

The 'Coloured' Revolutions

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**'Coloured Revolutions': Democratization? State-Building?
Permanent Revolution ?**

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Note to readers: This is a very draft version of my paper. Please do not quote or distribute. I would appreciate any remarks or comments. Thank you.

The wave of Colour Revolutions succeeded in achieving a revolution at least in one sense, by rotating the transition paradigm upside down. For a decade exit from really existing socialism was seen through elite based reforms primarily in the field of economics. The notion of transition was inscribed in bringing first the capitalist market which was supposed to create the social basis for a democratic regime. The declared aim of the systemic transition was to bring about “market economy and democracy”. This was not simply the result of the imagination of some scholars, but dictated by the nature of the crisis of the Soviet system itself, which were both an economic crisis and a political one. Therefore, while talking about “transition” one was talking about two subjects, reforms and change in two distinct fields, with well defined differences.¹ In the post-Soviet space, there was even an evident tension between the two elements of the transition: how to give free political will to the masses that were going to lose their jobs, salaries, social benefits, and status? How to bring out simultaneously change in ownership structure in what the masses eventually would consider unfair, while, at the same time give power of political choice to elect their political leadership and therefore the programme of action, to the masses? Whenever there was clear contradiction between the politics and the economics of transition – as it was the case during October 1993 when Russian president Boris Yeltsin confronted his parliament – the choice was clear for the majority of the Western observers: democracy had to wait first for economy to bring about the privatization of the state property, which was the logic behind supporting Yeltsin rather than the Russian parliament. Therefore, transition was essentially about economics, about turning the Soviet planned economy to a capitalist market through “shock-therapy”, that is privatization, liberalization of the economy, and monetary stabilization, and only later about political reforms. This was a reaction to Gorbachev’s failure, which had started with the need of economic modernization for which he thought necessary to initiate political reforms, yet he drastically failed to achieve his economic goals and led to political upheavals instead. Little thought was done on whether mass privatization and monetary reforms were the necessary solutions for the economic ills of Russia, or other post-Soviet states.² Only a new, competitive economic system was thought to be able to create the necessary conditions of democracy.

Second, transition was also about downsizing the state. The problem of the Soviet model was the domination of the state, its monopoly over the political and the economics. Therefore, to exit from this model it was important to withdraw the state from its monopolistic role in the economic field and permit the emergence of a market, based on newly privatized former state property. In politics, there too democracy could emerge only by limiting the interference of the state – dominated by the ruling party – in politics. There too competition was necessary. Competitive elections, multi-party representation, a vibrant civil-society which could inspire Western values, privately owned media financed by the market through advertisements to make sure of its independence from the state, all this was seen as all thought to be necessary elements of the goal of the transition. Competition in the political field would reflect the competitive economic interests, as privatization was considered to create differentiated social interests and the emergence of a middle class, which in its turn

¹ In fact, transition in post-Soviet countries was a triple metamorphosis if one adds state-and-nation building on the to-do list.

² Peter Rutland, “Mission Impossible? The IMF and the failure of the market transition in Russia”, *Review of International Studies*, (1999): Vol. 25, pp 183-200.

would stimulate the development of a civil society.³ Therefore, the state had to shrink, become smaller, even weaker⁴. Democracy was to be first of all found outside the state, through the emergence of competitive sources of power in opposition parties, non governmental organizations (NGOs), private media, etc, while there was little consideration that as the monopoly of the party-state over politics had ended, the nature of the state itself was in rapid mutation. In other words, the monolithic totalitarian state was rapidly substituted by a fragile weak state, without even being noticed.

The third idea on which transition was based was that it had to happen fast. Transition was believed to be a matter of a few short years. It was believed at the beginning of the adventure of transition that it was enough to peel away the dominant role of the ruling party and its hegemony over the state apparatus to permit the emergence of a western type market-based democracy. It was also believed that the hardship caused by mass privatization, the unpleasant phase of transition, would follow by an economic boom that would bring popular changes to the reforms. The unpopular reforms could not have dragged over years, and even less for the whole decade without causing a massive backlash. That is one of the reasons why the reformers were in haste, knew that their window of opportunity was a narrow one, and massive reforms had to be imposed at once.

Transition, while had many things in common with revolutions such as relatively rapid change of the political and social system of a given country, it was not supposed to be one. There were many reasons for this and the first one was cultural: the general mood in the East European and Soviet societies was to mark their differences with those regimes they wanted to replace, which drew their legitimacy from the October Revolution. They saw in their project a return to “normality” that the Bolshevik Revolution had hindered, and corrupted their societies by putting a certain ideology as the central legitimating component of the state and its policies. Transition was also heavily relying on elite inspired social engineering, rather than change coming as a result of mass mobilization as it is the case with revolutions. Moreover, transitions followed “velvet” that is non-violent revolutions, and therefore transitions were supposed to take place in a non-violent manner, although the human suffering that was resulted from the transitions – let alone the ethno-territorial wars to readjust territory to fit the new states into it – is as important as in the cases of major revolutions. Lastly, there was no need for revolutions to open the way for systemic change. By 1991 the Soviet model crushed as Gorbachev desperate efforts to reform the monolith led to its destabilization and disintegration, and the resulting struggle between hardliners and reformers led to Gorbachev’s defeat and led to Boris Yeltsin taking power. The system was destroyed by its own elite, and therefore the gates were open for a peaceful systemic metamorphosis.

The concept of democracy increasingly took a narrow meaning. Initially, the 1989 revolutions were seen as spontaneous, self-organized civil-society against the state, with references to libertarian currents that were marginalized as a result of the rise of Marxism among European left. “Civil society was perceived here [in the context of 1989] as the ideal of

³ Steven Fish, “Rethinking Civil Society, Russia’s Fourth Transition”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 3, July 1994, pp. 31-42.

⁴ The “shrinking” of the state was not limited to Soviet-style states, but was a global phenomenon starting with the US and the UK under the neo-liberal regimes of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher starting in the early 1980’s, and later in most European countries a decade later.

a voluntary community opposing the coercion of the state, as the arena of the democratic formation of collective will, and as a space for freedom, dialogue, and communication.”⁵

that went hand in hand with the rapidly progressing social stratification. Democracy was increasingly seen as a political system where the key ruling positions altered as a result of competitive, and regularly organized elections, or “procedural definition” in the words of Huntington.⁶ Other auxiliary characteristics necessary for fair competitive elections, such as political freedoms, independent media, etc, were equally perceived as necessary and their functioning monitored by a number of international organizations. The term has been emptied from any meaning of equality between citizens, social justice, or participation in decision-making in major issues. More than in any other context, the critique formulated elsewhere by John Dunn is pertinent for countries in post-socialist transformation: “Is modern capitalist democracy simply a system of political authorization, or does it offer, as it certainly purports to, a definite and prospectively coherent approach to formatting political deliberation on all major issues of public choice?”⁷

The transition theories of the early 1990’s were too good to be true: mass privatization led to crony capitalism, since neither a legal system could have been applied nor market logic used to privatize on such a massive scale: the market value of the entire Russian industry in the time of voucher privatization was a mere 12 billion dollars, or the market value of the ZIL automaking industry that employed over 100’000 workers was a mere 16 million dollars⁸. The original sin of post-Soviet transition was the manner property was privatized whereby only nomenklatura insiders could profit from the common good of the Soviet heritage, while the majority of the people suffer unemployment, devalorization of their savings, and even hunger on a scale unseen since World War II. This mass privatization happened in relative calm way in systems where elite coherence was high, and in very brutal ways in cases of elite competition. In Russia, property related conflicts led to mafia wars in the streets of Moscow, Petersburg, Tolyatti, and Volgograd leading to thousands of dead and taking proportions of a civil war. The result of a decade of cataclysms led to degradation of living conditions with catastrophic impact on public health and birth rates. In Russia only the population shrunk by over five million over a decade.⁹

More than a decade after the fall of the Berlin wall and the Soviet regime, two state models have emerged: states where the double transition of capitalist economy and democratic representation did take place. In our Western perspectives we come to consider the countries that “succeeded” in transiting are exactly the same countries that were admitted into Western alliances such as NATO or the EU.¹⁰ “Transition represents a unique historical opportunity for several nations to put down an anchor in western Europe or even to join the European Union. In addition, the prospect of this connection to central and eastern Europe focuses expectations and gives credibility to the political and economic process of transition. Entry to the European Union implies adopting the political and economic system of the

⁵ Alexander Smolar, “History and Memory: the revolutions of 1989-1991”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 12, No. 3, July 2001, page 9.

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave, Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oklahoma University Press, Norman, 1993, page 6.

⁷ John Dunn, “Capitalist democracy: elective affinity or beguiling illusion?” *Dædalus*, (Summer 2007), page 10.

⁸ Maxim Boycko, Andrei Shleifer, Robert Vishny, *Privatizing Russia*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1996, pages 119-120

⁹ From 1992 to 2002 Russia’s population fell from 148.7 million to 143.6 million. See David E. Powell, “Death as a Way of Life: Russia’s Demographic Decline”, *Current History*, October 2002, page 344.

¹⁰ Michael McFaul, “Transitions from Postcommunism”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, No. 3, July 2005, page 5.

west.”¹¹ Outside that zone regimes which pretended to preserve social welfare and pretended to organize free elections, while failing to deliver in both.¹² Even with the minimalist definition of democracy – that of procedural democracy – the masses have voted only once for neo-liberal shock-therapists, after which they either voted to former Communists turned into social democrats, or the ruling elites could not afford to trust their citizens. In a number of countries the elite monopolized power to bring about socio-economic change. Yet, as Michael McFaul has argued “[i]mposed transitions – transitions in which one side dictates the rules of the game – are more likely to produce illiberal democracies or even pseudodemocracies.”¹³

For those unlucky states outside the geopolitical interests of leading European countries, which were left lingering out in the cold without the spectre of a new “socialism” that is the promises of an eventual EU membership, the existing motivations for a semblance of political reforms, and material means to stabilize elite domination – were few. A decade of economic transformation had led to social polarization between handfuls that had accumulated vast richness, and masses of people who had lost as a result, and were highly bitter. The new elite was simultaneously arrogant – ‘we are rich because we are the best’ mentality is omnipresent – while at the same time highly insecure. They fear a possible backlash that would put an end to their fairy tale, one of the major reasons for the massive capital transfers to offshore zones. Even worse for elite stability is that social dislocation did not permit for the emerging political opposition or for the civil society to have social basis for support, and therefore permit for institutional development. Most post-Soviet states reproduced the former political mechanisms whereby a politburo of a few people took the real decisions important for the republic while the cabinet of ministers was little more than administrative structures with no power. Economic advantages came as a result of political monopoly of power. Once outside the pyramid of power there was no institutional refuge for continuation of political activities: parliament did not function as a counter-weight to the politburo-executive; business interests did not support an opposition grouping who had no hope to return to power for the lack of free competition over power through elections; the mass media did not broadcast information about dissidents since most advertisement was paid by companies owned or aligned with the power pyramid.

Only few post-Soviet states chose an authoritarian model of governance, and these few did not go through shock-therapy. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and, after 1994 with the arrival to power of Lukaschenko Belarus as well, chose to preserve the Soviet system in their republics – very much like Stalin tried to build socialism “in one country”. Their authoritarian model was the continuation of what was there before, and a rejection of rapid change: the state monopolized politics and in return promised economic stability. In Uzbekistan, for example, after an initial drive to privatization of small enterprises, further privatization stagnated after the mid-1990’s creating a “semi-centralized” economic system.¹⁴ By then, as rapid privatization caused havoc in most post-Soviet countries. In contrast, this authoritarian model had its charm: it was better to receive a salary even a small one and have free

¹¹ Gérard Roland, “The Political Economy of Transition”, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 16, No. 1. (Winter, 2002), page 40.

¹² For a paper arguing for the possibility of simultaneous economic and political reforms, see V. Bunce, “Democratization and Economic Reform”, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2001, Vol. 4, pp. 43-65.

¹³ Michael McFaul, *Russia’s Unfinished Revolution, Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2001, pages 19-20.

¹⁴ Ruziev, Kobil, Ghosh, Dipak and Dow, Sheila C. (2007) “The Uzbek puzzle revisited: an analysis of economic performance in Uzbekistan since 1991”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pages 8 and 25-26.

communal services as well as empty shelves, rather than variety of imported consumer goods which was off budget for the majority. As the economic situation continues to decline as a result of inefficiency of the economic methods plus high level of corruption, the model seems to lose its former shine.

In the rest of the Soviet space, from Russia to Kyrgyzstan, the transition experimentation led to a stalemate of a new sort. After a decade of “successful” privatization and eventual economic stabilization (especially after the 1998 Russian financial crisis), it was evident that the success of economic reforms in the sense that it brought about systemic change, was not in itself enough to bring about the anticipated political reforms. The mass privatization of the economy did not lead to a Western style liberal society. It created a number of new problems unknown in the Soviet times, such as criminality, xenophobia, corruption of an entirely new scale. Liberal ideology, considered as the only possible alternative to the socialist stem in the early 1990’s, was associated with the problems that mass privatization created. With the failure of the first wave of reforms in Russia, and starting from 1993 the public opinion and that of the elite rapidly moved towards nationalist and Statist positions. With Putin coming to power, we have a new boost to Statist positions in Eurasia. While the fundamental principles of the transition theories (the deal of reaching a law based market and democratic society) are not entirely rejected, the placement of the accent has changed. Putin’s “managed democracy” still pretends to be a democracy, while Chubais for a time talked about Russia as a new “liberal empire”. Economic modernization, while still an important instrument, was no more intended to lead to democracy, but instead to a strong state. The new regimes while expressing some features of democratic polity were clearly non-democratic. Elections were organized but were not free competitions, and the people in command used “state resources” to keep their monopoly of power; pluralism existed but parties in opposition could not come to power through elections which made them uninteresting for the general public; independent media existed but only marginally was constantly under pressure by the state¹⁵. The result was in spite of mass privatization the economy did not function in a “rational” manner, meritocracy did not exist, and resources were not used rationally. The result of privatization was flight of capitals, the state was corrupt, the economy in decline, and mass poverty continued to grow. Some even used the term “de-industrialization” instead of “privatization” or “transition”. In fact, the way this mass privatization was done – thousands of state companies put on the market in societies lacking private capital – could have led only to chaos, to undermining legality, and corruption of the political institutions.¹⁶ Transition, like revolutions, was not possible to keep within a legal framework, because both aimed at changing the system and not perpetuating it.

A decade later it was time to announce that the transition paradigm needed revision, Thomas Carothers argued that many countries who are supposed to be in a transition mode were not moving towards democracy, but were rather “have entered a political gray zone”.¹⁷ According to Carothers, a large number of countries considered to be in transition were in fact stagnating by combining some features of democratic regimes, such as political opposition, civil society, and holding regular elections, yet these institutions failed to represent citizens as

¹⁵ Only print media with limited circulation was tolerated to be outside the control of the central government, while electronic media with capacity of national broadcasting was brought under state control.

¹⁶ I had made this argument in the context of Russian reforms in “Réformes et modernisation laissent la Russie exsangue”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, July 1998:

<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1998/07/CHETERIAN/10660.html>

¹⁷ Thomas Carothers, “The End of Transition Paradigm”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2002, page 9. See also “Illusions of Transition: which perspective for Central Asia and the Caucasus?” Conference Proceedings, *CIMERA/Graduate Institute of International Studies*, Geneva, 2004.

they were perceived as corrupt and colluding with the elites in power. The article also identified state weakness and the challenge of “state-building” as central for further reform, and under estimated by transition theories.¹⁸

By the end of 1990’s there was a need to change, since the rapid, elite inspired top-down reforms failed to deliver. It did privatize former state property but in many post-Soviet republics failed to guarantee property rights; market mechanism replaced planned economy yet it was corrupt by crony capitalism and favouritism. The elites in power were seen by many as having failed to deliver the necessary reforms and failed, their former popular support had waned, and corrupt manners prevented the larger sectors of the population to profit from the economic upturn after a decade of hardship. Yet, and in spite of all, there was no way to change the ruling circle simply because elections were not transparent, honest and fair. There was a growing social demand for political change, yet the ruling elites used a large variety of dirty tricks to block any institutional and legal means for power transfer. This change forbidden to take place in the halls of the parliament had to come from the street. Here enters the Colour Revolutions.

The Making of Colour Revolutions

The wave of Colour Revolutions that started with Serbia in the year 2000 and soon spread to post-Soviet republics of Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) were a declaration of the bankruptcy of the transition model. The Colour Revolution did not have a socio-economic programme or political objectives different than the one declared by the old regimes from Serbia to Kyrgyzstan. Both the old autocrats and the young revolutionaries aimed in joining the civilized world of Western nations, and therefore achieve market based economy and a democratic political system. What the young revolutionaries revolted against was the unwillingness, or incapacity of their rulers such as Milosevic, Shevardnadze, Kuchma-Yanukovich or Akaiev to deliver on their promises. The revolt was against the failure of a first generation of reformers, often with political roots going back to the old regimes,¹⁹ in bringing transition to its conclusion, against a decade of disillusionment and failures, and carrying in their action the hope of a new possibility of success.

Very much like the revolutions of the 1989-1991 in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the wave of the Colour Revolutions did not bring any ideological renovation. They did not revolt against the existing order to create a new one, but to become “ordinary” like the

¹⁸ Carothers, *op. cit.*, page 16.

¹⁹ Slobodan Milosevic was a former Yugoslav Communist Party cadre and head of the Belgrade city party committee in 1984 and became head of Serbia branch of the party in 1986; Eduard Shevardnadze was the minister of interior of Soviet Georgia, and later the first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party from 1972 to 1985 when he was called to Moscow as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, before becoming the second president of independent Georgia in 1992; Leonid Kuchma was a manager at Yuzmash factory in Dnepropetrovsk in Eastern Ukraine, before becoming a member of the parliament from 1990 to 1992, and nominated Prime Minister from 1992 to 1993 ; lastly Askar Akaev was an academician trained as physicist in Leningrad and Moscow, and became a senior professor at Polytechnic Institute at Frunze (now Bishkek) in 1977, and head of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences in 1989 and on the same year he was elected a deputy of the Supreme Soviet.

peoples of Western Europe. It was a revolution against the revolution: a revolt against the original utopian revolution of the Bolsheviks which tried to build a new society and finally failed.

Also very much like transition theories, Colour Revolutions were very much elite led - although depend on popular mobilization to bring the necessary regime change. With the exception of Serbia, where the October revolution was led by long-time opposition to the Milosevic regime, in the three other cases mentioned above the revolutions were led by people who served high posts in the old regime. In Georgia the revolution was led by the triumvirate Zurab Zhvania, who was the head of Civic Union of Georgia which was the ruling party from a year after its foundation in 1993 until late 2001 and speaker of the Georgian parliament from November 1995 to November 2001, Nino Burjanadze, who succeeded Zhvania as the speaker of the Georgian parliament from November 2001 to the Rose Revolution, and Mikheil Saakashvili, who was the minister of justice under Shevardnadze from October 2000 until his resignation on September 2001. In Ukraine, the Orange Revolution was very much led by a fraction of the ruling elite as well: Viktor Yushchenko was the head of the Ukrainian National Bank before becoming Prime Minister (December 1999 to May 2001), and his Madeline Yulia Tymoshenko was an oligarch herself from Dnipropetrovs'k who headed the United Energy Systems of Ukraine and close to notorious Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko, another politician from Dnipropetrovs'k. Later, Tymoshenko became deputy prime minister under Yushchenko. The Orange Revolution was generously funded by a number of Ukrainian oligarchs, such as Petro Poroshenko (the "chocolate king") and Davyd Zhvaniia, among others.²⁰ Lastly, the Kyrgyz revolution follows the same pattern where we have a former prime minister B as well as Rose Otunbayeva and Felix Kulov, leading the revolution.

Colour Revolutions is possible only in semi-authoritarian but weak or failing states. Those states were simultaneously dominated by authoritarian leadership which did not have complete control over the political scene, thus allowing certain pluralism in the form of opposition parties, mass media outside its control, and a NGO sector. As a result of this pluralism, the ruling authorities faced a dilemma: how to keep their political hegemony over the state yet organize elections in order to renew their political legitimacy? This was the Achilles heel of the regimes, which opposition forces used ingeniously: knowing that the elections are not run in free and fair manner, the opportunity of the elections were instrumentalized to bring about political change through mass mobilization and peaceful revolution. In all of Serbia under Milosevic, Georgia under Shevardnadze, Ukraine under Kuchma and Kyrgyzstan under Akaiev, an authoritarian rule did not take shape either because the four rulers failed to achieve one or did not want to construct one. In the four counties opposition parties did exist, whether representing former members of the ruling elite, or more radical opposition, there was relative freedom for formation and operation of civil society organizations or at least foreign funded "Non Governmental Organizations", where opposition elements had some access to mass media, albeit a restricted one. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine Colour Revolutions in consolidated authoritarian regimes.

Another feature in common of the four cases and a sign of state weakness was its corruption. According to Transparency International "Corruption Perception Index" of 2003, out of 133 countries surveyed Ukraine occupied 106th position, Kyrgyzstan 118th position, and

²⁰ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*, Yale University Press, 2005, pages 62-63.

Georgia the 124th one, all three considered as the most corrupt nations.²¹ The perception of corruption reveals several symptoms, the first among them is that the state as such is failing to fulfil its function, giving way for its “privatization” for various private purposes and interests. Second, that on the eve of the revolutions the public opinion in these countries considered their own administrations both inefficient but also illegitimate.

Electoral Revolutions

The most exposed moment of those weak states is the moment of elections. And even more so when the constitutional term of the president in office has to leave office and try to find an adequate successor to ensure the stability of the regime. At such electoral moments the ruling elite is extremely exposed as it needs the support of a number of regional and **sectoral** interest groups and leaders who, during the day of the election, would mobilize their **clientel** and bring the necessary number of votes either through distribution of money and/or services, or through coercion. The change of the person of the president creates competition and divisions within the coalition in power over the person who should succeed in the highest post, and further weaken the ruling elite. For example in Ukraine, the acting president Leonid Kuchma had to leave office and assigned his Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich as his heir. Yet the two personalities represented different currents within the ruling elite, Kuchma being from Dnepropetrovsk while Yanukovich representing the Donetsk oligarchy and its coal and steel industry interests. Therefore, many elements within the ruling elite were not very fond of seeing power come to the hands of the Donetsk elite. Similarly, in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, the revolutions happened in a time when the president in office Shevardnadze and Akaiev had their constitutional terms at their end. Although the two leaders did not clearly signal that they were leaving office nor that they will keep the leadership firm in their hands, many of their supporters started hesitating to continue their support to a regime which was at its expiration date and shifted support.

The peaceful revolutions from Serbia to Kyrgyzstan increased interest in elections as moments of transition to democracy, opening the way for a “second” wave of post-Soviet democratization. “Electoral revolutions” were seen by some as a second wave of democratization: “The second round of democratization began in Bulgaria and Romania and then moved on to Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia-Montenegro, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. In each of these cases, the political turning point was an election that led to the defeat of illiberal political forces and a victory for the liberal opposition” and “the goal has been the same: to transform rigged electoral rituals into fair elections, thereby facilitating a transition from an illiberal to a more liberal government.”²²

The last example is from Armenia, where in the February 2008 elections the opposition led by former president Levon Ter-Petrossian challenged the official results and organized mass demonstrations. Here too we have both the elections as “focal point” and the change of the person on the head of the state – from Robert Kocharyan to Serge Sargsyan,

²¹ See, “Corruption Perception Index 2003”, Transparency International, available online: http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2003

²² Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, “Favorable Conditions and Electoral Revolutions”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 4, October 2006, pages 5 and 6.

often with hidden competition between the two personalities that are supposed to guarantee the stability of the regime. Yet in the case of Armenia it did not lead to a peaceful revolution but a bloody repression leading to eight killed and dozens of wounded as a result of a night-long clashes between the opposition and police forces.

Elections are also moments of mass mobilization for the public opinion which strengthens the chances of opposition groups otherwise lacking means and instruments to influence politics and regime change. In the words of one analyst electoral fraud represents “focal point for solving collective action problems” and organizing mass demonstrations.²³ Yet, it is not so much the fact of the electoral fraud that is important here, but the claim of the opposition that electoral fraud did take place to mobilize the masses against the regime. Increasingly in post-Soviet space, elections are failing to bring rotation of ruling groups and providing legitimacy to the rulers, while for the opposition what counts is not the fact of fraud itself but to field an alternative candidate who could gain his (rarely her) legitimacy for the opposition voices (not the majority of the voices) to declare himself the winner and call for mass demonstrations and activate the mechanisms of a colour revolution.

In a number of cases of Colour Revolutions claims to fraud in parliamentary elections were used to bring change on the top of the state. This was the case during Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, where claims of fraud in the parliamentary elections were instrumentalized to bring down the President of the country Eduard Shevardnadze, who had a mandate up to the presidential elections on March 2005. We have the same case in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005, where after claims to fraud in parliamentary elections it was the regime of Askar Akaiev that fell and was replaced by a new head of state. In the failed Colour Revolution in Armenia in February 2008 presidential elections we have a similar mechanism, where the opposition candidate and former president Levon Ter-Petrosian claimed he had won the elections before the elections took place, and after the elections he opposed the official results that gave him 21% of the votes claiming that he received 65% of the votes. Opposition leaders who aim to prepare the ground for a Colour Revolution type of change often prepare the ground during the pre-election period by launching a negative campaign whereby they focus on the failure of the incumbent and promise regime change rather than competing on a concrete electoral programme.

“Non Violent Revolutions”

For the participants in the Colour Revolutions, and most especially for the founders and the members of the youth organizations such as Otpor, Kmara or Pora, the fact of the non-violence of their movement is strongly underlined.²⁴ This is an ideological reference in harmony with the non-violence of the 1989 velvet revolutions in Eastern Europe. While this could be more than simple tactical element to recruit members and appeal to the sympathy of the West, the Colour Revolutions risked becoming violent. The opposition formations that led these revolutions were ready for such an eventuality. For example in Serbia the opposition had distributed arms on its members to be used in case Milosevic would call special units to

²³ Joshua A. Tucker, “Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions”, *Perspectives on Politics*, September 2007, Vol. 5, No. 3, page 536.

²⁴ Author interview with XXX

repress the mass demonstrations. Pro-opposition mayors of major cities, such as Milan Protic, the mayor of Belgrade, or Velimir Ilic mayor of Cacak, had police forces loyal to them who were armed and ready for action in case loyalist police would have tried to suppress the mass demonstration²⁵. In most cases, as in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine, the leaders of the Colour Revolutions negotiated with the heads of armed forces of police and special army units not to intervene in the political crisis. The possibility of non-violent revolutions says a lot about the nature of post-Soviet states, their fragility and their lack of social depth. Only few thousands of people are enough to bring down the head of the state. This was the most extraordinary in Kyrgyzstan, where the regime of Askar Akaiev fell and the head of the state fled the country only after a day of opposition mobilized some fifteen thousand of their supporters in the capital Bishkek.

In order to achieve regime change without the use of violence it is the necessity to build a large coalition including elements of the old regime. This coalition building before the revolution often conditioned political developments after the fall of the old regime. By including in the coalition, or by simply guaranteeing the neutrality of elements of the police, the security, oligarchs who made their fortune under the old regime often in corrupt methods, the leaders of the revolution become indebted towards them. Such deals make any serious reform after the revolution difficult. That is, the large coalition formed to bring down the dictator led to compromises that hampered political and institutional reform after the revolution. As a result, most Colour Revolutions led to political paralysis because of the hybrid nature of the political forces that came to power: in case reforms are attempted it is resisted by the conservative wing of the coalition. In case reform is not pushed seriously enough, then the left wing of the coalition is dissatisfied. The result is that post-colour revolution politics was often characterized by polarization of forces and political crisis that blocked reform, change and modernization.

To illustrate, the best is to take the Serbian example. The leader of the opposition and the engine of the revolution was Democratic Party led by Zoran Djindjic. Yet, he was seen by many too close to the West, in a country that came under massive NATO aerial bombardment just a year earlier. In order to increase the opposition chances to win the popular vote a compromise candidate had to be found, and the opposition coalition proposed Vojislav Kostunica as the candidate for the presidency, since his nationalist stance on a number of issues gave him more credibility and chances to win the vote. In order to avoid bloodshed Djindjic also had to negotiate with security forces of the Milosevic regime, including with the notorious Milorad “Legija” Ulemek, the head of the “red берет” special forces, and the most dangerous military units that risked confronting any possible popular demonstrations. As a result of those compromises, the post-revolution Serbia was blocked between a reformist Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, and a conservative President Vojislav Kostunica. When Djindjic was faced with the problem of the special security units under Milosevic who at the same time controlled much of the illicit trade and tried to undo those “mafias”, he was assassinated less than three years after the revolution by no other than by orders of the “Legija”.²⁶ After October 2000, much of the Milosevic era military leadership had stayed in place; for example the Milosevic era army chief of staff General Nebojsa Pavkovic was

²⁵ Albert Cevallos, “Whither the Bulldozer? Nonviolent Revolution and the Transition to Democracy in Serbia”, *United States Institute for Peace*, Special Report 72: <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr72.html#top>

²⁶ Renaud Girard, “Zoran Djindjic, l’homme qui avait passé un pacte avec le diable”, *Le Figaro*, Novembre 4, 2003.

dismissed by President Vojislav Kostunica only by mid-2002²⁷. Paskovic was a close associate of Milosevic and had taken part in the fighting in Vokovar and Kosovo, among others, and knew much about the inner machinations of the regime. Yet he stayed in office because he had turned sides in October 2000.

Similarly, the Orange camp in Ukraine in 2004 was a collection of heteroclitic political forces including liberal politicians, centre-left currents, nationalist groups, plus oligarchic interests from the west, centre, and even east of the country, including figures with contradicting trajectories such as Yushchenko, Tymoshenko, Poroshenko, Moroz, etc... After the success of the Orange Revolution, Yushchenko hesitated but later realized his promise by appointing Tymoshenko to the post of Prime Minister, while the “banker of the revolution” Petro Poroshenko became the secretary of National Security and Defence Council. The contradictions between Tymoshenko and Poroshenko (the “chocolate king”) led to the collapse of the Orange coalition in September 2005. Yushchenko had the following to say when he dismissed Tymoshenko and formed a new government: “(..) I was becoming a witness, first, of disagreements among these institutions which turned into serious topical conflicts and internal intrigues, which affected the fundamentals of state policy. Eventually I became a witness of the situation when on a daily basis I had to intervene in a conflict between the national security council and the cabinet, between the state secretary and the national security council, between the cabinet and the Supreme Council [parliament]. In other words, these conflicts have become the government's daily agenda.”²⁸

While the political situation is paralyzed in Serbia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, nevertheless the changes created conditions for political dynamism, decrease of pressure from non-governmental media, and in the cases of Serbia and Ukraine the organization of free elections.

State Building and State Collapse

The revolutions led to varying results: In Serbia and Ukraine, the opposition had formed a wide coalition to bring about the bloodless revolution. Next to bringing down the autocrat little united those forces which had contradicting interests and ideological references. As a result, the new coalition in Serbia and Ukraine was not coherent, suffered from internal divisions, and did not succeed in bringing about important reforms. In Georgia, the Rose Revolution led to concentration of power in the hands of Mikheil Saakashvili, and the political reforms aim at building a strong state even at the expense of political and individual freedoms. In Kyrgyzstan, we have the collapse of a weak state as a result of the one-day revolution, and as a result an increase of criminal interference in politics, continuous mass demonstrations to bring political change, and weakening of state authority. While in Serbia and Ukraine we did not have massive property re-distribution, in Georgia we have politicized assets redistribution, and in Kyrgyzstan we have criminal struggle over economic assets.

²⁷ *Reuters*, “Yugoslavia Fires Milosevic-Era Army Boss Pavkovic”, June 24, 2002. Paskovic refused the orders of the president, reacting: “He has practically decided that my service ends as of tomorrow, as if I were the greatest scum in this state (...). Of course, I have refused this and I will not carry out this order.”

²⁸ “Ukrainian President Announces Top-Level Dismissals”, TV 5 Kanal, *BBC Monitoring Service*, September 8, 2005.

The national question remains to haunt the four countries and weaken its resources. In Serbia and Georgia this has taken the form of national struggle against secessionism, while Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan it is a question of internal, regionalist divides.

Lastly, in the geopolitical dimension, the usage of “democracy promotion” by the Bush administration for its foreign policy purposes has increased suspicion elsewhere. In a number of post-Soviet countries independent media and NGO’s have since come under repression to block an eventual regime change with Western support.

Interestingly, the colour revolutions brought fundamental political change – yet not the kind of change promised or expected by the supporters of the revolution. In the case of Serbia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan the change was in defusing the centres of power, and thus creating a new political reality in which there is a greater margin of freedom for citizens, for civil society, and for independent media.

Politics in Serbia and Ukraine look chaotic, and often gloomy of late, yet underneath this anarchy the two countries took very important steps forward. The most important is the organization of free and fair elections. The December 2003 and January 2007 legislative election in Serbia took place away from revolutionary fervour and were carried out in free and fair conditions. Similarly, the March 2006 parliamentary elections in Ukraine were carried out without the ruling party using “administrative resources” as a result of which the party of the president took only the third position. This alteration of power and political elites based on the results of elections are the necessary- although not sufficient – precondition for the emergence of a democratic polity.

The other major achievement was the development of a parliament which is free from the political will of the head of the state. In Serbia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan today the parliament is not the rubber-stamp of the presidential office, and has revealed its capacity to oppose the executive. Again, this initial separation of powers between legislature and executive powers is an important precondition for the development of democracy.

The entrenchment of traditions of holding free and fair elections, plus independence between the executive and the legislative is a tremendously important step in the way of establishing a democratic rule. A leading expert on the matter Barrington Moore sees “the development of democracy as a long and certainly incomplete struggle to do three closely related things: 1) to check arbitrary rulers, 2) to replace arbitrary rulers with just and rational ones, and 3) to obtain a share for the underlying population in the making of rules.”²⁹

I would not like to suggest that what we have in Serbia or Ukraine is division of power and competences between different state institutions. Far from that. What we have at this stage is various political formations “squatting” different sectors of the state. We are not yet at the stage of creating checks-and-balances, nor could the changes we have until now be considered “irreversible”. The political crisis in both countries is serious, and it could create

²⁹ Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Beacon Press, Boston, first published 1966, 1993 edition, page 414.

temptations of “strong ruler” who promises order and thus re-creates pyramidal form of power once again.

In institutional paralysis often resulted from high political tensions between the two blocks. In fact, large mobilization of forces and non-violent revolution gave way to large number of supporters of the old regime to recreate new alliances and confront proposed changes of the new forces. For example, in Serbia the DSS of Kostunica recruited many members of the former supporters of Milosevic, and often acted in alliance with the Socialists and the Radicals. In Ukraine, Yuschenko made alliances at more than an occasion with the Party of Regions headed by his former rival Yanukovich. This constant making and breaking of political alliances has brought the political system into near collapse, or even on the verge of civil war: in Ukraine in May 2007 political tensions were so high that troop movements were ordered, and units loyal to either side of the two camps were put on alert, which did not exclude the risk of violent clashes.³⁰

Ukraine, as well as Serbia, can go in different directions: either the in-fighting will lead to political arrangements where the various interests groups will find institutional set-ups to protect their power, while agreeing on rules for the functioning of the state. It could also lead to more difficulties further undermining the state legitimacy and weaken its institutions.

One way of looking at the basic differences between the four cases is to go back to the Leninist concept of revolution: to take control of the state apparatus by force in order to use the state to bring social change.³¹ In Serbia and in Ukraine, for different reasons, the structures that led the revolution failed to take control over the state apparatus; in fact, they only took partial control, sharing the state leadership with their allies in the large coalitions that led the peaceful revolutions. In Ukraine, the Orange coalition took control over part of the state in a geographic sense. Large areas of the country were out of their control, namely Donbass region, which is the industrial centre of the country. In Kyrgyzstan the revolution led to the disintegration of a fragile state. It is only in Georgia where a coherent group took over the state structure and reinforced it.

The Georgian Model

The Georgian experience contrasts with that of the “political crisis” model described above. Here we have a centralized power under the leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili who controls the state apparatus, the legislative, the judiciary, and can realize his political projects with little opposition. The result is that the new – often very young – government is implementing reforms at full speed. These reforms concern two fundamental areas: the first is strengthening the state, and the second is changing the socio-economic structure of the society on a neo-liberal model.

The traffic police that was one of the most visible symbols of corruption under Shevardnadze, has been disbanded, and new police officers have been recruited. Similarly, the

³⁰ Steven Lee Myers, “Battle Over Control of Troops Escalates Political Crisis in Ukraine”, *New York Times*, May 26, 2007.

³¹ V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, U Books, London, 1968.

army officers were discharged and taken over by the interior ministry who has been receiving massive investment for upgrading and modernization.³² Tax inspection has been reinforced and the state budget increased thanks to the collection of taxes. The state controls and commands more today than it was the case under the old regime.

What concerns the social and economic sector, than the most important is the reform in the education sector. At Tbilisi State University, most former teaching staff has been fired, and new ones recruited; a voucher system has been introduced to give the possibility to students to choose where to place state subsidies, and a nation-wide unified state entrance exam was introduced to eliminate corruption linked to university admissions. The new reforms also aim to remove the Soviet era distinction between universities where teaching was done and academy where research was practiced.³³ Lastly, there is a project to privatize universities by 2010. Similar reforms aim to privatize the health sector.

Many observers have questioned whether the results of the Rose Revolution will lead to democracy.³⁴ Critics say that looking at the human rights record of the new Georgian administration, the restrained media freedoms, the weakening of the civil society, all this culminated to the strengthening of the state at the expense of existing democratic freedoms. As id democracy under Shevardnadze was the *result* of state weakness and not of the existence of democratic institutions within the Georgian state or society, and once this weakness was removed as a result of the Rose Revolution we have a reduced space for political pluralism.

One could argue that the current limitations of freedoms are necessary to carry out structural –and painful reforms for the long-term good of the society. Yet, Georgia has an additional problem: how will political change come about? Currently in Georgia the National Movement which is the party in power controls all the levers of the state. In fact, Georgia is a one-party system, where there is little – or no – distinction between the state and the ruling party.³⁵

Will the “Georgian model” developed since the Rose Revolution with pyramidal political system and mass privatization in social and economic fields bring Georgia closer to modernization? Will it bring closer to democratization? By looking at current trends one would conclude that Georgia is definitively moving away from democracy, not just by creating a centralized political system, but also because the economic reforms of neo-liberal nature is increasingly alienating the population: between 2004 and 2006 official statistics note that poverty increased from 36% to 40%.³⁶

³² Defence spending constitutes a quarter of the state budget in Georgia in 2007.

³³ Author interview with Gigi Tevzadze, rector of Ilia Chavchavadze University and one of the main architects of the education reform in Georgia, Tbilisi, May 15, 2007.

³⁴ Laurence Borers, “After the ‘revolution’: civil society and the challenges of consolidating democracy in Georgia”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 3, September 2005.

³⁵ After the victory of the revolution, the five-crossed flag of the National Movement was adopted as the new national flag of Georgia, as if to underline this unity between party and state.

³⁶ M. Alkhazashvili, “Poverty Up in Georgia”, *The Messenger*, April 24, 2007.

Redistribution of Property and Wealth

To understand the dynamics for change brought by this revolution wave it is useful to look at what is happening with property rights. There are three different ways how property is being treated in the four countries. In Serbia and Ukraine property revision has been limited in time and scope. In Georgia, property redistribution is on-going, and is highly politicized, as we can see from the recent history of Rustavi-2 TV company. In Kyrgyzstan, property redistribution has been mixed with infighting between political interests, assassinations, and the coming of mafia chiefs into the political arena, revealing the deep disarray of this society after the fall of Akayev. Fight over property was not limited to assets dominated by the “family”, but included struggle over markets such as that of the Karasuu bazaar in the south of the country, Karakeche coal mines in Narin province, and over land in and near the capital Bishkek, leading to violent clashes and contract killings.³⁷

In Georgia in the weeks after the revolution several former close collaborators of Shevardnadze were arrested, accused of wrongdoing, and released after they paid important sums to the state treasury.³⁸ This extra legal behaviour was not limited to the period immediately after the revolution, but played a role in change of property from the control of oligarchs loyal to the old regime, to the new elite in power. Recent government projects seem to even question small and medium size property titles, especially in real estate in Tbilisi. Government critics accuse the authorities of opening cases against small property owners accusing them of irregularities in the process of past privatization practices with the intention to reverse current property titles. The recent history of ownership of Rustavi-2 television, the flagship of the Rose Revolution, reveals how closely connected is political control and property rights in Georgia: Rustavi-2 was owned by Erosi Kitsmarishvili during the revolution; his political ambitions clashed with the former prime minister Zhvania, after which Kitsmarishvili was forced to give up his ownership of the TV company and leave Georgia. The next person in control of Rustavi-2 was businessman Kibar Khalvashi, thought to be the representative of then Interior Minister and number two of the regime Irkali Okruashvili. After Okruashvili was forced to resign, the ownership of the Rustavi-2 once again shifted and the company is now owned by a “friend” of Dmitri Kitoshvili, “the Chairman of the National Regulatory Commission for Communications” which is a political post and therefore depends from support from higher up in the political pyramid.³⁹

³⁷ *International Crisis Group*, “Kyrgyzstan: A Faltering State”, Asia Report No 109, December 16, 2005, pages 4-10.

³⁸ Sulkhan Molashvili, the former chairman of the State Audit Agency and close ally of ex-President Shevardnadze was arrested in July 2004, accused of corruption and misappropriating 3 million laris. He suffered heart attack under torture. After he was treated for his heart attack he was returned to jail once again. See: “Court Remanded Ex-Audit Chief”, *Civil Georgia*, July 17, 2004;

³⁹ Zaal Anjaparidze, “Georgian Media Mogul Forced out of Business”, Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, October 15, 2004:

http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=401&issue_id=3109&article_id=2368699

and Célia Chauffour, “Médias: qui tient les rênes du 4^e pouvoir en Géorgie ? » *Caucas.com*, January 1, 2006 :

http://www.caucas.com/home/breve_contenu.php?id=29

and “Reports : Rustavi 2 TV Changes Hands”, *Civil Georgia*, November 20, 2006;

<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14127>

Property redistribution took violent forms in post-Akayev Kyrgyzstan. This redistribution was not simply the expropriation of the ownership of the “Family”, through legal mechanisms, but a generalized struggle over the economic assets of the nation, after the collapse of the former regime, and the slow emergence of a new power structure. This struggle brought to the forefront of Kyrgyz political events the leaders of the Tulip revolution, parliamentarians, and mafia bosses. Bayaman Erkinbayev was an MP, owner of Kara Suu market, and former martial arts champion, who was alleged to be involved in mafia activities as well as drug trade. He was killed in a contract murder on April 2005, probably as a result of fighting for the control of Kara Suu bazaar and commerce in southern Kyrgyzstan. Other contract killings include Usen Kudaibergenov, a close ally of Prime Minister Felix Kulov, and Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev a pro-Akayev MP, both killed in 2005. Critics accuse the government of using the pretext of former corrupt practices to change the current ownership of Pinara Hotel in Bishkek, Bitel mobile company, and Pyramida TV, among others. In 2005, Bakiev’s government revoked the license from the British Oxus Gold to develop Jerooy gold mine, with the pretext that the agreement was signed under the old regime. Similarly, Kara-Keche coal mines were occupied by Nurlan Motuev, a “robin hood” type personality who enjoyed the support of Rysbek Akmatbaev, a known mafia boss. Motuev was arrested on May 2006, the same day Rysbek was mysteriously assassinated. Both Akhmatbaev and Motuev were used in the power struggle between Bakiev and Kulov.

Property was distributed under Shevardnadze or Akayev in an illegal way. Yet property redistribution in post-revolution Georgia or Kyrgyzstan was done in extra-legal manners, and its logic follows the same patterns of property redistribution based on political interests.

The National Question

Next to social and economic transformation, all of the four countries concerned have the national question high on their agenda. Literature about democratization has often underlined contradictions between democratization projects and the national question.⁴⁰ National question has emerged in two different ways: in Serbia and Georgia it was the nation (in the sense of the dominant ethnic group the Serb or the Georgian) against external “enemies” trying to break away with part of the national territory: Kosovo, Abkhazia, South Ossetia. In Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan the national question was how to build a unifying national identity out of regional identities: Ukraine’s east-west, and Kyrgyzstan’s north-south divide.

The national question divided Serbia between reformers who wanted to abandon the national cause to move towards reforms and European integration, and conservatives (the socialists and the radicals with the support of the Democratic Party of Serbia) who positioned themselves as the guardians of the national values and interest. Serbia has gone through three wars, and the status of its territory remains uncertain as the status of Kosovo remains an unresolved problem. Since the October 2000 revolution the country metamorphosed from “Yugoslavia” to “Serbia and Montenegro” to “Serbia”, changes that bring enormous stress on state institutions which should cope with those changes.

⁴⁰ See, among others, Dankwart A. Rustow, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3, April 1970, pp. 337-363.

Similarly, Georgia has the question of its territorial integrity high on its agenda. Although during the Rose Revolution the question was not part of the mobilizing discourse, it became high on the agenda of the Saakashvili administration as soon as the new presidential elections took place. In fact, one of the most remarkable achievements of the Rose Revolution is bringing of Ajaria – ruled by Aslan Abashidze as his private fiefdom until May 2005 - under the control of Tbilisi in a bloodless coup. Yet, Georgian attempts since to bring two separatist regions ruled by non-Georgian ethnic groups, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, has led to armed clashes in South Ossetia in summer 2005, and increase of tension in Abkhazia. Bringing the national question and territorial integrity of Georgia high on the political agenda without an adequate discussion and evaluation of the period of conflicts in Georgia had a number of consequences. First, it referred to the late 1980's and early 1990's during which the political discourse in Georgia was dominated by extreme nationalist discourse, and in lack of any critical distancing it legitimated Georgian nationalism packaged in a new democratic discourse. This policy also gave high importance to the military ambitions of Georgia, and since then military spending has skyrocketed now exceeding a quarter of all state spending. Lastly, the utilization of the national question could impose a “national unity” against “foreign enemies” in moments of critical internal debates, and suffocate dissident voices within the Georgian society.

In Ukraine the national issue, contrary to Georgia, led to internal divisions. Following the Orange Revolution the new president represented west Ukrainian political forces that had confronted the Kuchma-Yanukovich alliance of east Ukraine. President Yuschenko has pushed a number of policies that expressed west Ukrainian identity but deeply antagonized Ukrainians in the east and the south of the country. Pushing for Ukrainian language in public space at the expense of the Russian language, the recognition of the famine in the 1930's as genocide, and the rehabilitation of Ukrainian nationalist guerrillas which fought the Soviets in the 1940's have their roots in the west Ukrainian identity, but are strange to the rest of the country. By failing to develop an all-Ukrainian identity space Yuschenko pushed east and south Ukraine in the arms of the party of regions not based on socio-economic platform, but as an expression of a party representing regional identities.

In Kyrgyzstan we have a situation similar to Ukraine. The revolution brought down not only the president and his family from power, but also the ruling clan. In case in the past Kyrgyzstan was ruled by northerners, since March 2005 the country is ruled by southerners. Therefore, political conflict is increasingly articulated around north-south identity, which is an easier formula for mass mobilization, rather than around political ideas and visions.

The posing of the national question has sapped energy and resources away from the reform agenda, in all four countries. The manner the national question is articulated in the four countries differ from each other, yet all four are prone to conflict: in Serbia it could ignite a new conflict in Kosovo as well as weaken the reform dynamics; in Georgia it led to internal unification and consensus against the external enemy, the separatist regimes but even more so against Russia; in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan the national question led to internal divisions based on regional identities.

The Backlash: Russia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan

The instrumentalization of the US foreign policy makers of democracy promotion as an aggressive tool of foreign policy caused a large back-lash in numerous countries. Whether US role in the spread of colour revolutions is real or imagined, the usage of American officials in their discourses to justify their policies abroad, and often lumping together their military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan with political events in Georgia and Ukraine, has had negative consequences. In the words of one American analyst, there is a “danger that democracy could come to be viewed as a tool of external statecraft rather than an indigenous development.”⁴¹ But in spite of rhetoric of supporting democracy, its aid to democratic promotion abroad has been falling in the last years: the request of the administration for 2006 was \$482 million, down from a \$556 million request for 2005 and a \$585 million appropriation in 2004.⁴²

As a result, a wave of backlash followed the wave of color revolutions. In Russia, shocked by the events in Ukraine and fearing that similar events could take place in Russia, the authorities made sure that no loose ends are found. Civil society structures and especially NGO's that received support from abroad came under high pressure. Head of the Russian security Nikolai Patrushev declared to the State Duma that NGO's were in fact covers for foreign espionage networks.⁴³ As a result, Russia adopted tougher laws which made foreign financial assistance extremely difficult. Media outlets, already under state control since the coming of Vladimir Putin to power in the year 2000, were brought under tougher control. Lastly, the Russian authorities created a youth movement called “Nashi” to imitate the youth movements in Serbia or Ukraine that organized the peaceful revolutions, but this time with the opposite objective: to defend the regime from outside influence and spread patriotism among the Russian youth.

In Uzbekistan, the authorities clamped down on NGO's, civic activists and human rights defenders on the aftermath of the Andijan uprising in May 2005. As a result scores of journalists and activists have been imprisoned since, while many others have left the country. Azerbaijan seems to be following a similar policy to avoid a revolution back home: opposition parties have been forced to leave their offices, while scores of journalists are attacked, beaten or harassed on regular basis. After the closure of their *Realni Azerbaijan* newspaper and the imprisonment of its chief editor Eynulla Fatullayev, 24 journalists have asked political asylum at foreign embassies in Baku in June 2007.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Mark R. Beissinger, “Promoting Democracy: Is Exporting Revolution a Constructive Strategy?” *Dissent*, Winter 2006.

⁴² *Bloomberg*, May 11, 2005.

⁴³ Simon Sradzhyan and Carl Schreck, “FSB Chief: NGOs a Cover for Spying”, *Moscow Times*, May 13, 2005.

⁴⁴ http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=22331

Conclusion: What was it about?

To be able to answer to the question concerning where to place the Colour Revolutions in our understanding of revolution and political change, one has to look at those events in a broader context. Colour Revolutions, very much in the tradition of Velvet Revolutions of the late 1980's have brought systemic change without the utilization of violence, a new dimension that still needs theoretical reflection in the study of revolutions.⁴⁵

Colour Revolutions are the dominant form in which “change” is imagined today in the heart of Eurasia. It is the rehabilitation of the politics, vis a vis the omnipotent economics, the instrument of choice for social transformation in the 1990's. This change of the centre of gravity is accompanied by increasing mass participation. In the past decade, transition was imagined as the affair of the elites against the will – and also short term interests – of the masses. Colour Revolutions could not bring regime change without mass mobilization, without the *avant garde* of student movements, without Pora and Kmara. Yet, the role of the masses was limited and instrumentalized to bring change in a situation of paralysis, but without bringing any change to the political culture, choices, or ideological prejudices. The Colour Revolutions released mass movement which remained under the leadership of the reformist wing of the old elite. Both the 1989-1991 wave of revolution and state collapse, and the more recent Colour Revolutions have been led by right-wing ideology of neo-liberal path to modernization. This is an incredible phenomenon if one considers the massive social engineering of the 1990's, the mass privatization and the social dislocation that resulted. Until now in 2008, the colour of the rebellion remains liberal ideologies that confront statist ones taking shape to justify stability and the new order.

The question remains: could liberal/neo-liberal ideologies lead revolutionary change nearly two-decades after the fall of socialism? Could such a change bring democratization and participation of citizens, or increasing elite isolation? Does accelerated privatization and liberalization of the economies of the eastern European and post-Soviet countries deepen the existing social problems, or is it a necessary phase of a new era of “permanent revolution” on the way of a new epoch of modernization of the Balkans and post-Soviet region?

⁴⁵ For a discussion on recent theories of revolution, see Jack A. Goldstone, “Toward A Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory”, *Annual Review of Political Science*, Volume 4, June 2001, pp 139-87.