himself as a democrat and reformer to the Georgian population and the outside world. His power is, however, not unchecked. He faces competition from within the Georgian elite and criticism from the powerful Orthodox Church. Due to the strained relations with Russia he depends heavily on the support of Western powers, which gives them a certain leverage they do not have in of Armenia, with its close links to Russia, or Azerbaijan, which cherishes the independence it can afford because of its huge energy resources.

Regional conflicts involving separatist movements (Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia) have raised nationalistic fervour and might have a negative impact on democratic development.

In Central Asia there were only a few democratic revolts: Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and 2010. Prior to that, at the beginning of independence, all five countries were marked by an 'incredible weakness of pro-independence movements', with 'both the elites and the masses [...] reluctant to leave the imperial union to which their homelands belonged'. As a consequence, democracy is practically non-existent (the exception is Kyrgyzstan), with the only variation being the degree of authoritarianism.

The largest state of the region, Russia, lost an empire and went through a very chaotic period during the 1990s. It turned out to be impossible to introduce capi-

1. Brill Olcott, Martha, The James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, *Central Asia: Confronting Independence*, Rice University, April 1998 http://www.rice.edu/energy/publications/docs/UnlockingtheAssets_CentralAsia_ConfrontingIndependence.pdf

talism and democracy without alienating large parts of the population, impoverished and angered at the corrupt privatization of state assets. This laid the foundation for the Russia of Vladimir Putin.

Democracy was an option for all countries of the former Soviet Union after it collapsed, but were they ready to use it? The past kept haunting them and they had to redefine their relations with Europe and Russia. Some chose to maintain close links to Moscow, others oriented themselves more toward the European Union. But even these latter countries show internal splits and still contain strong pro-Russia factions.

Europe: one continent, two models of democracy?

What makes democracy promotion complicated in Eastern Europe and beyond is a strong divergence of views on what constitutes a democracy and what is the rule of law.

A number of post-Soviet states has developed a hybrid mode of government that can either be called semi-authoritarian or semi-democratic. Russia is the best example. There, the belief that democracy in the Western sense of the word is simply not suitable for Russia has taken root among a large part of the population. It has led to the acceptance, to some degree, of a so-called 'managed democracy': a governing system where a certain amount of freedom and public debate is allowed, but where the ruling elite takes no risks with elections. The formal facade of a democratic state is maintained, but the golden rule of democracy – to let the people decide who is to occupy the democratic institutions – is not respected. In Russia those in power defend their version of democracy by referring to the chaotic state of affairs during the 1990s, but also the specific character and history of the country, or the need to maintain stability in a society that has no experience with pluralism. The West has no right to interfere in what is labelled a sovereign democracy. The basic aim is to maintain an absolute monopoly of power.² This concept has loyal followers elsewhere, like in Kazakhstan where the single-party parliament³ is explained by officials as 'the will of the people.' There are different ways of implementing this doctrine – in some cases to justify outright dictatorships. But what these regimes have in common is a legalistic approach reminiscent of the communist era, the extensive abuse of administrative resources, and the manipulation of elections and electoral systems: a preference for single dis-

2. See the contribution of André Gerrits to this publication.

3. About to become a two-party parliament at the insistence of the president.

tricts instead of proportional systems, which makes life difficult for opposition parties.

This fundamental deviation from the Western concept of democracy is causing a potentially serious rift inside important European institutions, along the lines of what could be called the EU type of democracy versus the Moscow model.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has to deal with these diverging concepts on a daily basis. This also includes the countries of Central Asia. The dangers of walking the thin line between Eastern and Western concepts of democracy are obvious: either the OSCE becomes a lame duck because of the internal conflict, or it masters the art of relativity, smoothing over the differences, but thus becoming much less relevant in terms of independent assessment and election observation – its most crucial *raison d'être*. Some observers note that the 'OSCE has had to deal with efforts by the Russian Federation to reorder OSCE priorities and relativise its longstanding *acquis*.'⁴ So far the OSCE has steered a course between the two options, for instance by allowing Kazakhstan to chair the OSCE while still showing a strong commitment to free and fair elections, even if this causes frictions.

A similar difficulty can be observed within the Council of Europe (CoE). In his speech before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 24 January 2011, CoE Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland noted that he believes 'Europe is being torn apart again by the centrifugal forces of economic globalization, by xenophobic tendencies, by social exclusion. Basic values like freedom of the media and freedom of religion are being relativized.' He also said in a more historic perspective: 'The great European project after the war started with the recognition deep down in society that everyone was in the same boat, that they had the same rights and shared the same values,' and 'we have to start from this point once again.'⁵

4. Law, David, *Intergovernmental Organizations and Security Sector Reform*, p.5, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2007

http://books.google.nl/books?id=C4YEuo6lgOsC&pg=PA5&lpg=PA5&dq=OSCE+relativises&source=bl&ots=uzAG_ov57h&sig=_KANRloDoxSOzFLbEQDszAy86Bk&hl=nl&ei=K_XYTruWEMOP4gTxmeTrDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false

5. <http://www.coe.int/portal/web/coe-portal/event-files/parliamentary-assembly-sessions/all-session-news-january-2011/speech-by-thorbjorn-jagla>

So far this simmering conflict within the OSCE and the CoE has not led to a breakdown in relations in wider Europe. On the contrary, the economies of the EU and the post-Soviet states have become more and more intertwined. The West has been able to avoid real controversy because the peoples of the managed democracies seem to accept their present conditions. But that can change, as we have seen recently in Russia, where large demonstrations were held in protest against election fraud. This raises the question of how sustainable the Moscow model is.

The impact of social democracy

As Social Democrats, we have faced the difficult task of building a political base in the three regions. We already pointed to the lack of EU leverage, the peculiarities of the post-Soviet states and diverging views on democracy as complicating factors. To these could be added the uncertain legal environments and the creation of political landscapes without the traditional right-left divide that exists inside the EU. The general aversion, after independence, to anything with the word 'social' in it, meant that parties with a social democratic label first and foremost had to prove that they had nothing (more) to do with the socialist past. In this process it was not helpful that sometimes 'new' faces were slapped onto old communist parties, increasing the general public's scepticism. Those who called themselves socialists or social democrats often had and still have difficulty in defining what leftwing policies can offer the voters.

Across the region the development of democracy in general, and social democracy in particular, has varied. In some countries the former communist ruling parties managed to rebrand themselves and re-enter their country's politics in a relatively successful way (for example Ukraine in the 1990s), while in others they either remained painfully old-fashioned and only relevant for the older, nostalgic generations (e.g. Georgia, Moldova), or they withered and practically disappeared (Ukraine at present, Azerbaijan). In a few countries new social democratic movements and parties without any connection to the former communist movements were established (Moldova, Georgia at present), albeit with varying success.

The countries in question can roughly be put into three main categories and one subcategory: authoritarian regimes, more or less free countries with authoritarian tendencies, a country (Moldova) that can be regarded as having achieved freedom and democracy, fragile though it is – and Russia, which falls somewhere in between the first and the second category.⁶

The first category – the easiest to define – includes the states with a clearly totalitarian rule: Belarus, Azerbaijan and the Central Asian states, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan. In these countries the opposition does not have any space to operate legally, there are no free and independent media apart from some semi-legal internet news portals. Dissidents face criminal prosecution. The degree of authoritarianism can vary, however: in Azerbaijan opposition parties can apply for permission to demonstrate, but only at stadium grounds practically outside the capital Baku, while in Belarus any gathering of over 3 people has become illegal. In Turkmenistan, any dissent is dangerous, while in Kazakhstan opposition parties are allowed to exist, even if they do not stand a chance to gain representation in any state bodies, including parliament.

What these countries also have in common, unsurprisingly, is the weakness of social democracy. Again, there is a varying degree of social democratic presence. In some countries there are many parties that call themselves left-wing, but they fail to cooperate effectively or be of real relevance (Belarus), while in others it would be difficult to find even one truly social democratic party (Turkmenistan). Given the political repression, it is very difficult to assess the potential of the democratic left in these countries.

The second category consists of states that are relatively free but also show authoritarian tendencies: Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan. Some have witnessed real democratic revolutions (Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan). To a varying degree they are characterized by political instability, corruption, a weak rule of law, weak parliaments and oligarchic economic structures. Human rights violations do occur, elections have not always been free and fair. Some are more pluralistic than others, and their relations with the EU and Russia vary.

The state of social democracy in these states is equally varied. In Ukraine the initially (relatively) strong social democratic presence has all but disappeared,

6. In its 2011 survey Freedom House uses only two classifications for the three post-Soviet regions: partly free (Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan) and not free (Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan and the rest of Central Asia). But one may question their classification of Russia and Moldova. The European Union has treaties with all these countries, but their contents differ. Human rights, the rule of law and democracy are dealt with in the political dialogues between the EU and these countries. Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan are included in the EU neighbourhood programme and are entitled to financial support. They are considered as special partners of the EU. See also the article of Max Bader and his classification.

although there does still seem to be political space for a new leftist platform. The Socialist Party of Ukraine supported the Orange revolution but switched sides later, and there were social democratic fractions in other democratic parties too, but they failed to constitute a united social democratic front and have lost political relevance. The Party of the Regions that took power a few years ago was seen as an alternative, but it lost its attractiveness as a possible partner when it started supporting the policies of the president. Armenia has a stable socialist party that is a full-fledged member of the international social democratic community, but its views regarding some issues (such as the relationship with Turkey) have made European social democrats cautious. In Georgia the main original leftist force with popular support, the Labour Party, is seen as very old-fashioned. A new party, the Social Democrats for the Development of Georgia (SDDG), may offer some hope, but it is in the early stages of party-building. In Kyrgyzstan the Social Democratic party is a significant political force, having given the country its president (the former prime minister). However, the OSCE report on the recent elections showed that they left much to be desired, as there were problems with voter lists and tabulations. Nevertheless, the OSCE was 'cautiously optimistic'.

Moldova may well be the only country that falls into the third category. Although the country has made some major steps towards democracy, it still faces many problems: a huge economic crisis, rampant corruption, and lack of political stability due to a deadlock over the election of the next President between the democratic Alliance for European Integration and the Communist Party. The main centre-left party, the Democratic Party, is in the ruling coalition. However, its future also depends on the resolution of the political crisis, as the general population is slowly getting tired of the elite's political games, and there are fears that should there be early parliamentary elections, the turnout would be extremely low.

Finally Russia: its official concept of democracy has already been described. For more than a decade already the country has been in the control of prime minister Putin (soon to be president again) and his United Russia party. The enormous profits of the energy sector have helped the ruling elite keep the country stable. With the administrative resources available and clever manipulation of the rule of law the democratic opposition has been marginalized. The opposition parties that are represented in parliament operate within the 'accepted' democratic paradigm. There have been attempts to develop an independent social democratic movement in the past, but they all failed. At present the Just Russia party, that has official recognition and did relatively well in the last parliamentary elections, is considered to be the partner of European social democracy. It used to be labelled a

'Kremlin' party, but this qualification seems obsolete now that it has become much more critical of the regime and its leader was forced to step down as president of the Federation Chamber.

The need to diversify

Against the background of the developments described above, we have to assess our working methods and define how we want to operate in the future. It is clear we have to deal with each region and each country in a different way. Despite their similarities and their common history, each of them is on a different path in terms of democratic development.

This final section deals with the role of the SI, the PES, the S&D Group, the European Forum and the party foundations. We have formulated some general recommendations and we are of course aware that the above-mentioned members of the social democratic family have their own mandates and responsibilities, some more practical, others more political. The context of our involvement is mainly determined by local factors, but without a strong commitment of the EU, the OSCE, the CoE, the UN institutions and the IFI our ambition to help strengthen democracy and to create sustainable social democratic movements will be an almost impossible task.

One of the main questions, before devising a plan of action, is whether or not we are able to physically organize events involving the (social democratic) opposition. In most countries of the first category this would be a difficult, if not impossible mission. So in those cases it makes sense to concentrate more on the general democratic development, identifying new agents of change like internet activists, youth movements, independent NGOs etc., and supporting them where we can. Basically the aim would be to help create a multi-party environment which might also offer more scope for social democrats. This could be done in cooperation with other party-political families and/or international democracy institutions. These efforts should be coordinated with the EU, OSCE, CoE and UNDP.

The approach to the countries of the second category is somewhat easier, as basic conditions to operate on the spot are present, including a number of basic freedoms. But as already mentioned, in most of these countries there are hardly any parties we could consider as viable partners. One option to be explored here is looking for new platforms and new initiatives on the left side of the political spec-

trum. It is also politically important to maintain our presence: these countries are partners of the EU and we need to counter the tendency to ignore them as soon as public opinion is galvanized by dramatic developments in other regions, like North Africa. Our existing partners in these countries should of course not be neglected, but we have to carefully monitor their development and assess from time to time whether they follow an acceptable direction, i.e. whether they keep respecting the principles of social democracy.

In Moldova we have to support the Democratic Party's role in the country's pro-democratic and pro-European leadership. Moldova is still at a cross-road. In practical terms, this means support on three levels: the political level (the European Parliament, the European Commission etc.), the party level (the PES), and through the European Forum and the political foundations.

We should continue to develop relations with the Just Russia party, as it offers an entrance into the country, but it should not become our exclusive partner. Independent youth and gender movements also deserve our support, as do independent contenders in the upcoming presidential elections.

Since it is difficult to predict what will happen in the years to come and surprising events should not be excluded, we have to remain flexible and adapt our modus operandi – if need be – to changing circumstances.

Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova: Europe's Grey Zone

*By René Does, specialist on current affairs in the former Soviet Union and editor of *Prospekt-online*, an online magazine about the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.*

After the demise of the Pax Sovietica in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the ensuing expansion of NATO and the European Union with a string of Eastern European countries ten and fifteen years later, three new independent states at the Western flank of the Soviet Union were considered to form a 'Grey Zone': Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. Together, they formed a geopolitical 'vacuum' at the heart of the European continent. Is there currently any change discernible in this situation?

Politically, the 'greyness' of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova has both internal and external aspects. Internally, there is an ongoing tension between democratic and autocratic tendencies (with the exception of autocratic Belarus). Externally, there is an ongoing tension between integration into Western political structures such as NATO and the European Union on the one hand, and into post-Soviet structures, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the upcoming Customs Union and Eurasian Union in the geographic area of the former Soviet Union, on the other.

Political systems

The nature of the internal political systems that took shape in the former Soviet states have been subjected to a great number of nomenclatures and classifications, especially at this moment of the bi-decennial anniversary of the demise of the Soviet Union. An interesting and comprehensive classification was made by Yaroslav Shimov in the Russian online newspaper *Gazeta.ru*⁷. Shimov distinguishes four types of political systems.

7. www.gazeta.ru, 8 August 2011

Firstly, there is a category of 'New Europeans' that has successfully made the switch to democracy and a market economy, and became integrated in all the Western political and economic structures. Of course, these are the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the only three former Soviet states that are not and never have been a member of the CIS.

Secondly, Shimov distinguishes a category of 'imitation democracies'. Here, the political system has 'condensed between democracy and autocracy'. This kind of political system is the most widespread among the former Soviet states. Members of this group are Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine under the new president Viktor Yanukovich, and Georgia during the second term of president Mikhail Saakashvili.

The third category consists of former Soviet republics with a 'forced democracy', that is: a democracy without adjectives, but where democratic structures are nonetheless hampered by internal ethnic, regional and linguistic cleavages and the strong influence of economic interests groups ('oligarchs'). Moldova is a member of this category because of its 'frozen conflict' in the separatist region of Transdniestria and the use of Russian as official language besides Moldovan. Before Yanukovich was elected, Ukraine could also be called a 'forced democracy' according to Shimov, if you take into account the dichotomy between the pro-European Western part of the country and the pro-Russian eastern part, the possible separatism in the Crimean peninsula, and the discussion about the status of the Russian language besides Ukrainian – although the political system of Ukraine was judged to be free and democratic. The other members of this group are Kyrgyzstan and Georgia during the first term of Saakashvili (January 2004 - November 2007).

Finally, there is the fourth category of 'sultanates', defined by Mr Shimov as 'despotism in its most blatant form', which are founded on a 'heavy repressive apparatus and the most stringent choice of partners'. The reason behind the Asian epithet for this kind of regimes is that 'sultanism' prospers mainly in the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. But there is also a European former Soviet republic with a political regime that has the characteristics of such a sultanate, namely Belarus.

Ukraine

The dichotomy in Ukrainian society is politically expressed in a nearly even balance between pro-European and reformist forces and parties, and pro-Russian and conservative forces and parties. In the beginning of 2004, the reformist forces took the upper hand, although it took a 'velvet revolution', in the form of the Orange Revolution under the leadership of Viktor Yushchenko (Our Ukraine party) and Yulia Tymoshenko (Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko, BYuT), who then became president and prime minister respectively. But in the presidential elections of January and February 2010 the loser of the Orange Revolution, Viktor Yanukovich of the pro-Russian Party of the Regions, took revenge by defeating Yulia Tymoshenko in the second round of 7 February, albeit with the smallest of margins.

In daily politics, Ukrainian leaders have to strike a balance between the pro-European and the pro-Russian forces in society: the pro-European regime of Yushchenko and Tymoshenko was less anti-Russian than expected, and the policy of the pro-Russian leaders is less pro-Russian than the political leadership in Russia would hope. As a result, Ukraine remains stuck in the geopolitical 'Grey Zone' between the European Union and the post-Soviet political structures in the East.

But this may change under the new president Viktor Yanukovich, who takes his example from the Russian leader Vladimir Putin. After his election as president, Mr Yanukovich restored the Constitution of 1996, which had been replaced in 2004 by the new Constitution of Yushchenko and Tymoshenko. As a consequence the president has more powers, at the expense of parliament, and the election system of the 1990s is restored, entailing a mixed election system of proportional party elections and district elections (225 seats each) and the rise of the election threshold from 3 to 5 percent. This will all be to the advantage of the presidential Party of the Regions. Furthermore, in October 2011 Yanukovich's political arch-enemy Ms Tymoshenko was jailed for seven years because of supposed abuse of her position as prime minister in 2009 when negotiating a new contract for gas deliveries with Russia. Mr Yanukovich might be underestimating the negative reactions of the United States and the European Union, accusing him of political abuse of the judicial system. As long as Ms Tymoshenko remains imprisoned, further integration into Western political and economic structures will be halted. At the moment, the regime of Mr Yanukovich is considering joining the new Customs Union in the CIS as a trade-in for cheaper Russian energy deliveries.

Belarus

Speaking or writing about Belarus, one has to remember that Belarus is governed by 'the last dictator in Europe', President Alyaksandr Lukashenko, and that it is a 'Soviet reserve'. Until a short time ago, Belarus was considered by its population to be a 'successful version of the Soviet Union'. The compliance of the Belarusian population with the regime of Mr Lukashenko and the lack of a real, strong opposition can be explained by the absence of a strong feeling of Belarusian statehood, the result of a strong Russification and sovietization of the republic during the twentieth century.

Nonetheless, since 2011 the regime of Mr Lukashenko has slumped into a deep political and economic crisis. After the presidential elections of 19 December 2010, a harsh crackdown on the protests against the official election result put paid to the beginning overtures between Mr Lukashenko and the European Union. Furthermore, the Belarusian economy was sucked into a deep financial crisis. Both developments forced the regime to turn to Russia for political and economic relief. Among other things, Mr Lukashenko has promised that Belarus will be a member state of the new Eurasian Union coined by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, and giant the Russian gas company Gazprom received a majority stake in Beltransgaz, the main Belarusian state pipeline company.

Moldova

For the longest part of the first decade of the 21st century Moldova, the poorest country of Europe, was the only former Soviet state to be governed by a communist party, the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM). As the result of a velvet revolution after parliamentary elections in the beginning of 2009 (the world's first Twitter Revolution), a coalition of pro-European parties, the Alliance of European Integration (AEI), took power. But a political crisis unfolded as it proved impossible to elect a new president. In the parliamentary republic Moldova a new president has to gain at least 61 of the 101 parliamentary votes. Two parliamentary elections did not result in such a majority (currently the AEI has 59 seats in parliament), as a result of which parliamentary speaker Marian Lupu remains in function as interim president.

Despite its European orientation, the AEI government was shortly forced to turn to Russia for economic and financial assistance, especially in the form of cheaper

energy deliveries. Furthermore, a recent opinion survey among the Moldovan population revealed that 45.6 percent of Moldovans is in favour of joining the Customs Union in the post-Soviet region, against 33.8 percent in favour of joining the European Union⁸.

In 2011, the geopolitical pendulum in the Grey Zone was swinging in the direction of Russia and the East. Several causes can be discerned for this development: nostalgia for Soviet times, the still strong historical and cultural ties with the Russian civilization, a lack of democratization, and the extensive economic dependence on Russia, especially with regard to energy deliveries. The post-communist history in Europe's Grey Zone bears testimony that the pendulum may again swing back in the direction of the West and towards European integration, although the perspectives for that are not favourable at the moment.

8. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22 November 2011

The Politics of the South Caucasus

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While Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are often viewed as forming one region – the South Caucasus – there is as much that distinguishes the three countries as unites them. Politically, none of the countries has become a democracy in the two decades of post-Soviet independence. The political regimes of the respective countries, however, show important differences. This article first outlines the nature of politics in the three countries, and then discusses the factors that impede democratization in the region.

Authoritarianism to varying degrees

Of the three political regimes, Azerbaijan's is the most unambiguously authoritarian: since 1993, the country has been ruled by one political faction, the legislature is entirely dominated by pro-regime supporters, and opposition to the regime is effectively counteracted. The authoritarian order in Azerbaijan moreover appears durable: the political elite is largely united around president Aliyev, who took over power from his ailing father in 2003, and the regime controls the abundant rents that accrue from the exploitation of natural gas and oil resources. Attempts by the opposition in 2011 to emulate the uprisings of the Arab Spring, moreover, met with little enthusiasm and were swiftly oppressed. Politics in Armenia and Georgia are less monolithic: in these countries, rival elite factions vie for political influence, opposition parties occupy a share of seats in the legislature (though far short of a majority), and the number of political prisoners is comparatively limited. As in Azerbaijan, however, elections are consistently and deliberately unfair. Over the past twenty years, power has changed hands twice in both Armenia and Georgia: with that, however, the nature of political competition has remained largely unchanged. The first Armenian president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, was forced to relinquish power in 1998 after a conflict with the government. His successor Robert Kocharyan stepped down after the conclusion of his second presidential

term to make way for current president Serzh Sargsyan in 2008. Georgia's long-serving president Eduard Shevardnadze was called to assume leadership in 1992 after a troubled first year of independence. Eleven years later, Shevardnadze was ousted following a fraudulent parliamentary election, and current president Mikheil Saakashvili was elected soon afterwards. While Georgia has acquired a much more effective state since, it has not become more democratic.

The political future of Armenia and Georgia in the short term and medium term is also more difficult to predict than it is for Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijan, term limits for the presidency have been scrapped, and it is widely assumed that Ilham Aliyev will be elected for a third term in 2013. Saakashvili, by contrast, is expected to step down in the same year after the conclusion of his second term. Many observers believe that Saakashvili will seek to become prime minister after a new constitutional arrangement comes into force that will shift some powers from the presidency to the government and the legislature. The entrance into politics of Georgia's wealthiest man, Bidzina Ivanishvili, however, is seen as a viable threat to the political power of the faction around Saakashvili. In Armenia, Sargsyan's authority is contested both from within the elite, including his immediate predecessor Kocharyan, and by a vocal opposition headed by first president Ter-Petrosyan.

All three regimes are 'electoral authoritarian' in that they lack the minimal conditions of democracy, but, unlike classic authoritarian regimes, do organize regular elections in which opposition forces are to some degree allowed to run, albeit on an uneven playing field. The difference between Azerbaijan on the one hand and Armenia and Georgia on the other is well captured by the categories – influential in political science literature – of hegemonic authoritarianism and competitive authoritarianism. In competitive authoritarian regimes, such as Armenia's and Georgia's, incumbent presidents and ruling parties typically win elections, and invariably so by unfair means, but an element of uncertainty and real contestation is preserved. Sometimes an election in a competitive authoritarian regime can even bring about the removal of a regime, such as in the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003. The dynamic of electoral politics in hegemonic authoritarian regimes, such as Azerbaijan's, is fundamentally different: the strategic calculations of political players here are shaped by the anticipation that the incumbent president or ruling party will inevitably win by a large margin of victory. Consequently, the likelihood of power changing hands through elections is minimal in such regimes.

Obstacles for democratic development

A number of factors can be seen as impeding or complicating the democratization of the three countries. First, executive-legislative arrangements and the legal framework around elections favour the perpetuation of the incumbent regime. In all three countries, constitutional provisions that locate most executive power in the presidency facilitate the concentration of power in a single hand limiting the impact of a system of checks and balances. The rules for legislative elections are such that either a significant share of seats in the legislature (in the cases of Armenia and Georgia) or all seats (in the case of Azerbaijan) are contested in single-member districts. Because these districts are in most cases handily won by pro-regime candidates, who benefit from access to 'administrative resources', the legislatures are dominated by pro-regime forces.

Second, one may point at the impact of a political culture that is not conducive to democratization. This deficient political culture arguably manifests itself in the weakness of political parties and civil society. Especially problematic for political parties is that in many cases their activity is dictated by the economic interests of their leaders or financial backers, and that there is next to no internal party democracy and, consequently, no grassroots base to speak of. More so than in most democracies, political parties are fully controlled by a narrow leadership. Not only are few people politically active, levels of civic association (outside political parties) are also low. Weak party and civil society development, however, is in part also a consequence of other factors than political culture. The inconsequential role of the legislature and the election of many MPs through single-member districts provide weak incentives for party development. The circumstance that many political parties have few chances of gaining substantial representation due to the existence of an uneven playing field further works against party development. In addition, a restrictive legislative framework and fear of repression can have a negative effect on political party and civil society development.

Third, the failure to resolve regional conflicts is sometimes believed to be standing in the way of democratization. Since the early 1990s, the Georgian government has not been able to exert authority over two territories located within the borders of the Georgian Soviet republic – Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Also in the early 1990s the government of Azerbaijan lost control over the area of Nagorno-Karabakh, whose ethnic Armenian leadership is supported by the Armenian state. It is fair to say that the Azeri and Georgian governments are obsessed with regaining control over the lost territories. Moreover, given the resilience of the de facto

independent states, and their support by Armenia in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia in the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the threat of violent conflict continues to hang in the air. The low intensity and long duration of the conflicts, however, make it difficult to argue that they would preclude the consolidation of democracy.

Fourth, the authorities wield significant control over economic resources. This enables them to buy the loyalty of the elite, decreasing the likelihood that those elites will challenge the power of the regime. Part of the explanation for the lack of elite unity in Armenia and Georgia, compared to Azerbaijan, may be the more limited volume of resources that the regime controls. Due to the export of hydrocarbons, the regime in Azerbaijan controls a much bigger volume of resources that it can use not only to buy off elites, but also to provide public goods to gain the support of parts of the population.

Fifth, there are few elements in the external relations of the three countries that could stimulate democratization. The conditionality of the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy, in which the three countries are included, provides few 'carrots' for far-reaching reform. Participation and membership in the OSCE and Council of Europe have positive effects, but are unlikely to fundamentally change the nature of the political regimes in the countries. The sources of potential external leverage over the three countries are markedly different. Armenia's closest ally Russia is at best indifferent to the authoritarian tendencies of the Armenian government. Georgia's main partners, the United States and NATO, have continued to provide support to the Georgian government despite a sustained lack of democratization. Azerbaijan, finally, due to its economic strength, is hardly subject to external leverage.

Institutional change v. revolutions

Ultimately, of course, the lack of democratization in the three South Caucasus states hinges on the absence of political will among the leaders of the countries to allow democratization. Achieving a breakthrough in the current (semi-)authoritarian stasis will require either regime change or a change in the incentive structures of political leaders. Because politics in Armenia and Georgia remain highly contested, revolutionary situations there continue to be a distinct possibility. As the experience of Georgia demonstrates, though, elite replacement is far from being a guarantee for democratization. One of the more feasible ways through which the

incentive structures of political actors can be changed is through institutional change. In this respect, the coming into force of the constitutional amendments in Georgia in 2013 may yet create a new political reality. In Azerbaijan, there is little pressure to change the status quo from within the elite, the opposition, or from abroad, and the prospects for democratization therefore are grim by any measure.

Who Cheers For Democracy in Central Asia?

By Jos Boonstra, Senior Researcher FRIDE / Head of the Europe-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM) programme, Brussels

Central Asia is one of the most repressive regions in the world. Compared with the other two former-Soviet regions of Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) and the three South Caucasus states (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Central Asia shows the least inclination towards democratization. Whereas the five Central Asian republics are very different, none of them can be labelled a democracy or claim to have made substantial progress towards democratic practices.

Kazakhstan has gone through a period of steep economic growth due to oil and gas exports. A middle class is emerging and the income per capita almost doubles that of Turkmenistan and quadruples that of Uzbekistan, number two and three of the five Central Asian countries. But little has been done to build a genuine democracy. The country is by and large dependent on its President Nazarbayev. A broad political landscape is lacking, which could turn out to be problematic when a successor needs to be chosen. Over the last few years the President has mostly been concerned with his country's image by securing high-level international chairing positions (the OSCE in 2010 and the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 2011) and in polishing his own legacy by hiring well-paid consultants (including Tony Blair) to present Kazakhstan and its President as an unrivalled success story.

The human rights situation and progress towards some democratic practice in Kazakhstan, however, is more secure than in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Both countries were labelled by democracy watchdog Freedom House as being part of the nine 'worst of the worst' countries. After its independence Uzbekistan, the most central and populous country in the region, developed into an effective police state led by President Karimov. The country has problematic relations with all its neighbours and has not been able to overcome its murderous image after the 2005 Andijan events in which hundreds of protesters were killed. The EU has

lifted sanctions and the US and NATO are on a reasonable footing with Tashkent in order to ensure the use of the Northern Distribution Network aimed at the war effort in Afghanistan, but little or no progress had been made in improving the human rights circumstances.

In Turkmenistan President Berdymukhamedov has created his own powerbase since December 2006, when he took over after the sudden death of President Niyazov. This has not led to the country's opening up, starting reform or rebuilding the destroyed school system. China, and to a lesser extent Europe, Iran and traditional export partner Russia, have taken a keen interest in Turkmenistan's enormous gas reserves. The country lacks any independent civil society or political opposition, but the President has undertaken small steps to build a managed democracy, for instance by allowing (controlled) opposition candidates for the upcoming presidential elections in 2012. Apart from the gas industry, Turkmenistan remains one of the most isolated countries in the world.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan lack the natural resources to build a rent seeking economy based on energy exports and are unstable development countries. Both are more open and free than their three northern neighbours. The authoritarian tendencies seem to be of a similar nature, but the capacity to build an effective police state are lacking and foreign donors need to be accommodated through some form of democratic practice. Kyrgyzstan experienced a second regime change in 2010. In 2005 President Akayev was removed by Kurmanbek Bakiyev in what is better described as a coup than a genuine popular revolt. When President Bakiyev turned authoritarian himself and was removed in April 2010 due to popular protests, hope emerged that the country's track record of being open and having an active civil society would translate in democratic reform. This development was countered by the ethnic violence that erupted in June 2010 in the south of the country, as well as by the rivalry between political leaders lacking political parties but boasting personal business interests. The constitution was amended and Kyrgyzstan is now a parliamentary democracy and was able to hold free and somewhat fair elections last October. The new President Atambayev is likely to be more concerned with balancing power interests in the country than pushing for democratic reform. Donors have so far mostly reacted on a small scale to the ethnic violence and have not developed a democratization strategy together with Kyrgyz authorities that is backed up with appropriate resources.

Tajikistan is led by authoritarian President Rahmon, who managed to end the civil war in 1997. The country's parliament does contain a genuine opposition party (the

Islamic Renaissance Party) as a remnant of the peace agreement that ended the war. Nonetheless, tensions over the growth of Islam are rising in Tajikistan and the government increasingly takes a hard-line approach towards various forms of opposition. The country is characterized by widespread and endemic corruption and severe security threats. Corruption by the elites is especially damaging since it blocks any economic development. Meanwhile, the country's stability is at risk due to energy shortages, tensions with Uzbekistan over water resources, negative influences from Afghanistan (drug trade and radicalism) and a complete lack of economic opportunities for its young population, which increasingly moves to Russia to find work.

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as the poorest countries in the region, do offer limited space for a democratization process that is bottom-up and will take time to foster. Meanwhile Kazakhstan occasionally seems inclined to make small steps towards a more open society. All three will need incentives and sometimes pressure to engage in democratic reform. Here the EU and US play an important role, which is complicated by the other interests both have (hard security and energy). Another complicating factor is the Central Asian neighbourhood, where Russia and China have taken the lead without being bothered by value-driven agendas.

Difficulties of democratization

The difficulty of democratization of Central Asia and challenges of 'Western' efforts of democracy support can be summed up in four basic points:

Firstly, democracy is seen by the leaderships of Central Asian states as a direct threat to their existence. The notion of democracy is at odds with the vested interests of the elites (ruling families and clan interests) and is seen as countering the stability they believe provides for themselves as well as for their outside business partners Russia, China and to a lesser extent the EU, US, Turkey and India. This is why the regimes argue that the focus should be on the terrorist and radical Islam threat instead of Europeans and Americans pushing democratic values. Security threats are indeed challenging, but they mostly come from different directions than the one-sided emphasis of Central Asian regimes on extremism and radical Islam suggests. It is poverty, lack of opportunity for the new generation and interstate and ethnic tensions that seem to be the most important threats to the stability of the state. In a sense the biggest threat to the Central Asian populations are the regimes themselves, suppressing their people and choosing regime security over state and human security.

Secondly, Central Asian regimes (but also some Western critics of democracy promotion) often argue that the historical development of Central Asia is different from that of other parts of the world, and as a result their values cannot be put on a par with Western values. Of course the mechanisms of democratic government can and should differ between societies. But basic ingredients of a democracy such as free and fair elections, a transparent government, a parliament that holds government to account and a vibrant civil society are part and parcel of any democracy. Central Asian states have agreed to these prescriptions when they joined the UN and OSCE. It is not about pushing democratic models but fostering practice. At the same time democracy often has a negative connotation for the people because the concept is linked to the first decade of independence, and is hence associated with robber capitalism and uncertainty. Strong leadership is needed, say many Central Asians. This is all true, but would the average person in the street object to free and fair elections, an independent justice system, effective governance and basic human rights? Probably not. Whereas Central Asia might not cheer for democracy, and while every democracy has downsides and limitations, the notion as such has been agreed to by the states and is to the benefit of the population.

Thirdly, Central Asian regimes have built up most of the institutions of a democracy but lack any democratic practice. Whereas often the law is well arranged on paper, a good legal practice is lacking. To satisfy Western powers and give civilians a feeling of state building a facade democracy is installed, including a parliament and a judiciary with, on paper, a basic division of power and institutions such as a few political parties and a civil society. Central Asian regimes have become quite adept at building a Potemkin democracy, for instance by establishing and funding civil society organizations (GONGOs) and regulating the existence of political parties that support the government. The EU, US, OSCE and other actors interested in promoting democracy have found it increasingly difficult to criticise the lack of reform when all the institutions are in place.

Fourthly, the Western powers that seek to promote democracy have fallen victim to an identity crisis themselves and have been severely hurt by accusations of applying a 'double standard'. The US and especially EU position in the world is in decline. In Central Asia this will be most notable after 2014, when NATO troops have left Afghanistan while Russian dominance in the region is stable and Chinese economic influence is on the rise. Western prescriptions of democracy and human rights can be rebuffed by Central Asian regimes because there are more alternatives, such as Turkey and India, countries that are democratic but feel they should

refrain from interfering in other countries' internal situations. Meanwhile the OSCE has become irrelevant as a regional security organization and a reference point for democratic practice, due to internal divisions over its human dimension and criticism from several former Soviet republics: they feel that Western members should not preach democracy and human rights in the East, since they are less vocal when energy supplies are at stake and have democratic and human rights shortcomings themselves.

The EU's role

The European Union is a relative newcomer to the region and only started building serious relations five years ago when it launched its Strategy for Central Asia. One of its priorities is to promote democracy, good governance, rule of law and human rights. So far the EU has not devoted specific attention to democracy, for the reasons outlined above. It did succeed in organizing annual Human Rights Dialogues with all five republics. This is an accomplishment, but unfortunately the practice has little impact on the human rights situation in the region, and the EU runs the risk that these dialogues sidetrack human rights issues from other policy fields. Some EU-funded good governance projects are underway, civil society receives a bit of support, and the EU plus several member states have been active in the rule of law field, also on a regional basis, which is an accomplishment too. Unfortunately these initiatives only scratch the surface, because funding is extremely thin – especially compared to Eastern Partnership funding for East European and South Caucasus partners – and Central Asian regimes will only allow projects and reforms that do not threaten their position: democracy is seen as too much of a threat.

The prospects for democratization in Central Asia are dim and security risks of instability – including Arab spring scenarios – are on the rise. For Europe, engagement with Central Asian regimes (and directly with the people) seems a better choice than sanctions and isolation. The EU will always have to perform a balancing act between interests and values. But giving up on the promotion of values will not solve anything for the EU. This will not suddenly help Europe to achieve its strategic energy and security objectives or bring opportunities that will take Europe in the lead at the expense of China or Russia.

Targeted democracy support, a strong line on human rights and increased contact between Europeans and Central Asians seems to be the way forward. This is why

education initiatives and contacts between civil societies are so important in building a genuine partnership and weeding out misconceptions such as the ones described above. The European Parliament plays an important role here in connecting civil society activists and experts with elected representatives and policy-makers, as the included report (appendix C) shows. Whereas the trip to Central Asia might have been the most challenging to organise and direct results are lacking, the effort is worthwhile if continued through more parliamentary and civil society initiatives.

The Political Situation in Russia

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Until the aftermath of the December 2011 Duma elections, politics in Russia happened behind closed doors. Rivalry, conflicts of interests, competition, negotiations and decision making take place in a non-transparent entity of power groups and political clans⁹ that have found each other throughout the past decade under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. Russia is not a flawed democracy, but a specific dictatorship. The political order here combines authoritarian and 'democratic' elements, hence it is semi-authoritarian: a mostly free society, a very weak rule of law, and a closed political system, completed by a number of institutions through which the political order informs itself about the society without fulfilling responsibilities towards it. Formal and informal, institutional and personal power are often difficult to separate. Will the aftermath of the recent Duma elections and the street protests in particular, impact Russian politics? Has Russia's authoritarian regime overplayed its hand?

The people in power

The formation of the Putin-Medvedev duumvirate in 2008 was a typical product of Russia's semi-authoritarian order, an uneasy combination of 'democratic' and authoritarian aspects. While all democratic rules (constitution) and procedures (elections) were seemingly observed, an informal, undemocratic decision (the continuity of Putin's power) was actually put into effect and legitimized.

9. A political clan may be defined as a network of politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen, often centred around one or more powerful political figures, which is marked by organizational structures and institutional procedures that serve their interests. Political clans usually have an informal and institutional character; they are rooted in the bureaucracy; they share a certain ideological orientation and political preferences; and the members of the clans are loyal to each other, while the separate clans, while competing for political power and welfare, have a certain degree of mutual loyalty, as they share a common interest in the continuity of the status quo.

Many of the political challenges that Russia's leaders are now facing, including until recently the question of succession, and more recently the manifestations of popular protest, have arisen from the nature of the semi-authoritarian political system. Practically all political issues were discussed in the Russian media¹⁰: the lack of democracy, the pointlessness of elections – even the sham of the Putin-Medvedev tandem was examined in the months preceding the parliamentary elections. This political 'debate', however, did not produce any practical consequences whatsoever.

Political opposition is tolerated in Russia as long it does not enter the political arena. The Duma is controlled by the executive. All parties, including the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, are to some extent dependent on the Kremlin and conform to the current political regime. Opposition parties are excluded from participation in elections. In the past eight years the Justice Department has registered only two new political parties, which do *not* include the Party of Popular Freedom (PARNAS), led by Russia's veteran 'liberal' oppositionists, the formerly prominent politicians Boris Nemtsov, Vladimir Ryzhkov and Mikhail Kasyanov. Incidentally, the Russian regime has little to fear from this 'real' liberal opposition. Democratic parties have long been demoralized and marginalized by a combination of manipulation, repression and division. The consequent repression of the democratic opposition is no longer motivated by the importance of these movements in society – which is very limited – but by the political 'psychology' of the authoritarian regime: to maintain the absolute monopoly over politics they have to avoid any appearance of weakness.

The Population

The Russian media followed the revolutions in the Arab world with great interest. The overwhelming opinion, however, is that such popular uprisings are unlikely in the Russian Federation.

Public opinion surveys give a mixed and sometimes contradictory image of the political opinions of the Russian population. In general Russians have little faith in the political institutions and especially –from long experience, I suspect – in the

10. The most important is the interconnectedness of political and economic power and corruption in the highest political ranks. Research into the machinations of the powerful is always risky, especially outside of Moscow.

'democratic' institutions of their country, like political parties and parliament. The majority of Russians subscribes to the ideal of democracy, but has little patience with the (Western) liberal democracy: it is considered unsuitable for Russia.

Although Russians overwhelmingly support their undemocratic leaders (at the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections only 25% of the voters voted against the Kremlin candidate), they are extremely dissatisfied with their *own* political situation. They feel powerless and unprotected by the law. Elections are generally seen as a political ritual without a real meaning. Neither voting nor protesting is considered an effective means of influencing those in power. In short, many Russians are frustrated over the fact that they do not have any influence on the political order in their country, which they nonetheless still generally support. So the powerlessness that many Russians feel is not translated into a strong need for formal democratization. The state of democracy in Russia is of little concern to most Russians.¹¹

Recently, however, the political mood has started to shift. The stagnating economic development is one of the reasons for a growing political dissatisfaction. Although Putin and, to a lesser extent, Medvedev remain fairly popular according to all polls, there is more and more scepticism and criticism concerning their construction of shared power as well as the politics for which they are responsible.

The ruling party United Russia – dubbed the party of 'thugs and thieves' by Alexey Navalny (1976), one of Russia's most famous bloggers – did extraordinarily badly in the regional elections of March 2011 and the parliamentary elections in December 2011, where it lost its constitutional majority.

The Russian media were full of debate about the rigidity of the political order. One after another think tanks issued dark scenarios for the future. A group of famous Russians wrote an open letter in the independent *Novaya Gazeta* (1 June 2011) demanding free and fair elections. Even some of the government's advisory bodies called for quick and substantial democratic reforms.¹² Opinion polls show that

11. Recently 1,600 Russians were asked what their biggest political concerns were: 53% mentioned inflation, 52% the low quality of public services, and 51% the low standard of life. Only 11% mentioned the problematic state of democracy and human rights as their biggest concern. (*Ria Novosti*, 5 October 2011) (*Johnson's Russia List* (JRL), no. 180, 6 October 2011)

12. 'Threat: Decreasing popularity of the ruling party can lead to a political crisis,' *Vedomosti*, 30 March 2011, triggered by a report of the Center for Strategic Development (see also Sam Greene, 'Mr Medvedev, Mr Putin, beware the Ides of March!', 29 March 2011, www.open-democracy.net).

a big part of the Russian population wants the country to come 'under the control of society.'

However, Russians barely have any possibilities to legally voice their political dissatisfaction, other than staying at home on Election Day (the possibility to vote against all candidates or parties was revoked several years ago). Until recently, public dissatisfaction in Russia has generally translated itself in political disinterest and passivity. For the regime, political passivity is a second-best option. Active docility would be better, but the Russian population could barely be seduced to it despite repeated attempts by the Kremlin.¹³ Nonetheless, dissatisfaction and passivity are an uncertain combination that is not without dangers. The population is cynical and distrustful, unhappy¹⁴ and frustrated. Feelings of injustice, shame over the state of the nation, helplessness, and aggression are widespread. According to a recent poll 60% of the Russian population is tempted to blow up everyone and everything.¹⁵

When will social dissatisfaction no longer lead to passivity and disinterest, but to political action? The only correct answer is: we don't know. The self-immolation of a deeply frustrated vegetable vendor in Tunis is generally seen as the beginning of a popular uprising in several Arab countries. Unexpected and sometimes small events can have great consequences. Whether or not the (stolen) results of the Duma elections or, even more importantly, those of the presidential elections will trigger massive popular protest (i.e. anything comparable with what we have witnessed in some Arab countries or, earlier, in Georgia or Ukraine) remains to be seen. Social protest is no unknown phenomenon in Russia, but time and time again opinion polls show that Russians do not take to the streets easily, and certainly not for political reasons. Such protests as post-communist Russia has witnessed were generally instigated by dissatisfaction of a socio-economic nature.¹⁶ The demonstrations in Moscow and a range of other cities in December 2011 were exceptional – a hopeful but uncertain sign of political change.

13. Initiatives like *Nashi*, the youth movement loyal to the regime that was organized after the revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine (March 2005), and the Russian National Front, have remained of little political consequence.

14. Of the populations of 13 European countries, Russians are the least happy (*Moscow Times*, 22 August 2011).

15. *Novaya gazeta*, 24 June 2011.

16. In January 2005 changes in the social measures package (the replacement of facilities in kind by uncertain financial assistance) led to massive, initially spontaneous but later also organized protests, first in Moscow and St Petersburg and then in other parts of the Russian Federation. The authorities were shocked. While the social reforms were rolled back, the political reins were tightened. If social protest had any effect on the political order in Russia under Putin, it was in an authoritarian, not a democratic direction.

The Elite

In a strongly personalistic political order that is largely based on personal relationships, as is the case in the Russian Federation, succession creates an inevitable insecurity concerning the continuity of the existing power relations, and thus one's own position within the hierarchy. *Kto kogo?* Who will rule over whom?

The political order in Russia has been characterized as a form of 'patronal presidentialism'¹⁷: a political clan structure, a system of political patronage, in which the supreme power to a large extent belongs to a directly elected president.¹⁸ A super-elite of 20-30 persons (the 'clan heads', 'major shareholders' and 'managers' of modern Russia)¹⁹, followed by their bureaucratic clientele, are in constant competition over power and welfare and are kept in balance (or under control) by the ultimate arbiter, in this case Vladimir Putin.

Patronal presidentialism rests on three pillars: interconnectedness of political and economic power, extensive corruption, and the presence of an undisputed leader.

The interconnectedness of political and economic power ensures that the national riches are divided by and amongst the elite. Political power gives access to the extremely profitable functions in government – including the state sectors of the economy – and in the private sector. The Russian state is pre-eminently a rent-granting state. The first children of the elite²⁰ have already been detected in leading administrative positions.

Patronage and clientelism exist thanks to widespread corruption. Corruption 'facilitates' the division of national riches, the essence of the patronage or clan system, and thus hides it from public eyes.

17. Henry Hale, 'Democracy or autocracy on the march? The colored revolutions as normal dynamics of patronal presidentialism', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, xx (2006) pp. 1-25.

18. Of course this does not apply to the actual president (Medvedev), who holds the constitutional power, so much as to the Prime Minister (Putin), who holds the actual power – a clear example again of the difference between formal and informal power and institutions.

19. Everyone on the list of the super-elite is in some way connected to the state sector of the economy. The list includes: the president and the prime minister, the (deputy) heads of their staffs, one or more vice-premiers (including Igor Setsjin and Sergey Ivanov), chairmen of one or both chambers of parliament, the chairman of United Russia, Moscow's mayor Sergey Sobyenin, Alexander Voloshin, the secretary of the security council Nikolay Patrushev, the CEOs of a number of state companies (Gazprom, Rosneft) and of several private companies (Lukoil, Rusnal).

20. Sergey Ivanov Jr, Pyotr Fradkov, Dmitri Patrushev.

Finally, Russia's patronal presidential system needs the power of an undisputed leader, the ultimate arbiter. The leader personifies unity and consensus, internally as well as to the outside world, to the elite and to the population. He keeps the balance between the rival clans²¹ and interferes constantly in the political process (*'ruchnoe upravlenie'* or 'manual management' in the Russian jargon). And it is characteristic of the super-presidential political order in Russia, where informal constructions and personal relationships are more important than formal procedures and institutions, that the supreme authority currently rests with the *prime minister*, Vladimir Putin.

Insecurity about the person at the top of the power pyramid(s), the ultimate arbiter in the political power game, may give rise to doubts about the continuity of the existing power relations, including the position of the clan heads and their clientele. Russian politics bear some of the marks of a zero-sum game: those who lose power and influence run the risk of losing their privileges and welfare, even freedom. If the power of the leader is no longer indisputable, there is more chance of calculating behaviour by the elite. In an extreme circumstance the insecurity about the position of the leader can even endanger the stability of the political regime itself. The recent increase in capital export from Russia (19 billion USD in the first quarter of 2011, more than twice as much as in the same period the previous year²²) seemed a symptom of the nervousness of a part of the elite.

The Result

In Russia, for a long time the insecurity over the continuity of the existing power relations boiled down to that one question: who will be the new president? No political issue was more widely discussed than the future of the political tandem Putin-Medvedev and the Kremlin's presidential candidate. Although in the Russian media the most diverging opinions were passed, among the opinion-making class there was a clear preference for the candidacy of Medvedev. Putin was highly praised for political stability, economic welfare and the national confidence that he brought about, but, as was suggested, it was time for a change, a new

21. Nikolai Petrov (Moscow Carnegie Center), cited by Brian Whitmore, 'Russia's indispensable man', *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 16 August 2011.

22. Ben Aris, 'Putin for president?', *Business New Europe*, 17 May 2011 (www.bne.eu). Other figures are also given, but the meaning is the same: capital export or flight from Russia has significantly increased.

dynamic. The 's'-word (or in Russian the 'z'-word) was mentioned: stagnation (*zastoy*). The reactions to Putin's nomination were in the same spirit: from low enthusiasm to open distress over the possibility of another 12 years of Putin. Incidentally, Medvedev's supporters were also not always enthusiastic about his candidacy. The disappointment in Medvedev's achievements over the last years is general: many words, little action.

Russia is not ruled by intellectuals but by a small group of individuals, a clique of influential men, concentrated in the power ministries (*siloviki*) and the major (semi-)state companies. For them Medvedev has remained a power factor of relatively limited political consequence. Medvedev was not above the clans. At most he and his clientele *are* a political clan. Medvedev has not managed (if he even tried) to convince Putin and other members of the political elite that he is capable of safeguarding the interests of the current power apparatus (including those of a possibly retiring Putin), that he could be a long-term arbiter standing above the parties and the system and guaranteeing continuity. Medvedev's political power was too small to continue his presidency based on his own strength. Medvedev's loyalty was big enough to realize the 'power exchange' within the elite without any evident disagreements.

The tandem is history, Putin's air of omnipotence is definitively gone, and the Russian population has loudly voiced its frustration over the arrogance and unresponsiveness of the powers that be. But the margins of Russia's semi-authoritarian political order seem wide enough to allow for political change without fundamental reform. For the first time in years, however, politics in Russia no longer happen exclusively behind closed doors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the results of our mapping effort we present the following recommendations to the different actors that have a stake in Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia.

Overall

As a general principle, we should take care to differentiate our approach for the countries in question depending on their democratic and social democratic development. A relevant way to categorize them accordingly has been presented in the introductory article to this publication. Of course there is a need for a certain flexibility, with regular assessments of the developments in each country and with corrections to our approach where needed.

The European Union

The European Union has extensive relations with all the countries that have been examined here. Existing treaties offer the basis for human rights dialogues which should include the topic of democratic development. They should get the priority they deserve and not be considered secondary to economic or other interests. Through existing financial instruments and the future European Endowment for Democracy more funds will have to be made available for democracy promotion. The EU member states should defend the competences of the OSCE and the Council of Europe in the field of human rights and democracy.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe

For obvious reasons the European social democrats should seek closer cooperation with the OSCE and the Council of Europe and especially with their parliamentary assemblies.

Party of European Socialists

- In countries of the first category (authoritarian regimes) the PES should show clear solidarity to progressive and left-wing parties, affiliated or not, that strive for democracy and support social democratic values and are facing very difficult circumstances. It should promptly respond to any repression by the

authorities of the states concerned. The PES should promote cross-border communication and cooperation between parties facing similar circumstances, by offering them a meeting place, for example during important PES events, and by creating a platform on which such cooperation can be built.

- In countries of the second category (relatively free with authoritarian tendencies) the PES should keep open lines of communication and make regular assessments of developments on the ground. As this category involves countries where the state of democracy is shaky, the party landscape volatile and (political) corruption often rampant, the PES should also assess its partners regularly to make sure they are not diverging from the standards of (social) democracy as laid down in official documents of the PES and the SI. This approach should also be applied to Russia.
- In countries of the third category (on a democratic path), the PES should cement the existing partnerships in view of eventual closer cooperation with the EU (even if membership of the EU is not opportune at the moment). A regular assessment of the democratic development of the country in question and of the policies of affiliated parties is called for.

The Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats of the European Parliament

- In general the S&D Group should use the many possibilities that the European Parliament offers to maintain open lines of communication to the countries in question. Where partners are represented in parliamentary working relationships should be established.
- Through the relevant European Parliament committees, the interparliamentary delegations and the plenary, pressure can be exerted on states that disrespect democracy and human rights.
- For the countries of the first category, the S&D Group should remain a strong advocate of democratic change and reject any attempt to let economic interests dominate the relations with these countries. Repression of democratic rights and basic freedoms should be promptly condemned. Opportunities to visit these countries – which still exist for parliamentarians – should be used for the promotion of democracy and for contacts with the opposition.
- As regards the countries of the second category, the S&D Group should focus on the development of more substantive relations aimed at stimulating reform, but also at drawing attention to the social dimension of the transition processes. In order to achieve this the Group should maintain contact both with the governments and opposition parties, including of course relevant social democratic ones. Again this approach is also appropriate in the case of Russia.

- For countries of the third category, the S&D Group should act as an advocate for further European integration (even if not membership) and closer ties. Supporting countries of this category with their often difficult and necessary reforms will consolidate the democratic progress they have made.

European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity

- In countries of the first category the European Forum should adopt a double strategy: wherever possible support existing social democratic forces and create alliances with NGOs, independent personalities, youth and gender movements and active users of the social media to promote democracy in general. The Forum should work with other political families, international institutions and NGOs to establish multi-party platforms. If appropriate, the Forum should facilitate the exchange of democratic experiences. In the past people from the successful Serbian OTPOR movement have provided their expertise to opposition organizations in Azerbaijan.
- In countries of the second category and Russia the European Forum should establish and strengthen ties with social democratic political parties, but also with other progressive organizations, like NGOs or youth movements, to build support for the social democratic ideals. The party political foundations linked to the Forum should support the parties or organizations in question through training and exchange of knowledge.
- In countries of the third category the European Forum and the foundations should provide extensive support to social democratic parties that have established relations with the PES or the Socialist International, through training programmes and exchange of knowledge, and aim to build long-lasting partnerships with them. When basic training is no longer necessary, more advanced training programmes should be developed.

APPENDIX A

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN EASTERN EUROPE

*Conference co-organized by the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
22-23 October 2011, Kiev, Ukraine*

INTRODUCTION

On October 22nd and 23rd 2011 the European Forum, together with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Kiev office, organized the conference 'Social Democracy in Eastern Europe', in Kiev, Ukraine. The event brought together representatives of social democratic political parties and organizations, as well as independent political scientists and experts from the civil society from the European Union and four Eastern European countries: Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. In this publication we have decided to separate the discussions about Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine) and about Russia, and address the latter in a separate part.

The conference was led by three chairs: **Jan Marinus Wiersma**, Vice-President of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity; **André Gerrits**, Chairman of the Alfred Mozer Stichting; and **Alain Richard**, Senator, Former Defence Minister of France and Member of Presidency of the Party of European Socialists.

The aim of the conference was to discuss the current situation and the historical background of the democratic institution building in the Eastern European countries, and to identify the challenges and prospects for social democracy, and their relationship with the European Union.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

DAY I. Current political and economic situation in the Eastern European countries

PANEL 1: *The latest from the region: the effects of the economic crisis in Eastern Europe*

Aleksandr Muravschi (economist, consultant for Deputy Prime Minister (of economy), Moldova)

'Major results of social-economic development of the Republic of Moldova in 2011'

Mr Muravschi gave an overview of the recent economic growth of the Republic of Moldova, emphasizing the immense increase of the GDP during the last four years and the prevalence of export over import in 2011. However, referring to current economic problems, he noted that there is a necessity to change the economic paradigm, which is currently based on the money flowing back from Moldovan nationals working abroad. Speaking about the interdependence of the political and economic sectors, Mr Muravschi mentioned the absence of a stable legal and practical basis for the development of long-term investment as one of the main reasons for the slow pace of economic growth. He finished his presentation on a positive note by affirming that economic shocks similar to those that happened in 2008 are not anticipated in the near future in Moldova due to the strength and stability of the banking system, and because the monetary fund holds assets of over 2 billion US dollars.

'Dead-end or a way out? Economic policy scenarios for Belarus'

The presentation of the speaker, a **Belarus economist**, centred around the historic factors responsible for the economic decline in Belarus. The main negative factor was the cut of indirect 'energy subsidies' from Russia, following which the economic prosperity was artificially maintained. The current concerns are: significant imbalance in the labour market, a big risk of a banking crisis, and loss of confidence in the national currency. Two policy scenarios were provided as possible solutions for the economic problems. The first scenario would be Belarus meeting preconditions set by the International Monetary Fund in order to get the next loan; the second was called 'easy money', i.e. turning to Russia for economic assistance. The speaker pointed out positive and negative effects for each of the scenarios, but emphasized that social protection reform will be a cornerstone for any scenario. **André Gerrits** (Chairman of the Alfred Mozer Foundation, The Netherlands) commented by saying that whatever scenario will be chosen, we are bound to witness big political changes.

Vladimir Dubrovsky (Senior economist at the Centre for Social and Economic Research, Ukraine)

'Ukraine and Russia: the lessons from the past crisis'

Mr Dubrovsky compared the economies of Ukraine and Russia. He pointed to Russia's superior governmental effectiveness versus the higher level of democracy and accountability in Ukraine. Mr Dubrovsky remarked that the economic crisis has severely impacted both countries, but that the internal factors of the crisis were different. According to him, the main cause of the Ukrainian crisis was overconfidence, which led to a lack of reforms. In contrast, Russia managed to implement its fiscal policies because it has a Stabilization Fund. Speaking about lessons learnt from the crisis, Mr Dubrovsky said that because there is almost zero trust in the Ukrainian national currency at the moment, the overconfidence has melted away. He thinks this will help stimulate big reforms. On the other hand, he remarked that too rapid developments can be unstable and risky, and that the rising social tensions in Ukraine should not be lost sight of.

Discussion

Referring to Mr Dubrovsky's presentation, Olena Lukanyuk (Project Manager of the Institute for Democracy and Social Processes, Ukraine), confirmed the increasing social tension in Ukraine. Boris Guseletov (Head of the International Department of the Just Russia Party, Russia) commented on the interrelation of economy and politics in Russia, saying that after a report of the Centre of Strategic Research that concluded that Russia's economic policy is leading to a deadlock, people changed their attitude towards the authorities and President Dmitri Medvedev lost many supporters.

PANEL 2: *Challenges and prospects for social democracy in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine*

The second panel was a round-table discussion, in which representatives of social democratic political parties from the region presented their parties and elaborated on their current challenges and prospects.

A **Just World Party** (Belarus) representative said his party was founded 20 years ago and was called the Party of the Communists of Belarus until 2010. Like all Belarus political parties, the Just World Party cannot fully exercise its right of assembly. Belarusian authorities are doing everything possible to block the activi-

ties of political parties and their efforts to unite. The only concession that can be obtained by a political party is assistance in finding office space. He also mentioned recent changes in the legislation concerning the ban on public demonstrations in the streets, including those organized by political parties; the only loophole in the law left for such gatherings has now been closed.

A representative of the **Belarusian Social Democratic Party 'Narodnaya Hramada'** thanked the European social democrats, and especially the German Social Democrats, for their support after the repression in Belarus following the rigged presidential election of Alexander Lukashenko in December 2010. He said that his party had applied for registration, but its request was denied. He also addressed the EU social democrats, asking them to facilitate awarding the Sakharov Prize to their party leader Nikolai Statkevich, who is now a political prisoner.

A representative of the **Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada)** confirmed the unfavourable conditions for the activity of political parties in Belarus. He also expressed his concern about the interference of the government in internal party affairs. He said that the Ministry of Justice determines whether or not a party congress is valid, whether or not a party member is accepted into the party etc. He added that his party has not had an office since 2009.

Oleg Tulea (Member of Parliament for the Democratic Party of Moldova, DPM) presented his party's position in the country. He said the Democratic Party of Moldova was created in 1997 as Democratic Movement, and was joined in 2008 by two large social democratic groups. In 1998 the party won 24 seats in the national parliament, and in the 2010 parliamentary elections it won 15 seats. He said that the DPM has strong ties with the European Social Democratic parties and is observer member of the Socialist International. Mr Tulea said there is currently much debate in Moldova about whether the political system – which is now parliamentary – should be parliamentary or presidential, because of a deadlock in parliament between the Communist Party and the democratic parties regarding the election of the next president. The first round of presidential elections in parliament will take place on 18 November 2011. The parties are negotiating to try and reach agreement on a candidacy, but for now it is unclear if they will succeed. If not, the country may well be faced with early parliamentary elections.

Alexander Antonov (Social Democratic Party of Ukraine) said that Ukraine is currently witnessing an ongoing dismantlement of democratic structures, and he called this process an attempt to return to Russian and Belarusian standards.

Referring to the Tymoshenko case, which receives a lot of attention in political circles and the media both in and outside Ukraine, he noted that this is not the most important issue, as there are many other people being persecuted, particularly businessmen who refuse to cooperate with the authorities. He said that Ukrainian society needs new political leaders. Mr Antonov cited the Movement for a Fair Salary and the School for Business Democracy as the two main projects of his party. He also asked the EU social democrats to give his party political support, and he suggested an expert assessment of the party's activities. He called for the adoption of 'anti-Lukashenko measures', meaning smart sanctions, against President Yanukovich.

A representative of the **Young Social Democrats 'Maladaya Hramada' (MSD-MH)** in Belarus said that one of the main problems of both government and opposition in Belarus is that nobody is able to come up with a clear plan for the reform of Belarusian society. She doubted whether the opposition would know what to do if the regime fell tomorrow.

Concluding the debate, **Jan Marinus Wiersma** said that much has been learnt about social democratic parties in Eastern Europe. He agreed with some of the speakers that the opposition parties should always be prepared to come to power, while at the same time it is important to monitor and support the youth movements, the bloggers and independent activists, in view of their potential contribution to democracy movements.

PANEL 3: EU-Eastern Europe: Eastern Partnerships

Jan Marinus Wiersma (Vice-President European Forum)

'On the Eastern Partnership in general and the perspectives of the EU enlargement'

Mr Wiersma discussed the Eastern Partnership and the perspectives for EU enlargement. He emphasized that Europeans are not committed to new memberships other than those of the Western Balkans countries, Turkey and Iceland, and he expressed his opinion on the case of Ukraine, which is currently negotiating an Association Agreement with the EU. Mr Wiersma said that a reference to membership of Ukraine in the future agreement will encourage the country to proceed with reforms. However, he noted that Ukraine is involved in a struggle about its democratic future, the outcome of which is unclear. The main question will be whether the still strong pluralism in the country can put a stop to authoritarian trends. As to which strategic direction of Ukraine will take – to the West or to the

East – this is a decision the country has to make independently. He affirmed that political consensus and unity in Ukraine are possible, as witnessed by the successful preparation of Euro 2012.

Vsevolod Chentsov (Acting Director-General at the Directorate-General for the EU of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine)

'On the European prospects of Ukraine and its role in the Eastern Partnerships'

Referring to the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, Mr Chentsov said that both sides should find a compromise on the article concerning prospective EU membership of Ukraine. He pointed out that the request from Ukraine to grant it a membership perspective cannot be rejected by the EU, as every European country has the right to apply for EU membership. Speaking about the progress Ukraine has made on its way to EU integration, he noted that the legislative basis for cooperation in such areas as energy and a free visa regime has already been prepared, and Ukraine hopes to enter the implementation stage. He also said that cooperation between the EU and Ukraine in the framework of the Eastern Partnership Summits makes Ukraine less enthusiastic, as this kind of cooperation has less impact than bilateral cooperation. Addressing the strategic question of who needs whom more, Mr Chentsov said that Ukraine definitely needs the EU, but the EU also needs Ukraine.

Discussion

The participants further discussed the eligibility of Eastern European countries for EU membership by emphasizing the need for a mentality change, so that EU integration can be internalized and not be a wholly external process. The countries in question should concentrate on economic benefits and not make integration a victim of political wheeling and dealing. The EU was criticized for underfunding The Eastern Partnerships. **Jan Marinus Wiersma** (European Forum) said the Eastern Partnerships were initiated because the process of approximation between the EU and the six countries was going very slowly and an upgrade of relations was deemed necessary.

Regarding the EU integration prospects of Belarus, a Belarus representative referred to the results of one survey showing that Belarusians want more cooperation with the EU, but believe that the EU is blocking this ambition. She mentioned the high prices of EU visas for Belarusian citizens, and argued that things like this stand in the way of positive campaigning for European integration and the information campaigns planned by the Belarus civil society, which seek to provide more information on the EU to counter the negative propaganda of the authori-

ties. **Vitali Andrievski** (Director of AVA.MD news portal) pointed at the negative influence of the long talks between the EU and Moldova on the free visa regime. He said that because Moldovans cannot easily travel to the EU, many of them apply for Romanian citizenship, which they receive relatively easy. This threatens the sovereignty of the state of Moldova.

DAY II Historical background of democratic institution building and the development of social democracy in three Eastern European countries

Panel Democratic institution building and the development of social democracy in Belarus after independence

'Democratic institution building in Belarus since its independence'

A **political scientist from Belarus** started out by naming the factors that have a negative influence on the development of the democratic political system in Belarus. He noted that most of them are not new and have played a role since the 1990s. He mentioned the factor of the elites ('Alexander Lukashenko rules because there is no new elite in the country') and the factor of the industry (a Soviet style of development and obligations to Russia) as the determinants for the development of the specific Belarus situation. The speaker explained that democratic institutions in Belarus were being established after the country became independent, but this lasted only until president Lukashenko came to power in 1994. They were then either destroyed or their functions were devaluated, and a referendum gave more power to the President, who, according to the speaker, is not so much part of the political system, but stands above it. The consequence of the elimination of the separation of powers is that Belarus has had no real parliament since 1996. The speaker speculated that the parties will play a minimal role in the parliamentary elections of 2012, whether they support the regime or not.

'Development of social democracy in Belarus since its independence'

A **social democratic party representative** described the development of social democracy in Belarus as an unstable process characterized by frequent interruptions of the activities of social democrats. Among their internal problems he noted an absence of democratic skills, a foggy knowledge of what social ethics are and how social democrats should behave, a lack of socialist solidarity, rifts within the parties, and the problem of what he called the 'leadership disease', meaning the excessively dominant position of individual leaders. However, he was of the opin-

ion that social democrats do have prospects in Belarus because there is a platform for dialogue between leftist forces. Whereas there were only five leftist parties in 1994, by 1998 nine more had been founded. He also commented on the increased participation of women in the building of social democracy.

The regional participants viewed the human factor as the main issue of social democracy building in their countries, referring to problems of leadership and the mechanisms of recruiting new members. A **social democratic party representative** reiterated the difficult position of political parties in Belarus, stressing the problems with non-registration, finding office space, and excessive subordination to the Ministry of Justice; he said these factors make it difficult to recruit new members. The increased participation of women in social democratic parties was confirmed by a **representative of a social democratic gender organization** from Belarus, who said she was impressed to see a large share of women in the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada). However, she remarked that women should not be recruited merely to serve as a workforce for the party's activities. This is the case at the moment, with women being actively recruited and encouraged because the situation is difficult and they are needed for the many things that need to be done.

Discussion

Answering the question if the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) supports the integration of Belarus in the EU, its representative said that he is a Eurosceptic, but that the future of Belarus in the EU is incorporated in the programme of the party.

Panel Democratic institution building and the development of social democracy in Moldova after independence

Vitali Andrievski (Director of AVA.MD news portal, Moldova)

'Democratic institution building in Moldova since its independence'

Mr Andrievski started his presentation on a positive note, stating that Moldova is one of the leaders of democracy transformation in the post-Soviet arena because the country has managed to build many new democratic institutions. In spite of this, however, he noted there is no political elite that is able to respond to modern challenges. According to him, the main problems hindering further democratic transformation are the clan system of elites and the power of oligarchs, the influence of Romania on Moldovan mass media, and the inability of Moldovans to

build a political nation. He said that Gagausia, Transdnistria, and Romania are building their own nations, but a Moldovan nation is non-existent. Referring to the role European integration can play in reforms in Moldova, Mr Andrievski said that the integration is not just a European project, but involves the modernization of the country. Nevertheless, he expressed his concern over negative developments in Moldova and in most other post-Soviet countries, and listed the following main elements: depopulation, de-urbanization, an increase of crime and human trafficking, a corrupt judicial system, a decreasing index of economic freedom and the absence of a middle class. He suggested two possible solutions for Moldova's problems: developing a strategic partnership with Russia, and working on a visa-liberalization regime with the EU.

Corneliu Ciurea (Political expert at IDIS Viitorul Institute for Development and Social Initiatives)

'The Development of social democracy in Moldova since independence'

Mr Ciurea argued that the situation of social democracy in Moldova is determined by the relationship between the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM, leader Marian Lupu) and the Party of Communists (leader Vladimir Voronin). He said that the struggle between the two camps is very serious and that the communists do not recognize the Democratic Party as left-wing and call the DPM leaders henchmen of Western capitalism. Referring to the problem of oligarchy, discussed earlier by Mr Andrievski, he confirmed that this issue has become urgent since 2010. Concerning European integration, he said that right-wing parties in Moldova give full support to this process, which is part of the reason why the Democratic Party feels more comfortable with them. In his view the alliance of DPM with two right-wing parties had enabled Moldova to start the process of EU integration. He added that the issues of human rights, including discrimination against sexual minorities (which is very new for Moldova), have recently become important, and that the society started to understand why the country should begin to meet the conditions for visa liberalization.

Oleg Tulea (DPM) commented on Mr Ciurea's presentation, adding that the problem of the oligarchs is relevant for all the parties in Moldova and that it should be solved in a systematic way. He mentioned the Law on Political parties adopted in 2009, according to which parties will get financial assistance from the state, and said it can be considered as a first step to solve the problem, as parties with official state financing are less likely to resort to oligarchic support. However, he noted that the law still has to be put into effect. With regard to the people's understanding of social democratic values, Mr Tulea pointed out the need to establish

an ideological informational platform, as people have no clear understanding of right-wing or left-wing politics. They generally tend to think that right-wing parties are simply pro-Romanian or pro-European and leftist parties are pro-Russian.

Discussion

The discussion also dealt with the Transdniestria problem and the existing deadlock with regard to the breakaway region. The Moldovan delegation remained divided on this. Some viewed the issue as an internal problem that could have an impact on the assistance from the EU, while others suggested that Transdniestria is an external issue dependent on external factors. In any case, apart from political will on both sides, unification of Transdniestria and Moldova will require serious financial assistance, making it even more difficult. The political future of Moldova was also examined. Many assumed that Communists will play political games – such as creating alliances with right-wing forces in order to increase their power.

Jan Marinus Wiersma (European Forum) concluded that there is a good general basis for the development of democracy in Moldova, but that Moldovans have to give up dreams of joining Romania and accept that the country has to go its own way. He also noted that, based on past experience with other countries, a parliamentary system is generally more conducive to a stable democratic development than a presidential system.

Panel *Democratic institution building and the development of social democracy in Ukraine after independence*

Vitaly Shybko (Head of the Institute for Democracy and Social Processes (IDSP), Ukraine)

'Democratic institution building in Ukraine since its independence'

Mr Shybko noted that one of the major legislative problems standing in the way of democratic reforms in Ukraine is the Constitution of 1996, which the current authorities have reinstated and which gives the president and parliament less power. Several provisions of that constitution do not meet today's challenges. Mr Shybko was very critical of Ukrainian elections and said election fraud is carried out in such a professional way that sending more EU and OSCE observers will not change anything. He pointed at the growing social tensions in the country and the reluctance of people to protest against the prosecution of politicians. Mr Shybko noted that one of the mistakes advocates of democracy make is that they focus only on elections, while other important elements of democracy building are neglected.

Olexiy Haran (Professor of Political Science at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy, Ukraine)
'Development of social democracy in Ukraine since independence'

Mr Haran agreed with Mr Shybko on the archaic nature of some of the provisions of the Constitution and said election fraud would be more difficult if Ukraine had a proportional electoral system. He described the current state of affairs as a drift into deep authoritarianism. He said people were reluctant to protest and take to the streets because they were disappointed in the Orange revolution. **Mr Antonov** (Social Democratic Party of Ukraine) expressed his hope that Ukraine will see a change of elites shortly and that a democratic transformation will follow. **Mr Haran** also discussed the falling ratings of the Communist Party since 2004, the failure of the Socialist Party to grab their chance to become popular, and the existence of a niche for social democracy which, according to him, nobody can fill at the moment. He concluded his speech by encouraging the European social democrats to work with different forces in Ukraine in order to identify a strong partner that will be able to fill the niche of social democracy.

Jan Marinus Wiersma (European Forum) pointed out that it would be very difficult for European social democrats to identify such partners. He said that there is a need for a strong democratic movement and a women's movement. He argued that, if the EU should clash with Ukraine over the Yulia Tymoshenko case and President Yanukovych would switch to cooperation with Russia, this would have a negative impact on the work of socialists and democrats in Ukraine. Mr Shybko said that Mr Yanukovych is more likely to play manoeuvring games between Russia and the EU.

Discussion

Further discussions concerned the question of leadership and its role in building social democracy within the country. Some argued that there is a necessity for a strong leader who would be able to unite people around him. Others rejected the necessity of building socialist structures around one leader and suggested focussing on clear goals and plans for what a social democratic party as a whole can offer to society.

APPENDIX B

Social Democracy in South Caucasus

*Conference organized by the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity
27 March 2010, Tbilisi, Georgia*

INTRODUCTION

On March the 27th 2010 the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, with the support of the UK Labour Party through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy Funds, organized a regional conference in Tbilisi, Georgia, entitled 'Social Democracy in South Caucasus'. The subject of the conference was the development of democracy and social democracy in the region, and it was attended by representatives of social democratic parties of South Caucasus, local political experts and representatives of the European social democratic movement.

The conference was chaired by **Hannes Swoboda** (Vice-President of the S&D group in the European Parliament), **Peter Schieder** (Chair of the PES EEN WG) and **Jan Marinus Wiersma** (Vice-president of the European Forum). The workshop offered a good opportunity to bring social democratic parties from the region together in order to identify issues that are of importance to social democracy and to the development of democracy in the region in general.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

DAY 1

PANEL I *The process of democratization in each country and its influence on regional politics in South Caucasus.*

Alexander Markarov (Political analyst, Yerevan State University, Armenia) described how since its independence Armenia has slowly developed from a

strong presidential system to a more balanced democracy, with a constitution imposing limits on the presidential powers. In 2005 the parliament's term was extended from four to five years, and it was given a bigger say in the appointment of the government. The president's prerogative to dismiss the prime minister was annulled, making the government subject to a parliamentary vote of confidence.

In the presidential elections from 1996 to 2008 the opposition tended to form coalitions based on negative competition with the authorities, this being the only uniting factor. In recent presidential elections an attempt was made to present a 'joint' candidate of both the political and the non-political opposition and to establish a policy consensus rather than opt for a mere negative campaign. However, this only works in presidential elections, as in parliamentary elections each of the major opposition actors expects to overcome the threshold and get representation in parliament, while in presidential elections they only can win if they cooperate.

While political alternatives seem to be absent in Armenia, the population still believes in the value of democracy: for 54% of the population elections are important, and the same number supports the democratization process.

Overall, the state of democracy and freedom of the media have worsened. Most newspapers are private-owned and they are not subject to supervision by an independent, professional body. This has led to the lowering of standards and has transformed newspapers into carriers of personal political agendas. There is a lack of diversity of opinions and objective reporting in the media, especially on TV.

Ghia Nodia (Chairman of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Georgia) said that according to most international assessments, Georgia is partly free, or has a hybrid political regime, with elements of both democracy and autocracy.

Although President Saakashvili speaks of democracy, it is not his priority: he only cares about Georgia's international image as a democratic country. However, the current regime is often cynical about the motives of Western governments when they criticize Georgia's democratic performance. The international community has an important but limited positive influence on Georgian political actors when it comes to the quality of democracy. Despite criticism, the West is also considered to be the best available arbiter in the internal separatist conflicts .

Despite its democracy deficit, Georgia is recognized as the regional leader in

democracy development, as confirmed by all Freedom House ratings. The Rose Revolution caused enthusiasm among pro-democracy forces in the region, while setbacks (like in November 2007) caused strong disappointment. At the same time Georgia's democracy has few implications for regional politics, although the Rose Revolution initially led to a cooling down of the relations with Azerbaijan. The Georgian government tends to highlight the fact that Georgia is ahead of the others with regard to democracy, but rarely does this in public. Critics of the government understandably almost never highlight it. Georgia is also considered a regional leader in dealings with NATO and EU. This has a negative effect on its relation with Russia.

Since the Rose Revolution and since Georgia applied for NATO membership, the West has held the country's democracy to higher standards than before. Democratic shortcomings have been one of the publicly stated reasons to deny Georgia NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP). But according to the country's leadership and most analysts (both inside Georgia and outside) this is merely a pretext to justify a decision made on geopolitical grounds.

Matthias Jobelius (Director South Caucasus Office, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Georgia) introduced the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) which opened its office in Georgia in 1994, in Armenia in 1995 and in Azerbaijan in 2002, and as head of the South Caucasus division he can offer an analysis of the situation in all three countries. In all of them the political situation is polarized. None of the countries has managed to strengthen the freedom of the press, create an environment for free elections or establish a dialogue between the regime and the opposition. There has, however, been economic growth in Georgia, as well as a strengthening of its state institutions.

Georgia did advance, but in the previous two years has witnessed a degradation of democracy. One explanation might be the inability to build a dialogue between the regime and the opposition, and to find coherent solutions for external and internal problems. In Armenia, the situation has been polarized since the March 2008 post-election violence, paralysing political life. So far the government and the opposition have not found any common ground. As long as the power structure based on oligarchs and clans remains intact there will not be any democratic progress. In Azerbaijan the last elections were not very exciting and lacked any real campaigning. At the moment there is no sign that the ruling elite's power will be challenged, as there is no strong opposition. There are no prospects for progress in the democratization process.

If political interest in regional integration is lacking within the countries, the West cannot demand it. Georgia, however, has the opportunity to take the initiative by improving its relations with Russia. Armenia is struggling with bad relations with Turkey. At the moment it looks like both Turkey and Armenia will not sign the bilateral normalization protocols, which will be a major setback for the normalization of the relations between the two countries.

The transformation processes in South Caucasus have not been completed. The reforms implemented so far, instead of bringing the countries closer to EU standards, have put them at a greater remove from accepted democratic principles. European socialists have something to offer when it comes to the redistribution of wealth and the separation of political and economic powers.

Discussion

During the discussion it was argued that in Georgia there is no space for the opposition to really challenge the regime, and European countries should enhance their support for the country's democratization process.

Irakli Petriashvili (leader of the Georgian Trade Union Confederation) also mentioned that social awareness in Georgia is low and the regime takes advantage of this by not including the society in the decision-making process. That is why the trade unions try to offer civil education to the people. There are no labour laws and labour conditions are extremely poor. In the last three years several people have died in work-related incidents due to bad labour conditions. People can be fired for no reason. The trade unions aim to improve the quality of life and working conditions for the Georgian people. Europe should pay more attention to labour conditions in Georgia. It was agreed that although trade unions in Europe are different in many respects, they need to assist their South Caucasus counterparts.

Another point that was raised in the discussion was the need for more involvement from the civil society in the Caucasus. NGOs in this region have no political foundation and mainly focus on human rights. But there are also other important issues which need to be addressed, such as health care, many people not having any insurance. Although trade unions in Georgia are 'agents of change', they are unfortunately ignored by the regime. Therefore, the EU should give a signal to the government that this is unacceptable. Political parties, on the other hand, should focus more on programmes and policies. For this, they need the help of EU partners.

PANEL II *Social democracy in the countries of South Caucasus: state of play*

A **political scientist and representative of an opposition party** from **Azerbaijan** noted that nowadays there is hardly any election fraud as there is no need for it: a large part of the parliamentary mandates is being bought. The current opposition is rather weak, both inside and outside parliament. Political parties don't have enough money to finance activities. All available funds are controlled by the regime.

There are currently no leftist forces in Azerbaijan's parliament, but this does not mean that there are no leftist forces in the country in general. This also goes for the opposition: if there is no leftist opposition in parliament, this does not mean there is no opposition in the country.

According to the speaker, the country's biggest problem is the frozen conflict with Armenia about Nagorno-Karabakh. Western mediators constantly talk about conciliation, but what kind of compromise is feasible when 20% of the country's territory is occupied?

Hopefully the new generation will come to power, but it is doubtful whether young people will join the opposition, since it has little to offer.

Levon Mkrtychyan (Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnatsutsyun – ARF) argued that like most former Soviet republics Armenia embraced neo-liberalism and applied 'shock therapy' to liberalize the economy, privatizing everything. In the immediate aftermath of independence, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation called for an alternative approach, with gradual liberalization and a central role for the state in strategic economic decisions as well as in healthcare, education and social security. It also demanded a parliamentary system to avoid concentrating too much power in the hands of a strong presidency. This debate ended with a crackdown on ARF in 1994 and the introduction of an economic shock therapy and a strong presidential system.

The result of this was a twofold concentration of wealth: geographically and oligarchic-monopolistic, with a small oligarchy that virtually owns the country, a highly developed centre in Yerevan, and a greatly underdeveloped periphery. Unfair income redistribution, growing social discontent, precarious conditions in the job market and heavy dependence on remittances from abroad became the norm. The line between business and politics became invisible. Whenever the ARF took part

in governing coalitions, it tried to change this by pursuing the inclusion of at least several of its socio-economic and democratic policies in the coalition's programme. It booked a few successes (like delaying the government's plan to privatize pension plans), but these were subsequently overruled as soon as the ARF left the coalition.

The problem with strengthening social democracy in Armenia is the deficit of democracy itself. From 1992 onwards media freedom, free, fair and transparent elections and freedom of political assembly have been under constant attack. In the last presidential elections of 2008 the irresponsible behaviour of both the authorities and the extremist opposition – itself the initiator of putting limits on democracy when it was in power – created the atmosphere that resulted in the tragic violence of March 2008.

In October 2009 the ARF unveiled a detailed plan – Roadmap to Regime Change – proposing some fundamental changes to Armenia's socio-economic, political, and governmental structures that are necessary for the survival of the country. For the ARF, regime change has a broader meaning than just the change of the personalities.

Armenia is currently faced with a lack of efficient economic management. Problems are increasing much faster than they are being solved. Consumers' purchasing power is decreasing while inflation is rising. The government's anti-crisis programme has been ineffective and the monopolies remain powerful. The ARF is determined to bring about the systemic change necessary for the country's survival and its further development and believes that 'the ideals of socialism are unattainable without democracy, and democracy is incomplete and lacking without socialism.'

Lyudmila Sargsyan (Leader Social Democratic Hnchakyan party, Armenia) stated that Armenia's political regime is authoritarian with a pseudo-democratic facade. Only the 1999 election results were accepted as legitimate by Armenian public opinion. The ruling elite has methodically suppressed mass protests with increasing cruelty, culminating in a massacre by government forces in central Yerevan on 1 March 2008, where 10 people died and over 200 were injured. Human rights violations, unfair trials, total control of the media, open harassment of opposition and dissidents, and political prisoners have become the norm. Other problems include a lack of sufficient social aid to the unprotected and government interference in the economy to help oligarchs.

The ruling elite has very close links with the oligarchy and organized crime. The assets of state officials are estimated from hundreds of millions to billions of US dollars. The most corrupt areas are law enforcement, healthcare and education. Approximately 44 families account for 55% of the national GDP.

In addition, Armenia pays a price for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan, as it provides financial, economic and other aid to the separatist region. In the resulting geo-political situation, with the threat of renewed military action in the conflict zone remaining high, Armenia is forced to sustain a high level of military spending, which officially amounts to 4.07% of the GDP.

For the above reasons the Social Democratic Hnchakyan Party (SDHP) entered a broad non-parliamentary opposition coalition: the Armenian National Congress (HAK). HAK consists of 17 parties of different political orientation and dozens of NGOs. Its main goals include restoration of the constitutional order and the legitimization of government through democratic, fair and transparent elections. In the socio-economic sphere HAK has developed a systematic programme of reforms ('100 steps') with SDHP experts. Key points include progressive taxation, export promotion and support of small businesses. Special importance is given to the issues of separating politics from business, taking anti-monopoly measures and reforming the banking sector.

SDHP believes that only the realization of the above-mentioned programme will create the necessary conditions for the restoration of real political pluralism and for the realization of social democratic ideas.

Ghia Jorjoliani (Social Democrats for the Development of Georgia, SDDG) started out by saying that SDDG was created on 27 February 2010. The party's main target group is Georgia's student population. It aims to put social democratic ideas on the political agenda of Georgia.

Only 15 out of the 200 political parties in Georgia are politically active. Until recently there was only one explicitly leftist party: the Labour Party. Parties in Georgia are built around personalities, and they tend not to agree about the distribution of powers.

The political rule in Georgia has changed several times by way of revolutions, but this 'post-Soviet style of democratic change' has not brought about any real democracy. This is because the prevalent opinion in Georgia has always been that

as long as it has an electorate and free elections, the country has a democracy like that of any European country – but without a strong social democratic component this is not the case.

SDDG stands for equality, solidarity and development. Without these elements the country will remain underdeveloped – as it now is. Cooperation with the countries of the European Union and with the Union as a whole will assist Georgia in its democratic transition.

Kakha Kokhreidze (Leader of the Movement for Solidarity, Georgia) said his movement is not a political party yet, but rather a civil society organization. Mr Kokhreidze remarked that the Saakashvili regime is limiting the opportunities for the existence of organizations like the Movement for Solidarity.

The movement tries to promote social democratic principles and does not lack support, as many citizens in Georgia support social democratic ideas. However, the media situation is the weak link for social movements. Without independent national and local media civil society movements cannot flourish. European foundations should work together to support pluralistic principles in Georgia. One of the ways The Movement for Solidarity can contribute to this is through awareness raising, which it has been doing already: promoting social democratic policies with the support of its international partners.

Discussion

During the discussion the Georgian Trade Union Confederation voiced its willingness to collaborate with the party Social Democrats for the development of Georgia, as long as trade unions and workers' rights can be the party's main points. SDDG expressed its willingness to do so.

PANEL III *The involvement of European social democrats in the democratization and the inter-state relations of South Caucasus*

Libor Roucek (Vice-President of the European Parliament) first noted that social democrats are in power in several EU countries and have participated in many governments in the past. He explained the difference between a social democratic outlook and that of other ideologies. While conservatives often have nationalistic tendencies and highlight the differences between people and peoples, social democrats are internationalists and therefore want to build a common future

across borders. Liberals believe that the market will solve everything. The free market is indeed an important tool, but welfare should be equally distributed across layers in society. Thus, while the economic system would collapse without a market, some planning is necessary in any economy.

Turning to the countries at hand, Mr Roucek noted that when it comes to relations with Russia, it should be a common task to develop friendly relations with it, as it is neighbouring South Caucasus states as well as the EU.

With regard to regional cooperation, the Caucasian countries would do well to follow the example of the 'Visegrad Four', four Central European countries that united to work together in a number of fields of common interest with the goal of European integration in mind. Despite the fact that their individual situations were different, it worked.

As regards the Eastern Partnerships, the EU wants to help and stabilize all regions of Europe and establish deep and comprehensive free trade areas and visa-free regimes. The EU and South Caucasus should develop a joint vision on how to cooperate. The South Caucasus countries should also aim at more cooperation among themselves.

Zoran Thaler (Vice-Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Armenia, EU-Azerbaijan and EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committees) remarked that the countries of South Caucasus should fight against undemocratic structures at all levels. Topics that should receive priority in these countries are judicial independence and education. The EU should use the association process to promote positive developments in this area as well as democratization as such.

Mr Thaler noted that the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, which exists for EU and Georgia as well as for the other countries included in the Eastern Partnerships, is of great importance. The countries can bring up their specific issues in these joint committees.

Discussion

The question came up whether it might be possible to create a social democratic platform within the framework of the Eastern Partnerships. The answer was that there is already a tool in place that could be used for this kind of initiative: the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly, which is the parliamentary component of the Eastern Partnerships.

DAY 2

PANEL I *The development of social democracy and democracy in Georgia*

Ghia Nodia (Chairman, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Georgia) analysed the development of democracy in Georgia since its independence, stating that the country was never a dictatorship nor a full democracy. Strong points are a stable consensus in favour of a European-style democracy, a genuine freedom of expression and a vibrant civil society. Weak points include a lack of constitutional changes of power, over-concentration of power in the executive branch and a weak political party system. Since the early 2000s, Georgian sovereignty is increasingly threatened by Russia, which sees it as key for controlling its 'near abroad'.

Five stages of development can be identified in post-Soviet Georgia:

Stage 1: The National Independence Movement and the first nationalist government (1989-91) – Georgia develops the most radical pro-independence movement within the Soviet Union, dominated by ethnic nationalists. The new elite (poets, filmmakers and so on) shows an extremely low level of political competence. This results in two ethno-territorial conflicts and a bloody coup in the early 1990s. The economy detracts by three quarters.

Stage 2: Rebuilding the state under Shevardnadze (1994-98) – Destruction of the private armies and state monopolization of the legitimate use of force. Life becomes more normal and there are no more random shootings in the streets by 1995. The regional conflicts become frozen. Corruption is stabilized.

Stage 3: The crisis of the Shevardnadze government (1998-2003) – Stability is bought at the expense of diminished pluralism, and mainly serves corrupt interests. Public revenues are low, there is no law enforcement. Private armies re-emerge. Disillusionment about the government's poor performance leads to a gradual break-up of the ruling coalition.

Stage 4: Fast modernization from above: The new agenda (2004-07) – The 2003 Rose Revolution brings to power a new Westernized elite. The newly elected president Mikheil Saakashvili's agenda is based on fast social, political and economic modernization. Several constitutional changes are implemented in 2004, resulting in a high concentration of power in the hands of a young, Westernized political elite.

A flush-down syndrome can be observed: people socialized during Soviet times feel redundant. Some visible achievements: enormous increase in public revenues and a dramatic decrease of mass corruption. For the first time the confidence in public institutions increases.

Stage 5: The rise and fall of the new protest movement (2007-09) – Degradation of the democratization process. From 2007 a new protest movement starts to develop, basing its criticism on allegedly unjust practices of the government, the ‘flush down syndrome’ as well as a lack of human rights.

Currently, there is no opposition strong enough to really challenge the regime: the old ‘revolutionary’ opposition is ‘dead’, and a new one has yet to develop. In 20 years time Georgia has become a kind of Western-style democracy with a fairly stable liberal economy. Exclusive ethnic nationalism and revolutionary movements have no impact. However, the country lacks territorial integrity, a clear security architecture, separation of powers and an articulated and institutionally protected societal pluralism.

Ghia Jorjoliani (SDDG) stated that only social democracy can serve as a basis for democracy in Georgia. Twenty years ago there were strong social democratic movements in Georgia and the country has a rich social democratic history. From the 1930s onwards the Bolsheviks tried to discredit social democratic ideas and the effect of that still lingers. The result is a poor understanding of the Western choice of democracy.

Currently, there is no strong support for social democratic ideas. The Labour party enjoys 5-10% support of the population. In the last presidential election of 2008 its candidate garnered 6% of the votes. However, the party is not so much organized along social democratic principles, as built around its leader.

In Georgia there is no real distribution of powers between the central and local government. The privatization of the economy has contributed to the weakening of the state. The main economic resources, for instance, are now concentrated in the hands of a couple of families. The economy is a real challenge to social democrats.

The Soviet style trade union is prevailing and people just take any job they can get. Unfortunately, in Georgia there is no mechanism to help people get to work. There should also be special assistance to the agricultural sector, otherwise the people

working there will be excluded from society. The country needs to overcome the existing crisis of participation. Georgia needs a parliament that is a real representative body. A proportional type of voting is one of the priorities for Georgian social democrats.

Discussion

It was also argued that there is ‘elite’ corruption in Georgia, mainly at the top level. The judiciary is insufficiently independent, although public trust in the judiciary is now higher than it was under President Gamsakhurdia (1991-1992).

It was highlighted that in Georgia there is no problem of media censorship, everyone can say what they want. The problem is the imbalance in ownership of the media and its lack of transparency.

The electoral system of the country is already mainly proportional, but this fails to help the development of parties. A majoritarian system, on the other hand, would lead to a two-party system.

A Georgian representative concluded that his country is heading in the right direction, but in the short run there will not be any breakthrough in the democratization process. However, the resources for democracy are growing and eventually the country will develop into a real democracy.

PANEL II *The development of social democracy and democracy in Armenia*

Boris Navasardian (President of the Yerevan Press Club, Armenia) said that one potential source of democratic development could be a power that really poses an alternative to the authorities, like the 1988 Karabakh movement. Another example is the 1997-98 change of power, when public discontent caused Levon Ter-Petrosyan (president at the time) to leave office voluntarily in favour of Robert Kocharyan.

Opposition politicians in Armenia need public support to present a real alternative to the ruling power. The authorities have tried to appease the public to a certain extent. However, the country has not experienced major change for the better, and should have had the chance to express this in elections but couldn’t because they were not free and fair. Until recently there was also a lack of a viable alternative that could challenge the authorities. This changed around 2008 with a more

promising alternative president, who managed to expose state intimidation. As a result, election monitoring missions started working and the ombudsman's office became active, under pressure of public opinion and the international community. But this did not last. The issues of unfair elections and political prisoners were replaced with traditional ones like the balancing act between Russia and the West, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and relations with Turkey.

Turning back to viable alternatives: as soon as one appears, the country will witness a resurgence of democratic attitudes. These can take the shape of pluralist discussions in the media, since the authorities are not strong enough to suppress them. But they have no real effect.

Another feature of the opposition's development since 2008 is that young people started to get interested in political issues like the environment, instead of being interested only in having a career in government institutions.

One possibility for Armenia's democratization is cooperation with the EU in the context of the Eastern Partnerships. Another possibility is inter-parliamentary cooperation through EURONEST, where the agenda points proposed by the Armenian parliament differed from those of the government: the latter is mainly interested in strengthening economic relations (such as a free trade agreement), while members of parliament (even if they are pro-government) mainly bring up political and environmental issues.

In short, pluralism of views and power can lead to truly democratic changes. Armenia is still far from real pluralism, but the fact that the public opinion cannot be completely ignored gives hope.

Stepan Grigoryan (Board Chairman of the Analytical Centre on Globalization and Regional Cooperation) remarked that after the Soviet Union's collapse it became apparent that this old system had lost the historic wager with the 'capitalist' system, or, put differently, with the democratic system of norms and values and market relations in the economy. As a consequence the world has shifted to the 'right'. In Armenia the communists tried to hang on to old schemes and ideas, transforming thereby into a marginal group without any influence on decision-making.

When it comes to the protection of labour, the Armenian Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU) has well-developed sector organizations (healthcare, mechanical industry, agriculture and so on) but a weaker regional network. In itself the exis-

tence of the CTU is a positive thing, as it enables the daily painstaking labour of ensuring the rights of working people. Its main deficiency is its low degree of independence. There were attempts at creating new trade unions in Armenia, but they have not borne fruit. A National Collective Agreement was signed for the first time in 2009 between the Armenian government, the Union of Employers and the Confederation of Trade Unions. The agreement contains a social dialogue (on the fight against violations of labour law, the regulation of labour conflicts and the fight against forced labour) and (regional and sectoral) social partnerships.

In 2010 Armenia's government announced an increase in pensions and social aid with 11% and 15% respectively. In absolute terms this comes down to about 6-8 USD a month. Social policies need a larger budget share. In order to improve the state budget, corruption needs to be fought effectively and major businesses and capital need to be taken out of the shadow economy. Major businesses (oligarchs) are exempt from taxes due to the close links between business and politics (many oligarchs are in fact members of parliament). Socialists and social democrats have not been very keen to attack this system. For instance, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, having a representation in parliament and having been part of the governing coalition for many years, left the coalition in 2009 not because of a conflict about social policies, but because of a difference of opinion on Armenian-Turkish relations.

Socialist and social democratic forces in South Caucasus could use contacts between them to help create an atmosphere of tolerance and confidence in their societies, which could be helpful also in the context of the resolution of regional conflicts.

Discussion

Concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it was put forward that the problems with Turkey can be solved more easily and need have less drastic consequences than the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh. The relations with Turkey are less controversial than with Azerbaijan.

In Armenia there is some fertile ground for democracy. If there was a real battle of ideas – which there currently isn't – it would not take too long to change the system. The positive thing is that not everything is in the hands of the authorities, as is shown by the fact that 350,000 people voted for the opposition candidate Ter-Petrosyan in the 2008 elections. The Armenian leadership always pays attention to those with power, so if new power concentrations occur they cannot be ignored.

Armenia is very sensitive to its international image, since unlike some of its neighbours it has no real natural resources. The president and the authorities probably favour the ideal of a democratic European country, but they are not yet ready to give up their own interests by promoting it.

Free elections are essential for building democracy. Armenia's election results are dictated by the top, not the bottom of society (i.e. the people), so candidates try to appeal to the ruling elite first and foremost.

PANEL III *The development of democracy and social democracy in Azerbaijan*

A **political scientist and head of a civil society organization from Azerbaijan** stated that in Azerbaijan there is no discussion between the political right and left. There are two parties and only two sides: one that wants the current leaders to stay in power – mainly motivated by business interests – and another, bringing together different ideologies, that wants them to go. All capital is controlled by government members and employees. There are no free elections, no possibility to freely engage in party building, and no transparency.

There have been different political periods under different political leaders. Aliyev Sr. and Aliyev Jr. are in fact very different. Heydar Aliyev had a lot of political experience. After the fall of the Soviet Union he realized that things had changed and a new type of government was required. However, his background made it impossible for him to become a convinced democrat. He wanted to have good relations with the West, in which he succeeded because he was perceived as a strong politician who was taking his country in the direction of democracy and integration with the West.

Ilham Aliyev recently said that there is no opposition in Azerbaijan because there is no need for it, as he is doing so well. He considers democracy an internal matter. This results in the repression of opposition parties and the media: Azerbaijan has the largest number of arrested journalists on OSCE territory. Fear of reprisals by the authorities prevents the media from giving voice to opposition politicians. In addition, NGOs are repressed by being subjected to impossible demands, like the registration of all donations with the Ministry of Justice.

The authorities do not even try to pretend to be democratic anymore. They openly say that they have alternatives and can always turn to Russia or the Islamic world if the West pressures them too much.

The main message they receive from the international community is that oil and gas are more important than democracy. However, some change can be observed: with the support of the S&D Group the European parliament recently adopted a tough resolution on the freedom of speech in Azerbaijan. This met with some surprise in Azerbaijan, which needs a strong message because its situation is much graver than in Armenia or Georgia.

Another **social democratic political scientist from Azerbaijan** outlined the history of the development of social democracy in Azerbaijan. He remarked that the conditions of the left were not different from those in the entire former Soviet Union. From the 1920s onwards the Soviet regime had repressed the left opposition that criticized the Communist Party-elite for betraying the leftist ideals. There were ordinary communists who wanted reforms, and a great number of the initiators of popular movements were Communist Party (CPSU) members.

After the dissolution of the USSR state capitalists became disciples of the market place and planned to dismantle the system promptly, minimizing the losses for the elite. Thus CPSU leaders paved the way for ethnic-territorial conflicts, starting with Nagorno-Karabakh, which smothered the masses' democratic impulse, unleashed brutal national instincts and transformed politically conscious citizens into an easily manipulated mob. The democratic movement in Azerbaijan quickly became nationalistic, and there was no room for the left. In 1990 the Social Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (SDPA) was established.

The old communist leadership succeeded in privatizing the most profitable branches of the disintegrated economy. Local CPSU leaders amassed enormous assets. Anyone daring to show civil courage and demanding democracy was repressed or banished. The new elites promptly came to terms with the elites of Europe and the US on the basis of their mutual economic interests. Oil, gas transit and guarantees of geopolitical and economic privileges compelled the leaders of the democratic West to recognize and even 'grow fond of' dictators from South Caucasus and Central Asia.

The social and political structures which originated in popular activity during perestroika quickly degraded under the conditions of the new system. The Social Democratic Party (SDPA) was no exception. Deprived of financial sources, of direct links with the organized working class and of the opportunity to participate in elections, the SDPA was transformed into a group of intellectuals engaged in putting forward alternative projects.

What can be done under the current circumstances? A limited number of citizens has a huge task in educating and organizing society. The authorities are harassing the free mass media and imposing restrictions on the internet. Under these circumstances, social democrats should intensify their work with the civil society and step up their activity with regard to an immediate resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. They should promote models of peace that take into account the legitimate interests of the two peoples.

A particular emphasis should be put on trade unions. The authorities are well aware of the force of organized labour, so they have fought attempts of workers to self-organize from below. Unfortunately SDPA enjoys no support in the working class or in the state bureaucracy and operates as a weak regional group.

Discussion

To the question whether anyone from within the ruling elite could pose a threat to current leaders, the answer was that those people in Ilham Aliyev's team who posed a threat to him in 2005, were punished for that to set an example.

Concerning Azerbaijan's energy riches, it was pointed out that the country only has oil, does not produce anything else and has to buy all other products abroad. Therefore its economic power is overrated. The European delegation was urged not to forget the promotion of democracy while working with Azerbaijan on projects like the Nabucco pipeline.

Addressing the improvement of the relations with Turkey and the possible consequences for Turkey's long-term ally Azerbaijan, it was mentioned that the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement is very important, as it would enable both sides to abolish the mutual myths about each other. Relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan could improve and the region would win and become wealthier. Contacts should in any case be developed between the Azerbaijanis, the Armenians and the Nagorno-Karabakhis.

The discussion also touched on the role of Islam in Azerbaijan. Islam is becoming a more and more important factor because Western values are losing ground – partly because of the Western powers' behaviour and attitude – while people also grow tired of authoritarianism. As a result they look to their own history and the Islamic society the country once had. The government is afraid of Islam and has taken some repressive measures, like banning headscarves in schools.

An Azerbaijani representative thanked the European delegation for the tough resolution on Azerbaijan adopted by the European Parliament and for the Eastern Partnerships program. However, few opposition members are able to participate in projects like the civil forum of the European Partnerships in Brussels.

Concerning the recent acts of defiance by young bloggers, and young people's possible role in politics, it was noted that political consciousness is growing. Young people realize that for democracy to work they have to engage. The government is afraid of the younger generation: there have been crackdowns on rock concerts where songs were performed that called up to fight and resist. It helps that the young generation is technically savvy and speaks other languages. However, the internet plays the role of kitchens in Soviet times: a place where people can talk about change without actually taking to the streets and demanding it. When bloggers Adnan Hajizade and Emin Milli were arrested some time ago, only a couple of dozen people came to the court hearings, while hundreds followed them online.

The European delegation said an attempt will be made to set up a more detailed programme for the region. The European Parliament should be clear on the importance of democracy and human rights. If it acts firmly and clearly, results can be achieved.

Closing remarks by Peter Schieder (Chair of the Party of European Socialists Eastern European Neighbours Working Group)

Mr Schieder pointed out that the added value of the conference is the opportunity to analyse and see things from a different perspective, to learn about problems and trends, to see what can be done in the future. The PES, the S&D Group and the European Forum will work on a report of the conference and debate a political follow-up. The questions raised will be forwarded to the relevant European institutions.

APPENDIX C

EU and Central Asia: Roles and Perspectives

*Conference co-organized by the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D Group) and the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity
6-7 November 2010, Almaty, Kazakhstan*

INTRODUCTION

On 3-5 November 2010 a delegation of European social democrats representing the Party of European Socialists (PES), the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D Group) conducted a fact-finding mission to Astana and Almaty, Kazakhstan, in order to get a clearer picture of the political situation in the country through bilateral meetings with government representatives, OSCE and EU officials, representatives of political parties, civil society, youth groups, academics and international NGOs.

The delegation was led by: **Kristian Vigenin**, PES Presidency Member, Coordinator of the S&D Group in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament and Chair of the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly, **Jan Marinus Wiersma**, Vice-President of the European Forum, and **Adrian Severin**, Member of the European Parliament, S&D Group Vice-President for Foreign Affairs.

On 6-7 November the three organizations, with the support of the UK Labour Party through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy Funds, organized a conference entitled 'EU and Central Asia: Roles and Perspectives'.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

DAY I

PANEL I *Central Asia and the World: the geopolitical role of the region, the importance of energy and its relations with Europe.*

A **political scientist from Tajikistan** started by saying that Central Asia feels isolated, both geographically and mentally. The region is now worse off than in the Soviet era. The international community is not really occupied with the issues that are going on in the region. He gave the example of the export of wine from Tajikistan. It cannot be done by airplane; it has to be exported over land. But that has become very difficult, and consequently the export of wine has completely collapsed. The speaker said Europe should take into account the human component as well, next to energy and other natural resources. If the human component would get more attention, the countries would be able to develop their economic potential to the full. In his view, the focus should be on education. Together with literacy, this was one of the positive gains of the Soviet era that is now unfortunately being squandered – the educational potential of Central Asia has been lost. The knowledge level is low and highly skilled people travel to the West. The reason for this is that leaders put their personal interest above the collective interest.

A **representative of an opposition political party from Tajikistan** elaborated on the differences between the Central Asian states, which do not need be real obstacles. It is not necessary for the Central Asian countries to import European values, as they have their own values. He spoke about the European view of Central Asia: Europe should be criticized for viewing Central Asia as a 'back-up of fuel'. Europeans only see two forces in Central Asia: secular authoritarianism and religious extremism. They are blind to the middle path between secular and religious forces in the region. Nevertheless, he concluded on a positive note by saying that Europe is gradually getting a more realistic view.

Representatives of the **Ata Meken party** (Kyrgyzstan) expressed their feelings that the EU is applying double standards towards Central Asia and other regions. A spokesman of a **social democratic party from Kazakhstan**, however, stressed that Central Asia needs Europe's support. Europeans often behave as tourists only, despite the pervasive corruption and the total lack of freedom. The social democrat stressed that he would like to see Kazakhstan integrated into Europe so that the region would be more than 'just a petrol station'. The peoples of Central Asia

have to take more responsibility; Europe plays a smaller role than China and Russia. Europe can only give moral support. The Kazakh social democrat concluded that Central Asia is completely disintegrated and its leaders pursue only personal interests.

A **human rights expert from Uzbekistan** observed that every country in Central Asia goes its own way – the Central Asian countries are incapable of cooperating with each other. He said this is because they are not fully developed yet, and as an example he referred to the policemen in Uzbekistan, who are often illiterate. He said it is hard to expect them to behave properly without any education whatsoever. It is very hard to establish democracy in an atmosphere like that. The Ata-Meken Party representative (Kyrgyzstan) added that if the countries would have common values, they would be able to cooperate. But in fact they are all competing with each other for markets.

A **representative of a social democratic party from Tajikistan** noted that, indeed, in terms of what the common Central Asian values entail, the countries can differ a lot from each other. There is a total lack of orientation. He agreed with his colleague from another Tadjik opposition party that the Central Asian people need to add their own oriental values to the European ones. He said that integration between the Central Asian countries is impossible. It would lead to the destruction of national myths and heroes, and that would be considered unacceptable.

PANEL II Democracy and human rights in Central Asia.

A **representative of the Freedom House** briefly outlined the human rights situation in Central Asia: Access to a fair trial is denied, there is no access to independent media (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are the worst), there is torture (even though Central Asian countries have joined international conventions on torture), and freedom of speech is under pressure and religion as well. He compared the situation to the one that existed during the Soviet era.

A **representative of a social democratic party from Kazakhstan** said he believes the opposition is able to lead his country to reforms and that the door to negotiations with the authorities is still open. He launched the idea of establishing a joint body for the sister parties of Central Asia. The Ata-Meken Party representative was very positive about this idea and believes that together they might be able to influence the governments of the Central Asian states. His party believes that transition in

Kyrgyzstan will take a long time, but one has to start somewhere. The human rights expert from Uzbekistan said the main problem with human rights activists is that they are not united and only focus on specific cases.

When the question was raised: 'Do you need stability to get democracy or do you need democracy to get stability?', a **social democrat from Tajikistan** said he believes only parliamentary democracy and market freedom will lead to the protection of human rights. The importance of an institutional mechanism to enhance these, protected by a constitution, was emphasized. The system of checks and balances was praised. The **human rights expert from Uzbekistan** remarked that the institutions of the Central Asian countries date back to feudal times, as the countries have no really independent and fair judiciary. According to him the European system can be adopted, but it has to be supplemented with local laws.

A **representative of a Tadjik opposition party** pointed out that religious rights should be protected as well. He mentioned the fact that for the first time in history Tadjik women are forbidden to attend the religious service in the mosque, while at the same time the hijab is banned from public universities. This is leading to a certain radicalization among young people. He said the countries have to work at nation-building and stimulate the advancement of minority rights. Just like his Uzbek colleague he fears that otherwise the countries will become marginalized and risk sliding back into feudal times. Both stressed the importance of building a civil society and the importance of NGOs. The Tadjik representative said secular NGOs are needed in Tajikistan to present radicalized religious youngsters with a positive picture of secularism. Another Tadjik representative, on the other hand, while acknowledging the need for NGOs, criticized them for being too apolitical.

PANEL III The role of European Social Democrats in Central Asia

A representative of a **social democratic party from Kazakhstan** began by saying that he finds the social democratic doctrine especially relevant for the Central Asian region. His party thinks that values such as solidarity apply to the whole region of Central Asia. He mentioned the need for theoretical assistance and popular books to promote social democracy. Furthermore he would like to see European leaders actively highlight social democratic values, for instance within the OSCE. Support from the European Parliament is needed as well. An **opposition party representative from Tajikistan** was curious to know how Europe and the European social

democrats would respond if elections in Central Asian countries would be won by Islamic parties, and whether Europe would accept it if they formed a government. The answer was that they would support such a government, provided that it would respect secularism, democracy and solidarity. **The Ata-Meken Party (Kyrgyzstan)** representative raised questions about the far right and multiculturalism in Europe. It was acknowledged that Europe is not perfect either, but all participants agreed that a stable multi-ethnic state can only be reached through democracy.

On the European side the conclusion was that cooperation with Europe can be achieved at different levels. Political support is the most important, for instance through concrete activities. It is also important that the ruling elite knows that the opposition and the human rights activists have support from Europe.

DAY II

PANEL I Kazakhstan

The second day started with a discussion on the situation in Kazakhstan. A **representative of a Kazakh NGO** began by giving a brief overview of recent political history. Then a **Kazakh political scientist** gave an outline of the development of social democracy in Kazakhstan.

In the 1990s there was a brief transition from communism to democracy. The economy, however, came first; politics came later. In 1997 Strategy 2030 was adopted – it was a blueprint for development meant to move the country from the old collectivism towards a more private approach to society. The intention of the state was to represent the interests of the middle class. The model Kazakhstan decided to follow was a mixture of Western and Asian models. One of the top priorities of the government was domestic stability, together with a strategy for combating unemployment and poverty. The only opposition to this was formed by the communist party. In the 2000s the communists shifted towards social democracy, and centre-left and centre-right parties appeared on the scene. In 2003 the ruling People's Democratic Party redefined itself as Nur Otan, a party with an ideology which the political scientist labelled as 'social democracy without democracy'. Its main priority was to improve the Kazakh standard of living and to build a social state. Kazakhstan did not automatically use foreign recipes of (forced) democracy. Ideologically there was agreement between all parties about the need for a social welfare state.

Discussion

Questions were raised about the role of trade unions. The answer was that the working class is not one monolithic group. Labour unions don't have any resources and are therefore weak.

PANEL II Tajikistan

A representative of a **Tadjik opposition party** started his presentation of the political history of Tajikistan over the past 20 years by pointing out the differences between Tajikistan and other Central Asian states, especially Kazakhstan. Tajikistan has witnessed a civil war and has an active Muslim party. When asked if there is a religious conflict in the country, he immediately stressed that there is none and that there is cooperation across religions among the parties.

He then gave an overview of the situation in Tajikistan. Because of the civil war, from 1992 to 1997, the democratic process in Tajikistan was reversed. Between 1997 and 2002 there was a brief return to democracy. Currently Tajikistan, under President Rahmon, has a system that can be called a 'super presidential state'. In Tajikistan there is no clear vision of the future. The authorities have no ideology or strategy. Immediately after the war the ideology of Zoroastrianism became the official state ideology. Then 2006 was announced as the year of the 'Aryan nation'. However, the authorities realized that this new label did not receive any support either. Therefore the Tajik government started looking for new ideologies again. 2009 was the year of the 'Muslim path' – the authorities sought the support of the religious part of the nation. However, in the last election they clearly saw that they did not get this support at all. Since the last elections the government has had a slightly different attitude towards the population. Now they are not only persecuting political parties, but also suppressing religion. For instance, women cannot enter mosques anymore, neither can people under 16. The speaker indicated that Tajikistan might be on the road to a new civil war. According to him, human rights are being constrained, independent websites are being blocked, and the situation is getting worse. Nevertheless, he does not expect an outbreak of violence. Tajikistan has an acute need for international help, but the speaker also said that he wants loans and grants for Tajikistan to be conditional on the improvement of human rights.

Questions were raised about the troublesome situation in the Rasht Valley, which has stabilized according to the Tajik government. This was confirmed by a **civil**

society representative from Tajikistan. He said the indigenous people of the region were maltreated by the authorities, which resulted in an armed conflict. When asked about the size of Islamic fundamentalism in Tajikistan, he responded that the threat does not exist in Tajikistan. There is a certain sympathy among young people for religion. But it is the government that conjures up the threat of Islamic fundamentalism to distract people from the real problems. He stressed that Tajikistan is certainly not being Islamized.

Next, a **social democratic representative from Tajikistan** gave his view of the situation there and the current state of social democracy in the country. He said the first regional movements were founded in the 1980s, but they had no real program and disappeared. The second wave was more radical. There was a revival of Tajik culture, called the 'Revival' movement, but it was weak because of regional differences. Nevertheless, it could count on 30 percent of the vote in 1999. Then in March 2004 there was large-scale popular unrest. The movement was accused of stirring up the unrest, leading to its collapse as support dropped. Then the Democratic Party of Tajikistan emerged, a genuine movement founded on the communist ideology that won a lot of sympathy among the people. However, the main problems after the civil war were the lack of funding and conflicts between Tajik democrats.

The Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan was established in 2003 and has often clashed with the authorities, since President Rahmon can now serve for two more terms because of an amendment introduced by the government. The party is now at a low due to a lack of funding and internal disputes. Moreover, the fact that there is no real strategy and that certain parts of the social democratic program are already implemented by the government makes it even harder for the party to compete.

Panel III *Kyrgyzstan*

Kyrgyzstan currently has one of the most dynamic democratic processes of all former Soviet Union countries, as it held its first fully free and fair parliamentary elections in October 2010. The discussion was set off by **Ms. Elmira Nogoybaeva** (NGO Polis Asia, Kyrgyzstan), who outlined Kyrgyzstan's history since independence.

Mr Murat Sujunbayev (National University of Kyrgyzstan) then noted that Central Asian countries are far less individualistic and more collectivist in nature. In his

view, Central Asia could be divided into nomad countries and settled countries. The nomad countries are used to more democracy, while the settled countries are more authoritarian, as people there 'cannot move around'. Moreover, he also noted differences between industrial and agricultural areas. The poverty level is high and the middle class is underdeveloped. For Mr Sujunbayev it was clear that this is not a good, solid basis for social democracy.

Again, the need for education as essential for democratic development was stressed. In the view of Mr Sujunbayev, followers of the nomadic way of life, when they are settled, decide to opt for more education rather than immediately starting to work in the industrial sector. This is what happened in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. They are willing to study (including women). Mr Sujunbayev also stressed the need for a middle class. Poverty should be fought as well, because as long as there is poverty, there is no guarantee that ethnic violence won't flare up again.

Discussion

The discussion elaborated on the party system in Kyrgyzstan. **Mr Sujunbayev** stated that many political parties in Kyrgyzstan have no program and are hardly developed. **Ms Nogoybaeva** said there is a very competitive and open public space in Kyrgyzstan. She acknowledged that there are many parties in Kyrgyzstan, but expressed the hope that quantity leads to quality. The downside, she said, is that there is a lot of fragmentation and it is difficult to reach a consensus. She was positive, however, about the fact that the Kyrgyz politicians at least try to sit down and find agreement. In addition, she noted, there is also a high percentage of women participating in Kyrgyz politics, especially in comparison with other Central Asian countries.

Concerning foreign relations, Ms Nogoybaeva suspects that the Kyrgyz party leaders who travel to Moscow want to bring Russian paternalism back. She expressed her concern about the powerful pressure that is put on Kyrgyzstan by Russia and warned that there could be an internal conflict if Kyrgyzstan's neighbours try to impose their system on Kyrgyzstan. Regarding the rise of China, she said that the countries of Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan, are not ready for China's economic expansion. Russia is not a reliable partner either, therefore the USA and the EU will have to play a certain role in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

PANEL IV *Uzbekistan*

A **civil society representative** from Uzbekistan gave an overview of the human rights situation in the country, ruled by the authoritarian President Karimov. From 1995 to 2004 Uzbekistan had a unicameral parliament with 250 deputies, but they had only two or three sessions a year. Since 2005 there has been a bicameral parliament. In theory parties have a bigger role than before, but in practice they don't. The 2009 elections were not free at all.

In Uzbekistan, laws on democracy and human rights exist only on paper. There is a high degree of control and interference from the state. There are five parties: the Liberal Democratic Party, the National Revival Party, the Environmental Movement, the People's Democratic Party and the Justice Social Democratic Party. The latter two call themselves social democratic. However, according to the speaker these parties are not real; they don't function properly and are part of a scheme to cover up for the lack of democracy. According to him, the population of Uzbekistan is unaware of this. The true opposition parties are Elik and Berlik, both operating from abroad (in Turkey and in Sweden). None of the Uzbek political parties have a clear ideology, and as a result of self-censorship the parties have failed to become strong analytical centres in civil society. The electorate is not well-informed or educated. Consequently, the political parties and the electorate have a life of their own. The electorate considers the parties to be part of the system. Moreover, constitutional amendments prevent the establishment of so-called initiative groups and the nomination of their candidates in elections.

When asked what will happen in the near future, the speaker said that the president and the ruling elite want to extend their power to all three branches of the state. At the moment the political power in Uzbekistan is totally centred in the executive branch. The president wants to see more power shift to the legislative branch.

The speaker urged the EU to reconsider its attitude towards Uzbekistan, and take the human rights dimension into account. He believes the EU should also invest more in NGOs, but it is uncertain to what extent they are able to function. There are supposed to be more than 5000 NGOs in Uzbekistan, but many have been created by the government. Moreover, they do not cooperate or exchange opinions. He emphasized the need for close cooperation between Uzbek and other Central Asian NGOs and to focus on broader issues. He launched the idea of having a round table discussion between Uzbek activists working abroad and the govern-

ment. He also expressed the thought of having a round table with the EU, together with the opposition parties of Uzbekistan and the Uzbek leader Karimov, in a constructive way.

PANEL V *Turkmenistan*

The last debate of the day featured **Dr. Raisa Kaziyeva** (Kazakh political analyst), who talked about the current state of affairs in Turkmenistan. Dr. Kaziyeva said that Turkmenistan is gradually changing its position from a closed to an open country, but outsiders are still not taking an active part in the life of the country. Furthermore, all Turkmen media are government-owned and censorship is very effective. It is very hard to get information about the country; most of it comes from Europe.

President Berdymukhamedov was elected four years ago. He is working hard on his image of a democratic leader. Dr. Kaziyeva thinks that there are some achievements Berdymukhamedov can boast of, in terms of macro-economics and the economic growth rate of Turkmenistan: the country is projected to have the highest growth rate of Central Asia. The Turkmen leader currently plays the energy and security card. Turkmenistan is not totally closed anymore, as there are now foreign companies operating, mostly in oil and gas, but also in agriculture. Dr. Kaziyeva observed that Turkmenistan has undergone radical changes due to the development of the energy sector.

However, Dr. Kaziyeva stressed that not all is going well. There are several problematic issues, such as unemployment and the high number of people living below the poverty line. Analysts from outside the country say that Turkmenistan has a catastrophically low amount of drinking water. The water supply to the biggest cities in Turkmenistan is strictly regulated: three times a day for one hour only. Moreover, food prices have risen. The social atmosphere is very tense. Nevertheless, electricity and water remain free of charge. The pension system is the pride of the current president, even though these pensions are extremely low according to Dr. Kaziyeva. The overall domestic policy is called 'the great revival'. When Dr. Kaziyeva was asked about the religious situation in the country, she said that there is no pressure regarding the freedom of religion, nor is there any sign of illumination.

As to the international relations: China's primary interest in Turkmenistan is gas, as it is Turkmenistan's major customer – there is a pipeline from the country to

China. Russia and the EU are of course major players as well. Russia's relationship with Turkmenistan is very difficult. There is the issue of the dual Russian-Turkmen citizenship. A lot of Turkmen work in Russia (which is why one gets wildly divergent population numbers for Turkmenistan, depending on the source). However, Turkmen people are being forced to give up one of the two nationalities, and police and Defence agencies are firing non-ethnic Turkmen. Talking about the relations with the EU, Dr. Kaziyeva said that Turkmenistan is a country Europe should really focus its attention on. It should not reject Turkmenistan when it asks for help with humanitarian problems, even though there are already UN programs in place, e.g. for vaccination or combating the infant mortality rate. She believes that the EU should not reject any opportunities to get closer to Turkmenistan. Keeping the channels of communication open, Dr. Kaziyeva said, is the only way to cooperate or to have a dialogue with Turkmenistan.

APPENDIX D

Social Democracy in Eastern Europe: The Case of Russia

*Conference co-organized by the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
22-23 October 2011, Kiev, Ukraine*

INTRODUCTION

The situation in the Russian Federation was also discussed during the seminar in Kiev. However, given the importance of the country and its special position in Europe we have created a separate chapter dealing with it.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

DAY I

Boris Guseletov (head of the International Department of the Just Russia Party) said that the Russian regime is authoritarian, and that out of seven officially registered parties in Russia only four may have a chance to enter parliament in the upcoming elections. Referring to the forecasts of research centres, he said the ruling United Russia party could expect 52% of seats in Parliament, and the Just Russia Party is expected to get only 6.5%, which would leave it without seats in parliament, the threshold being 7%. The polls, however, vary per week; for instance in the week of October 10th the party's rating was higher and it was expected to get 8% of the seats. Mr Guseletov noted that the Just Russia Party now also participates in local elections.

Alexey Karpov (International Secretary of the Russian Social-Democratic Union of Youth RSDUY) started his presentation with a brief overview of the political life in Russia. He said that the political process is completely paralysed, there are no transparent elections and the people have lost trust in the government to such a degree that a lot of them are waiting to escape from the country. Mr Karpov compared the worlds of the people and of political parties in allegorical terms, saying that the two groups live in different aquariums. Referring to his RSDUY, which has observer status in the Socialist International and works towards creating a social democratic state in Russia through political education, he said that although its activities are prohibited in Russia, it still carries out its projects. However, the party is not fighting the system as it believes the system will kill itself. Mr Karpov also spoke out in favour of travel abroad, calling it the best instrument of democratic change: once people start to see and experience true democratic development, they will start wanting the same in Russia.

Day II

Boris Guseletov (Just Russia party)

'Development of social democracy in Russia since independence'

Boris Guseletov spoke about the difficulties the social democrats face in post-Soviet Russia. The major problems are the absence of a broad social basis for social democracy, the negative image of its ideology because of the Soviet heritage, and the related problem of identification, because people hardly distinguish social democrats from communists. Speaking about the position of his Just Russia party, Mr Guseletov noted that during the last four years the support for the party among the population had increased, while the popularity of the Communist Party decreased. He emphasized that following the economic crisis in 2010 Just Russia was the only party to propose its own anti-crisis program. Mr Guseletov said that his party stands for liberalization of the political sphere, calling for a lowering of the electoral threshold to 3% (now scheduled to decrease from 7% to 5% for the first elections after the elections of 2011). The party also proposes a simplification of the party registration procedure and the establishment of parliamentary control.

Discussion

Representatives from Russia went into a debate on what will change after the elections in December 2011 and what the opposition parties have to offer to ordinary people. **Mr Karpov** (RSDUY) believes change will not come from political parties

but from outside the political system, while **Mr Guseletov** believes any lasting institutional change has to come through elections, and thus through parties. One of the major conclusions was that Russian society does not see real alternatives in the upcoming elections, which is to the advantage of the ruling United Russia Party and provides a possibility for fraud.

Andrey Ryabov (Scholar-in-residence of the East East: Partnership Beyond Borders Program of the Carnegie Moscow Center)

'Democratic institution building in Russia since its independence'

Describing the political environment in Russia, Mr Ryabov said that there are almost no institutions independent from the government, and those that are do not have access to resources. However, he expressed the firm belief that Russia is moving towards democracy in its own way. Going into the historical background of democratic institution-building, he stated that the progress that had begun in the 1990s was put a stop to in 1999 when Vladimir Putin came to power and proposed (metaphorically speaking) a new consensus to the Russian public: economic prosperity in exchange for a lack of social and political participation. Speaking about the challenges and future prospects of the political system, he said that the country is entering a period of radical uncertainties, characterized by a lack of public competition and silence of the opposition. The ruling elite accumulates huge resources to manipulate the mass audience. He stated that negative attitudes to the authorities are growing, which unfortunately do not lead to demands for more democracy, and that instead another threat to the government is emerging: nationalism. Mr Ryabov added that it would be difficult to find a new leader who is able to preserve the stability of the current political system while carrying out reforms, because Vladimir Putin transformed the system into one of manual management that relies on concrete rule by concrete people.

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