OPEN SOCIETY NEWS

SOROS FOUNDATIONS NETWORK NEWS
SPRING | 2001

Central Eurasia:

Oil, Poverty, and the Struggle for Democracy

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SPRING 2001

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COVER PHOTO
James Hill
Oil fields, Baku, Azerbaijan

The numerous nonprofit foundations established by the philanthropist George Soros are linked together in an informal network called the Soros foundations network. At the heart of this network are the national and local foundations that operate in more than 30 countries around the world, primarily in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. These foundations share the common mission of supporting the development and maintenance of open society. To this end, they operate and support an array of initiatives in educational, social, and legal reform. *Open Society News*, published by the Open Society Institute in New York, reports on the programs and grantees of the foundations in the network. For additional information, see the Soros foundations network website at www.soros.org or contact the Open Society Institute, 400 West 59th Street, New York, NY 10019, USA; TEL (212) 548-0600; FAX (212) 548-4679; or E-MAIL wkramer@sorosny.org

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of *Open Society News* focuses on the Caucasus and Central Asia in an effort to familiarize many of our readers with an area of growing international importance where open society is struggling to take hold. While each country in the two regions is different and complex in its own way, many of the basic elements of open society—democracy, rule of law, access to information, strong civic organizations—are fragile or threatened. By highlighting some of these problems and the individuals and organizations trying to solve them, this issue provides a realistic picture of the challenges ahead. It also invites readers to learn about and participate in promoting open society in the two regions.

To readers who want to know more about the topics presented in this issue of *OSN*, we recommend the Central Eurasia Project's website, eurasianet.org, for a comprehensive analysis of current events in the area. To respond to *Open Society News* articles, readers should go to the Soros foundations' website, www.soros.org, and click on *Open Society News*. This is an electronic version of the newsletter with a Readers' Comments section that provides a format for sharing responses with *OSN* editors as well as fellow readers. It is an excellent opportunity for discussion as well as making contacts with others committed to open society.

OSN is also interested in learning how many readers would like the newsletter delivered directly to their e-mail addresses. Readers interested in receiving *OSN* electronically are urged to enter their e-mail address in the subscriber box at www.soros.org/osn.

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Looking Beyond Transition in Central Eurasia

ANTHONY RICHTER

The countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia have passed through their "transitions" to arrive on the world stage facing economic, political, and social challenges common to countries throughout the world. Anthony Richter, director of OSI's Central Eurasia Project, argues that the states in the two regions must now look to international standards and systems for solutions to their problems. ■

In 2001, the states of the Caucasus and Central Asia will mark their first decade of independence. Should they still be called transitional societies? The idea of a transition can be an appealing notion, but it's a relative one, depending on how long it takes and where the country is located. Sharing a border with Germany or Afghanistan can influence the stakes for the would-be reformer set on political openness and liberal trade. And whether a transition takes two centuries or five years makes a great deal of difference to people buffeted by political and economic change.

But what if the period of rapid transition is over in the Caucasus and Central Asia? What implications does that have for the people who live there and those of us who interact with them and their leaders?

A new world has undoubtedly taken shape in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Myriad developments are at play: the transformation of relations with Russia; new interactions with countries on the other side of former Soviet borders; the reassertion of local traditions; and the pursuit of nation-building projects and economic development.

But the expectation, widely held at the time of the Soviet collapse, that these countries were to be "societies in transition" on a fast track to democratic and market reforms has not been fulfilled. The assumption that transition always moves in the same direction toward greater openness was an unexamined article of faith in the early 1990s. Moreover, the expecta-

tions, which were not based on any solid analysis, have not been borne out by subsequent developments.

As the countries of the regions are now integrating into the international system, they face many of the problems and trends that other countries do—whether it is the mixed blessing of an oil boom or the scourge of drug trafficking. Given their standing, then, it is worth asking whether the term "transitional" is useful any longer, either analytically or politically.

During the Cold War, Sovietologists argued that the USSR was so exceptional a political system that it was unique and therefore not susceptible to social scientific analysis.

Men gathering to pray, Tajikistan

> "The politics of transition puts responsibility for today's problems on the past and postpones demands for justice until tomorrow. But declaring an end to the transition puts important problems on the table today."

Now the argument for the uniqueness of formerly communist countries is advanced under the cliche of "societies in transition." But the political use of "transition" is perhaps more damaging than the academic one. Ten years ago, the notion of a "transition" served to encourage the supporters of a break with the Soviet past. Today, the idea of "transition" can just as often serve as an excuse not to observe international human rights treaties, or to postpone grappling with difficult political and economic reforms.

The shift in emphasis toward postponing reforms is important. The politics of transition puts responsibility for today's problems on the past and postpones demands for justice until tomorrow. But declaring an end to the transition puts important problems on the table today.

As we see in this issue of the *Open Society News,* new opportunities have appeared in the form of oil and gas, though the full benefits and costs of such sudden natural-resource wealth have yet to be properly planned. The Internet, with its own pipelines of information, has only just begun to penetrate the region, but the lift to productivity and development is challenged by policies that may yet neutralize its impact.

Though they may often seem new and remote from the vantage point of Washington, D.C., or the capitals of Western Europe, the states of the Caucasus and Central Asia are starting to compete with older, more powerful states for funds and attention from investors and foreign governments. These countries are participating in regional if not global business cycles, and are contending with the interests of countries from which they were previously sheltered by Soviet borders and a centralized government in Moscow.

Unlike in other developing economies, there is generally more enthusiasm than suspicion about globalization in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Regional leaders are putting much hope in the global economy and foreign investment to cure their ailing economies and make them rich. In many ways, the countries in these two regions have finally arrived—though certainly not at the destination they anticipated in 1991. Central Eurasia's arriviste status was underscored by the Eurasia Economic Forum held in Kazakhstan in 2000; unlike the annual meeting in Davos, the only protests in Almaty were by those who didn't get an invitation. Recently, however, environmental NGOs are beginning to question the impact of transnational energy corporations in the Caspian Basin.

The countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia have reached a point where they can no longer use their transitions as an excuse to ignore serious problems while aspiring for support from the international community. The sources of their problems may be unique, but the standards they are expected to accept are used around the world. When it comes to good governance, human rights, and economic policy, the rule must be acceptance, not exceptions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.eurasianet.org

Will Oil Funds Benefit the Masses?

(Or Just the Ruling Classes)

"The greatest single question is who will exercise ultimate control over the fund. Both countries are run by authoritarian regimes where the presidents were elected by less than democratic means. It is unclear to whom the presidents are accountable."

Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are planning to direct some of their oil wealth into "oil funds" which could be used for social development and economic stabilization. David Stern, Caucasus and Central Asia correspondent for the *Financial Times,* examines how the funds work, what these two countries have done so far, and the challenge of creating transparent and effective funds. ■

DAVID STERN

The recent creation of oil funds in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan cuts to the heart of whether these two former Soviet states will be able to successfully manage the petrol dollars expected to engulf their societies in the next decade.

Significant questions about the structure of the funds, how the money will be spent, and what roles international and domestic organizations may play remain unanswered.

Observers see both governments' interest in establishing the funds and their public statements about exercising tight fiscal control as a positive sign. But at the same time others have expressed nagging doubts that, given Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan's reputations for corrupt and authoritarian regimes, the money might be wasted, or even worse, simply disappear.

After ten years of post-Soviet decline, both countries are in dire need of social development projects and improvements to their infrastructure. The funds present an excellent opportunity to right social ills, some observers say, which may threaten the countries in the long run.

An oil fund, or "future generations fund" as it is sometimes known, is an extra-budgetary institution set up by an oil-producing nation to deal with huge profits from the sale of its oil and gas.

Judging by funds already established in Norway and Kuwait, the money

is usually put aside in an outside account, which can be saved for a "rainy day" when oil reserves begin to run out. Or it can be used to finance needed projects, such as developing infrastructure or helping the national pension plan.

At the heart of every oil fund also is the attempt to avoid the high inflation and economic imbalances that often plague oil-producing economies. Oil profits inject enormous sums of hard currency into a domestic market. This in turn drives up the local exchange rate.

Prices for domestic goods and exports as a result skyrocket. Local industry then becomes less competitive and starts to stagnate. In no time, a country finds itself depending almost exclusively on its energy sector with nothing from other industries to balance it out.

The real danger here, say analysts, are the gross imbalances being created in the country as a whole. Not only does the country's economy become lopsided, but so does society, since only those people connected to the oil sector reap any benefits. Divisions between the haves and the have-nots increase, and the country faces possible political instability.

Oil funds avoid this scenario simply by getting the profits out of the economy. The cash collects interest or it can be invested in some reliable financial instrument, and only gradually, in an orderly fashion, will the money be injected back into the economy.

This is at least the theory.

At the moment, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, with advice from international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF, have just begun the process of creating their funds.

Kazakhstan announced that it had deposited $660 million from the sale of its five-percent stake in the Tengiz onshore field. Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev signed a decree in the last days of 2000 for the establishment of a national oil fund with a starting capital of around $300 million.

The two funds appear to be similar, although the guidelines published provide only the roughest of outlines. Both funds will be supplied by oil royalties, signing bonuses, and taxes from the oil companies. Both will be held in a special government account and supervised by a special government body.

The Azeri oil fund is directed by Samir Sharifov, and is supervised by an intergovernmental committee. Sharifov has pleased members of the international financial community by stating that the fund's management will be fully transparent, including yearly audits, and fiscally conservative. In fact, Sharifov said that no monies will be spent at all in the first years, and when spending begins, it will draw on dividends, but not the principal. At first, the money will be held in the Azerbaijani National Bank, but eventually it will be moved to accounts abroad.

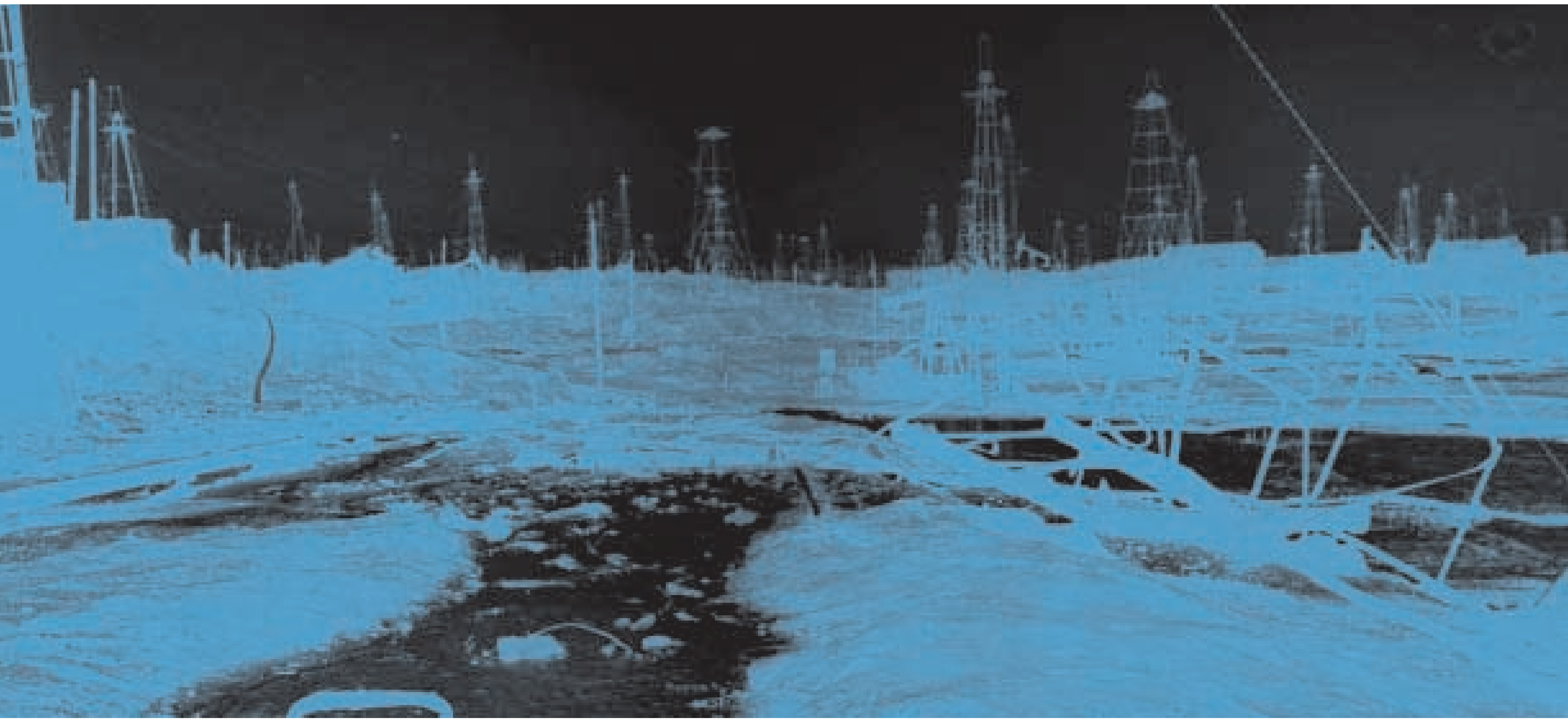
"The idea is to bring the amount of money to some substantial figure first, which will give us the chance to study the experiences of other countries. Only then will disbursement begin," said Sharifov.

In the U.S., Alaska's state oil fund gives an annual dividend to tax-paying residents. Alberta, Canada, and Norway have used their funds to supplement government revenues. Colombia and Venezuela also established similar funds, but their success has been hindered by mismanagement, corruption, and an overestimation of revenues.

For Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, the devil, as always, is in the details. What sort of audits will be conducted? ask observers. How will the supervisory committee fulfill its duties? How will the money eventually be spent? Sharifov said that all these questions will be worked out in the coming years.

Some analysts say that there is a risk that the fund could inject too much cash into the economy if extra measures are not taken. "The question is whether the fund is going to be well-integrated and coordinated with the government's budget," said Michael Mered, the IMF's representative in Baku. "The spending of an oil fund needs to be calibrated within the macroeconomic framework."

At the same time, however, both countries are in desperate need of infrastructure improvements and poverty relief. Azerbaijan is considered the poorest country in Europe, with an average per capita income of $40 per month. Kazakhstan is not much better off.



Sabit Zhusupov of Kazakhstan's Institute of Social and Economic Information is a strong advocate of using the monies to alleviate social ills. According to him, schools, hospitals, and small businesses in the country's provinces are in desperate need of support. The lack of infrastructure is creating an exodus from the smaller towns to larger urban centers.

But he sees little chance of the oil money going to benefit society at large. "The social aspect will not be important for the fund—what will be important will be national defense and developing more oil fields." The result could be disastrous for the country in the long run, he said.

Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan's "breathtakingly corrupt" societies, in the words of one observer, also give pause for thought. Although corruption may not directly affect the management of the fund itself, it could nevertheless play a role in how the money is dealt with once it is disbursed.

"There is no proper system for managing investments and expenditure. They just dream things up," said a Western expert. Sharifov, when asked how the disbursements will be monitored, simply said, "Good question."

But probably the greatest single question is who will exercise ultimate control over the fund. The difficulty here is that both countries are run by authoritarian regimes where the presidents were elected by less than democratic means.

In the words of Azerbaijan's regulations, "the fund shall be accountable and responsible to the President of the Azerbaijan Republic," who also has the power to appoint or dismiss the fund's director and approve the supervisory board.

Kazakhstan also provides for a fund under the control of its president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, with little input by the country's parliament or other outside bodies. It is unclear to whom the presidents are accountable.

Arvind Ganesan, director of the Business and Human Rights Program at Human Rights Watch, says the best way to insure that the funds function properly is to make them transparent to as many organizations and government bodies as possible. "That is where issues of governance, corruption, and human rights converge. If the government does not allow public scrutiny of its accounts and is not accountable for their use, these funds become huge pots of money ripe for corruption and mismanagement, while broader goals of development and democratic participation are undermined."

Oil field workers and refugees, Azerbaijan

Although Kazakhstan's oil reserves already dwarf those of Azerbaijan, the problems the two countries face are the same. The trick is making sure that their new-found wealth works to the benefit of their respective societies.

"All these ideas are up in the air. That is why we at the moment are not entirely confident in their program," said one representative of an international financial institution in Baku. "They still have a ways to go."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For an IMF review of oil stabilization and savings funds, visit http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.cfm?sk&sk=3648.0. For information on Norway's fund, visit http://balder.dep.no/ud/nornytt/uda-233.html and http://odin.dep.no/fin/engelsk/economy/p10002425/index-b-n-a.html

Georgia Appeals to Public to Help Fight Corruption

The Georgian government acknowledged this winter that controlling corruption is one of its top priorities. George Papuashvili and Goka Gabashvili of the Open Society Georgia Foundation and Zaza Namoradze of the Constitutional and Legal Policy Institute report on efforts to strengthen the government's anticorruption initiative by getting the public and NGOs directly involved in anticorruption policymaking. ■

ZAZA NAMORADZE
GOKA GABASHVILI
GEORGE PAPUASHVILI

Voting in Georgia. An anticorruption initiative will try to increase people's trust in public institutions and policies.

> “If we fail to cure the nation of the poisonous malady of corruption, Georgia as a civilized nation, and Georgia, as an independent state, will have no future.”

Military officials line their pockets with money budgeted for their soldiers' food. A student buys a diploma to avoid years of study. A criminal breaks the law, confident that a bribe to the right police officer or prosecutor will make any charges disappear.

In Georgia, corruption has permeated all levels of society—from doctors and lawyers to traffic cops and athletes. Indeed, the extent of corruption is so great that it is seen by international and domestic policymakers as the primary obstacle to Georgia's political and economic development.

Transparency International's 1999 Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks countries in order from least to most corrupt, put Georgia at 84th out of the 99 countries analyzed. Neighboring Turkey, Armenia, Russia, and Azerbaijan ranked 54th, 80th, 82nd, and 96th, respectively.

President Eduard Shevardnadze recently wrote in the draft Guidelines for the National Anticorruption Program, “If we fail to cure the nation, public and State from the poisonous malady of corruption, Georgia, as a civilized nation, and Georgia, as an independent state, will have no future.”

In the past, Shevardnadze's government has made half-hearted attempts to tackle corruption. Of late, however, the government appears to have adopted a more serious, systematic approach by creating a working group last summer, which then drafted the General Guidelines for the National Anticorruption Program in October 2000. In March, Shevardnadze signed a decree initiating anticorruption measures that lead up to the full program.

The guidelines acknowledge the presence of illegal lobbying groups in all three branches of government, “criminal overlapping interests” in the public and private sectors, and describe how corruption easily took hold in the weak state. Georgia is depicted as a pyramid of corruption. At the base, there is “petty” corruption with low- and mid-level officials extorting minor bribes and favors while at the top is “grand” corruption with state agencies and high-level officials embezzling huge sums of money and resources.

The government has responded by putting forward a set of measures to bring transparency to Georgia's institutions and to overcome the sense of impunity that fuels corruption. The measures stress economic liberalization and deregulation of state agencies to decrease the power of officials to extort citizens and squander public resources. Other measures call for the reform of law-enforcement and regulatory agencies to make them more open and accountable to the public.

While the European Union, the World Bank, and civil society advocates like George Soros have expressed interest in supporting the program, two significant questions remain: Does the Georgian public really care? And what will it take to win popular support?

“Corruption is a way of life,” David Usupashvili, a principal architect of the guidelines, told reporters in January. “People were naturally cynical about communist laws and rules, but in independent Georgia they still don't respect any laws. People don't believe that the state will ever provide services or enforce the law, so they don't pay taxes.”

In an effort to increase people's trust in public institutions and policies, the Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF), together with USAID contractor organizations and Georgian NGOs, started the Anticorruption Program Distribution Project in December 2000. The project aims to cultivate public support for anticorruption efforts by providing Georgians with the government's plan and allowing them to make recommendations to improve it.

Commercial vendors, schools, and universities have distributed 150,000 copies of the Anticorruption Program, a letter from the working group, and a questionnaire throughout the country. The mailing cost of returning questionnaires is covered by the project. The working group will then consider the responses later this year.

OSGF and OSI's Constitutional and Legal Policy Institute (COLPI) have contributed $18,000 to the project's $41,000 budget. The U.S. Department of Justice, USAID, and Transparency International–Georgia are covering the remaining costs.

OSGF is also planning follow-up meetings to its December NGO roundtable, which will focus on developing anticorruption projects for Georgian NGOs, and how the media and NGOs can assist and also monitor government anticorruption efforts.

Georgia is plagued by severe corruption, and many are skeptical about efforts to defeat it. However, it is crucial for Georgia to stamp out this disease and develop a transparent society—a prerequisite for democracy. Despite its weakness and instability, the government's avowed commitment to fighting corruption is a positive sign. Outreach efforts to include the public in this struggle will do much to increase optimism about limiting corruption and giving Georgia a secure future.

Zaza Namoradze is deputy director of the Constitutional and Legal Policy Institute (COLPI), Open Society Institute–Budapest; Goka Gabashvili is program coordinator at the Open Society Georgia Foundation; George Papuashvili is program director for Anticorruption and Law Programs at the Open Society Georgia Foundation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For information from the government, visit www.corruption.gov.ge. For information about Soros foundation involvement, visit www.osgf.ge. For one of Georgia's best anticorruption NGOs, visit www.crc.iberiapac.ge

Music Opens Passages between East and West

> "The Silk Road Project has helped me gain a new sense of belonging to a place—my place—at the same time that it carries my musical voice to distant cultures."
>
> —SANGIDORJ SANSARGERELTECH, MONGOLIAN COMPOSER

Yo-Yo Ma and Mongolian musician Buyanjargal Narangerel at Tanglewood.

There is a long but often underappreciated history of cultural exchange between Central Asia and the West. Ted Levin of the Silk Road Project describes how music is revitalizing this tradition and helping to break down barriers between people. ■

TED LEVIN

Cellist Edward Arron

At first glance, Yo-Yo Ma and Ganbaatar Khongorzul might seem unlikely collaborators. Ma is a renowned classical cellist who performs at venues such as Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. Khongorzul is a vocalist from Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, who takes huge breaths of air and produces loud melodic phrases in the *urtiin duu* or "long song" style of the Gobi Desert.

In fact, however, the two musicians have a harmonious partnership. On a recent six-city U.S. concert tour, Ma and Khongorzul performed Mongolian composer Byambasuren Sharav's "Legend of Herlen," an innovative composition fusing Western and Mongolian instruments and idioms.

Sharav's piece, scored for a "long song" vocalist like Khongorzul, as well as for percussion, piano, trombones, and a two-string Mongolian horsehead fiddle called *morin khuur* played by Ma, is one of sixteen new works by composers from Mongolia, China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and Iran. The music was commissioned by the Silk Road Project, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1998 by Ma, who also serves as artistic director.

After years of performing around the world, Ma became intrigued by the migration of music across boundaries of time and culture. Starting this year, Ma hopes to use the Silk Road Project to link composers and musicians from East and West through an ambitious program of festivals. A Silk Road ensemble will travel to Central Asia for a series of concerts in the fall of 2001. The following summer, the Silk Road will be the focus of the Smithsonian Institution's annual Folklife Festival, a celebration of art, dance, and music attended by more than one million people each year.

The historical Silk Road, a network of land and sea routes linking China to the Eastern Mediterranean, thrived from around 1000 BC to 1500 AD. Luxury items such as silk, as well as innovations like gunpowder and the magnetic compass gradually entered Europe from the East on the Silk Road. New varieties of instruments such as lutes and cymbals arrived as well, and this stream of technology and ideas had a profound influence on cultural development in the West.

By creating a network of arts festivals, the Silk Road Project, in cooperation with local organizers, aims to revitalize the transcultural links epitomized by the historical Silk Road. And as many governments in Central Eurasia adopt isolating, neo-nationalist cultural policies, the project can also demonstrate how performing arts exchanges can be a crucial vehicle for openness.

"I'd never thought about using Mongolian music as a resource for compositional innovation," said Sangidorj Sansargereltech, another Mongolian composer participating in the Silk Road Project. "I was educated at the Moscow Conservatory and then lived and worked in Madrid. The Silk Road Project has helped me gain a new sense of belonging to a place—my place —at the same time that it carries my musical voice to distant cultures."

Sharav and Sansargereltech are just two of the many musicians recommended by Open Society Institute (OSI) culture coordinators in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia to Silk Road Project organizers who visited the region in 1999. Silk Road Project concerts will also feature performers like Iranian composer Kayhan Kalhor who plays the *kemanche*, a spike fiddle held upright that is a distant cousin of the cello.

In summer 2000, OSI culture coordinators arranged for composers and performers from their respective countries to travel to the Tanglewood Music Center in Lenox, Massachusetts, where the Silk Road Project's newly commissioned pieces were performed for the first time in an intensive, week-long workshop.

Tanglewood often hosts talented musicians from distant lands, but the sheer diversity of sounds, instruments, and musicians at the Silk Road performance was stunning. Students were delighted and awed as Ma and Silk Road Ensemble musicians from Iran, China, Lebanon, and Azerbaijan improvised tradition-based Silk Road fusion music.

The Silk Road Project is also using new technology to present the music and culture of Central Asia to a wider audience. In January, Ma joined website teams from OSI and the Silk Road Project in New York to discuss links between OSI's Central Eurasia Project website, eurasianet.org, and silkroadproject.org, scheduled for launch this spring. Ma sees the ancient Silk Road as the "Internet of Antiquity" and considers the web as an integral tool of contemporary cultural exchange.

Three years after its creation, the Silk Road Project is clearly making progress towards its ambitious goal of using music to bring cultures and people together. "By listening to and learning from the voices of an authentic musical tradition, we become increasingly able to advocate for the worlds they represent," said Ma. "As we interact with unfamiliar musical traditions, we encounter voices that are not exclusive to one community. We discover voices that belong to one world."

Ted Levin is executive director of the Silk Road Project.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Silk Road Project has the following temporary site: press.silkroadproject.org

Helping Street Kids Cope with Drugs and AIDS

“Local UNAIDS workers told trainers who went to Tajikistan that the topic of sexual health might be off limits. Instead, the meeting was one of the most active workshops in the region.”

A child begging for food, a street musician, and a teenage street vendor in Kazakhstan.

Teenagers in Central Asia, particularly in states along major drug trafficking corridors like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, are increasingly susceptible to HIV/AIDS and drug abuse. Street Kids International (SKI), with funding from the Open Society Institute's International Harm Reduction Development (IHRD) program, is providing youth workers in the region with new materials and techniques to make young people aware of these issues. Program manager David James-Wilson reports about SKI's first year of activity in Central Asia. ■

DAVID JAMES-WILSON

At the airport in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe, dozens of children and teenagers swarm around new arrivals, selling newspapers, offering to carry bags, or begging for money. They are members of Central Asia's "transition generation," born in the last years of Soviet rule and coming of age in a time of economic and social upheaval. Every day they contend with the boredom and anger that comes with declining youth services, marginal employment opportunities, and collapsing public education systems. According to a recent UNICEF study, in 1989, 61 percent of Tajikistan's 15- to 18-year-olds were enrolled in school. By 1998, enrolment had dropped to 24 percent.

Building bridges to these increasingly alienated young people has not been an easy task for youth workers in Central Asia. Programs created to serve at-risk youth often fail because social workers lack the training to reach young people who mistrust the adults around them.

Yet never has the need to develop effective health promotion and harm reduction programs been more urgent.

Throughout Central Asia, drug use and HIV/AIDS infection––and the related issues of depression, suicide, violent juvenile crime, and homicide—are rising rapidly. The same UNICEF study showed that average mortality rates for 15- to 24-year-olds increased by almost 30 percent between 1989 and 1998. The region is in a position similar to that of countries such as Thailand, India, Zambia or South Africa ten years ago. Young people in those countries are now paying a deadly price because the early warning signs of increasing HIV/AIDS transmission and drug use were ignored.

In Central Asia, the Open Society Institute's International Harm Reduction Development (IHRD) program has been supporting efforts by Street Kids International (SKI) to bring at-risk youth and social workers together before the spread of HIV/AIDS and drug use gets out of control.

Funded by a $100,000 IHRD grant, Street Kids International, a Canadian-based NGO founded in 1989, has spent the last year planning and running workshops for youth workers in seven cities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

The workshops center around Russian language versions of Street Kids International's award-winning animated videos, *Karate Kids* (1990) and *Goldtooth* (1994), which SKI has used with local partners in Latin America, the Caribbean, North America, Africa, and South East Asia. *Karate Kids* deals with sexual health (including HIV/AIDS), and *Goldtooth* addresses substance abuse. The videos are supplemented by translated print materials, which facilitate interactive exchanges.

Youth workers are often surprised during the workshops when tough, reticent kids acknowledge for the first time how drugs help them cope.

"When you can't overcome your problems, you have nowhere to go," said a participant who grew up in an orphanage, "but drugs help you escape. Drug dealers applaud your problems and are just waiting to help you escape."

The videos and exchanges moved one group of kids at an Almaty youth center so much that they became peer educators and started leading discussions with other young people.

SKI has also helped local social workers tackle the question of HIV/AIDS issues in more conservative Muslim regions of Tajikistan and South Kyrgyzstan. Local UNAIDS workers told trainers who went to Dushanbe in November that the topic of sexual health might be off limits. Instead, the meeting was one of the most active workshops in the region as trainers and participants used a respectful participatory methodology to identify how parts of *Karate Kids* and *Goldtooth* might offend some young people and social workers as well as members of the larger community.

"We asked social workers what questions would kids ask about HIV/AIDS if they could," said Lena Vinogradova, a workshop trainer and community center coordinator from Almaty. "They didn't have to talk from their own point of view, but from the perspective of children."

Workshop participants then used this technique to select points in the video where indirect questions about the characters could allow young people to safely and inoffensively discuss their own experiences. This process let social workers respect the community's values but also address sensitive questions of child prostitution, police violence, teen pregnancy, domestic violence, and sexual abuse.

After one year, much work remains to be done. With continued help from IHRD and a growing network of other supporters, Street Kids International intends to continue the program and give local youth workers more opportunities to lead workshops and supplement SKI's materials with their own. Responses from youth workers after the first round of workshops indicate that they are eager to continue reaching out to the region's "transition generation."

"I was once a teenager at risk," wrote a volunteer youth worker from Bishkek. "I'm so glad I can work with teens and protect them from drugs. Everything I've learned here will help me do that better."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To read the UNICEF research results, visit www.unicef-icdc.it/new/. For information on street youth, visit www.scfuk.org.uk. For HIV/AIDS information: www.unaids.org. For Street Kids International: www.streetkids.org

Struggling for Human Rights

Advocates of human rights in Central Asia and the Caucasus are fighting an uphill battle to prevent the erosion of democratic principles by increasingly authoritarian governments. Justin Burke, editor of OSI's eurasianet.org website, reports on how activists in the region are trying to preserve human rights and political pluralism in the face of state repression. ■

JUSTIN BURKE

In an interview years ago that explored Uzbekistan's post-Soviet aspirations, then–Foreign Minister Ubaidullah Abdurazakov spoke with candor about the political elite's governing philosophy. From the start, President Islam Karimov's administration regarded pluralism with suspicion and intended to govern with a firm hand.

"If you are the head of family, and someone begins to act up, you must assert your authority to keep everyone in line," Abdurazakov told me during that 1992 interview. "We [Uzbekistan] have a population of 22 million people, and we cannot play with fire."

Little has changed over time to alter official thinking. In the decade since the Soviet collapse, Uzbek leaders—along with those in other states of Central Asia and the Caucasus—have acted with ruthless resolve to defend their authority and establish tight control over their respective societies. After a brief dalliance with democratic rhetoric in the immediate aftermath of communism's demise, many regional leaders have largely reverted to Soviet-style authoritarian methods of government. Political opposition in most Caucasus and Central Asian states has been effectively neutralized, compromised, or hounded into exile.

The situation is such that the near-term prospects for civil society development in the regions appear bleak. In Central Asia, for instance, the only significant challenge to incumbent authority today comes from armed militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

Government repression has thinned the ranks of those promoting political and social alternatives, based on the adherence to fundamental rights and the rule of law. Yet, despite the hardships and the ever-present danger of imprisonment, a determined few individuals remain committed to the advocacy cause. These activists are largely fighting a rear-guard action, aiming to prevent authorities from thoroughly crushing the ideas ssociated with individual liberty. Their hope is to keep public discussion of democratic values on the agenda until the existing governments give way to a new political generation, one that is perhaps more willing to embrace pluralistic principles.

Among the most prominent human rights advocates still active in Central Asia and the Caucasus are: Natalia Ablova, director of the Kyrgyzstan Human Rights and Rule of Law Bureau; Ramazan Dyryldaev, director of the Kyrgyz Committee for Human Rights (KCHR); Evgeny Zhovtis, director of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights; and Eldar Zeynalov of the Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan.

Their activities are a blend of traditional human rights advocacy and journalism. Indeed, as governments have moved vigorously in recent years to quash an independent press, these advocates have increasingly come to see their mission as not just identifying instances of government rights abuse, but also developing broader sources for information. Both Zeynalov and Dyryldaev operate extensive information services that utilize the Internet to disseminate human rights alerts as well as alternative views on developments in their respective countries.

"Human rights are not respected in the Kyrgyz Republic nor in the whole of Central Asia. There is no independent mass media and citizens cannot realize their political rights, even though such rights are provided for in the constitutions of these countries," Dyryldaev told *OSN* in an interview. A major part of KCHR's mission, Dyryldaev added, is to "provide real and continuous information about the situation in Kyrgyzstan."

There are indications that governments are growing increasingly concerned about the activities of these human rights advocates. For example, a suspicious fire gutted Zhovtis's offices in Almaty in November 1999, destroying the organization's archives. Zhovtis has said he believes the cause of the blaze was arson. Meanwhile, the Kyrgyz authorities during the summer of 2000 issued an arrest warrant for Dyryldaev, prompting him to flee the country. Dyryldaev eventually found asylum in Austria, and resumed operations by establishing electronic links with information sources still in Kyrgyzstan. His recent experiences have done nothing to dampen his optimism that democratic change will come to Central Asia.

"Conditions could be improved if the international community provided assistance not only to the Central Asian governments, but also directly to people who wish to try to fulfill democratic reforms," he said. "We at KCHR do not plan to rest on our laurels. We are going to work and work again for the welfare of society."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For Eldar Zeynalov's Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan, visit http://www.oneworld.org/euconflict/guides/orgs/eu_a-i/317.htm. Ramazan Dyryldaev can be contacted at the KCHR via email at: chrights@imfiko.bishkek.su. For general information on press freedom issues, visit http://www.cpj.org/

Left Behind in the Rush to Go Online

A complicated mix of factors is limiting people's access to the Internet in Central Asia. Eric Johnson, executive director of Internews International, describes the region's level of connectivity and why the Internet is spreading so slowly in Central Asia. ■

ERIC JOHNSON

In less than a decade, the Internet has transformed the acquisition and distribution of information and stoked economies in developed countries three to ten times faster than other historic, technological innovations. The technologically privileged in even the most undeveloped countries now regularly access more reliable and thorough information about local events than is often available through their own local media.

A majority of Central Asia's citizens, however, are still denied access to the Internet for a host of economic and political reasons. The region lacks many of the familiar prerequisites for bringing the Internet to the public: a quality telecom infrastructure, content providers, computers, knowledge of the Internet, and affordable Internet connections. E-commerce, one of the driving forces behind the rapid-fire spread of the Internet in the West, is inhibited by the lack of electronic payment mechanisms such as credit cards and an efficient parcel delivery system.

Internet exposure in Central Asia stands at about 0.2 percent of the population, ten times higher than in Nigeria, yet ten times lower than in Russia, and far from the close to 50 percent figure in many developed countries. Most Internet use is by the wealthy, those associated with international organizations, scientists connected to the NATO-supported science networks, and students who take advantage of NGO-sponsored access centers. These centers provide almost the only affordable Internet access in the region's cities—except in Turkmenistan, one of the least-connected nations in the world.

Reporters sans Frontiere's 2000 annual report on Internet enemies listed Central Asian countries as among the 20 least free in the world. Three out of five of the Central Asian countries require international Internet connections to be run through the government. While these restrictions have not been very effective in controlling content and traffic, they have been successful in limiting the spread of Internet service providers (ISPs). State-regulated ISPs generate short-term profits for the governments through high access fees. By restricting the growth of ISPs, however, governments are causing their countries to fall further behind other developing countries and stifling the long-term economic development that could come from greater public access to the Internet. Governments in the region have also been short-sighted by not allocating funds to wire schools, and they are quickly losing the opportunity to prepare the next generation for the Internet and the demands of a global, information-based economy.

In the early post-Soviet years, foreign aid tried to address these problems by providing computers, e-mail, and connectivity—OSI and the Eurasia Foundation supported and partly funded the creation of the first e-mail service in Tajikistan. IREX, with support from USIA, has created over 20 free access centers in cities around the region. More recently, OSI-Uzbekistan has supported efforts to provide computer and Internet training for teachers and scientists.

Many of these donors' aid projects during the 1990s have successfully enabled key sectors of the population to use the Internet for specific projects. NGOs supported by USAID are now able to share organizing techniques via e-mail. Private broadcasters in Kazakhstan this February used the Internet to coordinate a one-day blackout of the nation's TV screens in opposition to a repressive draft media law.

The Global Internet Policy Initiative, a new effort by Internews and the Center for Democracy and Technology initially supported by OSI, The Markle Foundation, and AOL, aims to help over a dozen governments, including Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, to find legislative and regulatory ways to encourage greater Internet adoption. The UNDP is also conducting parallel work quite aggressively, particularly in Kyrgyzstan.

The imminent introduction of small direct-to-satellite two-way Internet connectivity in the region is unlikely to increase individual access, since the costs, while not great, are more than one user can afford. However, such an opportunity promises to dramatically increase the likelihood that a small company can put its own networked computers on the Internet—provided, again, that government regulations are not too overwhelming.

For a small number of people with access, the Internet is clearly able to break down many barriers that prevent Central Asians from getting information from abroad. And continued targeted assistance can help bring the Internet to more people in the region. But until the governments of Central Asia make proactive efforts to spread Internet use, the portion of the population using online resources is likely to grow incrementally, while other people, states, and regions get online and pass them by.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.internews.org. For information on OSI's Internet Project, visit http://www.soros.org/internet/index.html

No Way Out for Battered Women

Over the last several years, governments in Central Asia, as well as Central and Eastern Europe, have made statements about defending women's rights and promised to abide by international conventions protecting women from discrimination and abuse. However, research in Uzbekistan reveals the opposite—government officials are pressuring women to remain in abusive relationships. ■

CASSANDRA CAVANAUGH
MARTINA VANDENBERG

Domestic violence is one of the most difficult and underacknowledged challenges facing the people of Uzbekistan. While few states have laws against domestic violence in their criminal codes, the Uzbek government's inaction toward violence against women is disturbing.

Interviews with survivors, judges, lawyers, police officers, and activists by Human Rights Watch (HRW) show the widespread failure of the Uzbek government to protect abused women and to prosecute those who abuse them.

> "It is a sad irony that, frequently, the sole legal measure taken by the government against domestic violence is the criminal prosecution of abusers for 'driving a person to suicide.'"

Human Rights Watch conducted a fact-finding mission in May and June 2000 to investigate how the state responded to violence against women. The mission's findings will be published shortly in a report to be distributed to donors, Uzbek government officials, international organizations, and UN monitoring bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

One interviewee, who asked to remain anonymous, said, "They asked me in court for witnesses to testify that he beat me. But my children were the only witnesses. They told me not to turn my children against their father. They told me that if the neighbor had seen it then they could do something."

Most accounts suggest that authorities do as little as possible to stop domestic violence. This official indifference to abuse and emphasis on the family is rooted in ideology and instability. The government and the media promote women's domesticity, docility, and subservience as the embodiment of Uzbek values. In a time of economic upheaval and social discontent, the family is seen as one of the few remaining symbols of stability. As one government official put it, "When the family is strong, society is strong."

In the name of strong families, regional authorities intimidate local community officials with threats of censure if they allow divorce rates to grow. Representatives of state women's committees pressure women to remain in abusive situations that endanger their lives and well-being. Police in urban areas often refuse to take women's statements about domestic violence. Village officials occasionally call in police to warn a batterer, but allegations of domestic violence almost never lead to criminal charges. At most, perpetrators of domestic violence face administrative fines for misdemeanor infractions—fines that harm the victims as well because they are paid out of the family budget.

Community and regional officials in rural and urban areas told HRW about the central government policy of "family reconciliation," which calls for the preservation of marriages at all costs, and under almost any circumstances. Officials approached by women with violent husbands usually attempt to mediate the conflict by convincing the woman to return to her husband. In nearly all cases investigated by HRW, authorities readily blamed the women for the abuse.

A collective farm official told a victim of domestic violence, who had come to him for assistance, that "women are guilty in eighty percent of these cases."

Another interviewee was threatened and stalked by her husband after she and their children left him. Her frequent appeals for assistance to local government authorities went unheeded because her husband, according to the authorities, had not committed a crime.

In fact, the sad irony is that, frequently, the sole legal measure taken by the government against domestic violence is the criminal prosecution of abusers for "driving a person to suicide" (article 103 of the criminal code). Uzbekistan's recent report to CEDAW shows that 1,560 women committed suicide in 1998, but fails to acknowledge the role that domestic violence may play in these tragic instances.

The state's policy of artificially depressing the divorce rate further compounds the problems women face in obtaining relief from, and redress for, violence in the family.

The government declared 1998 the "Year of the Family," which in practice meant that courts and civil registry offices did everything possible to prevent divorce, even in cases of physical abuse. The family code gives judges the discretion to establish a six-month waiting period before granting a divorce. However, courts routinely interpret this waiting period as mandatory, even in cases of persistent family violence.

The research also showed that local officials often obstruct women's access to court in divorce cases by refusing to provide documents, such as birth certificates, necessary for filing a court case.

The failure of the Uzbek government to come to the aid of women is a cause for much concern among the international NGO community and women's advocates in the region. Although HRW is finalizing its results, a number of preliminary recommendations can be made. The Uzbek government needs to begin compiling domestic violence statistics to acknowledge how often the problem occurs. Authorities must also enforce existing laws and begin drafting specific ones that make domestic violence a criminal offense. Finally, the government should offer training sessions that teach relevant officials how to respond compassionately and effectively to reports of domestic violence.

Cassandra Cavanaugh is a senior researcher for Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia Division. Martina Vandenberg is a researcher at Human Rights Watch's Women's Rights Division.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For domestic violence in Uzbekistan, visit www.mnadvocates.org. For women's human rights issues, visit www.hrw.org. For more on Uzbekistan, visit http://www.undp.uz/ and www.neww.org/countries/Uzbekistan/Uzbekistan.htm

> "If desire for access to energy, hostility to Russia, fear of Islamic radicalism, or a combination of all three lead to increased U.S. interest in the region, then commitments to regional regimes may be made with no reference whatsoever to these regimes' behavior."

Army officer and soldiers, Kazakhstan

Western Policy in Central Asia: Values or Geopolitics?

The change from Soviet rule to independence has not resulted in a flourishing of democracy for the states of the Caucasus and Central Asia. In the following commentary, Anatol Lieven of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, argues that U.S. policymakers may have to choose between pursuing perceived strategic interests or patiently fostering long-term improvements while losing geopolitical influence over the region's current regimes. ■

ANATOL LIEVEN

Throughout the 1990s, the rhetoric of U.S. policy toward the Caucasus and Central Asia was based on the promotion of "independence and democracy," and the assumption that these two things were in some way one and the same. This assumption has proved an ideological construct with no necessary connection to reality.

Many of the dissidents who protested against Soviet rule—especially in the Caucasus—revealed themselves early on as national chauvinists, putting an extreme version of their nation's perceived interests far ahead of democracy and human rights, let alone minority rights. Following the failure of these 'national democrats' in Georgia and Azerbaijan in 1991-93, power returned to the hands of old communist elites in these countries. In Central Asia, power never left their hands. Today, the ruling systems in the region range from a deeply corrupt semi-authoritarianism, as

Militiaman, Tajikistan

in Georgia, to ruthless dictatorship, as in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

In some of these states, the human rights situation under independence is considerably worse than it was under Soviet rule. To judge by figures kept over the years by Human Rights Watch, Uzbekistan today may have four times as many political prisoners as the whole of the former Soviet Union in the early 1980s. In these circumstances, the language of U.S. representatives about these countries being "on the path to democracy and the free market" rings increasingly hollow, at least as far as the short- to medium-term is concerned—and beyond that, who can say?

As a result, U.S. policymakers in the region are faced with a growing dilemma. If they put support for democracy and human rights first, they risk undermining ostensibly "pro-Western" regimes and driving them into the arms of Moscow. If they decide to play by the same rules as Moscow, and support regimes in the region with no reference to their record on human rights, they risk the same dangers that in the past have cursed similar U.S. policies elsewhere in the world. The United States could be implicated in major crimes, and, should the regimes crumble, the hostility of the local populations would be directed against the USA as well. As several regimes move in the direction of what could be very messy succession disputes, this issue could rapidly become a very real one.

So far, this has not become nearly as acute a U.S. dilemma as in Central America or the Middle East, for the simple reason that the U.S. presence and U.S. interests in the region are much smaller. Nonetheless, U.S. officials have already felt constrained to be much less forthright in their descriptions of the Georgian and Azeri election processes than the facts would require. In Uzbekistan, U.S. criticism of human rights abuses has fallen far short of U.S. rhetoric over considerably lesser abuses elsewhere.

What effect the new U.S. administration will have on U.S. policy toward these issues is not yet clear. If U.S. interest in the region greatly diminishes, then Washington will presumably feel less constrained to support existing regimes or to deceive itself into thinking that these somehow represent long-term democratic progress. On the other hand, the new administration is clearly far less committed to the promotion of democracy and human rights than its predecessor. If desire for access to energy, hostility to Russia, fear of Islamic radicalism, or a combination of all three lead to increased U.S. interest in the region, then commitments to regional regimes may be made with no reference whatsoever to these regimes' behavior.

Certain voices for example have advocated making Uzbekistan in effect America's "regional policeman" for the area—exactly the role supposedly played by the Shah in the Persian Gulf. Tendencies in this direction could perhaps be increased by the new balance of both power and ideology between the State Department and the Pentagon. Under General Colin Powell, the State Department is unlikely to be seeking new areas of U.S. involvement, and, in the case of Russia's bloody war in Chechnya, it has already demonstrated a willingness to speak out over human rights.

The new Pentagon, however, may be a good deal more ambitious in its policies or at least its rhetoric. A leading role for the Department of Defense would also be encouraged by the fact that it has so much more money than the State Department, something already apparent in the way that Partnership for Peace and other military programs have gained precedence over civilian ones in Central Eurasia. The increasing way in which senior U.S. military figures are intervening in areas traditionally reserved for diplomats has already been demonstrated in differences over policy toward Indonesia—as has the fact that the military often have a very different set of attitudes when it comes to human rights.

A "securitization" of U.S. policy in this way, which would only be justified if truly vital U.S. interests were threatened in the region, would bring with it serious risks. Up to the present, most ordinary people in this region have had little reason to be grateful either to their own elites or to the West, and good reasons to remember the Soviet Union with nostalgia. Not only have living standards, health, employment, and personal security all plummeted, but in many places people are even less free than they used to be.

But while the West may be seen to have failed in its goals, these goals are still generally seen as noble ones. The West is not at present seen by most people (with the exception of Islamic radicals) as deliberately malignant—and that could change if the West ends up openly supporting repression. Finally, to play by Moscow's rules on Moscow's former turf seems inherently unwise. Moscow's capacity both for effective manipulation and for consistent cynicism and ruthlessness in this region greatly exceeds the West's, both because of greater experience and because in the end the region matters a great deal more to Moscow than it does to the West.

Even geopolitically speaking, Western values in this region should be seen as an asset, not a weakness. Over time, the success of the Western political and social model will go on exerting an influence for good, but the West should no longer have any illusions that these values can be quickly and widely implemented as far as the states and societies of the region are concerned.

Western NGOs have always known what Western diplomats in the 1990s tended to forget: that helping in the transformation of deep-rooted political, social, and cultural behavior patterns is usually an agonizingly slow process with many reversals. It is well worth doing; but it operates according to a time frame completely different from that which governs the search for short-term geopolitical advantage.

Anatol Lieven is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C.

Children play on an abandoned amusement park swing at the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan.

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