



Societies in Transition? Ukraine and the Caucasus.

CEES & URIS Workshop

Friday, 19 November 2021 (9.30 a.m. – 4.00 p.m.), University of Zurich, Room SOE-E-1

States and societies that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union underwent significant transitions that went beyond changes to their political and economic systems and encompassed all spheres of social and cultural life as well as belief systems and views on the past. The goal of this interdisciplinary workshop organized jointly by the Center of Eastern European Studies (CEES) and Ukrainian Research in Switzerland (URIS) is to explore the nature of (post-Soviet) transitions in the Caucasus and in Ukraine, analyze the concepts and ideas that accompanied these transitions, and follow the changes over time and space. We also enquire into the current state of the transition in various post-Soviet states and territories and look at some of the debates taking place within the societies of these regions. Our workshop comprises three chaired panel discussions of 75 minutes each. Each speaker will be invited to give a short input at the beginning in which they briefly present their current research and connect it with the overarching topic of our workshop. This will be followed by a discussion with the audience.

9:30 – 9.45 a.m. Welcome address: Jeronim Perovic, Introduction: Dunja Krempin

9.45 – 11.15 a.m. Roundtable 1: Roots of transition – Ideas in motion

Mikhail Akulov (URIS): “The Great and Terrible...” Hopes, Experiences and Disappointments of the Ukrainian “1918”.

Nino Gozalishvili (CEES): Nationalism or Populism?: Deconstruction of National-Populist Discourse of Historical (1989-1990) and Contemporary Actors (2015-2020).

Valentina Tanailova (University of Bern): The memory of Ichkeria in contemporary Chechnya and the diaspora: contexts and narratives.

Moderation: **Benjamin Schenk (Basel)**

Political and religious ideas and historical narratives are important catalysts for the transition of societies. They offer anchor points, creating cohesion and meaning during the period of change. And through them, various players in a society hope to create future prospects for a society, a group, a region or a country. But these ideas and narratives also have a high potential for conflict, as other players prefer different ideas and narratives. The potential for conflict comes into play particularly when it comes to political and social decisions about the desired direction. This panel asks about the roots of historical narratives in different regions of the Caucasus and Kazakhstan and their current meanings for political governments and social movements.



11.15 – 11.45 a.m. Coffee break

11.45 a.m. – 1.15 p.m. Roundtable 2: Current states of transition – Societies in motion

Mrana Dbar (CEES): Abkhazia in the post-bipolar world order.

Danis Garaev (CEES): Russian Islamists and Muslims on Nagorno-Karabakh: The Ideological Roots of Religious Debates

Najmin Kamilsoy (CEES): Civil society restrictions and shifting landscape: Understanding traditional and new civic activism in Azerbaijan.

Moderation: **Nada Boskovska (Zurich)**

Social awakening harbors opportunities for political, economic and social innovation as well as for long-lasting conflicts between various actors that may have sociopolitical roots, but also religious ones. The period following the collapse of the Soviet Union was shaped by the desire for social and economic stability and development. But this direction was by no means predetermined: While some actors were pushing for democratization of their region or country, others were looking for independence or found support in traditionalist religious ideas that sometimes culminated in religious fanaticism. This panel takes a look at Abkhazia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, addressing the state of transition in these Caucasian regions with a focus on political, social and religious developments.

1.15 – 2.30 p.m. Lunch break

2.30 – 4.00 p.m. Roundtable 3: The future of transition – Conflicts in motion

Rustam Anshba (CEES): International Isolation and Conflict Resolution: the Case of Abkhazia.

Murat Shogulov (University of Bern): Constriction, Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Memories: the case of the Memorial of Deportation in Chechnya.

Tamar Tolordava (CEES): Informality and Corruption Revisited - Crossover of Informal Governance and Corruption Under the Georgian Dream” Rule.

Moderation: **Ulrich Schmid (St Gallen)**

The conflict potential of transition due to the collapse of the Soviet Union is very high: Many regions of the Caucasus are affected by conflicts that have a massive impact on people's everyday lives, right up to armed conflicts. Historical narratives and memories as well as traditional forms of political governance are used to stir up conflicts and lead countries in the political and social direction desired by the ruling elite. Conflict resolution and the consideration of various perspectives in different regions are therefore all the more important. The panel focuses on examples from the North and South Caucasus.