

1999 Annual Caucasus Conference

University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies
Center for Slavic and East European Studies

State-Building and the Reconstruction of Shattered Societies

April 30, 1999

Since the late 1980s, the Caucasus and Caspian littoral states have been passing through a period of extreme turmoil—indeed, they have been among the most devastated societies of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Not only have they incurred the inevitable economic costs of decentralizing and marketizing their economies and the political difficulties associated with constructing new political and institutional infrastructures, but they have had to contend with interstate and intrastate war as well as the effects of the devastating earthquake centered in Armenia in 1988. Rebuilding the shattered societies of the region is proving to be a long and arduous process.

Despite these difficulties, there have been signs of regional stabilization and recovery in recent years. The economies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan all recorded positive growth in 1997 and again in 1998, despite the setback caused by Russia's August financial meltdown. The level of violence in the region has abated, with cease-fires (albeit precarious ones) in the conflicts over Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. In Azerbaijan and Georgia, internal order is also much improved when compared to the years immediately following the Soviet collapse.

This stabilization, however, remains partial and precarious. 1998 witnessed a "constitutional coup" in Armenia, an assassination again President Shevardnadze in Georgia, currency depreciations after the Russian crisis, most notably in Georgia, the expulsion of repatriated Georgians from southern Abkhazia, political violence on the streets of Baku, and growing fears in Moscow about the spread of Wahabism and Islamic fundamentalism in the North Caucasus. The most unstable region remains Chechnya, where internal political conflict has been accompanied by an explosion of kidnappings.

With this in mind, the theme of this year's annual conference will be "State-Building and the Reconstruction of Shattered Societies." Topics addressed at the conference will include the prospects for democratic consolidation; comparative economic performance and prospects for recovery; the impact of Russia's economic problems and the implications of the global financial crisis for economic stabilization and restructuring; the role of outside powers in contributing to, or undermining, stability in the region; the cultural heritage of the peoples of the Caucasus and the relationship between tradition and "modernity"; coping strategies for surviving the turmoil of the past ten years; and the ability of the international community to help reconstruct the region.

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Lipman Room, 8th Floor, Barrows Hall

Conference Schedule

Edward Walker, Executive Director, Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies: Introduction

Stephanie Platz, Alex Manoogian Assistant Professor of Modern Armenian History, University of Michigan: "Society, Nation, State: Ethnographic Perspectives on Transcaucasia."

Vladimir Degoev, Visiting Scholar, Center for Slavic and East European Studies, UC Berkeley and Professor of History, North Ossetian State University, Russian Federation: "The Challenge of the Caucasus to Russian Statehood: The Legacy of History."

Sergei Arutiunov, Visiting Professor, Department of Anthropology, UC Berkeley and Chair of the Department of Caucasus Studies, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Moscow: "Tradition and Prosperity in the Caucasus: Are They in Conflict?"

Bartlomiej Kaminski, Associate Professor, Department of Government, University of Maryland and Development Economics Research Group, The World Bank: "Economic Transitions in the Transcaucasus: Institutions, Performance, Prospects."

Leila Alieva, Visiting Scholar, Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, UC Berkeley and National Coordinator, United Nations Human Development Report, Baku, Azerbaijan: "International factors and domestic politics in the Transcaucasus."

Stephan Astourian, William Saroyan Visiting Professor in Armenian Studies, UC Berkeley: "Transcaucasian Nationalisms: Some Comments."

Charles Fairbanks, Director, Central Asian Institute, The Paul Nitze School for Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University: "The Weak State: Public and Private Armies in the Caucasus."

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