

Independence, democracy and the Russian taboo

**Tedo
Japaridze
&
Ilia
Roubanis***

Abstract

This paper argues that the relationship between Moscow and two former Soviet Republics, namely Georgia and Ukraine, has become a ‘systemic factor’ or a political cleavage in its own right. This perception or ‘framing’ of this relationship, it is observed, rests less on the actual evolution of this nexus of diplomatic relationships and more on informational strategies generated by parties, analysts and the press. This phenomenon we call the ‘Russian Taboo,’ in the sense that this perceptual frame has become a gravitational frame, leading international observers to evaluate progress in ‘transition’ of these polities by focusing on an ‘East versus West’ binary opposition. We thus trace the origins of this taboo, which culminated in the binding experience of the ‘color revolutions.’ It is then suggested that the bundling of foreign policy and democratic transitions is misguided, rendering this guiding perceptual frame redundant for the purposes of evaluating progress in the sense of democratization. Foreign policy orientation, it is suggested, exhibits much more continuity than is usually perceived, whilst democratization as a project in its own right seems to be insufficiently monitored.

** The ideas expressed in this article reflect the personal views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the institutions of which they are a part. Written largely in a polemical style, the article is meant to introduce some food for thought and remains open for further elaboration and discussion.*

** Tedo Japaridze, Amb., Co-Director, ADA Center for Energy & Environment ;
Ilia Roubanis, Dr., Lecturer, Greek School of Public Administration, Political Advisor*

Introduction

From the outset, it should be noted that this paper is not ‘a commemorative narrative,’ celebrating Georgia’s twenty two years of independence in the strict sense of the term. It is a paper inspired from analysts like Thomas de Waal and Neil MacFarlane, who have time and again been driving home the same message: for Georgia to advance along its path to democratization, we must come to face up to our ‘ghost,’ which is none other than our relation to Moscow. Framing the question as such, the ambition of this article is to contrast ‘facts’ with dominant notions of transition that have for long informed the analysis of post-Soviet polities. In this scheme, this paper attempts to use this historic occasion for a retrospective assessment of our immediate ‘transitional’ past. Admittedly, it is hard to grasp that it is nearly a generation since Georgia declared its independence from what Ronald Reagan once called the ‘Evil Empire.’ For those of us who lived through the turmoil of this seemingly open-ended process of ‘political transition,’ this is a time for recollection, reflection and assessment. For those of us who observed this period as academic bystanders of yet another ‘transition,’ this is a time for readdressing the validity of our assumptions, or indeed, the lens through which we look upon and evaluate the democratization process in this part of the world.

By virtue of these preliminary notes, it is hard to claim impartiality, neutrality and emotional detachment when revisiting this occasion. Lack of objectivity renders methodological transparency all the more significant. We opt to pursue a comparative approach, precisely in order to achieve some degree of dispassionate analysis, thereby contributing to a discussion that is relevant to political theorists and policy-makers. Thus we examine Georgia in comparison to Ukraine. Particularly, the theoretical focus of this paper is on the tendency to bundle together a number of

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phenomena within a super-concept of ‘transition’, including foreign policy orientation, market liberalization and, not least, democratization. This bundling, it is suggested, is often misguided. In sum, this article is written for this generation, which has not lived in the former USSR or through the confrontational charge of the Cold War experience, and should be allowed to carve its own self-referential future, without the baggage of our transitional prejudice.

Methodology

This paper focuses on the ‘framing’ of domestic politics in Georgia and Ukraine in terms of an ‘East-West’ binary juxtaposition. In this context, framing refers to the control of norms that moderate the communication of knowledge and the social relations that develop between the source and the target of the message.¹ This source-receiver relationship, it is suggested, has been constructed through layers of historical experiences in a period of political ‘transition.’ Shedding light upon this process is one of the two objectives of this paper; the other is to demonstrate that this form of ‘framing’ is currently counterproductive.

The selection of these two case studies, namely Georgia and Ukraine, is grounded on at least three significant similarities:

- i. Situated in the Black Sea region, these two former Soviet Republics have at one point or another perceived Russian involvement in the region as a clear threat to their territorial integrity. This has led to the bundling of these two states by international observers in a single geopolitical context of analysis, in which it is assumed that domestic politics are reflective of a ‘Moscow versus the West’ cleavage.

¹ Bernstein, B. (1996). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. London: Taylor & Francis.

- ii. Both states have had the experience of a color-revolution, that is, ‘the Rose Revolution’ in Georgia and the ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine, which cemented the dominant perception of domestic politics in these states as an ‘East versus West’ encounter. This is probably because these strong, dispersed and powerful civic movements benefited from the OTPOR movement (resistance in Serbia), that is, the transfer of specific know-how and methodologies mobilized against Serbia’s Milosovic (2000), facilitated by international financing and capacity-building seminars. From that point onwards, the forces associated with these revolts were perceived as pro-Western, hence democratic, and struggling against pro-Russian, hence autarchic, political forces.
- iii. Both states have been considered as candidates to join NATO, an objective that now seems to be fading, albeit remaining desirable.

Thus our comparison proceeds as following:

1. First, there is a summary of apparent drives for the perception of Georgian and Ukrainian political scene in binary, ‘East versus West’ terms.

2. Second, we examine the validity of this perception, juxtaposing foreign policy orientation with the advancement of a substantive democratization agenda.
3. Finally, we pose the question of whether our generation's notion of 'transition' is still relevant.

Thesis: 'Back to Europe' & the 'East versus West' Binary

Commemorating the birth, or re-birth of states, brings to mind the distinct role of identity politics. It should be remembered that in post-Soviet Republics the terms 'democratization,' 'liberalization' and 'independence' were used interchangeably.² For western analysts too, regime change, or 'transition,' was looked upon with great optimism. Despite socioeconomic hardship and nationalist encounters, early transitional periods of post-Soviet regimes were greeted in the West with a sense of optimism, of the type one finds when hailing 'the dawn of a new world'. At the time, the predominant narrative informing academic and political aspirations and expectations in the West was

2 see: Gonenc L. (2002). *Prospects for Constitutionalism in Post-Communist Countries*. London/NY: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and Kuzio Taras (b) (2002). 'National Identity and Democratic Transition in Post-Soviet Ukraine and Belarus: A Theoretical and Comparative Perspective,' *East European Perspectives*, Vol. 4, No. 15, Retrieved From: http://www.taraskuzio.net/Economic%20Transition_files/economics-perspective.pdf

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shaped by 'the end of history' thesis',³ which suggested that liberal democracy is the sole remaining project of modernity by means of historical natural selection. In this context, newly written constitutional texts were read as manifestos of a new political universe,⁴ or indeed the reinstatement of a 'state of nature' perceived as universal.⁵ In celebrating independence, democracy, liberalization or, 'transition,' the West was in fact celebrating its own historical, political and even cultural vindication.

Without fail, transition presupposes rupture, which in Ukraine and Georgia came initially with independence referenda. In Georgia, it should be recalled, voters in South Ossetia and Abkhazia voted for the preservation of Union in the referendum held prior to the collapse of the USSR in March 1991; incidentally, this was a referendum boycotted by the Round Table-Free Georgia, the New Democratic

3 Fukuyama F. (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*, NY: Avon Books INC

4 Priban J. (Sept. 2004), *Reconstituting Paradise Lost: Temporality, Civility, and Ethnicity in Post-Communist Constitution-Making*, *Law & Society Review*, Vol. 38, No. 3, pp. 407- 432

5 Elkin S. L. (January 1990). 'Citizenship and Constitutionalism in post-Communist Regimes,' *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 163-166

Party and the National Congress, the very political forces that less than a month later gained support from 93% of the electorate for independence. In Ukraine, the December 1991 independence referendum also delivered a 90% vote in favor of independence; but, it might also be recalled that this percentage was less convincing in areas such as the Crimean ASSR (54%) and Sevastopol (57%).⁶ In sum, it has been noted that generally, people in Eastern and southern Ukraine may often identify themselves as ethnically Russian, although hybrid identification is not uncommon.⁷ In any event, regional or sub-national exceptions to 'national identity' continued to haunt the political systems of both states. But in those early days, what mattered most was that substantial questions were being posed in on the basis of sound, free and fair electoral procedures, something previously unencountered.

These referenda were the domestic dimension of a greater spectrum of normative and political dilemmas that was unfolding in the early 1990s. The transition of states and transition of regimes are themes that are interwoven and simultaneously negotiated. It can be argued that in periods of domestic political flux, when there is no commonly accepted legal or po-

6 *The Ukrainian Weekly* (Chrystyna Lapychak), 'Independence - over 90% vote yes in referendum; Kravchuk elected president of Ukraine,' 8/12/1991, Retrieved From: http://ukrweekly.com/archive/pdf3/1991/The_Ukrainian_Weekly_1991-49.pdf

7 D'Anieri (2007), *Understanding Ukrainian Politics*, NY: M.E. Sharpe

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litical foundation, international law can offer an alternative legal corpus that is continuous and enduring, that is, if the international community is also willing to play a stabilizing role. If and when both legal and political conditions are met, the severity of domestic rupture can be tamed by the enduring presence of international norms. Thus in post-communist regimes it was often suggested that border settlement could have been founded on the *uti possedetis* principle which, based on the precedent of decolonization in Africa, would have allowed the gradual 'upgrading' of former regional-republican administrative boundaries to international borders.⁸

But, of course, the international balance of power was changing at the time whilst international norms were being 'revisited.' Clearly, Russia was never keen to detach itself from its status as a global power or from its former *lebensraum*. Either by evoking the image of a 'motherland' or a 'protector state,' Moscow continued

8 Weller M. (Jul. 1992). *The International Response to the Dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 86, No. 3, pp. 569-607 and

Teitel R. (May 1997), 'Transitional Jurisprudence: The Role of Law in Political Transformation,' *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 106, No. 7, pp. 2009-2080

to exert economic, cultural and political influence in post-Soviet polities, Georgia and Ukraine being no exception. And this continued involvement did affect domestic political processes, because even if ethno-nationalist cleavages in the Caucasus preceded, lived through and outlived the collapse of the USSR, the fact remains that there has been a continuous overlap between domestic and international policy agendas. In this context, Georgia and Ukraine differ significantly in how they dealt with their minorities and, coextensively, their relations to Moscow. But the effect was the same, for domestic politics were associated with a super-taxonomical concept of 'transition,' that is, a project of reform where each polity was evaluated in terms of its 'western versus eastern' orientation.

In Ukraine, ethnic, linguistic and national affiliation has been successfully blended into the political game, becoming a systemic factor, determining to a certain extent party affiliation. Incidentally, foreign observers often ignore the fact that this systemic aspect of the 'east versus west' cleavage also allows room for a healthy degree of hybridity. Therefore, members of the electorate who do not neatly fit the Procrustean table of ethnic-linguistic-national-political affiliation can also find political expression.⁹ Of course polarity also exists in Ukraine. Party affiliation often

goes hand-in-hand with the perceived stance of the party in its relationship to Moscow; this is a fact that while several analysts might find objectionable, has time and again proved to defuse conflict, keeping polarity within the realms of intra-party contestation rather than giving rise to civil war.¹⁰ But this is not to say that the influence of Moscow in Kiev was never a destabilizing force.

The Ukrainian economy was founded on industries organically linked with the former Soviet metropolis, namely: petrochemicals, defense, steel, coal, natural gas, etc. This huge industrial complex went hand-in-hand with a Russian speaking working class, residing in major urban centers in the East. In the early 1990s, Russians or Ukrainians with a Russian culture were estimated to comprise more than 35% of the population.¹¹ Thus the Ukrainian versus Russian nationalist cleavage, separating Galicia from the Crimea in terms of voting behavior, could also be seen as dangerously coinciding with other socioeconomic and political cleavages. And in producing a synthesis of this cleavage, which is after all the mission of every party system, it comes as no surprise that Kiev has since 1991 followed an almost uninterrupted 'multi-vector' foreign

¹⁰ Reuters (Lyuba Sorokina), 'Ukraine's election highlights the east-west divide,' 05/02/2010, Retrieved From: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/02/05/us-ukraine-election-division-idUSTRE6143L620100205>

¹¹ Motyl A. J. (1993), *Dilemmas of Independence: Ukraine after Totalitarianism*, NY: Council on Foreign Relations Press

⁹ *Op. Cit.*, Taras Kuzio 2002

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policy dogma, striking a delicate balance between the United States and the European Union on the one hand, and Russia on the other.¹²

Unlike Ukraine, in Georgia the attempt to institutionalize ethnic cleavages largely failed, mostly because bloodshed overshadowed other forms of political negotiation, not unlike former Yugoslavia. As soon as Georgia proclaimed its independence, ethnic enclaves were swift to proclaim their own, which they commemorate in a symbolic battle with Tbilisi that can hardly go unnoticed.¹³ Soon after independence, the uprisings in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (1992-1993), not without Moscow's backing of militants, led to dramatic humanitarian tragedies, with tens of thousands in civilian casualties and hundreds of thousands of refugees. This tendency towards 'final solutions' in the ethnic delineation of the polity was

¹² Pavlenko (November 2003), "Political Reform or a Game of Survival for President Kuchma?," PONARS Policy Memo, no. 294 http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/pm_0294.pdf.

¹³ *Moscow Times*, 'South Ossetia Marks 20 Years of Independence,' 20/09/2010, Retrieved From: <http://rt.com/news/south-ossetia-independence-anniversary/>

cemented in the summer of 2008, when Russia made a direct link between the case studies of Kosovo and the autonomous regions of Georgia. While there are a number of reasons to doubt the credibility of this equivalence,¹⁴ the fact remains that international norms have not served as a stabilizing force for Georgia.

This is not to say that there have been no serious attempts to appease ethnic minorities in Georgia, or to address concerns and establish some room for negotiation. True, the autonomous republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were established during the Soviet regime, but they were also recognized by the modern Georgian Constitution. Moreover, Presidential Decrees from 1994 to 1996 established Abkhazia and South Ossetia as Autonomous Regions. In 2007, a Commission to work on the South Ossetia status was established, headed by Prime Minister Zurab Nogaideli. However, precisely because this nexus of allegedly domestic conflicts often escalated into a war-by-proxy with Moscow, the relationship with the former Soviet metropolis has been marked by vitriolic rhetoric from both sides; Neil MacFarlane, for instance, has time and again spoken about the political capital invested in this conflict from both sides of the spectrum, gravitating on exhibitions

¹⁴ Slate (Hitchens Christopher), 'South Ossetia Isn't Kosovo,' 18/08/2008, Retrieved From:

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2008/08/south_ossetia_isnt_kosovo.html

However, the use by western analysts of the term ‘revolution’ places an emphasis on rupture, which may also be considered a one-sided exaggeration, since foreign policy options are geopolitically and socioeconomically constrained in ways that can hardly be transcended by the resolve of a single administration.

of bravado and patriotic rhetoric.¹⁵ In this scheme, the notion of systemic inclusion and conflict transformation remains an intellectual exercise.

The emblematic rift in Moscow-Kiev-Tbilisi relations, which also solidified the domestic nature of political cleavages, came with the color revolutions. A lot of ink has been used in conspiratorial theories about U.S./Soros Foundation involvement in these revolts. Conspiracy theories are of course one-sided exaggerations, which largely address the question of support in terms of *who and how*¹⁶ rather than *why*. The answer can only be that whatever the western involvement, it could only empower existing social forces willing to engage in civic activism. However, the use by

¹⁵ MacFarlane (27/07/2011), ‘Russia-Georgia Relations,’ *Politics in Spires*, Cambridge Un. Retrieved From: <http://politicsinspires.org/tag/peace/>

¹⁶ *Guardian* (Ian Traynor), ‘US Campaign Behind the Turmoil in Kiev,’ 26/11/2004, Retrieved From: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/nov/26/ukraine.usa>

western analysts of the term ‘revolution’ places an emphasis on rupture, which may also be considered a one-sided exaggeration, since foreign policy options are geopolitically and socioeconomically constrained in ways that can hardly be transcended by the resolve of a single administration. Doubtless in the context of Georgia and Ukraine, color revolutions clearly signified a determination to turn firmly westwards, partly in affirmation of sovereignty and resistance to the notion of belonging to a Russian ‘sphere of influence,’ but also as a desire to entrench EU style-and-standard pluralistic democracies. And, as noted earlier, ‘independence’ and ‘democratization’ are terms which, in this part of the world, went hand-in-hand.

In Georgia, the Rose Revolution (2003) came at a time when Moscow was widely perceived – and with good reason – to be openly challenging Georgian independence. In 1992 it was clear that Russian financial backing, military equipment and logistical support had played a crucial role in supporting autonomist forces in 1992; moreover, in the midst of the civil war in 1993, Russian troops were invited into Georgian territory to protect the government of President Shevardnadze vis-a-vis an attempted coup. This intervention had ‘strings attached,’ since it involved Georgia joining the CIS and accepting Russian troops on the ground

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as peace-keeping forces that would guarantee the negotiated ceasefire.¹⁷ From that point onwards, one might have assumed that Georgia was entrenched in the Russian sphere of influence. This was not the case. For instance, on September 23, 1999, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which monitors global democratic development on behalf of the U.S. Democratic Party, awarded its prestigious Averell T. Harriman Medal of Freedom to President Eduard Shevardnadze, the very President ousted by the Rose Revolution.

It is often assumed that Georgia’s pro-Western orientation was cemented in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution, which is clearly not the case. One can hardly dispute the fact that the elections preceding the Rose Revolution (November 2003) left a lot to be desired;¹⁸ nevertheless, the award-winning western credentials of Eduard Shevardnadze were impec-

17 (March 1995) Human Rights Watch Report, ‘Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Russia’s Role in the Conflict,’ Vol. 7, No. 7, Retrieval at: <http://georgiaupdate.gov.ge/ru/tagliavini/15c7ac9f9e93192bc30fbbeacc87c70b/d47fb18b456b1f8392cb799b18529463/5571e6e78bc e130b77ef65c825303656>

18 OSCE/ODIHR (November 3-25, 2003), ‘Post-Election Interim Report’ Election Observation Mission, Georgia, Parliamentary Elections, Retrieval at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/17822>

cable. This was the man who early on had carved the road for Georgia’s engagement in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline, anchoring Georgia in an emerging energy game that was clearly western oriented.¹⁹ Shevardnadze was also responsible for setting up the foundations of what would become a solid military structure, by cooperating with the US via the Train and Equip Mission; incidentally, this was program was initiated at the very time when Russia was putting pressure on Tbilisi to control the use of the Pankisi region which, allegedly, had become an operational base for Jihadist groups.²⁰ He had significant moral credentials - this was the former Foreign Minister of the USSR, who had aided Gorbachev in putting an end to the Cold War. In terms of foreign policy, one could hardly say that the Rose Revolution constituted ‘a rupture.’

Similarly, the ‘Orange Revolution’ (2004), came at a time when Russia seemed to be developing a ‘hands-on’ approach in Ukrainian politics. Broadly speaking, the elections preceding the events of the Orange Revolution in November 2004 raised fears that the country could split in two. This fear became acute when the Donetsk regional council

19 Baran Z. (2005). ‘Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Implications for Turkey.’ in Starr F. & Cronell S.E. (Eds), *The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Oil Window to the West*, Stockholm: Institute for Security and Development Policy

20 Areshidze I. G. (March-April 2002). ‘Helping Georgia,’ *Perspectives*, Vol. XII, No. 4, ICIP, Retrieved from: <http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol12/areshidze.html>

declared its willingness to proceed with a referendum on autonomy, that is, in a conference attended by the Mayor of Moscow (Yuri Luzhkov). This immediately brought to mind the ‘Transnistria precedent.’ It is of course no accident that Donetsk was the Yanukovich’s home-base. Yanukovich was perceived as running a ‘Soviet-nostalgia’ campaign, capitalizing on the fact that his opponent, Yushchenko, had an American wife and perceived US support, raising old, Soviet-born fears of ‘the enemy from within.’ But the fact, the event remained localized: many southern and eastern regions – including Crimea, Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kherson and Dnipropetrovsk – refused to back the movement.²¹ Nevertheless, the effect was the same, for an East versus West frame of perception, it solidified how the outside world perceived domestic political cleavages.

But again, the neat East versus West cleavage is a one-sided exaggeration. For if it is admitted that Yanukovich was former President Kuchma’s favourite candidate, or protégé,²² then one should also remember that Kuchma was also the architect of Ukraine’s ‘open vector’ foreign policy dogma. True, Kuchma today is mostly remembered as a Russophile and, perhaps, with good reason: the

emblematic gesture-exchanges between Moscow and Kiev pointed to this direction, such as Putin calling 2002 ‘the Year of Ukraine in Russia,’ swiftly matched by Kuchma’s proclamation of 2003 as the ‘Year of Russia in Ukraine;’ the Gazprom-Naftogas Ukrainy deal (2002) pointed to this direction; as did the declaration of Ukraine’s intention to join the Eurasian Economic Community pointed (2002). However, this was only one vector; there was another. Kuchma, along with Shevardnadze, was amongst the founders of the GUAM regional group (1997), which specified amongst its main aims the combat of separatism and the promotion of territorial integrity. It was under Kuchma’s Presidency that Ukraine first presented a plan for meeting EU accession criteria (February 2002) and addressed the technical dimensions of a plan to join NATO (May 2002).²³

Whether the coming to power of President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko constituted a simultaneous ‘clean break’ with Russia is open for debate. But, there is little doubt that the Orange Revolution movement expressed concrete and sincere democratic grievances. International electoral monitors were in consensus over the fact that the first electoral encounters of October-No-

21 Kuzio Taras (02/12/2004), ‘Ukraine: East-West Break-up are overdone,’ *Oxford Analytica*, Retrieved from: http://www.taraskuzio.net/media14_files/27.pdf

22 BBC News, ‘Profile: Victor Yanuchovich,’ 03/02/2010,

Retrieved From: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4038803.stm>

23 Haran Olexiy & Pavlenko Rostyslav (September 2003). ‘The Paradoxes of Kuchma’s Foreign Policy,’ *PONAR’s Policy Memo*, 291, Retrieved from: http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/pm_0291.pdf

Last but not least, one cannot help noticing that NATO engagement in the region also seems to be treating these two states as parts of a single equation, as evidenced by the fact that NATO's door slammed simultaneously for both countries in 2008.

vember 2004 were fraudulent, whilst the independent verification of Yushenko's toxin poisoning clearly demonstrated that there was foul play. Moreover, it seems fairly widely acknowledged that the Yanukovich campaign was helped by favourable coverage in the Russian speaking media, Russian political support, and financing.²⁴

Antithesis: Unbundling Transitions (FP & Democratization)

The legacy of Colour Revolutions cemented the coupling of the political landscapes in Georgia and Ukraine in single 'East versus West' frame; this perception was further reinforced by the fact that the interests and perceptions of western allies in the region are shaped by the dynamic evolution of a geopolitically larger 'game': 'Russia versus the West.' There are at least three examples bearing testa-

24 Woehrel S. (01/02/2005), 'Ukraine's Political Crisis and US Policy Issues,' CRS Report for Congress, Retrieved from: <https://www.hsdl.org/?search&collection=crs&so=date&submitted=Search&creator=true&fct&page=1&creator=Woehrel%2C+Steven+J>.

ment to this dominant frame of analysis, guiding western engagement in the region.

First, following the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, media analysts speculated that Ukraine could or would be the next in line to have its territory challenged by Russia. Specifically, as events were unfolding in Georgia in 2008, Ukraine briefly stood up to Moscow over its Crimean port. As Russian warships were departing Sevastopol for Georgia, the Ukrainian administration announced restrictions on the fleet and threatened to ban its re-entry in Ukrainian territory. For certain analysts this was yet another play in the 'East versus West' grand narrative.²⁵ In this scheme, the fear of the proverbial domino effect was at play.

Secondly, it is anything but uncommon for energy-security analysts in the region to refer to these two countries as the major theatre of an 'East versus West' encounter that Papava and Tokmazivilli have coined the 'Pipeline Cold War.'²⁶ In this scheme, Ukraine and Georgia are often seen as pawns in a greater energy-security chess game.

Last but not least, one cannot help noticing that NATO engagement in the region also seems to be treating

25 USNews.com (Alastair Gee), 'In Ukraine's Crimea the Next Flash Point With Russia,' 26/08/2008, Retrieved from: <http://www.usnews.com/topics/locations/ukraine>

26 Papava, V. & Tokmazishvili M. (Spring 2010). *Russian Energy Politics and the EU*, *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 4 (2)

these two states as parts of a single equation, as evidenced by the fact that NATO's door slammed simultaneously for both countries in 2008.²⁷ This decision was perhaps made in the fear that a proxy East-West encounter in the Caucasus could escalate into open confrontation with Russia, which would clearly be of global consequence if either of the two countries evoked article V.

However, it requires a huge leap of faith in order to believe that this dominant perceptual frame of a geopolitical encounter corresponds neatly with a clash of norms, values and political beliefs of domestic political actors. It may be observed that political actors in either Ukraine or Georgia will customarily feed upon this underlying 'East versus West' narrative for the purposes of their electoral campaigns. But this does not mean that this political rhetoric also bears testament to the democratic credentials of pro-Western leaders or proves beyond reasonable doubt the autarchic outlook of leaders employing a pro-Kremlin discourse. In sum, the East versus West frame of perception may not always serve international observers wishing to evaluate or monitor progress in democratization in either of the two states.

In Georgia as well as in the West, there have been those who ques-

tioned whether foreign policy orientation, which is fervently western oriented, coincides with substantive progress in democratization. Early on, the grievances concerning Georgia's democratic deficit were domestic.²⁸ But, increasingly, international observers have also voiced their concerns.²⁹ Domestic or international, 'transition' monitors of every ilk are swift to hail Georgia's decisive steps towards market liberalization, but then move on to point out that there is a lot to be desired in terms of democratization. Yet these remarks are often overshadowed, for whenever the prospect of elections comes to the fore, the 'East-West' paradigm resurges to the detriment of the democratization agenda. For instance, the ruling party has recently made statements to the effect that one of the prime Presidential candidates, whose businesses are mainly in Russia, could be influenced by the Kremlin. The argument is that anyone who has managed to stay this wealthy in Putin's Russia must have Moscow's support.³⁰ The Russophobe card is

²⁷ *New York Times* (Tinatin Khidasheli), 'Georgia: The Rose Revolution has Wilted,' 08/12/2004, Retrieved From: http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/08/opinion/08iht-edkhdasheli_ed3_.html?_r=1

²⁹ Bodewig Kurt (Germany), Acting Rapporteur and Subcommittee Chairman, 2007 Annual Session), *ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRANSITION IN GEORGIA*, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Committee Reports, Annual Session, 170 ESCEW 07 E rev 2, Retrievable at: <http://www.nato-pa.int/default.asp?SHORTCUT=1171> and

Freedom House Country Reports (Georgia/Ukraine), Retrievable from: <http://67.192.63.63/template.cfm?page=21&year>

³⁰ *BBC News* (McGuinness Damien), 'Billionaire Tycoon Shakes Up Georgia Politics,' 11/11/2011, Retrieved From:

²⁷ *New York Times* (Steven Erlanger & Steven Lee Myers), 'NATO Allies Oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine,' 03/04/2008, Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/03/world/europe/03nato.html?pagewanted=all>

And, perhaps paradoxically, there is evidence to suggest that this type of Russophobia is not constructive in any sense whatsoever, including foreign policy orientation, since, at times, this risky exercise in domestic bravado makes the Georgian alliance seem like a liability.

also deployed against journalists.³¹ The culminating effect is that whoever threatens incumbent power can swiftly and effectively be discredited by raising the spectre of Russia, thus silencing or diminishing the effect of domestic and international concerns about the regime's democratic credentials. And, perhaps paradoxically, there is evidence to suggest that this type of Russophobia is not constructive in any sense whatsoever, including foreign policy orientation, since, at times, this risky exercise in domestic bravado makes the Georgian alliance seem like a liability.³²

Conversely, despite full-circle lamentations on the recent Yanuchovich victory, which was seen by certain analysts as the Kremlin's victory

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/world-europe-15682606>

31 *Open Democracy* (Nino Tsagareishvili), *No Pictures, No Democracy*, 25/07/2011, Retrieved From: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/nino-tsagareishvili/georgia-no-pictures-no-democracy>

32 *Observer* (Thomas de Waal), 'Georgia's Volatile Risk-Taker has Gone Over the Brik,' 10/08/2008, Retrieved From: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/aug/10/georgia.russia>

and, hence, a Western defeat,³³ Freedom House indicators fair better in Ukraine than in Georgia on issues such as electoral procedures.³⁴ Some analysts are in fact more generous with Ukraine, suggesting that it may even become a 'regional example' of cautious yet decisive steps towards democratization, despite the fact that Yulia Tymoshenko sought to portray her opponent as the destroyer of Ukraine's European (i.e. Western) future;³⁵ and, given a tendency to embrace martyrdom, we should also bear in mind that political actors tend to often change role in this scene, with Tymoshenko herself once being hailed as the 'dissident oligarch'.³⁶ Meanwhile, in a Kuchma-like tradition, Yanuchovich seems to remain true to the 'open vector' diplomatic culture and with good reason. His weak Presidential office, unlike the super-strong Presidential office in Georgia, does not allow him to pursue divisive issues in a decisive manner. He promised before elections to recognize the Georgian breakaway republics; but so far has not done so. He has made no advances towards

33 *BBC News*, 'Pro-Moscow Yanuchovich to 'win Ukrainian Election,' 08/03/2010, Retrieved From: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8503177.stm>

34 *Op. Cit. Freedom House Country Reports 2010*

35 Wilson A. (18/03/2010). *Dealing with Yanuchovich's Ukraine*, Policy Brief, ECFR/20, Retrieved From: http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/commentary_dealing_with_yanukovychs_ukraine_a_policy_brief

36 Kuzio Taras (March 7th, 2008). *How the Gas Issue Plays in Ukrainian Politics and How Ukrainian Politicians play the Gas Issue*, Paper Delivered at Harvard University, Retrieved From: http://www.taraskuzio.net/conferences2_files/Ukrainian_Politics_Energy.pdf

joining NATO, but neither towards CSTO. Recently, quite dismayed with Ukraine, Dmitry Medvedev stated:

“If Ukraine chooses the European vector, it will certainly be more difficult for it to find opportunities within the single economic area and customs union between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, because this is a separate association. You can’t be everywhere at once and this is something that has to be understood by everyone, including my Ukrainian colleagues.”³⁷

Discussion – Synthesis: Moving Beyond the Russian Taboo

There is no doubt that the ‘Colour Revolution’ experience was founded on the activism, perseverance and self-sacrifice of thousands of people longing for democracy and, to an extent, the desire for a foreign policy shift that would take Georgia and Ukraine beyond the Kremlin’s grasp. The problem at hand is that this experience did not automatically fulfil both objectives at once. The fear of Russia, which can hardly serve as a model for democratic evolution, has justifiably entrenched a dominant perceptual view that ‘western foreign policy orientation equals democratic credentials.’ This is not the case. A western oriented foreign policy goes

a long way in cementing a market-oriented economy; goes a long way perhaps in creating a balance of power which, under certain circumstances, may lead to viable security architecture that keeps Russia expansionism at bay. But, so far, a western foreign policy orientation falls short of securing a western style-and-standard democratic process.

What is more, coupling the issue of foreign policy orientation and domestic democratization has, at times, been counterproductive. Clearly, the first priority of a democratic system is to achieve inclusiveness, even in the midst of extreme polarization on foreign policy issues. To this effect, a divisive line amongst traitors and patriots does not serve any purpose. Moreover, when anti-Russian rhetoric becomes the main instrument for boosting international legitimacy, the result may be that a country becomes a liability to its allies.

A second dilemma frequently encountered by political systems is the choice between effectiveness and inclusion. Now, in the context of a consolidated democracy, effectiveness can be the legitimate first priority, as it was in Italy in the reform of the Italian electorate system in the 1990s, designed to create effective governance in a political landscape that is notoriously fragmented. But, in an environment where individual freedoms and the separation of powers have not been achieved, then in-

37 EuroActiv, *Ukraine needs to choose EU or CIS-Medvedev*, 18/05/2011, Retrieved From: <http://www.euractiv.com/ebs2011/special-report-russia-ukraine-eye-customs-union-eu-news-504944>

clusion should be the first objective; if not, underrepresented social demographics may seek extra-systemic political expression. Following this line of thinking, less strong executive offices, which are systemically forced to be more responsive to parliamentary cleavages, may also be more appropriate for political systems in transition, if the prime objective is to secure that all political actors remain systemically committed. In any event, if neither electorate processes nor constitutional designs are informed by the overarching priority of securing systemic inclusion, then the political system is conducive to extra-systemic forms of mobilization such as ‘color revolutions.’

Thus, to allow room for the emerging generation to enjoy and celebrate Georgian or Ukrainian independence, our generation must first transcend its ‘Russian Taboo.’ This is not a proposal for a re-direction of foreign policy; it is merely a call for our generation to place its own fears second, focusing on the priorities of the next generation, who are clearly concerned with substantive democratization, longed for since 1989.