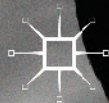


Post-Communist Civil Society and the Soviet Legacy

*Challenges of Democratisation
and Reform in the Caucasus*

HUSEYN ALIYEV



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To Hyosun

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book argues that the weakness of civil society in the post-Soviet Caucasus is not only a result of post-communist political and economic problems but is also due to the effects of historical legacies which continue influencing both formal and informal civil societies of the Caucasus's countries, weakening their ability to facilitate democratisation. Two decades after the break-up of the USSR, democratisation continues to present a challenge to all non-Baltic former Soviet states. The failure of most post-Soviet governments to overcome autocratic patrimonial habits of governance and to embark on democratic institution-building has been a characteristic of the former Soviet Union for the past two decades. Among many other malaises of post-communism, the inherent weakness of civil society has been observed in virtually all post-Soviet regimes. Unlike civil sectors of post-communist Central Europe or even the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, civil societies of ex-Soviet countries remain underdeveloped, ineffective and weak. In contrast, the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes, failures of institutional reforms, in conjunction with the continued reliance of ruling elites on informal structures rather than formal institutions is on the rise in most countries of the post-Soviet region.

All of the above is most notable in the former Soviet region of Caucasus. Throughout the entire post-communist period, the political and civil actors across the Caucasus have shown themselves incapable of shedding the old forms of governance, which led to further growth of authoritarianism and weakening of independent civil society. So why does the Caucasus's civil society fail to facilitate democratic state-building and institution-building processes, invigorating civil mobilisation and serving as a balance between the state and society?

This book examines the relationship between the weakness of civil society and the legacy of Soviet public and private spheres in the post-Soviet Caucasus. Starting from the assumption that the analysis of 'civic traditions' of formal and informal civil association inherited from the Soviet period can provide explanations as to why the present-day civil sector is weak, this study seeks to reveal the significance of the former regime's legacy for contemporary civic institutions. This book conducts an in-depth examination of both Soviet and post-communist formal

and informal civic association, offering fresh insights into our understanding of Soviet civic legacy and of how and why ‘civic traditions’ continue. The findings of this study emphasise, among others, that the antecedent regime’s institutional norms and individual attitudes can have long-lasting effects not only in particular countries but also trans-nationally.

Although most of the material in this book is original, some paragraphs of Chapters 2 and 3 draw from articles that were previously published. The following journals have kindly given permissions to use these materials, and I would like to thank them for their permissions:

The Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies (The George Washington University), which publishes *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, for the text that first appeared in H. Aliyev (2013) ‘Post-Communist Informal Networking: *Blat* in the South Caucasus.’ *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 21 (1), 89–112.

The International Strategic Research Organization (USAK), which publishes *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian Studies*, for the material that first appeared in H. Aliyev (2013) ‘Civil Society in the Soviet Caucasus: A Historical Analysis of Public and Private Spheres.’ *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian Studies*, 8 (15), 72–100.

Taylor & Francis Group, which publishes *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, for the material that first appeared in H. Aliyev (2014) ‘Civil Society in the South Caucasus: Kinship Networks as Obstacles to Civil Participation.’ *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 14 (2), 263–282.

Note on Transliteration

The transliteration of Russian words, including references in the Bibliography, follows the Library of Congress system for the social sciences. General exceptions are made for accepted Western spellings, such as Yeltsin, instead of El'tsyn, and Ossetia rather than Osetiia. Soft signs from the Russian language are marked with one prime. Translations of interviews, if conducted in Russian, are mine. Survey data, if originally available only in Russian, were also translated by me.

List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| ASSR | Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic |
| CPSU | Communist Party of the Soviet Union |
| CRRC | Caucasus Research Resource Centres |
| CSO | civil society organisation |
| EaP | Eastern Partnership initiative |
| EU | European Union |
| GDP | gross domestic product |
| GNP | gross national product |
| GONGO | government-organised non-governmental organisation |
| IDP | internally displaced person |
| IGO | international governmental organisation |
| INGO | international non-governmental organisation |
| NEP | New Economic Policy |
| NGO | non-governmental organisation |
| NKVD | People's Ministry of Internal Affairs |
| SSR | Soviet Socialist Republic |
| TsK KPSS | Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union |
| UN | United Nations |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union on 26 December 1991 brought a 'wind of change' for numerous peoples and nations, previously incorporated into the vast Soviet empire. The Caucasus, as well as the Baltic countries, Central Asia, Russia, Moldova and Ukraine, was entering a new stage of its history – the post-communist era. Yet, unlike other former Soviet regions, the Caucasus¹ – a mountainous multiethnic region – dissolved into violent armed conflicts, fuelled by nationalist aspirations long suppressed under the Soviet rule. Territorial grievances harboured by Armenians and Azerbaijanis, similarly to Georgians and Abkhazians, infected the South Caucasus with ethnic violence. In the North Caucasus, Boris Yeltsin's infamous suggestion, in his address to regional leaders, 'to grab as much autonomy as you can hold', was followed by the rise of Chechen nationalist separatism. The start of the Chechen wars marked the beginning of over 20 years of armed struggle in the North Caucasus.

By the end of the 1990s, the Caucasus remained a turbulent region. The cessation of armed conflicts in the South Caucasus was followed by a steady consolidation of authoritarianism, well entrenched in the nationalist rhetoric of post-Soviet elites, desperately clinging to power which continues to dominate the contemporary political landscape. In 2003 the Georgian 'Rose revolution' culminated in the overthrow of the Soviet-style authoritarian ruler of the country. However, across the Caucasus, as well as in 'post-revolutionary' Georgia, the reliance on patrimonial autocratic patterns of governance remained unabated. Almost two decades after the end of the Soviet rule in the Caucasus, it is clearly evident that the countries of this former Soviet region have failed to democratise: the region continues to remain under the firm grasp of authoritarian regimes. The failure of the post-communist political

transition is engendered in the persistence of paternalistic authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes notorious for unlimited presidential terms and controlled succession of leadership. Unlike in Central European former communist countries, the post-communist period in the Caucasus, as well as in other former Soviet states, is characterised by autocracy, clientelism and the spread of informal institutions and practices – features similar to those under Soviet rule. While Georgia is the only country in the region that gradually embarked on a slow process of post-communist reforms, others chose to prioritise the ‘strong’ patrimonial leadership over the tenets of participatory democracy.

This leads to the fundamental question of why democracy has failed to emerge in the Caucasus. This question has haunted researchers of democracy in post-Soviet states for the past two decades. The academic literature to date has emphasised both socio-political and socio-economic factors, in particular high economic inequality, the lack of democratic civil² mobilisation, political instability, insufficient previous democratic experience and the unwillingness of ruling elites to embark on democratic reforms. Of these causes, this book focuses on the failure of civil society to facilitate democracy. Although it must be admitted that civil society’s participation is not sufficient for transition to democracy, it is nevertheless necessary. Many scholars have stressed the significance of the civil sector in promoting democratic reforms, undermining authoritarian and paternalistic regimes and contributing towards the establishment of equalitarian, all-inclusive and transparent institutions. Hence, this book approaches the question of why the Caucasus has failed to democratise by focusing on the role of civil society.

The Caucasus is not a homogeneous region. Even the persistence of authoritarianism is not uniform across the region. If the North Caucasus, under the Kremlin’s rule, and Azerbaijan, governed by the same dynasty for the last 20 years, are the least democratic parts of the Caucasus, the pro-Western post-‘Rose revolution’ Georgia and its neighbouring Armenia are far more liberal. The Caucasus’s economies are as diverse as their political systems. The rapidly growing oil-dependent economy of Azerbaijan starkly contrasts agriculture-based Armenian and service and transportation-centred Georgian economies. In the North Caucasus, ravaged by decades of armed conflicts and the ongoing low-intensity insurgency, the economies of autonomous republics are mostly dysfunctional and heavily subsidised from the Russian federal budget.

Yet, besides their communist heritage, the Caucasus societies have one characteristic in common – the associational life, civil mobilisation and citizens’ participation in civil society are similarly low in all of the