

Closing Session

25 Years After 1989: What is the Unfinished Business?

ERIC CHENOWETH

Our seminar rapporteur is Charles Fairbanks, an expert in Soviet and post-Soviet affairs and a member of IDEE's Board of Directors. Irena and I first met Charles right after the introduction of martial law in Poland in December 1981 when he was the deputy assistant secretary at the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights during the Reagan Administration. At a time when it really was not clear that the US would adopt or keep a strong policy on the Jaruzelski dictatorship, he was our best ally in ensuring such a strong policy and in keeping that policy in place. In this session, he will provide some reflection on the seminar and thus a framework for discussing the unfinished business twenty-five years after 1989.

CHARLES FAIRBANKS

I want to highlight some elements that emerged from the discussion and then to look for some conclusions on what democrats in the former Soviet bloc might do in the future.

We began on Friday with the general topic "Revolution, Evolution, or Devolution." Mr. Viačorka noted that public protest can emerge at any time, which I think is important. I think in the seminar we should have looked more at the enemy and his weaknesses. Contemporary authoritarianism—or competitive authoritarianism as political scientists call it—definitely has weaknesses that can be exploited.

Mr. Viačorka also pointed out that since the Ukrainian events, dictators like Aleksander Lukashenka of Belarus now have two enemies, the democrats and Putin, and have to fear that a stronger man can replace the strong man. I would argue that we are entering a third period quite different from the first period in the early 1990s and different also from the second period that followed in between the two decades since. In this third period, the relationship between Russia and the other countries and the West will be quite different than it has been.

In the second discussion, people argued that formal constitutions are less important than informal factors, and I would agree. I would add, however, that they are very important in leadership succession crises, in which a number of dictators had to depart because they faced term limits and did not feel strong enough to change those limits.

It was at that point in the discussion that the problem of the weakness of political parties arose. This issue has been underemphasized; it seems to be the most significant problem of countries like Ukraine and Georgia that have an opening to democracy but not yet consolidated democracy. Arkady Dubnov argued that in Russia the parties are so weak that they tend to wind up taking the state as their base or their constituency. This observation can be extended to other countries. Certainly, such attributes kill any political enthusiasm of members, if there was any, and it also means that the system is unstable or cyclical. This is a big problem.

There was also in our discussions a real disagreement about the readiness of countries for democracy. Arif Hajili argued that it is not true that the societies in authoritarian regimes are not ready for democracy. Miljenko Dereta noted that changing the top doesn't change the system, that there is the structure of dictatorship at each level of society and therefore there is need for reform and activism from the bottom up, as in Kosovo. Sergey Duvanov, however, said that you cannot push or impose democracy on the people. Here the disagreements are based on the experience of the particular country. Tunne Kelam noted that certain situations can propel democracy. Estonian independence came from a desperate situation in which the Estonians were becoming a minority in their own land and it seemed the last chance. A people that is not "ready" can become ready in an unusual or dire situation.

There were also disagreements about whether there were common mechanisms or tools for democratic change. Isa Gambar raised the question "why are the post-Soviet countries so isolated from each other?" And they absolutely are. There is more news about the exploration of Mars on Georgian television than about Azerbaijan, not to say anything of Dagestan. For me, the reasons for this isolation remain unanswered. Mr. Gambar's proposal to establish some type of think tank that would foster communication among the countries of the former Soviet bloc is a very useful practical agenda item.

We also disagreed about the role of the West in influencing events in the region. Coming from the West, I was struck by how kind participants were towards Western policy. When I think, for example, that Great Britain took the lead for 70 or 80 years in creating a coalition of great powers to carry out a consistent campaign against the slave trade—at the cost of thirty thousand lives—it frankly makes me ashamed of Western inaction today. It raises the serious question of the decline of the West.

Sergey Duvanov said Russia would have devoured Ukraine and Georgia without the West, and Gábor Demszky said our countries still need the West to go forward. But Miljenko Dereta made the argument that the West

often does harm even when it wants to do good. I think this is certainly true in the case of the United States and it is a very important point. It is to some extent a hopeful argument, since one can argue more easily about *how* to do good as opposed to *whether* one ought to do good or not.

The debate about decommunization and transitional justice was the clearest. Gábor Demszky said “forget lustration,” whereas Petruška Šustrova and Levan Berdzenishvili, along with most of the other participants, were more in favor of it. Most people agreed on the importance of education and dealing truthfully with the region’s history. Tatiana Vaksberg, however, noted that there was almost no interest in history in Bulgaria, which is true also in the case of Georgia. That interest will come back I think. One might see something like the change in people’s interest in World War I many years after that war was over. Sometimes people are too close to events to think critically about them and then there comes a point in time when they want to start to think critically about them. I find my students in Georgia are getting interested in Soviet history.

On the development of civil society, the problem of donors becoming the constituency rather than one’s own people was raised. And it is a very prevalent problem. I think also that the Western strategy on Bosnia and Kosovo shows that among the Western mistakes is a desire to give people freedom but then to control the way they use it, rather than letting them fight for and develop their own freedom. Observing from closer up the difficult attempt to reach freedom in Georgia and Ukraine, I have concluded that people need to make mistakes—within limits—and to learn from those mistakes. This is what the English did when it became a half-free country between 1638 and 1689. Many of the problems in Eastern Europe come from the fact that freedom came so easily and quickly and people had to struggle to transform into reality existing principles rather than fighting an open enemy.

Miljenko Dereta argued that extremist groups are part of civil society and I agree with that quite emphatically. All civil society, even if it advocates unpleasant causes, constrains the government and forces the government to respond to the society and thus builds democracy. In many of these societies, there are only two alternatives: democracy without liberalism or liberalism without democracy, the latter being the formula of Saakashvili and Erdogan among others. I think the latter formula of liberalism without democracy, which we in the West are attracted to, is self-contradictory and won’t last. Democracy should be the priority.

Mr. Dereta also proffered that our task was to restore the dignity of politics and to me that is the most important agenda item. What can be achieved through a free press or civil society and everything else we

discussed is tremendously important but if what we want is a free government ultimately it depends on elections, institutions, and politicians, who are a very flawed breed of people but there have to be such people to make democracy work. All of you have the difficulty that you're trying to create free politics in circumstances where it is already weakened on two levels: first, representative democracy is already more detached from politics than direct democracy. Second, huge democracies like America or even more so the EU with its famous democracy deficit also are at a great distance from traditional concepts of the importance of politics. This is something that the former Soviet bloc countries need to discover and it is not easy in these circumstances. It helps that many of these countries are small. In a country the size of Azerbaijan or Moldova, the size of a city state, it is much easier than in Russia, where no one knows what is going on in that immense place.

Discussion

IVLIAN HAINDRAVA

I would like to reiterate: I believe that mistakes and failures that took place in Georgia are first of all the fault of Georgians—but not exclusively. Let us look at the period of the last twenty-five years: what was there twenty-five years ago and what is there now. Then, it was easy to say simplistically, “There is a good West and a bad Soviet Union; it is good there, and bad here.” There was a clear duality. Now, we can say “it is almost good there and not so good here.” In the past, Radio Liberty, BBC, and VOA spoke the truth, and our own radio and TV programs broadcast lies. Today, the situation has changed. On one side, we can hear half-lies and on the other full lies.

What is our situation in Georgia? My colleague spoke about ambassadors to Georgia. There were five or six ambassadors from each of the leading Western countries in the last twenty-five years. We know the names of every US ambassador but remember only a couple of ambassadors' names from the other countries. You don't have to know what the German ambassador in Georgia is doing today, but I should know and I do not know. Despite my current official position, I don't even know what he looks like. Nor does Levan and he is the deputy chairman of the parliamentary committee on EU integration. I understand that Georgia is not the center of the world and that these diplomatic and political appointees who are sent here do not think we are the center of the world either. We are situated in the middle of nowhere—on the periphery of Europe, Russia, Asia. And many in Europe neither want us nor regard us as part of Europe. But at the very least we are at the border of Europe, not the United States,

and Europe should be interested in what is happening on its border and what is happening there.

I have got this impression that Europe is tired and wants to be left alone and this is its goal. But Europe will not be left alone by the countries around Europe, neither by the Middle East, nor by Russia, nor by the former Soviet geopolitical space. We may disagree about what is Europe and what is not Europe but this is the environment around Europe and Europe cannot detach itself from all of the problems in the countries surrounding it even if our countries are not regarded as Europe.

The concept of Zbigniew Brzezinski was to establish a *cordon sanitaire* around Russia. What do we have today? We have a belt of frozen conflicts between Russia and Europe: Transdnister, Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. And Russia is able to manipulate each of them to its advantage.

So the question arises: what is the vision of Europe? What is EU policy? Unfortunately, my observation is that we see the bureaucratization of European policy with politicians and diplomats replaced by bureaucrats. If anyone had illusions that it was possible to do something with politicians and diplomats changed into bureaucrats, the latest events should disabuse them. Herman Van Rompuy or José Manuel Barroso [the former Presidents of the European Council and European Commission], even together, are hardly a counterbalance to Putin. In the meantime, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder receives remuneration from Gazprom.

One hundred and sixty years ago, Britain and France fought for the Crimean peninsula and sent their fleet there. As a result of winning the Crimean war, they stopped the expansionist policy of Russia for a couple of decades at least. Today, from Britain and France, we hear that they are not going to fight Russia for some far-off peninsula. In the 19th century, they managed to find their way to it and fought for this peninsula, but today one suspects they couldn't find it on a map even using Google.

When only four of the EU-NATO countries are willing to spend just 2 percent of their GDP on the military, it is hard to be optimistic about the future, not just about Georgia and Moldova, but also about the other countries. At the same time, we witness the success of Azerbaijan's so-called "caviar diplomacy" as a result of which some European politicians and diplomats turn a blind eye to massive human rights violations or applaud "elections" there.

In my opinion, Europe, represented by the European Union, is the most progressive integration project of humankind, but if inside the EU right-wing activists are sympathizing with Putin we can see that the values together with the goals of the West have become blurred. So, therefore,

what is the answer to the question? What is the unfinished business? As I attempted to show, the business has not been finished in either Tbilisi or Kyiv, but also it has not been finished in Brussels and Washington and Berlin. I do not know if this business is going to be finished. Certainly, the prognostication of Fukuyama of the final triumph of liberalism did not come true. We have to bring all of our potential and forces together, listening to each other. Here at this table we are experts of the post-Soviet space, we are better experts than those in Berlin, Brussels and Berlin. We still have a lot to do, a lot to finish, and certainly we have to do it together. But I am afraid it is not going to be easy.

ISA GAMBAR

I will continue the idea of Ivlian Haindrava. Twenty-five years ago we had the goal that the countries of Eastern Europe had to make the transition from a state-run economy to a free market economy and from an authoritarian political system to political freedom. These countries had to detach themselves from the Soviet empire and to become part of the enlightened, democratic world. These goals were clear. We were not talking about changing or transforming Western countries. The goal was to change *our* countries. The West was supposed to help us. Some Eastern Europe countries went down this road; they did carry out necessary reforms and to a certain extent achieved political and economic freedom. But a majority of the countries in the post-Soviet space have not gone down this path and this is the unfinished business that we must deal with.

Who is to blame? It is a familiar question. Ivlian said that in Georgia, firstly Georgians are to be blamed. I wonder if he is right. And while I can agree that you Georgians are to blame, perhaps it is not constructive to think this way. The example of Azerbaijan also shows that it is not a question of whether our people are ready for democracy. I understand that the Baltic peoples were more ready for democracy than our society, and the Georgian people are also more ready than the Azeri people, but we are not unready. I remember a Western political leader was in Baku as an observer in the Azeri parliamentary elections. He expressed surprise that Musavat and other opposition party representatives knew by heart the electoral law and were attempting to protect fiercely the right of citizens to exercise their right to vote according to their own consciences. To us it was not a surprise.

From 1945 to 1990, Germany was divided and during this period West Germany developed one way and East Germany part another. But in 1991, were the Baltic peoples more ready than the East German people to become free? Whom do the Azeri people resemble more, the North Korean or South Korean people? These are the same people. The South Kore-

an people were able to develop democracy very dynamically and their economic development index is higher than many of the most developed countries. North Korea is a swamp and even wind does not visit this country. The problem is not whom we more resemble; the problem is around us, in Moscow and other centers. Sometimes, the problem is not within a people or a nation only, but also with those who have a stake in maintaining dictatorship. In October 2003, on the streets of Baku, Ivlian Haindrava was saying that Azerbaijani people are much closer to democracy than the Georgians. A few months later, we were on our road toward a police state and Georgia was marching toward democracy. Would it be happening if Azerbaijan was not an oil rich country?

Yesterday, I admitted we committed many mistakes. But even a hundred of our mistakes are not equal to one mistake of Washington. When the US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage sent congratulations to Ilham Aliyev on October 15, 2003 before even the votes were counted and while thousands of peaceful demonstrators were being viciously attacked—it was one such mistake. The mistakes of Azeri, Ukrainian, Georgian democratic leaders do not influence the situation as much as Western policy. Can the liberal changes in Ukraine help liberate Crimea?

I am willing to accept the advice of friends. We need it. I want us to clearly understand, however, that the situation in our countries depends on decisions elsewhere. It is not an easy truth, but it is a truth we must recognize and consider in our future work.

ARKADY DUBNOV

I am afraid that my words are going to be misunderstood to say that I agree that nothing can be changed; that is not my intent. Many years ago, I studied energy at the university and was a specialist in automation. My supervisor was the son of Boris Pasternak, who was also an engineering expert. I told him that the electric engine should have this or that characteristic. Pasternak's son said to me, "The engine doesn't owe anything to anyone. It doesn't *have* to be this or that."

There is dissatisfaction with the European Union and its bureaucratization, despite it being, as one speaker said, the highest achievement of political democracy. I agree with him about the nature of the achievement, but we must remember that bureaucracy, also, is about democratic procedures. There are twenty-eight members of the EU. Federica Mogherini and Donald Tusk [the High Representative for External Affairs and the President of the European Council, respectively] can not and will never be like Putin. Putin decides everything himself and does not need consensus or any help from the bureaucracy to do what he wants.

Tusk works for the EU. He needs consensus and we can't demand that the EU take decisions without consensus. So we have to deal with it.

We think that Central Asia differs from the European part of the post-Soviet space but the differences are not that great. The main difference, however, is that these countries have more energy resources and for this reason it is harder to promote democracy there. I carried on a conversation with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier when he worked on the EU's policy towards Central Asia. I expressed my discontent with Steinmeier and the EU. But for him, Central Asia had only two aspects: as a potential market for the EU and as a source of energy supplies for the EU. These were the only two things that he was interested in. For Steinmeier—a left Social Democrat—democracy and human rights issues were not important.

But do not idealize the EU's vision now or twenty-five years ago. Some of the new EU countries could reach freedom because there were certain developments in the Soviet Union and in certain countries in Eastern Europe. It was these changes that undermined the dictatorships of Stalinist-Brezhnev times. Still, when the Soviet Union collapsed, we laughed that the OSCE was dictating the rules of the game and that it decided the countries of Central Asia fulfilled the democratic requirements of membership. Turkmenistan, for example. There was an OSCE mission there with a wonderful Romanian diplomat. She was very courageous but no one could understand the difficulties of Turkmenistan and the OSCE was easily manipulated. Turkmenistan lives in a different historical time and so does Azerbaijan. The Baltic States, of course, are different: these were countries created before the Second World War and were independent. It was the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that changed their situation.

Between the European Union and the United States, there is a huge difference as regards Russia. The US is not dependent on the energy imperialism of Russia but the EU is. When the EU takes decisions, some of its members must take this into account, such as Romania and Bulgaria regarding the southern pipeline or Germany regarding gas supplies. Angela Merkel and Putin have held 38 telephone conversations in the past year—we know the accounts of only 6 or 7 of them. Thirty-eight telephone conversations! It means Merkel is dependent on Putin and Putin is dependent on Merkel and there will be no decisions that would undermine energy stability. The EU is certain about one thing: everyone agrees Putin is unpredictable. We know he has nuclear weapons: how is the EU going to fight such a country with nuclear potential? The US can do things because it has nuclear parity and no one in Moscow is going to risk confronting the US with nuclear weapons. But the EU does not have parity and is dependent on Russian energy.

Let me sum up. Nobody owes anything to us. Europe does not owe us anything. The US doesn't owe us anything. We have to do everything ourselves. And we have to calm down and tackle these issues.

GÁBOR DEMSZKY

I am glad that out of this mosaic, we are now bringing these many different subjects together. There are two types of countries around this table. One group belongs to the *cordon sanitaire* around Russia: the Baltic States, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. More and more, Europe wants to involve other countries of the Balkans. Thinking in the longer term, European politicians are thinking that this is Europe. For Robert Schuman, and even for others later, the vision did not include these other countries, much less the Caucasus, Central Asia, nor even Ukraine. In 1989, the Soviet empire collapsed. It did not collapse because of us, because the democratic movements in those countries were so strong that we won, but rather that the system collapsed, the whole melted like ice on a hot summer day. These two years of 1989–91 were nothing when you compare how long colonial empires existed in history and how long it took to dismantle them. Time was compressed; the speed that all this happened was extraordinary. Helmut Kohl was the most surprised that from one day to another he could unite Germany. No one was prepared for it.

In this rush, many mistakes were made. The first was that Europe could be extended rapidly and go closer and closer to Russia. Not only the association membership to the EU was given and membership promised to this first category of countries, but also NATO membership. And it was crazy. I was in Moscow in 1990 as an observer to the negotiations on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. The highest generals of the Soviet armed forces were there with Shevardnadze, who was the only one authorized to speak. And we agreed that within one year, the troops would withdraw from Hungary, East Germany and the other countries. You cannot imagine the humiliation for these people that they had to give up, that they had to withdraw their soldiers from countries where they had a higher standard of living and Russia could not provide apartments or an equal standard of living at home. The Russians were foreseeing the collapse of the Soviet Union. Certainly it was humiliating. Associated membership in the EU was all right, but NATO membership was too much for them.

SMARANDA ENACHE

I hold the opinion that democracy and human rights are universal. Therefore, I would not embrace the idea that some nations have the right to have democracy and others do not. At what point in history they achieve democracy is not something we can predict, but we can see that aspirations

for democracy are not limited to what Europe has historically been nor to the United States. Therefore I am advocating for the right to democracy and respect for human rights for all nations in the twentieth-first century. And I do not share the idea that human rights are an invention of the West and we have to be careful not to offend states and cultures that reject values of democracy and human rights as being alien to their traditions. It is well known that at the UN there are countries invoking cultural pretexts for not respecting fundamental human rights or the rule of law on grounds of different traditions of their distinct culture.

On the other hand, because human rights and the rule of law and democracy originated in Europe and the United States, we as nations have high expectations that Europe and the US will support us, the new democracies. For our part, we have to do our best not to introduce more divisive challenges to the Transatlantic Alliance than it already has. We do not want a competition between the United States and the European Union, for example, because we need the unity of the Transatlantic Alliance. We should also understand that in the moment that we as nations and citizens have a choice for democracy we also undertake new responsibilities. We must acknowledge that we are part of the West with all of its risks and responsibilities. We speak of the West in two ways, geographically and politically, in the sense of values. We are not at a geography lesson here. We share values. We have a responsibility to contribute to the unity of Western civilization.

MILJENKO DERETA

In such meetings and discussions, I try to see what has not been mentioned. What we are overlooking is that the European Union did not develop in the framework of values that we are talking about. Smaranda mentioned human rights. Human rights are the last issue being discussed in Europe at this moment. The economic survival of the European Union is currently more important. It does not want to talk about values. Europe reacts to the provocation of Russia but without knowing how to deal with the aggression against Ukraine.

So we are talking on one level and the European Union is talking on a completely different level. In this regard, the EU did not react to Victor Orbán's speech proclaiming his new goal to make Hungary an illiberal democracy—even though Hungary is a member country. The reaction had to come from the other side of the Atlantic. In fact, the EU does not have a European policy on the issues we care about. Look at Belarus: what is the EU doing now in Belarus? Nothing. It didn't do anything during the wars of the Balkans. The EU countries always waited until things developed and everything was finished before starting to give us lessons on how to behave. That is my experience. So I think we have to be aware of that and

not to have great expectations from Europe. The only way to provoke a response from Europe is to create a crisis.

Second, no one talked here about poverty and unemployment. We were talking about politics as if this were an abstract activity, without context, and there were no economic conditions in our countries, no poverty and no unemployment. We all come from poor countries. The unemployment rate in Serbia is 35 to 40 percent. Fifty-five percent of young people are unemployed. There are no prospects for getting a job. This is something that we should work on: how to deal with this economic issue. The current governments cannot do it, don't want to do it, and don't know how to do it. They get through such crises now because of the passivity of citizens. But if by chance one of you or us comes to power we will have to deal with this problem and we are not talking about it.

ERIC CHENOWETH

Twenty-five years after 1989, which started the new era, we are witnessing something that we did not expect, a revival of outright Russian aggression and occupation in the region. Yet, while Putin has clarified the situation for us, Vytautas Landsbergis reminded us that he didn't just start this year to act aggressively. It was at least from 2008 and the war against Georgia. And other participants have indicated that the current outlook of Russia began much, much earlier. Certainly, the wars in Chechnya were clear evidence of the restoration of a brutal, murderous mentality in the Kremlin, yet the West was silent and totally ineffective in its response. It could not realize that this signified something that had to be counteracted. Even rallying the entire human rights community in Washington, IDEE encountered mostly indifference by US foreign policy makers.

I might point out that in an issue of *Uncaptive Minds* in 1994, Françoise Thom described the likely rise of Putinism well before Putin came to power by analyzing the revival within the Russian elite of the concept of Eurasianism.¹ This concept could be seen in policies regarding the "frozen conflicts" that Russia manipulated and maintained as well as in the expanding dominance Russia displayed towards the "near abroad." The West could not cope with any of it. Today, we have new frozen conflicts that are being created due to the revival of aggression and occupation and, while there is some response, we are witnessing overall an inability to cope with the scope of the problem on the part of the West.

But it is not simply a weak response to the revival of imperialism, but also to democratic openings, to the idea that democracy could in fact

¹ "Eurasianism: A New Russian Foreign Policy," by Françoise Thom, *Uncaptive Minds*, Summer 1994, vol.7, no.2 (26). — Editor's Note.

spread and root itself in the region. We saw this weakness even in Romania with the breakthrough election of Emil Constantinescu and the victory of the Democratic Convention. Western countries did very little to help make this democratic opening permanent and were indifferent and seemingly relieved to the retaking of power by the former communists. After this, we saw time and again the West failed to take advantage of democratic openings, whether it was Georgia or Serbia or Ukraine and in each case anti-democratic forces supplanted the initial democratic victories made possible by mass action. But much earlier, in the 1990s, Belarus and Azerbaijan were key examples of countries that had real and significant democratic forces needing support and they found only Western indifference as democracy foundered and succumbed to coups. A decade later, the West accepted the continuation of these dictatorships instead of adopting a strong policy of support to democratic forces mounting clear challenges to the existing rulers in elections. The “democracy promotion” activities around these elections turned out to be merely window dressing on an overall policy of tolerance towards dictatorship. These were forsaken countries.

There has also been surprising inaction to reverses in democratization, as in Hungary and Serbia, and also to reverses in civil society. In the latter case, there is now an all-out assault against genuine civil society organizations without any serious response, just another round of ineffective declarations. On top of which, Western donor institutions are incapable of recognizing not only the perversion and corruption of civil society throughout the region but also their implicit participation in the process of that corruption and perversion. By imposing the idea of agnosticism towards civil society groups—or worse, by actively preferring the professional experience of former communists trained in manipulating society to the inexperience of democrats who sought to rebuild civil society, however imperfectly—Western donor institutions have simply bastardized democracy promotion.

I think we must be a group that helps clarify the situation. What can be done? What approach should we have? I think we should have the same approach as we, generally, in this room have always had: to expand the space of free countries, countries that are free to choose their path through the democratic expression of the people, as well as to expand the “islands of democracy” within dictatorships, in which democrats know they have support to keep pushing forward. We should again adopt the approach of Zofia Romaszewska and her husband Zbigniew when they started in 1988 the organization of the International Human Rights Conference in Krakow. The approach was to expand the regional network of activists who had common principles, common ideas, and common grounding in

the concept of democracy, and to use these networks to revive the democratic idea and democratic practice within non-democratic countries. It is something that IDEE has tried to do in its actions, meetings, and seminars over 30 years.

IVLIAN HAINDRAVA

Isa Gambar states that whatever our mistakes, our fate is decided by Washington and Brussels. My view is that our fate is decided in Tbilisi and in Baku. Our strategic choice is made by us and others may either interfere or impede or help us. And the example of Ukraine is one of these illustrative examples. There are four million Georgians, eight million Azerbaijanis, but forty-five million Ukrainians. Do not complain that Russia is at fault and the political class in Ukraine was perfect and what happened was only because Putin arrived and then did what he did. The corrupt political class of Ukraine created the circumstances for what Putin did. Unfortunately. And my greatest hope is that the Ukrainian nation, following this evil, and now paying a much higher price than it should, achieves freedom. But it is nonsense not to recognize that the circumstances resulted from the mistakes of the political class of Ukraine.

Arkady Dubnov mentioned the energy dependence of Europe in relation to Russia. I discussed this issue twelve years ago at a conference in Germany where I warned participants that the Nord Stream gas pipeline would increase their dependence and vulnerability towards Russia. They laughed at this idea. They argued that we are interested in Russian gas and Russia is interested in European money and that Russia would not blackmail Europe. I was not such an expert or prognosticator. But the issue was clear cut. Professor Landsbergis and the Poles warned the Germans but the Chancellor [Gerhard Schroeder] was who he was and we have what we have.

CHARLES FAIRBANKS

I'm glad that people have begun to talk more about the contemptible nature of Western policy, which will get worse. And I think the crisis will get worse. But it is precisely for that reason that I think people are too pessimistic. In Russia, there is the revival of hope of a complete revision of 1991 and it is unclear if Ukraine can hold onto its sovereignty in this situation. So the West will be confronted with a much more difficult situation. It is not clear how the West will respond, but in the case of the United States it is already clear that a Republican administration or a Hillary Clinton administration will have a stronger foreign policy because the whole foreign policy elite has unanimously expressed shock at the weakness of US policy under the current president. As the crisis worsens, it will force decisions on the West. The weakness of the West is not fated.

ISA GAMBAR

Shevardnadze at first bowed to Russia and then moved his politics towards NATO. But it did not help him. Abkhazia and South Ossetia remained under the control of Russia. The problem is that the decisions of our politicians—Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, Saakashvili, and Ivanishvili in Georgia and the Aliyevs in Azerbaijan—did not change anything. Our territories are in effect occupied by Russia. South Ossetia is occupied by Russia. It is not that I want to move discussion away from our mistakes or our own strategies and decisions. But when I say that our mistakes are not comparable in significance, I am criticized. Moscow creates the conflicts and puts NATO in a difficult situation where it is not capable of including countries like Georgia as members. The countries that are aspiring to be members of NATO are in big trouble and this is the purpose of the politics of Moscow.

We are responsible for our country and our people. It has been a twenty five-year-long struggle for democracy in Azerbaijan despite decisions made in Moscow, in Washington, or in Tbilisi or anywhere else. I am ready to have a conference and to make detailed analysis of our mistakes. But I want to be clear and find reasons for what has gone wrong. Only when we are clear about the reasons for it can we influence what is going on. Of course, it is easier to influence decisions in Azerbaijan than in Russia or the United States. But we should do everything possible to exercise this influence.

VINCUK VIAČORKA

Do we have the right to discuss the mistakes of the European Union? Yes, we have, because we Belarusians feel part of Europe, not in an institutional sense but in a geographical and axiological sense. And so we feel partly responsible for decisions that are taken by the European Union. We want it to make wise and moral decisions. The better the decisions taken by the institutions of the EU, the stronger its values will be felt in Belarus or in Azerbaijan.

We are part of this moral and political space. We have a right to talk about it. In 1982, Ales Bialiatski and I could hardly imagine that thousands of our compatriots would take to the streets and demonstrate for democratic values but they did. They returned to their homes three years later and we are blamed. But in the beginning of the 1990s, our region was forgotten as soon as Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan turned over their nuclear arms to Russia. Miljenko Dereta was right: to bring attention of Europe and NATO to our region, it is necessary to have a serious bloody conflict.

Today we must be united and strong. We must scream out about the new situation resulting from the Russian aggression against its neighbors: “the gendarme of Eastern Europe” is beating someone who is trying to liberate himself. Once Ukrainians wanted to liberate themselves from a corrupt government, the punishing sword of Putin appeared. There was the precedent of Georgia, but it was not evident to everyone that this was the prelude to the situation we have now. If Europe and NATO do not respond, they are simply incapacitated. We see bloodshed in Ukraine because people are willing to fight and die for European values, yet Europe remains calm. If the EU ignores it and the US cannot find the strength to counteract it, how can we be optimistic in assessing the potential of the democratic world to defend its own values and itself?

IRENA LASOTA

I have been thinking about how to be optimistic and it is not easy. I will use the example of Cuba. Around the table, ten people have been to Cuba as part of IDEE programs to support the dissidents and emerging groups of civil society on the island. Others have sent their brothers, or children, or colleagues. Our activities in Cuba were for us the testing ground for what is possible, what is necessary, and where to start. We, from our standpoint, were very impressed by the Cuban dissidents. We met with oppositionists, artists, groups of printers who did not have printing machines. And this is one of the lessons that we learned: that in the worst possible conditions, one can try to do something. One can build small circles of opposition. The Cuban dissidents made a lot of mistakes and the West made a lot of mistakes, but still after more than 50 years of communism, there is still life, still opposition. One of the activists said if you give us thousands of memory sticks with films we can distribute them and spread information to people to give them another vantage point. Cuba, however, also taught us about Western donors, in this case the US government, who believe that if you did not build civil society in two or three years, in the fourth year they must move to other projects to achieve US goals. One new project the US government moved to was a program to work with local prostitutes—whom the US government failed to realize were government workers barred from US programs—to teach them about AIDS prevention. This was the new direction chosen because civil society was not built in a day.

No one was prepared for what happened now with Russia. Even Mustafa Dzhemilev, one of the greatest men I have ever met, did not prepare for it. They didn’t prepare anything for military occupation. For the Russians, everything was visible and it was easy to come in one week and control everything. On the one hand we say Putin and the other anti-democrats are the threat, but I am afraid we are not getting ready even on a technical level.

PETRUŠKA ŠUSTROVÁ

Twenty-five years after 1989, I find myself in the same situation as when I began to be active in politics and civic activities, forty-five years ago in 1968. Since then, I have always known that our oppressor sat in the Kremlin but we always fought—whether using a typewriter or any other way—against our government. Ours was a sovereign state even if the fate of our state was ultimately in the hands of the Kremlin’s leaders. After 1989, different people came to the Kremlin, and we know all about them, but there is nothing new about the Kremlin. The Kremlin is an old institution, older than our memory. Crimea was the object of interest of Catherine the Great—it is all the same.

Perhaps Washington, Brussels, and other Western capitals have changed. I am afraid that the West is prone to the temptation of a good and pleasant life. Let the Kremlin have its way; let someone like Ronald Reagan decide to fight and we do not have to do anything and we hope we will never have to help anyone. But the situation is not so dire and I do not know if the situation is so pessimistic. It is better than before. We are now in Warsaw and here there is a perfect, beautiful word—*solidarność*, solidarity—people here in this room around this table remember what this word was and is. It is our responsibility to use all our efforts and take all the possibilities to influence the West and people in the West to return to the straightforward approach in dealing with the East. This is the second side of the coin. As Vaclav Havel said—I am paraphrasing—“if we say there is no hope, it is not that there is no light at the end of the tunnel, it is our mindset that we do not see it.”