

**Understanding Democracy in Georgia
five readings and a comparison to Belarus, Russia, Ukraine**

A Summary of the Presentation on the Eastern European Day – University of Fribourg „Catching Up: Ukraine and Georgia Back on Track Towards Democracy“ 2 June – 3 June 2005

A Power point presentation (31 slides) contains the empirical results and will be made available on demand.

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in cooperation with the Eastern European network *)

We cannot understand democracy of a specific country like a globetrotter following a guide. Sensitivity for the life-stories of a society is essential. During the SCOPES- and INTAS-projects coordinated by us we embedded the systematic scientific work into qualitative explorations of the places where we hold our meetings. Each place has the honour to deliver the title of one of the Newsletters reporting on our discussions and results. Five readings of Georgian “public stories” lead to hypotheses, which help to describe the drives for change in Georgia and to compare them with the other NIS-countries involved into the network.

Skateboards from Switzerland. From Istanbul a group of Georgian school kids fly with us to Tbilisi. They show the skateboards bought in Switzerland after they presented Georgia at an International Youth Music Festival in Zurich. They are expected and welcomed like heroes at the airport of Tbilisi. On the airport, parents and friends, a mass of people, welcome the children like Argonauts; the interactions with the foreign context are multiplied. The youth crossing new borders and returning back is the reading off a first hypothesis, the *interaction drive*. The changes are triggered and accelerated by the new contacts and interactions with Western countries. In small states the probability for interactions is much higher than in big ones.

The Zigzags in statistics. One year later at the end of 2003 we received a figure from Tbilisi. It shows the line of the optimists that say the “things in Georgia are going in the right way”. Since 96 the line jumps from 54% to 88% in 01, back to 76% in 02, up to 84% in August 03 but it falls four months later to 14%. Until today the trust to the right way regained the level of 39%. The Zigzags reflect a kind of societal Tsunami in Georgia. In Russia the chaos produced by an earthquake is soon absorbed by the endless mass of land.

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In small states chaotic events or whirls can't be contained so easily; they explode, like in Georgia, even in the statistics of public opinion. The interaction drive explains very important trends, for instance, the management of ambiguities and chaos in post-communist periods. The creation of a public space by rallies and mobilisations are trials to create strong perspectives to overcome the or post-soviet chaos ("momento-kracja"). The third hypothesis "*drives by chaos*" was readable on the streets where the masses welcomed the outcome of the Rose revolution. They have felt that the chaotic drives could produce a "salto natale", the start to a new order and pathway to the future. It seems that in the bigger Ukraine the chaotic drives needed more power to avoid a "salto mortale" back to the established regime.

Stalin's mother remains in the grave. On Sunday we visit the Pantheon on the hill over Tbilisi. We learn to read a second hypothesis, the *drives by rebuilding the past*. Its content is to exhume bad figures of the past or to re-bury the good figures extinguished from history before. The drives from the past are evocated and steered by those of the expected future. The graveyard becomes a lake with islands of the collective memory; each of these islands generates a feeling of trust and hope that the best pathway to the future, the present and coming figures and heroes, is supported in the heritage from the past.

Churches on the hill. There is a church on a hill guarded by a monk who tells us the history of its destructions and rebuildings. Big powers imposed again and again their potency – Mongols, Turks, Iranians, Russians. Georgia had to hold its ground against them since the early history; it fought as a geopolitical lightweight against heavyweights. The geopolitical heavyweights have a big land mass, raw materials, access to the seas, a mass of people. They feel and behave as a centre of gravity, which needs neither a justification nor a legitimacy. From this reason the heavyweights are self-sustainable as symbolic centres of gravity. Besides history and the past even god and the sacred are self-constructions: Russia invented the third Rome; Germany the Aryan myth, Stalin the Soviet religious myth, Mao the Chinese revolutionary ideology; the Iran transformed into a holy state under Khomeini.

The Georgian monk tells the story of the church as a permanent resurrection of Jesus Christ who seems to be incorporated into the stones surviving each destruction as well as rebuilding. It explains the meaning of gravity in the eyes of a weightless country: in Georgia the gravitation centre is the continuity of the religion; it is not necessary to invent god since it is sufficient to rebuild its residence. The fifth hypothesis is readable in the history told by the monk and the pictures on the walls: *the drive for gravity* if a country is simultaneously weightless.

Georgia's pathway as a lightweight is currently again very interesting. The recent events around the 60th anniversary of the Victory Day highlight the competition for the future world order. In this symbolic fight the small states, the Baltic countries and very impressively, Georgia, have to play a prominent role. What the theory stated long before seems to become current: the fights on the worldwide hegemonies are taking place in the area of the Caucasus and Central Asia (Mackinder's heartland theory). Indeed, the imageries produced by the press let expect a turning point. Georgia seems to be on the road to the societal models typical for the Western hemisphere. The Euro-Atlantic civilisation seems to embrace more and more the "good governed" countries of the NIS, first the small states. The emotions for this vision on the sun side of the world society are obvious in large groups of the population of these states, where to a smiling President Bush the smiling of the honoured Presidents responds. Big *versus* small seems to mutate into big *and* small. Small states are often under strong pressures by the big hegemonic states. The more important is that in periods of increased rivalry, the smalls have to be the first friends if the rival super power is in sight.

WE and THEY. Again back to 2002. We visit districts of Tbilisi, which were touched by an earthquake shortly before. Some houses are badly damaged but people remain there. Stones from broken walls are used as barricades, which should hinder the traffic circulation and its vibrations endangering the defective houses. It is a security measure initiated by the local residents. We feel that we are seen as visitors from outside and are not part of their "WE" (the poor people) living there, but rather near to "THEY" (the rich elites) very distant from them. The fourth hypothesis can be read passing through districts and streets: *the drives by self-help for survival*. Passing through the roads in the night one can see the flares of the very small kiosks like candle lights in a church; they offer some basic things. It is the beginning of a basic democracy. The "WE" and the "THEY" opposition is a strongly felt quasi-scientific term. It reflects in an everyday language those contradictions, which describe and explain the most relevant factors essential for understanding democracy in Georgia; we will illustrate them on the basis of the empirical results of research.

Pathways compared: Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine

Looking back to the 15 years since the end of the "Imperium" we are still fascinated as well as challenged by one question: which are the driving forces behind the life-stories (pathways), dramas and events of the various new independent countries of the Eastern hemisphere, in the Central Eastern, Southern Eastern, the Slavic, Baltic, Caucasian and Central Asian areas of NIS?

The five hypotheses and readings of the Georgian case provide a framework for describing and explaining possible scenarios of specific countries. In the network there

is consent on the following trends

- *Drives by interactions*: This hypothesis is confirmed overwhelmingly. The effects of the interactions West-East are much more intensive in the smaller, weightless states like Georgia and the Baltic NIS. The changing matrix of relations between West and East, its interactions cover the whole territory in shorter periods. In the Western Ukraine these interactions are much more visible as drives (Ukraine liberates the EU from visas!) than in the Eastern parts. In Belarus the interactions are less relevant but could be, for instance, a very contested issue in the next time. In Russia evidently the spatial expansion of the new interactions and the corresponding drives is hindered by the big extension of the country.
- *Drives by chaos*: Again in the smaller states, in Georgia, the “societal earthquakes” are expanding in shorter periods throughout the whole territory than in big countries like Russia, Ukraine or Belarus. The chaos is contained easier in bigger states than in the smaller ones. However the Ukraine confirms that the whirls of events (again linked to elections) drive for a “salto natale”; but this outcome will be surely under the pressure of further whirls in the country. Belarus plays the role of a careful moderator of possible whirls. Maybe the fear of salto mortale is latent.
- *Drives by rebuilding the past*: It is evident that the interactions and whirls in the NIS challenge the consciousness and role of the past substantially. In each country there are strong trends for dissolving evolutionary pathways into “islands” of past. It becomes fragmented; this facilitates the construction of current and modern societal images by selections of specific periods. In Russia, for instance, Dostoyevsky helps to confirm the Russian role as centre of gravity. It seems that this drive follows a bifurcation: On the one side, the big states (hegemonies) mobilise the figures, parts and periods of the past under an extraverted perspective. Current ambitions for a central role, expansion and consolidation of borders are justified by corresponding images of the past. The analysis of the Victory day events could help to verify these hypotheses. On the other side, the smaller states focus more on an introverted perspective. They underline the continuity and particularities of the past periods and events within the own borders even if they were strongly influenced by external powers. It is essential that in the NIS these two perspectives are diverging: in the smaller states the introverted constructed past is solved from the extraverted period of SU, while in the Ukraine, Belarus and in parts of Russia a merging can be observed: the introverted outlook is mixed or combined with the extraverted one.

- *Drives by self-help for survival*: There is an overwhelming evidence that the contradictions, the gaps between state and society, WE and THEY, have left its tracks in the whole NIS. In this sense there is a homo post-sovieticus in all countries, but diversified as a Russian, a Ukrainian, a Belarusian, a Georgian model. In all countries there are various ways to generate drives for self-help or for a proceeding in direction of more public civil activities and democratic participation. Again it seems that smaller states or specific regions in bigger states are able to produce better and more efficient patterns for coping with poverty and scarcity or to facilitate entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviour. There is a strong need for more empirical insights into these fields.

- *Drive for gravity*: Russia has made a strong shift to strengthen its role as new centre of gravity. The sources of these drives are manifold: the bigness and combination of the geopolitical potentials of the Russian federation functions as power without any need for achievement; the business with oil, for instance, allows economic performances typical for a passive giant. Currently it seems that the shift to the management by gravity is the most relevant force in the Russian Federation. In Belarus this stream is evidently supported by the dominant elites; here maybe the management of probable whirls is important in order to avoid a crisis where the majority could lose. In the Ukraine we observe a change; it seems to be very pervasive, but simultaneously, the potentials for new whirls and a salto mortale are not excluded yet. In Georgia the salto natale seems to be ensured. The nostalgic return to a past shaped by Shevardnadze is not probable (70% reject such a pathway). However, the latent contradictions within the society in Georgia are not solved. The zigzag between optimism and pessimism remains and it will be difficult to find the pragmatic measures to fill the gaps between “WE” and “THEY”. The self-help trends should become more than candle lights if the main problems like unemployment are taken as the first problem (as people ranks it).

*) The network includes teams from eight countries, which cooperated in a series of INTAS- and SCOPES projects: Belarus (D. Rotman), Bulgaria (E. Ignatova), Georgia (M. Pachulia), Poland (M. Bienkowska), Russia (T. Vorozheikina, Y. Levada), Ukraine (M. Churilov, O. Stegnyj), Germany (N. Genov, R. Ohliger) and Switzerland (J. Juchler, R. Schaffhauser, Th. Walter). The teams constitute the Eastern European Branch of WORLD_DRIVES. The most important projects are:

- How Georgians view democracy? (Joint Research Project sponsored by SCOPES; Swiss National Foundation for the Promotion of Research (SCOPES FGEPj65810))
- The role of regions in transforming post-communist societies: Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine as cases for comparison (INTAS-1997-02025) (network project)
- Regions in the Ukraine: dynamics, movements and politics (INTAS-94-3938) (joint research project)
- LOCLAB: Dynamics and social impacts of the labour markets on local communities in Eastern Europe accelerated by the EU-Integration (INTAS-04-79-6799) network project).