Special discussion
What is going on in Russia, Ukraine and the Caucasus?
Challenges Facing Eastern Europe Today

The discussion took place on the 30th of June 2018, within the frame of the 15th Annual Warsaw East European Conference 2018 "Independence", organised by the Centre for East European Studies University of Warsaw. The panel was co-organized by the Harriman Institute, Columbia University. It was moderated by prof. John Micgiel.

John Micgiel: Good afternoon. My name is John Micgiel. I am chairing this third Round Table, which is co-sponsored by the Harriman Institute, Columbia University. We have three distinguished experts on various regions of the former Soviet space, talking about places that interest them and what is going on there.

Our first speaker is Julie George whose number one job is at Queen's College in New York City. She is also teaching at the Harriman Institute. She is very interested in what is going on in Georgia at the moment. Yana Gorokhovskaya, our second speaker, is from the University of British Columbia. She is an expert on, among other things, Russian electoral politics. Our third speaker is my old pal, Alex Motyl, once from the Harriman Institute and Columbia University and for the last fifteen years or so he has been an attendant professor at Rutgers University. Most people would associate him only with Ukraine but very early on he was also interested in minority politics in the USSR.

Let's welcome our first speaker – Julie George with a presentation concerning Georgia.

Julie George: Thank you very much. I am grateful and excited to be part of this distinguished panel. My presentation is entitled "What is going on in the Caucasus?". In the last few months you might have heard that there have been a couple of resignations of prime ministers – in Armenia and also in Georgia. It would be difficult to present exactly what is going on in the Caucasus in a 20 minute long presentation. Given that, I will narrow my speech to talk about these precise resignations, political events and changes in the Caucasus – looking at the current situation as well as back in the past.

Looking at Armenian and Georgian politics you will know that in the past few months there have been two prime ministers resignations. One in Georgia was of prime minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, who was replaced by Mamuka Bakradze. Also

in Armenia we have a new prime minister, after the resignation of the Republican Party candidate, and former president, Serzh Sargsyan. Now Nikol Pashinyan has taken over as the prime minister of Armenia. There are two things to say about this. Firstly, in Georgia this is not particularly interesting. It is not a momentous event. However in Armenia the emergence of Pashinyan, an opposition actor as a prime minister of the country is momentous and some say it is even revolutionary. In fact the name for it now is the Velvet Revolution.

While this was not so momentous for Georgia, of course Georgia itself is no stranger to momentous revolutions. It was the first of the post-soviet revolutions, the Rose Revolution, which took place in 2003 in Georgia. It led to the momentous resignation of president Eduard Shevardnadze, the election of Mikheil Saakashvili and the emergence of a new ruling party in Georgia, the United National Movement, that ruled until 2012/2013.

It is these two momentous events that I want to compare for you. The successes and failures of the Georgian Rose Revolution offer some important lessons, and some important insights, into what kind of processes we can anticipate in Armenia looking forward. I want to walk you through and present an analytical examination of four themes that I think will provide insight into where the Georgian experiences, successes and failures could show us what to anticipate in the Armenian political space.

The first one I want to mention is in the arena of party development and electoral politics. This is the most boring of the four topics that I want to tell you about. But here is the thing - the Velvet Revolution in Armenia like the Rose Revolution in Georgia have three very similar and parallel characteristics that draw our eye. One – they all promise a new accountable politics, accountability of the political leadership to the population. Two – they all focus on anti-corruption reforms. Three – all of these changes happened inside the political space – inside the government and parliament. As such the political arrangement inside that parliament, inside that political space is extraordinarily important. In order to build accountable politics that is institutionalized, meaningful and transparent one needs actual meaningful political parties that are programmatic and not clientelistic. Therefore the emergence and the development of parties inside Georgian, and also Armenian, political space will determine, in many ways, the outcomes, both in the short and in the long term, of the effects of these momentous events. Whether they are indeed revolutionary.

I have some observations about the Georgian case. The Georgian Rose Revolution was the culmination of the ruling party's collapse. The leadership of president Eduard Shevardnadze's party which was called the Civic Union of Georgia (CUG), had collapsed prior to the protests. And the mechanism of that collapse was from inside that party. Several defection factions emerged, two of which

were very similarly and closely inlayed. These were the United Movement, led by Mikheil Saakashvili and the United Democrats which was led by Zurab Zhvania. These two factions united to eventually form the United National Movement. What is important to know is that before the 2003 Rose Revolution these were intact, consolidated, they were acting in campaigns and competing in government politics.

In Armenia Nikol Pashinyan's Party "Yolk" had no such advantage, which has had both positive and negative consequences for the immediate policy outcomes in the Armenian political space. Yolk won 8% of the vote in the 2017 elections. The ruling Republican Party of Armenia was far from collapsing and had the majority representation in the Armenian parliament as an outcome of the 2017 elections. While there had been defections from the Republican Party such that they lost their majority – there had only been eight. Compare that to 120 of the 127 members of the Georgian CUG party. What this means is that the Republican Party is still intact. Nevertheless it is not popular. The people on the streets are tearing down the legitimacy of that party. What Pashinyan needs to do immediately is to call new elections and take advantage of his momentum, so that he can win a majority and then push forward his policy agenda. This will be difficult to do because he has no meaningful party mechanism. He has a very small party program. They are only building that. Becoming a leader with 8%, which is one of the smallest political parties inside the Armenian political space prior at this moment, is a very tough challenge. What that will do, is that it will slow down policy transformation. It will slow down the ability of the new ruling coalition to implement its policy changes. On the one hand that might be problematic. It is going to be dissatisfying to the public, who want to see the change now, they want it for yesterday, they don't want to wait until next year. But there are also problems having to do with quick reforms, performed too quickly and I think that Misha Saakashvili's Georgia is a testimony to that.

The second thing I want to bring up is that in Armenia we have seen very quick, very momentous and very effective change – that is anti-corruption reform. This is happening daily. Already there have been very high-level arrests of major oligarchs like Manvel Grigoryan. But also high-level detentions, for example of the president's brother Alexander Sargsyan. All of this feeds the crowd and creates a sense of accountability for the Armenian people. There are some benefits to these kinds of anti-corruption activities. Firstly, you get to break the existing oligarchic networks that have a strangle-hold on the budget and put a stop on real progressive, transparent and accountable policy. The second thing it does is that it helps to feed the public thirst for justice and retribution and this is a real part of any revolution or popular uprising. The third thing it does, more dangerously, is that it delegitimizes and eradicates, certain elements of the opposition. This points

out some of the negative sides of quick anti-corruption reform. Bringing obviously guilty people in front of the cameras is very good for public relations but it is very bad for justice. It does not permit a very systemic mechanism of bringing actual charges. It does not rely on real investigational processes, it does not build accountability in the main prosecutors office. And as such it does not offer much in terms of protection of the accused person's rights. Of course in the case of the big oligarchs – nobody cares. In Georgia nobody cared. Everybody knew somebody who was guilty – who cares! Whether or not the investigation was ongoing, whether there was any evidence – 'just lock them up, we know they did it'. But here is the thing – once all those obvious people are gone, in Georgia the state became too powerful, the prosecutor's office was not questioned, it was not accountable. It's actions were not transparent, which led to abuses of power. This also led to improper detention and a prison scandal that ultimately undermined the United National Movement (UNM) and led to the expulsion of Saakashvili from the country, perhaps rightfully so. But not only did it hurt the UNM and pulled them out of power, it continually hurts the Georgian Dream, the ruling party today. Just last week their prosecutor resigned for similar problems. Therefore there is a need to build these institutions rather than ignore them.

The single most important topic in the Armenian political space is Nagorno Karabakh. This is where the effects of the change can be most resonant and most bedevilling. For this case I want to draw some parallels to the experiences of the conflicts in Georgia – in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They might not be simply parallel events or structures but they do have some very serious similarities which I want to draw your attention to. The first is the nature of the reforms. In Saakashvili's Georgia immediately it started with the anti-corruption reform but there were also state-building reforms – the goal was to make sure that there was money in the budget that can be spent on accountable and transparent policies, that the Georgian people desired. There was also of course an anti-Russian component to this that exacerbated politics inside these conflicts. We need to pay attention to the political economy of the conflict areas. In particular South Ossetia's entire budget was drawn from not only Russian money but also contraband, smuggling goods from Russia into South Ossetia and into Georgia. People on both sides of this boundary line benefited from this contraband zone. The Ossetians benefited a great deal from it but also actors from the Georgian Ministry of Interior, that were making it happen, benefited a great deal. When Saakashvili came to power, he created some custom areas along the administrative boundary lines and this cut off that funding. This just jeopardised the fragile stability that was maintaining peace between the actors. The recent war didn't start in 2008, it started in 2004-2005 and you can trace it to when the provocations and tensions begun. They happened before and it was due to the eradication of contraband and smuggling in these zones.

Therefore it makes sense for us to pay attention to the political economy of Nagorno Karabakh and where it gets its money from. The budget of Karabakh runs at a deficit – its revenues do not pay for its budget. Much of its budget comes in transfers from the Armenian budget and also from diasporic donations. The money is inside the Armenian budget or often transferred in non-transparent ways. Another component inside Karabakh is that the single biggest employer is the gold mining company, which is linked to the Armenian oligarchs. It is registered in a shell company in Lichtenstein and it is bedevilled by oligarchic and likely corrupt influences. If the goal of the anti-corruption campaign is to undermine the oligarchs, then Pashinyan has a very difficult decision to make. Does he go for the long-term solution and undermine the oligarchic money and create transparency in the budget? If he does that, how does he plan to finance Karabakh and maintain stability in that area?

A similar logic applies to the relations with Russia. Russian energy is vitally important in the whole area of the post-soviet space. Russian companies control over 25% of the Armenian energy market. There is significant interaction between them and members of the Republican Party. For example the former prime minister used to be the head of Gazprom-Armenia. There are very close oligarchic ties that draw in Russian business interests in a very real way to Armenian business interests. Again, if these oligarchies are meant to be cut down through these anti-corruption reforms, then Russian interests will likely be jeopardised in some way.

Pashinyan has been very careful. He is not performing the Saakashvili's style zero-sum game. He has signalled very well, implicitly and explicitly, just how hard it is to maintain good relationships with Russia, to maintain Armenia's position inside the Custom's Union. But nonetheless in the short and medium term I can see a framework where even his best intentions will come up against very entrenched and moneyed interests. They may not be from the top level people that will be arrested but instead it will be from the subterranean political economy of the state.

What is important in all sorts of revolutions, is that they never bring about good things. The French Revolution didn't bring anything good. Revolutions are starting points, they are not ending points. Therefore expectations need to be mitigated and limited. There are three things here that are important for us to learn from the Georgian errors and to understand from their successes in order to be able to analyse the Armenian political future. One is to recognize that even with the best intention individuals are bedevilled by structural obstacles that significantly impede their ability to make change, especially to make swift change. Expecting swift change would not only be naive, it would almost be inappropriate. It would almost hurt the system and undermine the system before it had even begun operating. The second point – successes in some area of politics, like anti-corruption, can destabilise the ability to achieve successes in other areas, like the relationship with Russia or perhaps the

ongoing stability of Karabakh. Third – the most important Georgian lesson was also its biggest failure – the inability to build a strong party structure although the United National Movement truly tried. But also the inability to have true institutional changes in judicial and police reforms, so that they would be transparent and accountable and guard against the very serious risks of abuse of power.

Yana Gorokhovskaya: I would like to start by saying thank you to John for inviting me and to the Harriman Institute for facilitating my first time in Warsaw. I hope to give you a little bit of insight into Russian politics on one topic that I think people know a little bit about and another topic that I think very few people are paying attention to. This talk also represents an attempt on my part to merge two areas of study that I am engaged in: one that looks at electoral manipulation and one that looks at local level development of democracy and political opposition. The title of my speech is: Electoral Fraud as a Precursor to Political Engagement. I am going to talk about the case of Moscow.

It would come as no surprise to many of you when I will say that most countries in the world now have multiparty elections. This is a norm that emerged after the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Governments had to possess political legitimacy that came through multiparty elections. Therefore most countries in the world have regular and free (by free I mean that everyone has the right to vote) elections where several parties compete. There are only a few cases, a few countries in the world that don't have this. Of course the rise of multiparty elections across all types of countries did not usher in, as I think many scholars and activists had hoped for in the 1990s, liberal democracy. It is what the scholars came to call the electoral fallacy - the presence of elections does not simultaneously cause democracy to be consolidated in a country. Elections are only one part of many features of democratic government. Nevertheless multiparty elections are kind of a standard now and they present a dilemma for the autocrat that has them. You need elections to be legitimately in power but you want to mitigate the risk of losing it. In a democracy we are dealing with that risk by believing that our institutions will ensure that if my party loses the election this time and your party loses the election that time – there will be an alteration in power. This isn't the case in non-democratic states. The possibility that an election will be lost needs to be mitigated in some way. Scholars have now come to the conclusion and labelled these new regimes with elections but without democracy either as electoral authoritarian regimes or competitive authoritarian regimes. A definition of that could be that it is a civilian regime with authoritarian practices and democratic institutions – mostly elections.

How do you mitigate the risk that is inherent in having an election when you are an autocrat. I will be specifically talking about Russia. I think many of you will

be familiar with the fact that when we are in the West and we hear about an elections in Russia we typically hear about fraud and how the elections were captured by fraud. Russia is a paradigmatic case of electoral authoritarianism. Elections take place on what is called an uneven playing field – the incumbent has full advantage and uses state resources to make sure that he wins. So elections are free but they aren't fair. But fraud isn't the only way you can control or mitigate the risk inherent in an election. I am going to talk about a couple of other ways.

You can manipulate elections even before voting takes place. If I was hired to be an adviser to an autocrat, I would say that this is the smart move. You want to manipulate the elections before the voting takes place. There are three standard ways of doing this and all of these happen in Russia. The first one is that you want to stack the electoral commissions. This harkens back to the quote that is falsely attributed to Stalin: "it is not the people who vote but the people who count". You want to control the people who count. In Russia, according to a recent study, about a third of electoral commissions' members are nominated by United Russia and another third are in some ways dependent on the state, they are teachers, doctors, local civic workers. These people are counting votes in a way that is most beneficial to the state. Just this year a really interesting study came out where scholars, by looking at Crimea, demonstrated the value of seizing electoral commissions. In this past presidential election that just happened in Russia in March, it was the first time that Crimea was voting as part of Russia, since its annexation. Typically what you see in electoral commissions in democracy is that people who work or volunteer in them do it cycle over cycle, they gain some kind of experience and there is not a lot of change over. This is what you might observe in Crimea before the annexation – people who worked in the electoral commissions in the region did it time after time. After the annexation there was about an 80% turnover rate of people who were part of the electoral commission. So clearly something had to have happened with all these people who previously had been working in the electoral commissions in the Crimea before the presidential vote. So that is one way – stack the electoral commissions.

The second way of manipulating the election before the actual voting takes place is based on a notion that when you can't control who votes, you can control your choice: who to vote for. This is also something that happens time and again in Russia. It is just a simple elimination of people from the ballot or preventing them being on the ballot. There is a lot of regulations and steps you have to follow to qualify to be a candidate but at every level the Central Electoral Commission has control over that. Most famously, what happened this year was that Alexei Navalny was not allowed to be on the presidential ballot despite that fact that he had been campaigning for a year, and had gathered all the signatures, he heeded and had opened offices across all of Russia. The reason was that he is still techni-

cally serving a suspended sentence for embezzlement in the "Kirovles" case. He has been on trial for this twice. This was the case that the European Court for Human Rights deemed as being totally illegitimate, politically motivated and without any legal grounds. He was given the conviction as he was running for Moscow's mayor in the 2013 elections. The fact that he is still serving a sentence disqualified him technically now. There is a video online to watch how Navalny made a very passionate speech to the Central Electoral Commission how could they disqualify him. Their response was that they are simply following the law. This is an example from a high-level presidential election but this happens all the way down as well. To become a candidate it is incredibly hard. So people are just kept off the ballot.

The third way is a longer-term strategy so that you can control the flow of information that voters get. In Russia this happens through the state media, mainly television which is still the number one source of news for most people. There is a good division in demographics according to age – young people tend to get news from the internet but a majority of people still get the news from the state-run media. In them you won't see any coverage of opposition candidates and on the unlikely chance that you will see it, it will be extremely negative coverage. When Navalny was running for the mayor of Moscow he was on the ballot, he got 26% of the vote in 2013. He was on the news in Moscow at that time on the state-run channels but what you mostly heard was that he was a convicted embezzler and that his followers were causing traffic on Moscow streets.

These are the three tactics pre-election. When it comes to the day of voting there are two main things that an autocrat can do. Firstly he can mobilise vulnerable voters. There is a burgeoning literature on clientelism and patronage voting in Russia and in other places. In Russia's case this means getting the people somehow indebted to you to make sure that you get their vote. In Russia these are pensioners, soldiers, students. More problematically there are also people who are employees of the state or people working for large private companies but for whom the state is the main client. These people are mobilised at work, told how to vote. Problematically, when these people are surveyed they think that their manager can actually monitor whether and how they have voted and therefore they are convinced that their job is dependent on voting. Ethnic minorities in titular republics are also susceptible to this through clientelism links. So there is a whole part of the population in Russia that is captive and that can be mobilised for the regime. If you can combine this fourth tactic with the first three – the fact that the electoral commission is stacked so the people who enforce the rules are on one side of the competition, the fact that the ballot is limited and that the media doesn't provide the alternatives – you can see that people who would be likely to vote for the opposition are demobilised through these first three steps. And then people who are captured by the state are mobilised. This mobilisation is

also important because you need a turnout – that fact that people actually come and vote. During the run-up to the presidential election this year we kept hearing the "77" thing. Who wouldn't want to win an election with 77% of the vote with 77% of turnout. Putin didn't reach these numbers but this is what they were aiming for. The whole idea of an election in an authoritarian state is this function of legitimizing power and part of that is not just winning, it is winning in a way that demonstrates that these elections mattered to people.

Lastly, when you have done all that, and used those four tools of manipulation but you are still not too confident that you are going to win, you are going to engage in fraud. In Russia this is: carousel voting (where you just bus the same people from one polling station to another to vote), good old ballot-box stuffing, altering vote totals (recording and tabulating vote totals is still done in Russia by hand, so you can imagine that it is quite susceptible to manipulation). But unlike the first four tools, fraud is incredibly risky. It is risky for many different reasons but three of them I would like to specially underline here.

Firstly, one is reputation costs. If what you are trying to gain from an election is political legitimacy, an election that is won through fraud is illegitimate and it will be deemed as such by international organizations, by other countries and by your own public.

The second potential danger is something we saw in 2011/2012 in Russia which is that fraud leads to protest. People will come out on to the streets to protest fraud. In December 2011 after United Russia won the parliamentary elections with heavy-handed fraud that was documented by people using cell phones and then disseminated evidence of that on the internet. You had the largest protest since the collapse of the Soviet Union which took place all across Russia and they were spontaneous, not organized by the opposition. The opposition was playing catch-up with them. One of the interesting questions for which we don't have an answer to is why the protests broke out in 2011 if we know that fraud has generally been taking place in Russian elections since Yeltsin's re-election campaign in the mid-1990s? Fraud isn't new in Russia. People have made arguments that it is the visibility of the fraud that took place in the 2011 that really pissed people off. From the interviews I did at the time it seemed like it were the things that happened leading up to that election, especially, that was alienating people. We had the famous incident where Putin and Medvedev announced that they were going to switch places. They said it in September, way ahead of the March presidential election. People with whom I spoke to, who were liberals middle-class from Moscow, basically said that it was like spitting in one's face. So it is not so much that they had a lot of confidence in their political institutions but there was something offensive about practically saying that your vote doesn't mean anything.

The third potential risk, and it is what I would like to focus your attention on in the last part of my presentation, is that fraud can make people politically engaged. Fraud or the possibility of fraud can motivate people to participate in politics. In an authoritarian state they will tend to stream into those political institutions that are still opened to them, to which they still have access. In Russia that means local politics. In 2011/2012 when the protests took place something else also took place. People went from the protests and they formed communities or networks, people who had not been politically engaged, not until this point. They registered to be election monitors for the March presidential election. That act of registering and training as an electoral monitor exposed them to a campaign that was taking place in Moscow at the same time. So on the same day that the presidential election happened, in March of 2012, there was another election in Moscow and throughout the regions. Moscow has 125 municipalities, about 8 to 12 municipal deputies, who are elected for four years (it used to be for five). That municipal Moscow election took place simultaneously in March 2012 with the presidential election. A bunch of people who had been participating in the protest and who had then got registered as election monitors were recruited to run in these municipal election. About 200 people ran, about 70 of them won seats. This may not be a shocking number but this is a political space where political opposition in Russia had absolutely no presence up until this point.

Local self-government is guaranteed by the Russian constitution. There are municipalities all over Russia and they have some control over every day political matters but they get fairly little attention. Historically they have been controlled by the regime, therefore it is mostly United Russia. I have already mentioned the 70 seats won by the opposition in 2012. The next municipal election happened in September of 2017 and it was followed but headlines such as "Putin Has a Rebellion Brewing in His Backyard". It is a little bit exaggerated as far as headlines go but in 2017 over a thousand independent candidates ran in the local election and they captured one quarter of all seats in municipal councils in Moscow. Not only did they capture a quarter of all seats, but in eight rayons they shut out United Russia. Not a single UR candidate was elected. Another thirty or so either gained a majority or a plurality. One of the rayons where they shut out United Russia candidates completely is ironically the rayon where Putin votes – the Gagarinskyi rayon in central Moscow. Putin's local, municipal representative is a member of the opposition. The opposition ran not on a generally liberal platform. They had a filter where they basically asked questions to people who wanted to run, what do they think about Putin, United Russia and the Crimea. If your answers were wrong to any of those questions – you weren't part of this project. These people were openly opposed to the regime and they were elected.

This 2017 campaign was made possible by something that by its mastermind was called "Political Uber". It is not a great term but it represents what they did.

Maxim Katz was elected as a municipal deputy in the 2012 election, as a part of that first wave. He was 24 years old at that time, and he was a professional poker player. He printed a one-page leaflet saying: "I am Max, I am 24, I am Jewish, I think United Russia is corrupt, you should let me run for office". I am paraphrasing a little but it was pretty much that open. Then he served and then in the summer 2017 he organized a campaign of United Democrats which nominated people and helped them to run in municipal politics. What he means when using the term "Political Uber" is that he created an online platform which would essentially help you overcome all those barriers to political participation that we talked about as tools for manipulation. You know that the electoral commission is stacked – what do you do? You get a group of lawyers who draft bulletproof registration documents then you upload them in electronic form and you just have the candidates fill it with their own information. There is no way to go around that. Another challenge is the media. You are not going to get any coverage in the media – what do you do? You centralize all advertising, hire graphic designers who will make all your materials. And again the candidate just puts in his or hers personal information "Political Uber" was kind of a revolutionary change in opposition strategy in running at elections, specifically elections that take place on an uneven playing field. The opposition needs to be innovative, strategic and competitive. What we have seen over the last five years is that they are doing that. The rapid growth of opposition in municipal politics in Moscow from 2012 to 2017 demonstrates that the opposition is learning how to compete on this uneven playing field.

Why is this important? Often I get comments that Moscow is a different space from the rest of Russia and of course this is absolutely true – it is much more liberal, richer, more densely populated, more protest takes place there. What impact the innovation that took place in Moscow can have on the rest of Russia? When you put everything online and you make it in a digital form, you can use that platform pretty much anywhere. There is nothing to stop you from going from region to region and from town to town using this platform. It is exactly what Maxim Katz is doing – going from place to place using this platform. Successful campaigns also build experience for the politicians running in them and for the people who live in the area. Being in political office for the Russian opposition is incredibly important because one of the criticisms that the regime lobs at the opposition, time and again, is that they just make a noise in the streets. Putin said that if the opposition was serious they would get involved instead they are just interested in organizing protests. Therefore having real experience in office, even municipal, is important for the opposition to create legitimate politicians. Another thing about having an opposition politician in a municipal office is that it creates expectations among the residents of that particular neighbourhood – what does it mean to have someone who is representative of your interests in government. It

creates a certain amount of democratic spirit. That is something that takes place at a very slow pace, it is not a rapid change but still it is incredibly important.

A combination of authoritarian practice and democratic institutions is just the way that modern hybrid authoritarian regimes have worked which is a sword that cuts both ways. Although it is something that allows these regimes to be much more durable than most of us expected, the combination of authoritarian practice and democratic institutions also creates these very important tensions within the regimes. The regime is not the only strategic actor. Opposition politicians are also strategic actors and they can exploit the existing tension. And this is exactly what is happening in Moscow right now. Saint Petersburg is about to have a municipal election and I am sure we are going to see the same thing there. This could also happen on a regional level but also on a national one.

Alex Motyl: I would also like to thank everybody who invited me here. If you speak to a Ukrainian in Ukraine or for that matter in emigration or the diaspora, more likely the Ukrainian you are talking to will tell you that absolutely nothing has changed since the Maydan Revolution in 2014. This is paradoxical because any semi-objective look at Ukraine and the changes it has undergone in the last four years will indicate that Ukraine has changed enormously and primarily for the better. I will try to explain this paradox in a second but first I will present some indication of the changes that have taken place.

Let's start with the obvious one, namely the fact that Ukraine is in a war with Russia. In 2014 it had a battle-harden army of roughly about 6 000 troops and at this point it has an army that is considered to be, and probably is, one of the best in Europe of well over a 100 000 battle-harden soldiers, who have managed to fight Russia to a stand-still.
In terms of its security and defence policy Ukraine has managed to insinuate itself into western security interests and institutions. It has now become not exactly a darling of NATO but it has certainly become an important factor within NATO's calculations of its own strategies for the future. These are significant changes.

With regard to economy, nothing extensively has changed except for the fact that everything has changed. In 2014 and 2015 we saw significant drops in GDP, thanks to the Revolution but primarily to the war, invasion by Russia and the occupation. But since 2016 there was a growth in GDP at roughly 3 and 3,5 percent and that is projected to continue. Naturally Ukraine's growth should be between 7 and 9 percent but given the fact that GDP collapsed by some 20 percent in the aftermath of the Russian invasion – two years of a 3,5 percent increase aren't exactly bad. The banking system has been fundamentally reformed. Trade has been fundamentally restructured. Ukraine's trade was significantly dependent on Russia. That is no longer the case. The vast majority of Ukraine's trade is now with

the rest of the world in general and with Europe in particular. Energy and energy prices have been restructured. Naftohaz, the Ukrainian holding company that is responsible for oil and gas was one of the most corrupt and insufficient institutions in Ukraine and now it is transparent and works quite well. Infrastructure has experienced an enormous boom and there are going to be continuous large investments. Those of you who have been to Ukraine will have noticed that its roads are terrible. That is beginning to change and in the next five years roads and railroads will be significantly expanded. Ports will be renovated and added. Airports will be built and rebuilt. This is a process that has already begun and will continue for the next few years. Significantly, all of these ties are connecting Ukraine's metropolitan centres with one another and are projecting Westward - not North, not East, but West.

The IT sector and the information technology sector in Ukraine is booming. Agriculture is doing well. There is actually serious talk about privatizing agricultural land. I am not sure when that will happen but I wouldn't be surprised if it happened within a year or two. Privatization of state-owned enterprises is supposed to begin this year as well. And if so – it will add significantly to the budget. There has been a pension reform that was adopted in the fall of last year. There has been an education reform, a healthcare reform. All of these were reforms that were passed several months ago and are now in the process of being translated into reality.

Decentralization of political authority is now a reality as well. There has been a consolidation of local governments to reduce duplication and to increase efficiency. Most importantly there has been significant expansion of local budgets. Budgets have increased by some 50 to 60 percent and a lot of this money is going to local infrastructure and expansion of local services. Ukrainian culture has taken off in the last three to four years. People who are usually focused on economic issues tend to ignore this but several years ago Ukraine was producing one or two films a year. This year they are producing something like 40 films. Publishing has taken off. Music is booming and other things related to culture are also doing quite well.

In the meantime Ukraine's level of democracy remains pretty much as it was. It is hardly a perfect democracy but it certainly is a democratic system. It has maintained its commitment to liberalism. The country is pretty much tolerant. There are extremist groups but these are decidedly in a minority and they don't enjoy support of the vast majority of the population. I don't want to paint too rosy a picture but the point is simply that Ukraine has changed enormously in the last four years.

How then do we account for the fact that a vast majority of Ukrainians will tell you that nothing has changed? The reason for that is quite simple. On the

one hand the living standards have not improved for many Ukrainians. There are extremely high expectations as a result of the Maydan Revolution. There is the belief on the part of many Ukrainians that they will finally join Europe, that they will finally be European. What that meant is that living standards will be on the levels with that in Germany. But it didn't happen, first of all because the economy collapsed as a result of the Russian invasion in the Donbas and the annexation of the Crimea. Nevertheless there was disappointment on that level. At the same time there is disappointment with the fact that many of the reforms, especially economic reforms that have been adopted and mandated by the international community, specifically the IMF, have entailed raising prices for gas as well as energy and that of course has hit pocket's very directly.

By the same token Ukrainians are quite rightly disappointed by the fact that the vast majority of individuals who were implicated with the misdeeds of the former regime or the misdeeds of the current regime escaped punishment. That is certainly the case. Some of them fled to Russia, others fled elsewhere abroad. Many others have remained unpunished in one fashion or another. What the concern from the Ukrainians perspective is not so much the question of justice, it is the question of revenge which hasn't taken place. The public would like to see some "bodies swinging in the wind". The perception is that nothing has changed. In any case, the reality, in contrast to the perception, is exactly the opposite. The country has changed and it is moving in the direction of European integration and greater integration into the world community.

What has changed but to a lesser degree is the issue of corruption. When you will speak to most of Ukrainians, as well as to most Westerners – they will say that nothing has changed, the "old guard" is still in power, corruption has increased and it is totally out of control. You may have encountered a short statement by president Donald Trump at the G7 meeting when he was reputed to have said – "Why do we support Ukraine? They are all absolutely corrupt anyway". Again, the reality is somewhat more complex. Here the news is not as positive as I would like it to be but nevertheless significant steps have been taken to reduce corruption. There is an Anti-Corruption Bureau. There has been a law passed recently and an Anti-Corruption Court was created. A lot of this was of course done despite the foot-dragging of the administration. But the fact remains that it has taken place. You have a fairly transparent system by means of which tenders are organized – an electronic system. It was introduced some time ago and it has reduced corruption significantly as well. What is of significant importance, but tends to be overlooked, is that the reform of the banking sector, and the reform of energy pricing has also reduced corruption. But again, it reduced structural incentives for corruption. It hasn't led to any convictions or people "hanging on the trees", which is what most Ukrainians would like to see. Another significant but overlooked thing is the fact

that the power of the oligarchs has been significantly reduced. Dymitro Firtash, who was in charge of the gas is essentially an exile. Ihor Kolomoyski, one of the leading corruptioniers based in Dnipropetrovsk, has been curtailed. On the other hand, Petro Poroshenko, who is the president as well as his cronies, is doing quite well. But the fact is – two out of three is of some importance. Some indication of the reduction of power of the oligarchs is the wealth of Rinat Akhmetov, who is Ukraine's most wealthy oligarch. Several years ago his wealth was estimated at 30 billion dollars, four year ago, during Maydan, it was roughly 15 billion. At this point in time, according to "Forbes" magazine, it is a mere 5 billion. That is in no small measure, due to the fact that Ukraine, and this is one of the positive consequences of the war with Russia, has lost two of the most corrupt regions, that contributed to corruption in the past. Namely – the Eastern Donbas and the Crimea. Both of these regions were essentially dominated by oligarch criminal gangs. They are now in the Russian Federation de facto, if not de jure. One of the consequences of this is that corruption in Ukraine has been weakened.

Again, I don't want to paint a too rosy a picture with regard to corruption which remains a problem and concern. But despite the perception of most Ukrainians – the structural and institutional underpinnings of corruption, the reasons for engaging in corruption, have actually been reduced. And that is more important than whether "bodies will be swinging in the wind" as a result of actual convictions. What one really wants is to reduce the incentives of bureaucrats, businessmen, oligarchs and others for engaging in corruption. A way to do that is institutional and structural reform and Ukraine in fact has managed to do just that.

There are two factors that have contributed to these positive changes. One is, and we have to be quite open about that, the Ukrainian government. I am hardly a fan of president Poroshenko, but he has been the man who has been in charge of these reform efforts. He has overseen them, sometimes he has pursued them enthusiastically, often he has pursued them less enthusiastically. But the bottom line is that the governments that have been in place for the last four years have essentially pursued a reformist policy. Credit has to be given to them for that. Another significant thing is that the civil society, a variety of NGO's and the press as well as foreign institutions have been pressuring the government. They too have contributed to this environment that has led to something resembling positive change.

Last but not least, one man's contribution to Ukrainian reforms really needs to be underlined and that is of course Vladimir Putin. I will submit to you that if it weren't for Putin's dictatorial regime, invasion of the Eastern Donbas, annexation of Crimea and war that is taking place in Eastern Ukraine now as we speak – incentive for reform would have been significantly less. Putin has in fact created a very strong incentive for Ukrainian elites to engage in some kind of reform and

to do anything possible to remove Ukraine from Russia's sphere of influence. In this particular sense I would like to suggest to you that what has transpired in the last four years is the following: that Ukraine in late 2013 when it was still ruled by Victor Yanukovych was well on the way to becoming fully embedded in Russia's sphere of influence, a quasi-colony of Russia. Putin's intervention in late 2013, when he was insisting on Ukraine not signing the association agreement with the European Union, his support for Yanukovych and association with the violence that Yanukovych exerted on the protesters, as well as the subsequent annexation of Crimea and invasion on Eastern Donbas all of those have had the effect paradoxically, especially from his point of view, of incentivising the Ukrainian elites, its civil society and the vast majority of its population to move Westwards. Had it not been for Putin, Ukraine would have signed the association agreement, Yanukovych would have been re-elected, and within a few years Ukraine would be a kind of pro-European Russian colony. That would be essentially it. As a result of Putin's intervention Ukraine has effectively, from a security point of view, left Russia's strategic sphere. From an economic point of view it has essentially broken all its economic ties with Russia. That sometimes has negative consequences for the economy but from the point of view of strategy it has been very effective. And from a cultural point of view as well, Ukraine is well on the way to finally leaving the Russian world. Here we have the ultimate paradox – Putin intervened in order to prevent Ukraine's joining of the West but his intervention has actually pushed Ukraine towards the West and increased its chances of integrating with Western institutions. I am not suggesting that Ukraine will become a member of NATO and the EU any time soon but its institutions are being coordinated and harmonised with both organisations.

What could go wrong? According to Western conventional wisdom the major threat to Ukraine's security and existence is corruption. I, for the life of me, don't understand this. This doesn't make any sense to me at all. Corrupt societies have always existed and none of them collapsed as a result of corruption. Countries collapse and cease to exist not as a result of corruption but usually of foreign invasions. Corruption may undermine the long-term viability of a state but as we know from the examples of Zimbabwe, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or China, but also of Italy, Greece or any other country in the world – corrupt countries can exist for very long periods of time. Therefore the notion that corruption in Ukraine will somehow undermine this country is to me simply bizarre. I don't quite understand how people make that case unless they have some ulterior reasons for making that argument.

What is the main threat to Ukraine? I would argue that there are two such threats. The first one of course was, is and will be Putin. Maybe not so much Russia but definitely the regime created by Putin, whether you call it an authoritarian

regime or quasi fascist regime. Whatever this regime happens to be, it is based on an expansionist ideology. It requires some form of great power for Putin's self-legitimization and for the ability of Putin to require the support of the Russian population. He started the war, he annexed Crimea and there is no prospect in the foreseeable future for the war in the East Donbas ending any time soon. You may or may not be aware that there has been a recent flare up in the last two days, and some Ukrainian soldiers were killed. This is after several weeks of a relative low. So the point is, if and when Putin wants to escalate – he can, and if he wants to deescalate – he could do that as well. There is a military build-up taking place in the Sea of Azov and in the Crimean Peninsula There is talk, I am not sure how serious this is, among the analysts that Putin may be inclined to engage in some kind of aggression in Southern Ukraine. Whether this is just speculation or whether this is rooted in reality is hard to say. But the point is that as long as Putin is around and as long as Putin remains in charge of the kind of regime that he has constructed in the last ten to twenty years, the existential danger of an escalation to Ukraine will be ever present. Given his health, given the likelihood that he will remain president for many years to come, the danger to Ukraine of a Russian invasion and a full scale war will be on the table for the foreseeable future.

I am relatively optimistic about Ukraine's ability to maintain its security. In 2014 Putin could have invaded and seized all of Ukraine in about three weeks. Whether he could have sustain this occupation is another question. But at that point in time he could have walked across Ukraine and be in Lviv in about three weeks. Now Ukraine has an army, military industrial complex, an energised and more or less patriotic population that is not simply going to throw down its weapons and surrender. So the chances of a successful invasion are significantly lower. Nevertheless a quick little war embarked upon by a dictator who needs some form of legitimization is not inconceivable.

The other possible danger to Ukraine, and I would rank this significantly less, is the Ukrainian population. According to a recent poll 80% of the Ukrainian population believe that their country is moving in the wrong direction. Based on what I have been arguing, Ukraine has been going in exactly the right direction. The problem with that is that the elections both for the president and the parliament are supposed to take place next year. At this point in time Poroshenko has some 5% or 6 % support in the ratings. The leader in these ratings is Yulia Tymoshenko with about 15% and everybody else is either on single digits or even less. If she wins it is not the end of the world and it may actually even be OK. The danger of course is the victory of someone like for example Mr Boyko, the candidate for the opposition Party of Regions (Yanukovych's former party). This is certainly conceivable. If he was to win that might be very bad news. Of course if he starts to move very quickly in a pro-Russian direction that would lead to a

third Maydan. Equally problematic is the fact that parliamentary elections will take place some six months after. At this point in time, taking the current ratings into account, something like eight parties would make it into the parliament one of whom would have about 10% or 15 %. It would mean that you would have unwieldy coalitions, possibly with a crazy president. This would not be good. I am not sure if this would be an existential challenge although it would certainly be an invitation for Putin to intervene in some fashion or other, given the instability of the political system.

Let me end on the following point. Ukraine's problem at this point in time isn't about insufficient change it is actually too much too fast change. We have got it all wrong in the West when arguing that there has been no change. Actually it has been changing very significantly. I will go back to a famous book by a political scientist Samuel Huntington, from the 1960s entitled "Political Order in Changing Societies". The author argues that where you have significant social change you need to have stable political institutions in order to be able to manage those changes. Ukraine's problem is not that economic and social change has not been taking place. It has been taking place all over the place. The problem is that the political institutions are, not exactly unstable, but they are being in some fashion or another challenged, possibly undermined and certainly questioned both by NGO's, civil society and the media at home as well as by foreign governments. They are challenged to do more than they can do given the constrains, the requirements and the problems that they face. Ideally the West should begin to realise that Ukraine needs stable political institutions and elites as much as it needs the socio-economic changes that it is currently experiencing. And it is that kind of combination that would then guarantee stable change into the future and would also guarantee Ukraine's ability to resist existential challenges from the only source that can mount those challenges and that is of course Putin's Russia.

John Micgiel: Alex, in the past you have argued that Ukraine cut its losses in East Donbas and just hand it over to the Russians and move on. You have convincibly argued today there is no way to predict what Putin will or won't do. Even if they succeeded in doing that, that wouldn't prevent the Russians from doing something else nasty in Southern or Eastern Ukraine. What do you think of Kurt Volker's program for convincing Putin that there is a different way of dealing with the issue of Ukraine? Does that make sense to you or do you think that this is pie in the sky American optimism – try something different and see what happens?

Alex Motyl: I am somewhat sceptical about Putin's interest in genuine reconciliation in Eastern Donbas. Given the expansionist nature of the ideology that underpins his legitimacy it would be hard for him to admit or agree to some kind

of peaceful resolution that would result in Western Ukrainians, Eastern Ukrainians, Kiev, Donetsk and Luhansk singing songs and holding hands. That simply isn't on the cards. If he were wise and if he wasn't holding on to his regime and his ideology, he would do that. If Putin wanted to destroy democratic Ukraine, if he was smart enough to do that, he would leave the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics immediately, withdraw from all its systems and say to Kiev – "take it, it is yours". Ukraine would choke on them. That would spell the end of reforms, end of any kind of movement towards the West and that would essentially mean the return of the status quo ante. Because then you would have a significant voting block that would elect people such as Boyko or Yanukovych. That having been said should the West and the US try to encourage Putin to engage in some kind of peaceful resolution? Of course yes. For starters, something that may be amenable for both sides would be peacekeepers along the lines of demarcation. Ukraine has a problem with that because they want peacekeepers in the entire territory and Russia prefers to have them only on the lines of demarcation. My guess is that Kiev might be persuaded to agree to this, and that could be a first step. Even if there is no subsequent second or third step – you can call it a first step. That said I am not so optimistic. I don't see Putin embarking on any kind of compromise. He invaded for a reason. There is an advantage to him maintaining that zone of instability. There is also a significant disadvantage of course – by taking Crimea and Eastern Donbas Putin has actually made reform possible. He has removed some 5 to 6 million voters who would otherwise be voting against reform and against the West. As a result Ukraine has been able to embark upon a reform agenda. I am not optimistic about these chances but certainly they should be pursued because you never know.

Tomasz Knothe (CEES UW): My remark concerns Armenia. Would you agree with such an observation that Nikol Pashinyan represents a new type of politician, a new generation. He is neither Soviet nor anti-Soviet, he is away from the past. He can contribute to traditional Armenian politics. He was able to gain power also because Armenian elites were already a bit tired with Nagorno Karabakh elites who were traditionally considered a "them" as opposed to "us".

Julie George: In answering your questions, I would like to underline that foremostly I am an expert on Georgian politics therefore my answers will be coloured by that. While there is something to be said by the mentality of political elites, my first observation is that Mikheil Saakashvili was also someone new who was a break from the old and who was not embedded in the past in the way that some of his predecessors and colleagues were. But politics can also change elites as well. Therefore I don't think that there is any new generation or any new elites. Power

corrupts. You can break down networks and you can transform the elite where you have new ideas and new visions that come in. But I am an institutionalist at heart and I think that what actually pressures them are institutions that are built to move political power in accountable ways. I think institutions change people and not new generations of political elites.

When it comes to the second question concerning being tired with the Nagorno Karabakh elites. As an outsider looking at Armenian politics, the extraordinary power of the Karabakh elite, goes to the extent that some might say that it is to the detriment of other Armenian political interest is profound. I will stop there.

Piotr Wiench (SGGW): I have a question to professor Motyl, regarding recent media speculation about some utterances by the president of the US, who reportedly was to say that he doesn't exclude making a deal with president Putin concerning the annexation of Crimea which could be recognized by the US. I wonder whether you consider this likely and what would be the effect of such a deal for the stability of the region?

Alex Motyl: To be honest, I have no idea what Donald Trump will do or say, with regard to Crimea, with respect to the forthcoming summit and in general. He could declare a war, he could recognize Crimea, we could invade Zimbabwe. Everything is perfectly possible. For the sake of argument, I could assume that he made some noises about recognizing Crimea. Which is perfectly possible. Whether that had been cleared with the State Department or with his advisors that is another issue. What would that mean? Obviously Russia would be happy. This would be a vindication of Putin. Will that necessarily lead to an even greater increase in his already huge popularity is hard to say. But it will certainly not hurt him. Personally, I don't think it is going to be objectively all that deleterious to Ukraine. Of course Ukrainians will be outraged and you will have demonstrations and all these sort of things taking place. The Ministries and the President will be sending letters of protest. But in reality Crimea is what it is, for better and for worse and it is unlikely to revert back to Ukraine, let's just say, any time soon. So whether or not Trump expresses some kind of sentiments doesn't really change the fact that Crimea is where it is and it will remain there for a long period of time. Where I think Trump's comment would make the most difference is in regard to Europeans. Essentially by recognizing, even rhetorically, the legitimacy of Russia's annexation of Crimea Trump would be doing two things. One is up-ending the entire post WWII security logic and architecture on which the European Union and NATO rest. If that becomes possible then anything in Europe becomes possible. That alone would be a destabilising factor within Europe proper. But at the same time it would also increase fragmentation and fishers within Europe itself. I can easily

hear Angela Merkel – "oh this is a terrible thing, we are outraged", and so on. But I can just as easily see Gerhard Schroeder and his comrades in the Socialist Party as well as similar kinds of groupings in Austria, Hungary, Italy, Spain and other places, saying – "terrific, this is wonderful, finally we can move on and establish normal relations with Russia". The impact on Europe would be very deleterious. American-European relations would suffer as well. I am not sure if Ukraine would be affected except for the rhetoric. Putin would enjoy another moment in the sun but I am not sure if that would make too much of a difference to him.

Unidentified: My questions concern Armenia. What do you think about Nikol Pashinyan's decision not to intervene to dismiss judicial authority, like Mikheil Saakashvili did in Georgia? Do you consider it to be right? In your presentation you have mentioned that Armenia is dependent on Russia and Vladimir Putin has a good relationship with the former president Serzh Sargsyan. How would you comment on the fact that Russia did not intervene in the Armenian revolution and simply let it happen?

Julie George: The underlining question is the extent to which the judicial institutions are corrupted. If there is no law, if the law is a purchased law and decisions are purchased decisions than the decision to move them or change them is reflective of that underlying reality. If there is a law and if the incentives are shifted so that the law is no longer purchased and decisions can be based on the legal framework that is consistently and systematically applied, you need not change the judges. So the underlying question isn't about the decision whether to change or not change the judges. It is to what extent does law exist in the Armenian political space and to what extent do people embodying those positions and making those decisions, have the opportunity and the incentives to make legally based decisions in a systematic and objective way as opposed to a purchased one. Mikheil Saakashvili decided there is only purchased law in Georgia and therefore the entire structure needed to be shifted. He re-did the entire educational system in order to ensure that law degrees were actual and not purchased law degrees, because corruption had infiltrated the whole educational system in Georgia. Pashinyan's logic might be different depending on those circumstances inside the Armenian political space. I don't have that deep knowledge to know one way or the other. But if I were looking at it and trying to figure it out, I would look to see the extent to which a judge in Armenia can make a decision that works against the interests of entrenched powers, either old entrenched powers of the oligarchic regime or the new entrenching powers of the new regime. If the judge can operate against both and uses legal logic and judicial reasoning to make his conclusion then the personalities matter less in the process.

When it comes to Russia, I think the reason why Russia didn't intervene was that Pashinyan had a very careful message which was – we are not going to be against Russia and its interests. Putin's position in Armenia is very different than in Georgia. Putin's position in Georgia and Ukraine is to destabilize. In Armenia it is to stabilize. It is a very different mission. Given that, the Russian hand has to be lighter.

Aleksandra Gryźlak (CEES UW): I have a question about Georgia. We were talking about the public perception of the reforms in Ukraine. I would like to know what is the public perception about what is going on in Georgia right now? Would you agree with the opinion that the perception is also very negative? The Georgians were happy that they got rid of Saakashvili but now they feel their country is in a stagnation, they fear that corruption might come back. Do you believe that the present government in Tbilisi can change the facade of institutions into really democratic ones?

Julie George: In terms of people's perception of reforms in Georgia there are multiple views. Of course the Tbilisi view is different that the non-Tbilisi one. There are also short- versus medium-term arguments. In the short-term there is a lot of dissatisfaction. There have been multiple protests, strikes of the subway workers, protests over the court case that was recently controversially decided, dissatisfaction with the lack of economic development outside of Tbilisi. There you have, motivated middle/upper class, rich Tbilisi residents pushing back against the leadership. That is fairly normal, standard Georgian politics. Therefore yes, they are dissatisfied but not in any way that is outside any normal businesses of that segment of the Georgian community. The worker's strike is actually different and this is more destabilizing. In the medium term I think this is a group of people that are still relieved that the revolutionary rhetoric of the United National Movement has stabilised. The movement to the Georgian Dream was partly an anti-Saakashvili, anti-police and prison abuse comment. What I found very interesting when talking to my Georgian friends who would have been UNM supporters, is that they are extraordinarily relieved that politics is just not so volatile and so existential any more. And that the trade for stagnation is still a reasonable trade. The extent to which they continued to find that to be a reasonable trade is anybody's guess and maybe the subway strike is an indication perhaps that agreement to that bargain has maybe reached its end and the government needs to shift position, which is why prime minister Kvirikashvili has resigned.

In terms of institutional changes, I think that Georgia has instituted many democratic changes in very meaningful ways. The structure of the Central Election Commission has been extraordinarily well done. There have been many efforts made to

make information more transparent and available to people who seek it. So I think in many ways the legacy of Saakashvili and the UNM has been democratically institutionalized in some components. It has been of course pulled back by other arenas which are either as important or more important – the justice and the police are obviously areas where things have sat. Perhaps the resignation of the prosecutor that occurred last week and the fact that the government is under pressure to overhaul the judicial system for which that I was telling my Armenian colleague about. Trying to find judges who actually use judicial reasoning. That has emerged in Georgia to a large extent. I think that is the Achilles heel of most hybrid regimes.

Aleksandra Gryźlak (CEES UW): The presentation concerning elections in Russia was extremely interesting. It is great to here that people in Russia want to engage in local politics. To what extent can an electronic platform, this "Political Uber" really attract idealists, people who really can make a change or is it just another form of cynical tool for people who want to gain power in Russia.

Yana Gorokhovskaya: I think that having a slick, hipster electronic platform isn't necessarily cynical. I view the platform as a way of eliminating obstacles for participation in elections. The way it was described to me was – "if you have the will, we have a way, if you want to be part of politics, if you want to get elected we will help you do that". There is a different kind of problem potentially with this platform and with getting so many people involved. One is – where do you find all of them? Getting over a thousand candidates, that is a lot of candidates. There are interesting writings, academic works on civil society and political activism in Russia. There is not a lot of hope for it. Russia and Moscow don't have so many motivated citizens, people in Russia are atomized and politically disengaged. So where do you find all those people? People who had been elected several rounds from the opposition were worried about the influx of new faces. Not because they think they were cynical, but because day-to-day political work is incredible boring. One worry in attracting a bunch of college students into politics, is that they are really into the campaign, focused on winning, but once they win and you have the drudgery of looking over municipal budgets and meeting with grandmas who want their roof fixed in your neighbourhood, people will quit. I think it is too early to tell whether or not they will quit – they were elected only in September. Right now what is happening is that they are facing a lot of pressure from the regime, which has found these back doors into politics in Russia and they are trying to close them. They are actually forcing people out. Several important figures have resigned from their posts in the last year. What do people really care about when it comes to politics? They care about – and there is a special expression – NIMBY – not in my backyard. They care about local issues. For most people their road

into politics is by local issues. They want a school built in their neighbourhood or clinic or their road fixed. And this is what leads them into politics. Therefore targeting the local level is actually the opposite to cynicism because you are tapping into what people really care about and you are saying to them - “we can really do something about this”; “I may not be able to do anything about Putin, but I can make sure that the local budget is free of corruption”. Getting over the slickness of the campaign itself, I don’t see a lot of cynicism in there.

I will say, more broadly on Putin’s popularity and his strategy. It appeared a lot during this discussion. Putin’s popularity has dropped according to official statistics by 15% since the election. And that is largely because they just introduced the reform of the pension age which has gone up quite considerably. Even though reform works progressively, people are unhappy, this is something that upsets them. It was part of the campaign. Putin promised that they wouldn’t alter the pension age, and they did. There are things that can challenge Putin’s popularity. It is an open question whether or not you can do Crimea twice. This was called the “Crimea bounce” which gave him a boost in popularity but it also came at a really high cost – sanctions as well as Crimea being simply a drain on Russia, the infrastructure that it needs. Putin now may look elsewhere to boost his popularity but I doubt that he could do another Crimea.

Unidentified: Professor Motyl, you have mentioned next year’s elections in Ukraine. What is your prognosis concerning the role of Mikheil Saakashvili’s team in these elections?

Alex Motyl: I think Saakashvili is history. I don’t worry about him, I am not excited about him. I just think he had his moment in the sun. But since his escape from the police, it has been downhill for him, so to speak. I can’t see him playing any fundamental role within the political process. Of course it is not inconceivable that someone might hire him as a political consultant.

John Micgiel: We are out of time. Thank you to the panellists, We had a very interesting session. Thank you.

Julie George, Associate Professor of Political Science, Queens College, New York. She specializes in the politics of state-building, ethnicity, democratization, and secession in the post-communist region, particularly in the Caucasus.

Yana Gorokhovskaya, received her PhD in political science from the University of British Columbia in November 2016. Her research examines elections and patterns of protest in Russia and contributes to scholarship on authoritarian endurance and democratic backsliding.

Alex Motyl, historian, political scientist, poet, writer, translator and artist-painter. He is professor of political science at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey and a specialist on Ukraine, Russia, and the Soviet Union.

John Micgiel, adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, Associate Director of the Harriman Institute, Executive Director of the Institute for the Study of Europe, Director of the Institute on East Central Europe, former President of the Kosciuszko Foundation, and Visiting Professor at the Centre for East European Studies University of Warsaw. His teaching and research interests include the modern history of East Central Europe, and contemporary Politics in East, Central and Western Europe