CIVIL SOCIETY

THE ROSE REVOLUTION AND THE SOUTHERN CAUCASUS

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The Rose Revolution of November 2003 in Georgia repeated itself almost to the word in Ukraine, thus giving most of the expert community the firm conviction that little by little similar events would transform the rest of the post-Soviet expanse.

Elections of 2003 in the Southern Caucasus

In 2003, all the South Caucasian countries lived through election campaigns: on 5 March, the Armenians elected their president; on 25 May, they went to the polls to elect a new parliament; on 15 October, Azerbaijan received a new president; and on 2 November, Georgia made an attempt to elect a parliament, which developed into the Rose Revolution. It should be said here that even before these dates it was absolutely clear that the results would determine the future of these states.

International observers failed to reach a unanimous opinion about the presidential elections in Armenia. Their opinions ranged from "by rejecting the opportunity to carry out fair and objective elections Armenia lost its chance to move closer toward democracy," offered by Special Representative of the U.S. State Department Richard Baucher, to "it was a democratic and legitimate campaign," offered by the CIS observers. Defense Minister of Armenia Serzh Sarkissian, who headed the election team of President Robert Kocharian, offered his own explanation: "The CIS observers know Armenia and the Armenian mentality

well. Those who have never lived in our country cannot adequately explain local developments. Western observers came from countries with their own particular idea of democracy." This is not acceptable for the simple reason that "a particular idea of democracy" is genuine democracy, while in the post-Soviet expanse, democracy is merely imitated.

The OSCE and the Council of Europe agreed that the parliamentary elections in Armenia were better organized than the presidential, yet they fell short of the main international standards. The CIS observers praised them as "free and democratic," to borrow the phrase from Iury Iarov who headed the CIS group. They pointed to petty violations which did not interfere with the freedom of the voting procedure.

The Georgian leaders still at the helm at that time could draw several conclusions from the Armenian experience: the elections could be arranged and won in the old way; the CIS observers were prepared to accept any results; and the West, while being critical, was equally prepared to accept them. We can say that the "Armenian lessons" were further confirmed by the events in Azerbaijan.

Georgia went to the polls on 2 November; by that time the balance of power was clear. The sides were closely following the Azerbaijanian developments, while their leaders were saying in unison: "This should not happen in our country." It turned out, however, that the authorities and the opposition had different things in mind. While President Eduard Shevardnadze not only approved of what the newly elected President of Azerbaijan, Ilkham Aliev, did after he had been elected, he also added that he was prepared to do the same for the sake of normal completion of the election procedure: "It is not my intention to scare anyone, but I want everybody to know that I shall not retreat—I want normal elections." He made this comment on the Baku events at a traditional briefing session. The response was a stormy one: the opposition objected to falsifications and the use of force; it expected the elections results to be falsified. The Georgian leaders accused their political opponents of wishing to destabilize the situation under the pretext of possible falsifications. One of the Georgian newspapers wrote after the elections in Azerbaijan: "Isa Gambar and his Musavatists very much resemble our Mikhail Saakashvili and his Nationals. It was before the elections that they promised to use force—after the elections they promise mass unrest."[1]

Some of the opposition members, especially those who belonged to the National Movement, declared that they would resort to mass protests if the election results were falsified. The authorities did not hesitate to tag them as "agents of foreign countries out to undermine the Baku-Ceyhan project." These people deserved to be isolated from society, while the West was expected to stay away for the sake of the oil pipeline project: it was commonly believed that the West preferred "stability" to "democracy." The opposition, however, warned that the Baku variant would fail in Tbilisi: the official powers were not strong enough to launch repressions. It seems that the Baku events did a disservice to the government bloc guided by President Shevardnadze, which was readying itself for the elections.

Georgia attached a lot of importance to what the West thought. Observers from the "genuinely" democratic countries were expected to offer their unbiased and weighty opinion if the election results were falsified. This explains disillusionment with the verdict returned by some of the Western observers, who pointed to "individual violations" registered during the elections of 15 October, 2003 in Azerbaijan, and the doubts about the institution of foreign observers. On 18 October, one of the Georgian newspapers carried an article entitled "Infamous Assessment of the Infamous Elections," which put the feelings of the democratic opposition in a nutshell[2] (even though the title could not be applied to all observers).

The Georgian media plunged into a discussion of "why Shevardnadze was not allowed to do what Aliev could accomplish" and why the West proved to be stricter with Tbilisi than with Baku. It was written that, compared with Azerbaijan, Georgia was much better suited for democratic elections.

[1] *Sakartvelos respublika,* 18 October, 2003.
[2] See: *24 saati,* 18 October, 2003.

The Phenomenon of the Post-Soviet Election Campaigns

The "velvet revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine demonstrated that power could be changed peacefully across the CIS through democratic elections. Before that, this prospect looked dim: the ruling circles were reluctant to cede power and were prepared to go at all lengths to achieve "the desired results." Such elections created two major problems: a domestic one (the extent to which the opposition was prepared to accept another victory of power scored in this way) and a foreign one (the extent to which the international response to the violations detected in the course of the election campaign might prove critical and dangerous to the regime). The rulers of the post-Soviet countries have become past masters of "decorative elections," yet the authoritarian regimes trying to pass themselves for democracies run into great difficulties when trying to falsify election results (in fact, this is what creates a "decorative democracy"). Imitation deprives the democratic principles and institutions of their real meaning, while declared democracy inevitably increases the number of those who object to the discrepancy between what is said and what is done. Elections throw light on these practices: to remain in power, the rulers have to falsify the will of millions of voters. Popular repugnance of a regime that relies on falsifications is fanned by social and economic problems and poverty and strengthened by the commonly shared opinion that life will not become better while the present leaders remain in power.

In an effort to grasp the phenomenon of the "velvet revolutions," it would be wrong to concentrate on falsifications as the main cause of the mass protests: falsifications trigger mass unrest, but do not cause it. Social discontent which has reached its limits is the cause. People want to get rid of "bad rulers" as the main source of their troubles, while the "bad rulers" falsify elections to retain their power. The "velvet revolution" is a social riot, not a movement in defense of election rights. Numerous factors (political culture, the course taken by the government and the opposition, etc.) either keep unrest within peaceful limits (as in Georgia and Ukraine), or let violence develop (as in Kyrgyzstan).

In Georgia, for example, the election results were repeatedly falsified in 1992, 1995, and 1999. The nation, which still hoped for a better future with the old power (as in 1995) or was too pessimistic and apathetic (as in 1999), did not riot. The events of 1991-1992, which removed President Gamsakhurdia, taught the people to be afraid of destabilization. The coup was followed by "years of chaos and lawlessness" (1992-1994), as President Shevardnadze put it, which crippled the country. The president and his entourage never tired of praising the stability achieved under Shevardnadze and never tired of warning against the destabilization which might follow if the regime was challenged. In 2003, the nation did want to remove Shevardnadze, despite the threat of destabilization.

The Rose Revolution in Georgia

The year 2003 brought political tension: the corrupt clan system which had taken shape during President Shevardnadze's twelve years in power found itself in a deep social, economic, and political crisis. The president himself was fond of saying that unless corruption was defeated no democracy could be established in the Georgian state, the very existence of which might be endangered. Anticorruption commissions and programs were set up with the help of the West and NGOs, yet in the absence of political will no struggle against corruption could be waged in earnest.

Western friends, and American friends especially, insistently advised Shevardnadze to carry out democratic elections and retire to let "politicians of the new generation" take his place. This was a chance to overcome the crisis and let the country revive. The president turned a deaf ear to these suggestions. Former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, who came to Georgia to help President Shevardnadze form a Central Election Commission acceptable to the opposition and able to guarantee fair elections, likewise failed to convince his old friend. It turned out that the president and his cronies opted for a different course. Little by little all the forces that wanted the regime to survive closed their ranks around the president. By burying the Baker plan, they fanned serious suspicions that this time, too, the nation would be deprived of democratic elections. This meant that the West would no longer support the regime, yet the clans in power were also prepared to face this.

The system's continued existence promised more falsifications of the election results and pro-Russian orientation, a country with its own problems of democratic development. The course for democratic principles and values meant that the present corrupt clan system should be removed and the country should turn to the West. On the eve of the elections, nothing suggested that the country had a chance to revive and carry out democratic elections. There was no agreement in the opposition ranks, while the government continued to steer the country into the dead end of a "failed state."

The returns of the elections of 2 November caused disillusionment and buried the hopes for a better future. If accepted, they would mean that the people who grew fat on the country's distress would preserve their seats in the parliament and that the outcome of the 2005 presidential elections would be sealed. They meant that Shevardnadze would either name his successor or that his power would be extended in some way or other.

It is hard to say what Russia promised Shevardnadze before the elections and during the mounting protest wave after them; we do not know why Shevardnadze went to Batumi and why Aslan Abashidze went to Erevan, Baku, and Moscow. We do know that this was in vain: Shevardnadze had to renounce power. Then Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who made an emergency trip to Tbilisi, played a certain role in this. All the relevant facts are either well known to all interested in these events or can easily be found, so I will not go into the details of the Rose Revolution, but will limit myself to a discussion of various opinions about it.

Three Opinions about the Rose Revolution

Today in Georgia there is no agreement about the events of November 2003; they are still treated as a political issue. The people who came to power speak about a revolution that opened a road toward a better future for all. The official version says that it was triggered by falsifications, which exhausted the nation's patience. Guided by the opposition, people took to the streets and forced President Shevardnadze to resign. David Zurabishvili, who represents the government bloc, pointed out: "Mikhail Saakashvili planned no revolutions; he did not want to remove Shevardnadze immediately after the elections. What he planned was to use the parliament to put pressure on the regime."[3]

The opposition is mostly inclined to describe the Rose Revolution as an anti-Shevardnadze plot in which external forces were also involved. This means that it was not a revolution, but a coup d'état. Some of the opposition members go even further: they are convinced that the president himself was also involved: it was with his consent and his active participation that power was transferred to the Saakashvili-Zhvania-Burjanadze team. According to Irina Sarishvili, one of the leaders of the old government bloc, Shevardnadze and Saakashvili acted together according to a plot written outside the country and funded

[3] *Kvira,* 30 October-6 November, 2004.

by George Soros. The skillful transfer of power from Shevardnadze to his pupil Saakashvili puzzled even his teammates.[4] She said further: "It was not the United States alone that worked on the plot. Several other superpowers, Russia included, also contributed to it." We are tempted to ask: why did all of them pool forces to realize the plot? The answer is, "None of them wanted national power and national values to survive in Georgia." Can we really describe the Shevardnadze regime as one of "national values?" This is another question.

The three approaches to the Rose Revolution are nothing more than interpretations of facts; they leave too many questions unanswered. Reality is much more complicated and cannot fit into any of the above variants. Today, those in power prefer to forget the secret negotiations and agreements with some of members of the old regime in November 2003 and the money they received from George Soros to fund the Kmara youth organization then in opposition. Those who prefer to look at the revolution as a coup are freely holding forth about this. On the one hand, they cannot explain why tens of thousands of people fed up with Shevardnadze and his regime poured into the streets. It is even harder to explain why the former president selected a hazardous method with unpredictable results for transferring his power to the revolutionary triumvirate. There were much simpler ways to do this.

The "Velvet Revolutions" and Geopolitics

The question about the correlation between the internal and external factors in the Rose Revolution (and in "velvet revolutions" in general) is not limited to Georgia. According to certain experts, external forces may use election techniques to replace undesirable political structures with those better suited to their purpose. Elections and election techniques have become geopolitical instruments.[5]

External forces are out to actively influence elections in the post-Soviet countries, which may bring considerable geopolitical changes. Russia and the United States are seen as the two main players. Some people regard the "velvet revolutions" as the result of American intrigues designed to bring pro-Western politicians to power. We all know, however, that to prevent Viktor Iushchenko's victory, the Russian Federation actively interfered in the Ukrainian elections.

We agree that external forces can influence elections to a great extent. Russia and the West were actively involved in the Ukrainian election developments. External forces, however, cannot ensure the victory of a "velvet revolution" if the country is not ready for it.

The Carpathian Declaration signed jointly by Viktor Iushchenko and Mikhail Saakashvili on 5 January, 2005 denies that it was external interference that brought victory to the "velvet revolutions" in their countries: "No techniques or external interference can artificially start a peaceful and democratic revolution. The revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia required no political technologies or external interference."[6] The presidents have pointed out that the Rose and the Orange revolutions were historically inevitable; they started a new wave of European liberation which would bring the final victory of freedom and democracy to the European continent. These revolutions continue the process that started in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. We can say that the "velvet revolutions" constitute a method used by forces armed with liberal values to change the undemocratic regimes in Eastern Europe.

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[4] See: *Akhali taoba,* 20 October, 2004.

[5] See: S.P. Rastorguev, *Vybory vo vlast kak forma informatsionnoy ekspansii,* Moscow, 1999, pp. 17-24; G. Pocheptsov, *Informatsia i dezinformatsia,* Kiev, 2001, pp. 208-216.

[6] *Khvalindeli dge,* 6 January, 2005.

Why the Rose Revolution was Possible in Georgia

Those who tend to overestimate the role of external forces should ask themselves: Why did they succeed in Georgia and fail in its neighbors—Armenia and Azerbaijan? To better understand the "velvet revolutions," we need a better understanding of the domestic situation in Georgia. Under Shevardnadze, our country acquired a political system many called either "defective" or "hybrid." Indeed, it was a strange blend of democratic elements and the post-communist clan system. In Georgia, the clan system and the opposition were equally short of resources. The clan system could develop because civil society and democratic forces proved too weak. The clan system, too, demonstrated its weakness:

- the Shevardnadze regime had no considerable resources (such as oil or gas) to keep the clans afloat and cushion mounting discontent;
- the corrupt clan system had no ideology able to lure the masses;
- President Shevardnadze lost the West's support, which refused to accept the corrupt clan system and insisted on its destruction as a condition for its continued support. The West insisted on a real anti-corruption struggle.

In fact, Heydar Aliev and Eduard Shevardnadze pursued similar domestic and foreign policies. Russia's pressure forced them to seek Western support; they succeeded thanks to the Caspian power projects. Their pro-Western course, however, did not mean that they embraced Western values and principles at home. Their democratic statements were mainly sheer formality; in fact, they relied on the communist nomenklatura.

Georgia and Azerbaijan acquired states based on clans and corruption. In the latter, however, the system relied on resources controlled by the ruling class and corresponding political culture. In Georgia, civil society was more developed; the democratic principles and values which the regime formally recognized struck root; there were more or less independent media. This was why the fate of their political legacy proved different.

Why the "Velvet Revolution" was Impossible in Armenia

The Georgian Rose Revolution appeals to certain circles in other countries, in particular in Armenia where the opposition, which lost the 2003 elections, was not too weak to abandon any plans of revenge. The Karabakh factor still dominates the political process in Armenia: the country has fallen victim to the "Karabakh victory," which affected, among other things, its domestic developments. The authorities block all opposition actions under the pretext that confrontation may prove catastrophic—the opposition has to accept falsifications of the election results, corruption, and other faults of the powers that be. A "velvet revolution," however, can smoothly change society and avoid upheavals.

The Carnation Revolution in Armenia did not take place. Official Erevan and independent analysts agreed that the situation in Armenia differed greatly from that in Georgia. In the first place, its regime is much stronger; and it wields much more power than Shevardnadze did. In Georgia, the army and police remained neutral, which predetermined the course of events. In Armenia, the army and police sided with President Kocharian.

Official Tbilisi remained neutral to the Armenians events. Non-interference in the domestic affairs of neighbors and acceptance of the results of the developments there were the only reasonable position preferred by the South Caucasian leaders. The Georgian media were involved in an active discussion of the possible impact of the stormy Armenian events on Georgia, while experts agreed that Georgia would gain nothing if the Armenian crisis developed. Georgia needed a stable and predictable neighbor. There was a lot of talk about flows of refugees who might seek shelter with the Armenians of Javakheti. Some people said that the Javakheti Armenians preferred to side with the authorities, both in Georgia where they lived and in Armenia, therefore they supported President Kocharian rather than the opposition. (Official Erevan at all times curbed the separatist sentiments in Javakheti.) Some Russian politicians might have liked to fan separatist sentiments, but this went against the interests of Armenia, which depended to a great extent on the communication lines that crossed Georgia before reaching Armenia, to say nothing of the two countries' traditional cultural and historical ties.

The wave of pro-Western sentiments that arose in Tbilisi in the wake of the Rose Revolution meant that Moscow's positions in the region had weakened. This meant that Erevan too might turn to the West. Today, both the authorities and the opposition are pro-Russian, even though in the 1990s then President of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrossian made an attempt to turn to the West.

The Rose Revolution and Georgia's GUUAM Partners

Under Shevardnadze, Georgia entered into special relations with Ukraine and Azerbaijan; it was these three states that formed the core of one of the post-Soviet structures— GUUAM, the other "U" and "M" in which stood for Uzbekistan and Moldova. From the very beginning, Moscow treated it with suspicion as a structure limiting its influence across the post-Soviet expanse.

The Rose Revolution endangered, to a certain extent, Georgia's relations with Azerbaijan and Ukraine. Ilkham Aliev, who inherited power from his father and who dealt harshly with the opposition, was not expected to welcome the Rose Revolution, which might set an example for his domestic opposition. Despite this, the two leaders promptly established good relations, which started with a trip by the Georgian delegation to Baku to pay last respects to Heydar Aliev. Later the president of Georgia paid an official visit to Baku where the two presidents discussed their countries' future. Saakashvili repeatedly emphasized that Ilkham Aliev was the only president with whom he used the informal "you" (thou).

It was much harder to forge close ties with Kiev. Then President Kuchma described the opposition members who took the parliament building by storm as "a band of criminals." It was at that time that the close ties between Saakashvili and Viktor Iushchenko, one of the opposition leaders, became widely known. Saakashvili sided with the opposition which won the "Orange Revolution." The Georgian president was criticized on all sides for the "Che Guevara syndrome" and export of revolution. His friendly ties with the opposition might have damaged the official relations between the two countries: the Kuchma regime looked strong enough to allow its pro-Western opponents to win.

Mikhail Saakashvili started another scandal by making public information supplied by the Intelligence Department of Georgia about head of Ajaria Aslan Abashidze hiring fighters in Ukraine. The Foreign Ministry of Ukraine denied this. Saakashvili was forced to admit that he did not mean to say that the authorities were involved. This quenched the scandal but did nothing to restore the former warmth.

Later, Mikhail Saakashvili's visit to Ukraine improved the climate: the presidents buried their old grudges and started talking about strategic partnership. Leonid Kuchma said that the newly elected pres-

ident of Ukraine, no matter who he would be, would continue to look at Georgia as a key partner. As the Ukrainian opposition gained strength, Tbilisi grew more and more open about its sympathies toward the "Orange Revolution." In one of his interviews Mikhail Saakashvili said: "I knew that events would take this course long before it all started. I know this country well. I never agreed with those who tried to convince me that there could be no parallels between Ukraine and Georgia. I have always said at all official events that democracy cannot be stopped."[7]

The revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia created a new reality in the post-Soviet expanse. The Orange Revolution speeded up changes in Moldova; and GUUAM acquired new prospects. Significant geopolitical changes may follow.

New Prospects

In 2003, Georgia was the only South Caucasian country which could follow the road of a "velvet revolution." The Orange Revolution in Ukraine and later events across the CIS, however, created new opinions about the possibility of "velvet revolutions" in Erevan and Baku. The media have been writing more frequently about a possible "velvet revolution" in Armenia and its legal foundations. They point out that the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2003 were falsified. On 17 March, for example, the Noyan Tapan agency carried information that Russian oligarch Boris Berezovskiy, living in exile in Britain, was preparing a "velvet revolution" in Armenia. According to Uwe Halbach of Science and Politics Foundation (Germany), the absence of an Armenian Saakashvili capable of rallying the nation to carry out a peaceful regime change is Armenian's only problem.

President of Azerbaijan Ilkham Aliev will have to hold the parliamentary elections scheduled for the fall of 2005 in the context of the "velvet revolutions" across the CIS expanse; probably he will be forced to beat off another riot. According to the media, the local opposition is closing its ranks, as happened in Georgia and Ukraine.[8] Forced to answer a stream of accusations about falsifying the future election results, official Baku will find itself in a quandary. The question also arises of whether the opposition is strong enough to win. Furthermore, the West will have to make a hard choice between familiar stability and unfamiliar democracy.

When talking about the prospects of "velvet revolutions" in Armenia and Azerbaijan, we should keep in mind their foreign policy orientations. These prospects are unlikely to be realized in Armenia if no pro-Western forces appear on its political scene. Today, both the authorities and the opposition are looking at Russia. I have already written that in the 1990s, then President Ter-Petrossian made an attempt to change the course.

Several factors might make Armenia's pro-Western orientation stronger: Georgia's pro-Western course; and the prospect of withdrawal of the Russian bases from Georgia, which will weaken Moscow's influence in the Southern Caucasus. This will at least prompt Erevan to somewhat readjust its foreign policy course. Final settlement of the Karabakh conflict will strengthen pro-Western orientation. The continued frozen confrontation in Karabakh, or its partial defrosting, will prevent any velvet regime changes in Armenia and Azerbaijan; this can be used as an "anti-revolutionary technique." Settlement with Western help, which will create no victors and no losers, would promote democracy in both countries. The Goble plan of exchange of territories between the two countries might end the conflict.

The velvet prospects of these countries will largely depend on how Georgia manages. If it deals successfully with all its problems, destroys the clan system, and curbs corruption, Erevan and Baku will be tempted. On the other hand, failure in Georgia will make velvet coups much less attractive.

[7] *Kviris palitra,* 3-9 January, 2005.
[8] See: *Kommersant,* 18 March, 2005.

So far, criticism of the new Georgian leaders is gradually mounting. It comes from the camp that was against the revolution from the very beginning and from those who stood together with Saakashvili. State administration is one of the sources of this criticism: people want the leaders to shed their revolutionary euphoria and start ruling the country in a normal way. Paata Zakareishvili wrote: "Unfortunately, this has not happened yet. Georgia does not yet have a government which would look after the country rather than its own success."[9] David Usupashvili, one of the leaders of the Republican Party, seems to agree with this: "Our new leaders do not understand how they should behave and in what way state administration differs from an election campaign."[10] There is no longer the "wide anti-Shevardnadze consensus" of the time of the Rose Revolution; the deposed leader is engaged in memoir writing in his residence. Those who moved against him had very different ideas about the post-Shevardnadze future; popular discontent will increase if new power fails to justify the hopes pinned on it. The new rulers should be tuned to the changing sentiments of the public. Here is what Stephen Sestanovich, professor of Columbia University, has to say on this score: "The main challenge for Georgia for today is to preserve the consolidation that made the Rose Revolution happen. The government should take the right direction and should achieve the concrete results the people need. The people must come to believe that the government works."[11]

Whatever the case, the new Georgian leaders should adequately assess the situation in the country to achieve significant success.

[9] *Rezonans,* 14 February, 2005.
[10] *Rezonans,* 15 February, 2005.
[11] *24 saati,* 15 February, 2005.