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GEORGIA'S ROSE REVOLUTION

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Since the early to mid-1990s, all the republics of the former Soviet Union aside from the three small Baltic states have been growing steadily more authoritarian while the world democratic community has mostly stood by, raising ever less vigorous objections to strongman presidents and the routine use of electoral fraud and manipulation. Domestically, the picture has been no more encouraging. The public mobilizations of the *perestroika* and independence years have given way to widespread apathy, resignation, and cynicism about the prospects for democratic reform. These baleful trends dominated recent presidential elections in Armenia (19 February 2003) and Azerbaijan (15 October 2003). In the latter, a dying Heydar Aliyev—the local Communist Party first secretary under Leonid Brezhnev and president of independent Azerbaijan since 1993—managed from his hospital bed in Cleveland, Ohio, to engineer the succession of his 42-year-old son, Ilham.

Georgia seemed to be going the same way with a typically fraudulent post-Soviet parliamentary election on 2 November 2003. But then came a stunning reversal. A brief and nonviolent series of mass protests—the so-called Revolution of the Roses (22–23 November 2003)—forced 75-year-old incumbent president Eduard Shevardnadze to resign. This paved the way for fresh voting on 4 January 2004 in which the Rose Revolution's leader, a 36-year-old U.S.-educated lawyer named Mikheil Saakashvili, swept into office unopposed with 96.2 percent of the vote. New parliamentary elections were scheduled for late March 2004, after this essay goes to press.

The events in Georgia have confounded expectations. Democratization in Russia and many other republics seems at this point to have

failed, but now perhaps there is a second chance. This unexpected opportunity should make us reconsider the methods by which fragile openings to democracy may be sustained and widened.

The independence movements that triumphed in both Georgia and Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 1990s understood themselves as democratic breakthroughs. Nationalism fueled the early democratic movements, and then immensely complicated their successful institutionalization. Wars against ethnic separatists failed. This alone might have dealt a mortal blow to the democratically elected presidents, Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Georgia and Abulfaz Elchibey in Azerbaijan, even without corrupt entourages, economic crises, and simple inability to work the machinery of the communist state. Weakened by all this turmoil, the first democracies became failed states, and military coups ousted their leaders.

After initial power struggles, former Communist first secretaries Eduard Shevardnadze and Heydar Aliyev returned under the title of president and gradually consolidated power. They had to deal with somewhat similar problems and political forces, especially the severe economic distress that made the bulk of the population dissatisfied regardless of their political views. In both countries, only a small elite has benefited from privatization and new business startups. Political connections remained the favored means of acquiring capital, and each president's family or clan members controlled some of the most lucrative enterprises. Large numbers of refugees from the lost ethnic wars (Georgia's in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Azerbaijan's in Nagorno-Karabakh) posed a difficult challenge, as did intermittent hostility from Russia, which seemingly was behind a series of coup and assassination attempts against each leader.

Partially offsetting these problems, both nation-building efforts benefited from the force of nationalism. The Georgian and Azeri elites have been almost unanimous in their desire for a fresh start and at least outwardly Western forms. Accordingly, both countries have multiple parties, media nominally free of censorship (Georgia even has more than two television networks), and the rest of the panoply of Western institutions. Yet each has a "superpresidential" constitution that gives little scope to the legislative or judicial branch and lets the presidential apparat—in effect the successor to the old Communist Central Committee staff—make nearly all important decisions.

Shevardnadze and Aliyev each inherited an opposition that was not only loyal to the first independent government but also fairly strong (Azerbaijan's was especially robust), even if beset by the usual postcommunist-opposition banes of excessive personalism and unwillingness to make common cause and work together. To countervail against possible opposition influence, each president set up a government party—the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG) and New Azerbaijan, respectively—that melded highly antipathetic candidates, political traditions, and slogans.

Shevardnadze and Aliyev both became rulers with little power heading failed state structures, but their subsequent policies differed greatly. Originally, neither could avoid weak authoritarian rule accompanied by democratic institutions. Aliyev then proved more successful in returning to old Soviet-style ways. In 1994, Shevardnadze made Zurab Zhvania, the former head of Georgia's Green Party, secretary-general of the newly formed CUG, then later chairman of Parliament. Zhvania staked out a more reformist position than the ex-Communist officials in the CUG, and Shevardnadze allowed him to do so for years. After the dubious elections that returned Shevardnadze to power in 1996 and 2000, activity by independent nongovernmental organizations took off. This contrasted sharply with the situation in Azerbaijan, where in 2003 Aliyev was able to bar from election monitoring any NGO that received more than 30 percent of its funding from abroad.

Succession and Transition

Moments of leadership succession may present opportunities for democratization that both backers and critics of the "transition paradigm" have insufficiently appreciated. Perhaps sensing this, the ailing Heydar Aliyev set up the election laws to facilitate official fraud and keep the opposition off television, and then had the Azeri constitution amended to make Ilham acting president in the event of paternal incapacity. Shevardnadze, by contrast, had no chosen heir, and was only facing a parliamentary election in 2003. He had more resourceful foes to deal with as well, since Georgia's opposition, unlike Azerbaijan's, is the product of splits within the ruling party and hence features leaders with actual experience of governing. Finally, the U.S. attitude toward Shevardnadze was less lenient, whether because of lower U.S. expectations vis-à-vis Aliyev or because Azerbaijan has oil.

As the Azeri election approached, support for the opposition visibly flagged as its parties failed to unite; some even flirted with the regime. Shortly before the vote, Heydar Aliyev stepped aside in favor of his son. The only other contender with a background in the governing party, Eldar Namazov, found himself disqualified. A mission sent by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) cited serious violations including "a countrywide pattern of grave intimidation." It judged the voting flawed, though the general consensus among observers was that Ilham Aliyev would have won even a more fairly conducted vote, though perhaps not with the whopping 77 percent recorded in the official results.[1]

Ten thousand demonstrators took to the streets of Baku to protest the result. Some in their ranks (perhaps provocateurs pretending to be protestors) attacked cars and police officers. Police gunfire killed four and wounded hundreds more; hundreds were arrested, including electoral officials who refused to certify fraudulent numbers. The protests died out,

Georgia

and Ilham Aliyev was left to take the reins in the post-Soviet world's first instance of dynastic succession.

Things in Georgia were more complicated. The pace of reform slackened in the mid-1990s, and dissension within the ruling party rose. By the time of the June 2002 local elections (widely viewed as the opening engagement in the struggle to succeed Shevardnadze), the CUG lay in a shambles, torn apart by defecting factions. Never before had a post-Soviet president allowed this to happen. Shevardnadze, it seemed, did not care who was to succeed him. As a result, the 2002 local elections were the freest that Georgia had ever seen. Voters were repudiating the country's normal mode of rule. In Tbilisi, the capital city and home to a third of the republic's five million people, a pair of opposition parties wiped out the CUG. In the provinces the CUG did better, though even there the business-backed New Rights party elected numerous local councilors and mayors.

Shevardnadze then began trying to rebuild the CUG. The November 2003 parliamentary balloting loomed as a key test of strength before the April 2005 presidential election. Despite the ample official support it enjoyed, the new-model CUG was finding itself dragged down by internal splits, a dearth of leadership, and the plummeting popularity of Shevardnadze himself (whose approval rating was headed toward 5 percent). The full extent of the dry rot would become apparent during the postelectoral crisis: As independent networks showed the demonstrations on live television, the state broadcasting system ran U.S.-made "B" movies. At the moment of decision, the old regime had nothing to say.

Georgians should be grateful to Shevardnadze for allowing the opening in which democratic civil society developed. Such a society, added to formal institutions that presuppose democracy as the only legitimate regime, creates an explosive mixture only waiting for ignition. While

Thomas Carothers is right to call "dominant-power politics" rather than democratic transition the reigning tendency in pseudodemocratic states, we should not overlook the hidden fragility of false-front democracies.[2] These regimes pretend to be something they are not, and each stolen election declares their lack of legitimacy. Students of democratization should attend more closely to instances of election fraud as moments when prodemocratic forces can expose the underlying illegitimacy that plagues pseudodemocracy.

The autumn of 2003 witnessed a temporary and partial coalescence of various heavily personalistic opposition parties. These included not only New Rights but also the New National Movement led by Saakashvili (the former justice minister whom Zhvania had originally recruited into government service from a New York law firm), and a grouping around Zhvania himself and Nino Burjenadze, who was probably the country's single most popular politician. For the most part, the parties campaigned separately, but they did take part together in demonstrations against Shevardnadze and the CUG government. The Labor Party of Shalva Natelashvili opposed the government independently.

In a campaign that often evoked nationalist themes and made promises which could never be kept given budgetary realities, Saakashvili and Labor appealed to those who felt most injured by market forces. Saakashvili, the former Manhattan attorney with a law degree from Columbia University, showed remarkable skill at appealing across social-class lines, speaking eloquently in public, gauging shifts in popular opinion, and last but not least, getting on television. He was also unique in his clever and eclectic use of symbols, whether a neomedieval flag with five crosses or the roses that he distributed—as a sign of shared belief in nonviolence—to those who joined him in bloodlessly storming Parliament during the late-November revolution.

Keeping It Honest

While the main scenes of the campaign were unfolding, a related drama was playing itself out just offstage as the U.S. government sought to close opportunities for electoral fraud while the Shevardnadze regime angled to keep them open. The United States was in the throes of its most consistent and serious attempt ever in any ex-Soviet republic to secure free and fair balloting and ensure the effectuality of the people's verdict. The U.S. Agency for International Development spent US$1.5 million to computerize Georgia's messy voter rolls. The U.S. and European governments also gave OSCE money to deploy an unprecedented number of foreign election observers. At the same time, the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute gave a Georgian NGO known as Fair Elections enough money to field thousands of domestic monitors and conduct a parallel vote tabulation—one of the most effective tools for establish-

ing *prima facie* evidence of large-scale election fraud. Other Georgian and foreign NGOs also monitored the elections and conducted exit polls. The George Soros–funded Open Society Institute (OSI) gave money for Saakashvili and a number of prodemocratic student activists to go to Serbia and confer with the young activists there who had helped to topple Slobodan Milošević after his regime had falsified election results in the fall of 2000. The funding from OSI enabled the creation of Kmara (Enough), an NGO modeled on Serbia's Otpor even to the degree of using the same symbol, a clenched fist. Kmara activists received training from Serbs in all the techniques of nonviolent protest.

In July 2003, U.S. president George W. Bush sent former secretary of state James Baker to meet with both opposition leaders and President Shevardnadze. To the latter, Baker delivered a letter from Bush sternly stressing the need for free elections. Baker proposed a formula for representation of the various parties on the electoral commissions at each level. Shevardnadze agreed, but no sooner had Baker left than parties inspired by Shevardnadze began maneuvering against the Baker formula.

These U.S. efforts having heightened their expectation that the upcoming elections would be honest, Georgians felt dismay when, just a few days ahead of the vote, the computerized voting lists turned out to contain stunning errors. Acting without a legal basis, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) decided to scrap the computer-generated rolls. Election day was chaotic. Hundreds of thousands were turned away from the polls. Others found dead relatives on the lists. There was selectivity in the omissions and additions.

I served with a monitoring team sent by the U.S.-based International Republican Institute to the Marneuli district in southern Georgia, an ethnic-Azeri area notorious for bloc voting and electoral chicanery. Shevardnadze's government did have considerable support in this old-fashioned and largely rustic place, where traditions of patronage and deference to authority run strong and the opposition has little presence. I guessed that in a truly free and fair election, the government party would have won 60 to 70 percent of the region's vote. The reported results claimed more than 90 percent for the CUG, however, while facts on the ground bespoke blatant and systematic fraud. We saw the same people voting again and again; voters and even members of the precinct-level electoral commissions being arbitrarily thrown out of polling places; officials marking ballots for voters and refusing to carry out legally prescribed procedures meant to ensure fairness; instances of "family voting" in which patriarchs voted for their households; a needless and clearly intimidating police presence inside polling stations; and much more.

There is evidence that electoral commissions at various levels were doing their best to deliver Shevardnadze his parliamentary majority. The parallel vote tabulation showed the government electoral coalition with only about half the total that the preliminary official figures were

claiming, however—a sign of massive fraud. All the opposition parties believed that they had been cheated, and the public was angered by the confusion surrounding the voter rolls. The area that I monitored was one of two regions that reported their results suspiciously late. The other region, Ajaria, returned patently absurd figures claiming more votes for the local political boss's Shevardnadze-aligned party than the district had registered voters.

The OSCE and other monitors had already issued damning reports, and modest-sized protests had begun in Tbilisi (involving no more than ten thousand people), when word came of the insultingly ludicrous "results" from Ajaria. Thereafter, matters came quickly to a head. Ordinary citizens in Georgia, like their counterparts in other ex-Soviet republics, will grudgingly tolerate a certain amount of fraud—but this was far too much. Georgians, witnessing the vigorous foreign and domestic monitoring effort, had dared to dream of a clean and free election. They had put up with years of deprivation and failed reforms, hoping for improvement after Shevardnadze retired. Now they had been forced to watch as he had scraped his "party of power" back together and attempted a managed succession—the mess, it seemed, would never end. That the margin of Shevardnadze's narrow parliamentary majority came from Ajaria was twisting the knife in the wound. The area is ruled as a virtual fiefdom by Aslan Abashidze, a brutal and corrupt authoritarian notorious for his abject subservience to Russia, Georgia's old adversary and colonial overlord. Shevardnadze had cheated not only for himself, but for the most despised politician in Georgia. Whatever public respect the president retained fled when he hurried to confer with Abashidze, who then made a circuit of the Armenian, Azeri, and Russian capitals. Shevardnadze, it seemed, was trying to hold on to power by conniving with Abashidze to sell Georgia out to foreigners.

In Tbilisi, the crowds quickly swelled toward the 100,000 range—as big as the pro-independence demonstrations of the late 1980s, but far more orderly. Saakashvili stood up before the crowd to renew his demand—voiced already before the election—that Shevardnadze resign.[3]

In this explosive atmosphere the CEC announced the final, falsified results. On November 20, the U.S. State Department issued a press statement insisting that the results "do not accurately reflect the will of the Georgian people, but instead reflect massive fraud." As a Radio Free Europe–Radio Liberty analyst pointed out, this "was the first time ever that the U.S. has openly accused the leadership of a former Soviet republic of rigging an election."[4] Finally, on November 22, as Shevardnadze was formally opening the new Parliament, Saakashvili led a crowd into the chamber and disrupted the session. The legislators dispersed as Shevardnadze's bodyguards hustled him off the rostrum and out of the building, unfinished speech in hand. Although police were present, not a shot was fired. Shevardnadze fled to his suburban residence, declared a state of emergency, and vowed to have the revolutionaries arrested. Groups of armed

fighters were gathering on both sides. It appears likely that Shevardnadze meant to use force at some point, but the army, police, and presidential guards—internally split, unwilling to attack civilians as Soviet troops had done in Tbilisi in 1989, and subject to U.S. lobbying—never moved. There was little that Shevardnadze could do but resign.

The Future: Testing Democracy in Georgia

Nino Burjenadze, as chairman of the old Parliament, became acting president; the frightened CEC disavowed the November election and the courts canceled the results. On the heels of his overwhelming January 2004 presidential win, Saakashvili and his diverse coalition have tremendous authority. At this early date, the coalition's very variety adds to its power. Zhvania and Burjenadze know how to work the old, unreformed system while maintaining a generally reformist direction, and Saakashvili benefits from the high tide of enthusiasm for self-government and purification of the administration. As Lord Macaulay remarked of a British wartime cabinet formed in 1757 by the incorruptible William Pitt the Elder and the patronage-obsessed Duke of Newcastle, "the coalition gathered to itself support from all the high and all the low parts of human nature, and was strong with the whole united strength of virtue and of Mammon."[5] Washington, without having sought just this result, is euphoric, while Moscow is still anxious to win the new rulers' friendship.

What can trouble this blissful picture? Sadly, the answer is "quite a bit." Euphoria means high hopes, and as Juan J. Linz reminds us, "Presidents, especially those who come to power after a plebiscitarian or populist campaign, often find that the power they possess is hopelessly insufficient to meet the expectations they have generated."[6] The superpresidential levers that Saakashvili inherited from his predecessor and has even strengthened actually mesh poorly with Georgia's fragile, rust-eaten machinery of state. The Georgian government badly needs a complete overhaul, but it cannot be garaged in the meantime. Short-term fixes now being tried include attempts to raise revenue by going after corruptly gained assets: A son-in-law of Shevardnadze was recently arrested for tax evasion. If such efforts degenerate into shakedowns, they will besmirch the very cause for which the new leaders and the public have struggled.

There is a strong likelihood that the current governing coalition will split eventually. By both connections and personality, Burjenadze and Zhvania are far closer to the old *nomenklatura* than is Saakashvili, who is one of the world's youngest chief executives. Saakashvili is unique in having two extremely disparate sets of supporters: the desperately poor who have been unable to claim any of the market's benefits, and young Tbilisians who work for NGOs, multinational corporations, or Georgian firms that look west.

Division among reformers is not necessarily bad. If successful democratic transitions in East Central Europe are any guide, the winners in Georgia today have left out of their coalition parts of the political class and the voting public—including some supporters of democracy—who will soon enough coalesce around some alternative grouping that is roughly as democratic as the ruling party. Either Zhvania or Burjenadze could lead such a democratic alternative to a democratic government. But if a split is too bitter, is somehow ill-timed, or gives rise to an incoherent congeries of splinter parties (some of which are antidemocratic), then the achievements of the Rose Revolution may be imperiled and Georgia may face a drop off the cliff of state failure.

Another and greater danger to Saakashvili's success is the impatience of postcommunist publics. Broadly speaking, elections in the former Soviet bloc follow one of two opposite patterns. Both can be seen as responses to felt victimization at the hands of remote and unchecked political and economic powerholders.[7] Where the yawning uncertainties of post-Soviet life make people feel helpless, the sense of victimization fosters passive acquiescence in authoritarian rule. Shevardnadze used to benefit from such docility, as Russia's President Vladimir Putin does now. Where people feel slightly more secure, as in East Central Europe, there rises an urge to "throw the rascals out." Virtually every party that triumphs in one election is wiped out in the next. Georgia has daunting problems, and the new team will not have much time to relieve them. Yet success is by no means out of the question. The sudden victors benefit from a real transformation of the Georgian public mood.

There will be many temptations to return to authoritarian rule—either now, in order to nail down big changes while the revolution is basking in its honeymoon, or else under the gradually rising pressure of events. There are already some bad signs. The January 4 special presidential election, held within the constitutionally mandated 45 days, yielded a Saakashvili victory by the Soviet-style figure of 96.2 percent; no opponent of any stature would run against him. The parliamentary elections set for late March may yield no serious opposition; it will be easy for a government that wants to do so to craft a spurious opposition from Shevardnadze's former lieutenants.

Every revolutionary or reformist government faces the question of whether it should scrap old, misused instruments of power, or else try and reshape them into tools for positive change. With respect to Georgia's already-strong presidency, Saakashvili has taken the latter course with a vengeance. A series of hurried amendments—passed by a cowed Parliament over objections voiced personally to Saakashvili by democratic NGOs and other backers of the Rose Revolution—has pumped up presidential power and left Parliament and the courts almost without independent power. Shevardnadze's "superpresidential" constitution is now Saakashvili's "hyperpresidential" constitution.

Television shows which even under Shevardnadze were open to critics of the government have now mysteriously been canceled. But if public disaffection grows and Saakashvili huddles behind these prerogatives to shield himself from it, his coalition will fracture, key foreign supporters will bolt, the newly energized and already-skeptical NGOs will turn decisively against him, and Georgia's spell of democracy could melt away like the snows of March.

Lessons of the Election and the Crisis

The inspiring events in Georgia hold a number of lessons for academic students of democratization and prodemocracy activists alike. What sealed Shevardnadze's fall was the refusal of Georgia's military and security organs to move against the demonstrators. Was this a coup? Many Georgians and some foreign journalists seem to think so.

Had Georgians seen a stolen election followed by a change of power with no mass protest campaign intervening, they probably would have concluded that they were witnessing a coup. Demonstrations that forced out the president, without a preceding stolen election, probably would have seemed the same. Only an election fair enough to indicate the real winners, followed by government attempts to bury that result, followed by mass demonstrations, could give the public a sense that it owned the ensuing changes. Western governments and many NGOs tend to picture the "transition paradigm" as something legal and gradualist. But this picture can be deceptive. Does not the case of Georgia show that *sometimes* a sudden and extraconstitutional expression of public opinion can be good for democratization?

Not every former republic of the old USSR has all the factors that came together in Georgia last November. Among them were not only economic distress (common enough across the ex-Soviet world) but also a centuries-old national orientation toward the West; direct U.S. influence, even on the military; an aged authoritarian ruler with no obvious heir and a looming succession crisis; a divided ruling party; and an impressive array of vigorously independent businesses, NGOs, and media outlets. Of all these, the nonstate broadcast media may have held the key. Few Georgians can afford newspapers. Only the cameras and microphones of the private television networks could make it possible for the whole country to respond to popular campaign appeals, debate the plausibility of the official election figures, and catch the mood of Tbilisi.

Modern means of communication create a public world whose character is determined by editorial selection, particularly of news. The media can also make what is small or isolated seem large and portentous: The terms "media event" and "media hype" are not accidental. Having amplified events and issues, the media echo them back; Henry James aptly named a fictional newspaper *The Reverberator*. For all these reasons,

modern media are well suited to amplify the elements of pluralism that soft authoritarian regimes permit, making them potentially more democratic. Vladimir Putin understands this, which is why he has made such efforts to restrict the freedom of the "means of mass communication."

In 2003, Georgia was arguably the only ex-Soviet republic with genuinely independent television. Television is particularly selective and simplifying, because of its great cost, its need to appeal to enormous audiences, and its need to make events visually compelling.[8] It has a bias in favor of conflict narratives and tends to reduce everything to two sides. Television thus helped Saakashvili, the most radical oppositionist, to drag Burjenadze and Zhvania along with him. Saakashvili's red-and-white flags dominated the demonstrations visually and helped him dominate the opposition.

The huge role that television stations owned by wealthy private businessmen played in the Rose Revolution should affect our evaluation of the part that such "oligarchs" can have in democratizing authoritarian regimes. Shevardnadze made only intermittent efforts to bring these businessmen to heel. Putin has been more consistent: In Russia, any "oligarchs" who have not already been arrested or driven into exile are securely on the government's leash. Georgian business concerns seem to have a stronger international bent than their Russian counterparts, and the Georgian state is weaker than Russia's. So just as state strength of a certain sort is necessary for democratic endurance, perhaps state weakness of a certain kind and degree can aid democratization when the moment is right.

Curiously, at least one of the ways in which Georgian society is *not* modern or pluralistic redounded to the revolution's benefit. Consider Shevardnadze. By 2003 he had no feel at all for public attitudes and the resulting momentum of events. Turning to Aslan Abashidze (and behind him his Russian patrons) was an act of supreme folly. It was bound to affront most public-spirited Georgians, given both the old Georgian urge to counterbalance potent neighbors through strong Western ties and Russian behavior since 1991. Had Shevardnadze been less mentally isolated, he might have saved his presidency by forging a compromise during the nearly three weeks that elapsed between the fraudulent election and his resignation. Many accounts say that the opposition was open to a deal right up until Shevardnadze's surprise decision to step down.

Clearly Shevardnadze was cut off, deliberating only with a circle of his most corrupt and desperate supporters. Even some oppositionists were isolated, as one could judge from their miscalculations. One must always remember the anxiety and suspicion that thrive in the afterglow of Marxism, in which the most outlandish "insider" accounts of what is happening can cause politicians to ignore what their own eyes and ears tell them about events in the streets below.

The most important cause of this elite isolation is a sense that, once

the votes have been cast—and miscounted within the range of feasible and passable fraud—those in power will determine what each party will receive. Contemporary political science has not captured the full complexity of the bargaining that goes on over fraudulent elections. Some Georgian politicians, observing the bogus preliminary results, reasonably worried that they would not meet the 7 percent threshold for (proportionally elected) parliamentary seats. Their fear gave the government leverage. At the precinct that I was monitoring, I observed agents from *all* the nongovernmental parties calling their respective offices on cell phones and then bargaining with Shevardnadze's people. Earlier, OSCE observers overheard the ruling party's agents berating one party representative in Azeri Turkish: "See what you did! We could have had a deal . . . and now the observers are back." Such deals are rational when gaining a certain percentage of the total national vote means seats in parliament. We need to think more about how voting rules designed to foster good things such as moderation can be twisted in authoritarian societies, and how such rules can be adjusted to improve the chances for democracy.

A second irony regarding the limits to modernity in Georgia and the country's revolution was the lack of any significant tendency to appeal to legal procedures. Saakashvili, as noted, is himself a highly trained lawyer and had served as justice minister. But the movement that he led was an affair of the streets, not the courts. It was populist, not legalist. It took U.S. urging to get those angered by the election theft to file suit against the CEC. The natural reactions of most Georgians focused on either intrigues within the government or mass public protest. In the end, it was street-level action in Tbilisi that displaced the old regime. Throughout the crisis, the Georgian public believed more in the possibility of liberal democracy than did the political class.

Revolutions Without Thorns?

Bronisław Geremek, one of the most important leaders of the most revolutionary of the Eastern European regime changes, expressed its lessons in these words: "In our time, paradoxically, the sweeping change of systems and transformation of societies seem to require not a revolution but *a process of adjustment that dispenses with head-on clashes*."[9]

Under Shevardnadze, was Georgia not engaged in such a process of adjustment? The country did not lack for innovations and new men, but they mingled inextricably, unpredictably, and arbitrarily with outworn communist officials, institutions, and habits. There was no clear point of "regime change" to look back at or forward to. This postcommunist vagueness seems to have exhausted the Georgians' patience. They stayed with Shevardnadze for years, but none of the country's problems were ever solved.

Post-Soviet and Western governments used the "transition paradigm" to justify, and thus partly produce, the indeterminacy or malaise that the Georgian public reacted against. All the post-Soviet republics, and many in East Central Europe, are somehow stuck in this ambiguous in-between. Throughout this quarter of the earth, the losers are rarely "lustrated," and never ceremonially executed, transmuting them into public villains. Nor are the real heroes treated well by their compatriots. The root of this treatment may be the reluctance of postcommunist publics to explore the question of their own complicity with the vanished regime.

On the evening of 23 November 2003, Tbilisi became the scene of a city-wide party set to car horns and rock music. Georgians, given to self-contempt since the failure of their first revolution (marked by Gamsakhurdia's ouster) and the loss of the Abkhaz war, crawled out of bed late on the morning of November 24 with joyous smiles that they are still wearing. The Georgian revolution could disrupt so many old patterns only because it was *seen* as a revolution, abrupt and decisive, and because Georgians accomplished it *themselves*. Similarly, the most successful of the East European regime changes, overall, has been that of Poland, where the people can look back on a repeated struggle with the regime that began in 1956 and culminated in the most revolutionary of anticommunist oppositions, Solidarity.

Most of the early postcommunist "transitions" never enabled citizens to develop the capacities for self-help and self-government that the Georgian scholar and democratic activist Ghia Nodia calls "political muscles." People cowed into passivity for decades are not likely to be good at stopping new powerholders from manipulating the forms and institutions of democracy. And where the international democratic community has had the leeway, it has generally chosen not to empower the people themselves. Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq are all in some sort of a mess in part because external powers have tried to consummate a revolutionary democratic task without any revolutionists.

Our current preference for "transition" over revolution is perhaps emblematic of a deeper taste of our time, which likes to drift ambivalently between rigorous and demanding alternatives. The European Union drifts between coalition and statehood, the United States drifts between empire and humanitarian aid organization, ethnic struggles vacillate between war and peace (or float in the ambiguous realm of the "peace process"), and interventions to stop ethnic troubles often seem unable to decide if they are straightforward military campaigns or exercises in coercive bargaining (witness the NATO air war against Serbia over Kosovo). The outcomes that the developed countries have wound up preferring—Western protectorates in Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and East Timor, for instance—involve a great deal of hovering between the provision of forthright aid to local revolutionar-

ies and the application of a kind of neoimperial *Pax Romana* in which locals have little or no say.

We should view the Revolution of the Roses without illusions. The hard leading edge of the fashionable, well-educated crowd that Saakashvili led into the streets, into Parliament, and then into power was a line of young, lower-class toughs in leather jackets. Also on the scene were thousands of regime policemen and thugs trucked in by Aslan Abashidze to face down the revolutionists. The crowd physically prevented Shevardnadze from legally certifying the fraudulent election results; there was force, albeit not *armed* force. Had these formalities been completed, the change in administrations and the new, fairer elections would have lacked even the debatable legality that they had within the old regime's constitutional framework. As much as the revolutionaries' tactics, it was Shevardnadze's saving choices to flee Parliament and to resign that skirted bloodshed. And yet Shevardnadze apparently intended to send the army, the police, or the presidential guard to disperse the crowds. But these forces gauged the public mood, argued among themselves along generational lines, and in the end heeded the Pentagon's counsels on behalf of neutrality. Russian policies shifted during the endgame, and eased the outcome. The absence of violence was truly fortunate. Bloodshed would have rendered the changes far less legitimate and risked unexpected consequences of many kinds. Violence was avoided only by the thinnest of margins.

We should view the Revolution of the Roses without illusions. Violence was avoided only by the thinnest of margins. The next time an authoritarian regime is toppled in the post-Soviet world, it may involve open violence. Are we prepared for that?

Can the Rose Revolution be reproduced elsewhere? Probably, but not by identical means. Authoritarians are now forewarned against NGOs, a free press, foreign pressures, and Shevardnadze's whole style of soft authoritarianism. The next time an authoritarian regime is toppled in the post-Soviet world, it may involve open violence. Are we prepared for that? The Georgian revolution should provoke intensive rethinking, by scholars and democratic activists alike, of the advantages and drawbacks of government-managed transitions, international protectorates, "velvet revolutions" like Georgia's, and classical revolutions by violence.

In any case, the Rose Revolution's attractiveness as a new opening for other Soviet peoples, and as a cleansing and fructifying experience for Georgia, has changed the landscape. If they similarly ready themselves for political change, other ex-Soviet peoples will surely be worth

the Western efforts expended to help the Georgians. And the Georgian example may be worthy of creative emulation by other peoples who find themselves mired in the morass of a democratic "transition" that is going nowhere.

NOTES

1. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Republic of Azerbaijan Presidential Election," 15 October 2003; "OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report," Warsaw, 12 November 2003, 11.

2. Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (January 2002): 11–12. Note, however, the qualification that Carothers offers at 13–14.

3. As I argued in these pages while reviewing the first decade after the USSR's collapse: "If, at any point, a [post-Soviet] democratic leader wished to reintroduce the politics of class conflict and mass mobilization, public discontent could be a mighty source of energy for democratic change." Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "Disillusionment in Central Asia and the Caucasus," *Journal of Democracy* 12 (October 2001): 52.

4. RFE/RL, *Caucasus Report,* 24 November 2003, 1. See *www.rferl.org.*

5. Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Folio Society, 1980), 108.

6. Juan J. Linz, "Debate—Presidents vs. Parliaments: The Virtues of Parliamentarism," *Journal of Democracy* 1 (Fall 1990): 86.

7. Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "Disillusionment in Central Asia and the Caucasus," 53.

8. The most interesting political-science study of television news is Edward J. Epstein, *News from Nowhere: Television and the News* (New York: Knopf, 1974), esp. 163–99 and 241–47.

9. Bronisław Geremek, "Politics After Communism: A Horizon of Hope and Fear," *Journal of Democracy* 4 (July 1993): 101. Emphasis added.